

CHURCHES RESPOND TO

***THE CHURCH
TOWARDS A COMMON VISION***

VOLUME 2

Faith and Order Paper No. 232

Edited by: Rev. Dr Ellen Wondra
Rev. Dr Stephanie Dietrich
Dr Ani Ghazaryan Drissi



**World Council
of Churches**

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Publications

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Introduction

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV), the convergence document published in 2013, is a milestone in the ongoing conversation about the Church that has been a central focus of the modern worldwide ecumenical movement. This ecumenical conversation seeks to discern ways beyond the situation of long-standing ecclesial divisions toward the fulfillment of our Lord Jesus Christ's high priestly prayer that the faithful may be one as Christ is one with the Father, that the world may believe (John 17:21). As the churches have sought to work through their divisions and differences toward convergence and consensus, they have been able to grow closer together in communion and in mission. As a convergence document, *TCTCV* substantiates that growth, while it also offers possibilities and poses questions about how remaining issues might be approached.

TCTCV is the fruit of a concerted process of study and dialogue involving the Commission on Faith and Order in conversation over decades with churches and ecumenical bodies around the world. The present document builds on Faith and Order's first convergence document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) and the churches' responses to it.¹ It is also deeply informed by the important

work carried out by bilateral dialogues, consultations, commissions, and individuals at every level of the churches' life over many years. (This process is described in the Historical Note appended to *TCTCV*.)² The *BEM* process revealed that studying common understandings of the Church might help to address some of the remaining controversial issues that continue to divide the churches.³

At every stage, the Commission on Faith and Order has asked churches and ecumenical bodies for input, for responses to various study documents, and for guidance in structuring and pursuing its work. And churches, ecumenical bodies, ecclesial organizations, and various consultations have responded generously and constructively to

respond to BEM: Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text, ed. Max Thurian. Faith and Order Papers Nos.129 (1986), 132 (1986), 135 (1987), 137 (1987), 143 (1988), 144 (1988), (Geneva: World Council of Churches).

2. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 41-46. *TCTCV* is available at <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>. Much of the work discussed in the Historical Note can be found in the Faith and Order digital archives, <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition?sort=titleSorter>.

3. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), 147-151.

1. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). *Churches*

state more clearly and more hopefully the depth and breadth of the real yet imperfect communion that Christians around the world already share. Thus, *TCTCV* reflects the churches' deep faith in the Triune God revealed in scripture and lived out in the churches' traditions; their reliance on word and sacrament; their embrace of various types of communion ecclesiology; their renewed emphasis on mission and evangelism as foundational for the Church; and their desire for the exercise of Christ-like authority in service to the Church.

Along the way, as various lacunae have been recognized, the many participants in the ecumenical movement have sought to expand their dialogue to include more voices from the churches of the Global South, and from emergent ecclesial movements and churches. Increased attention to the diversity of contexts in which the churches witness and serve has revealed ever more extensively the wealth of gifts the churches receive from God and offer to the world in hope.

The process leading to *TCTCV* has also sought to state as clearly and accurately as possible the convergences that have emerged in areas where divisions have in the past been much sharper and deeper than they are now. It is clear that the churches agree in more ways than they disagree. And this agreement on matters of faith and ecclesial life is more profound and extensive than has at times been evident. In areas that continue to be divisive, new approaches and methods, such as receptive ecumenism and mutual engagement in mission and service, have made significant contributions that show even more promise

for the future. All this is evident in the responses to *TCTCV* which are included in these volumes.

TCTCV asked five questions designed to help discern the extent to which *TCTCV* does express a convergence and to chart further work needed to move towards the full visible unity of the churches.⁴ This process of reception deliberately continues the pattern set out in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)* and followed with other work from the Commission on Faith and Order and other commissions and bodies of the WCC.

These present volumes are a collection of the responses received between 2013 and 2020. We are profoundly grateful to all those who have given time, thought and prayer to responding to *TCTCV*; and it has been a delight, as well as a challenge, to hear and to engage with the results of so many deliberations and consultations. Publishing these responses is itself a further response to *TCTCV*, one that allows the churches and other groups to receive each other's responses and *TCTCV* more fully. This further reception, in turn, may encourage and strengthen further

4. "• To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

• To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

• What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

• How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

• What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?" (*TCTCV, Introduction, 2-3*).

participation in global ecumenical efforts to live into the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ “that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:23).

This publication in two volumes includes seventy-eight responses that have come from around the world, forty-five from member churches of the World Council of Churches and the Commission on Faith and Order (including united and uniting churches), and from other churches; thirty-six from a wide range of ecumenical bodies and groups, national and regional councils of churches, groups dedicated to ecumenism, university faculties and interested individuals. These responses are of great importance, and not only because they test the points of convergence and of difference identified in *TCTCV*. The responses express too the interests and concerns of many member churches and ecclesial bodies engaging in the work for Christian unity. They also provide invaluable insight and guidance for future work on ecclesiology by the Commission on Faith and Order and other interested groups and individuals. We offer these responses with limited editing, and with full references to the rich body of relevant sources that reflect churches’ own traditions and their involvement in ecumenical dialogue and interaction.

At the same time, a major focus of the Commission in recent years has been to go into more and wider conversations with churches who have not always been clearly or strongly part of the ecclesiological conversation before *TCTCV*, and whose understandings of ecclesiology would add

a valuable contribution to the ecclesiological dialogue. The analysis of the responses to *TCTCV* reconfirmed the real urgency of this need: geographically speaking, 97% of the responses came from the Global North; and, denominationally speaking, 92% of the responses came from churches or bodies which have traditionally already been part of the ecumenical movement (including the Roman Catholic Church). In other words, the fastest growing part of global Christianity has not responded or engaged with *TCTCV*. Their substantial input will be vital to Faith and Order’s future work on ecclesiology.

Therefore, in addition to the engagement with the responses received, the Ecclesiology Working Group of the Commission on Faith and Order has engaged in numerous direct and indirect encounters with voices from such churches (e.g., by consultations, conversations, analysis of official bilateral dialogues etc.), thus broadening the dialogue both regionally (churches from the Global South) and denominationally (e.g., Pentecostal, evangelical, charismatic, independent churches etc.). The fruits of these consultations will be published in 2021, after an additional consultation to be held in Asia. At the same time, the WCC and some of its member churches have heightened their interaction with partners such as the Global Christian Forum, the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Pentecostal Fellowship, and other ecumenical or interdenominational organizations which have much to contribute towards the broadening of the conversation. These efforts respond to a long-standing concern that the WCC has not yet been able to take into full consideration the faith

and order of all the world's churches in a way consonant with its mission to invite all churches "into full visible unity."

Further, members of the Ecclesiology Working Group have read and discussed together all of the responses received and identified key ideas and themes that are present in them. Group members have then written and discussed essays on these themes, and these essays will be published in 2021. These three volumes will accompany the Commission's message to the churches, summarizing the main discoveries made through this process of reading and reflecting.

We are deeply grateful to the Faith and Order Secretariat and Commission for all the work they have done with the Ecclesiology Working Group; to the Editorial Committee for this project, the Rev. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich of the Church of Norway, the Rev. Dr. Ellen K. Wondra of The Episcopal Church, and Dr. Ani Ghazaryan Drissi of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

*Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca
Interim General Secretary
World Council of Churches*

We are particularly grateful to Mr. Alexander Freeman, who has carefully and meticulously edited the responses for clarity of expression and facility of language. His involvement in the editorial process of the work was immense and extremely helpful. His work makes the responses more accessible to a worldwide audience.

We also thank all those churches and individuals whose efforts and funding made possible the global consultations and Faith and Order's work on ecclesiology, and especially the Nathan Soderbloom Memorial Fund for their yearly support.

The reception process of *TCTCV* continues within the Commission on Faith and Order and the World of Council of Churches, as work on a common vision of the church continues to develop. Churches and other ecclesial bodies will, we hope, continue to engage with the document as they discern ways toward ever greater, though yet imperfect, communion with each other. We ask for God's blessing on our understanding and our efforts, as we seek to be faithful to the Good News of God in Christ.

*Rev. Dr. Susan Durber
Moderator
WCC Commission on Faith and Order*

RESPONSES FROM CHURCHES

SECTION 1

1. Church of Lippe

(Translated from the German)

1. The Synodical Commission for World Mission, Ecumenism and Development of the Church of Lippe was responsible for dealing with the response. It set up a working group and also took account of the responses already made by various EKD member churches.

2. The Church of Lippe in general endorses the response of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (EKIR). It thanks the EKIR for allowing it to do this.

3. Several additions to the statement of the EKIR

a. Question 3: What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this study challenge your church to work for?

Like the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the EKIR, the Church of Lippe is ready to continue working to ensure that the model of “unity in reconciled diversity” is put into practice with all Christian churches.

The Church of Lippe also maintains the particular significance of the Lord’s supper and the eucharist. We are happy wherever table fellowship is fostered and we would like those with responsibility in the churches to strive even harder to expand table fellowship.

However, we are also aware that there are limits to unity. We are very concerned about the growth of fundamentalist ideas and statements from some churches. We particularly have in mind ethical questions and theological decisions such as the repeal of the ordination of women. Our question is how a constructive discussion on these issues can be pursued. This relates not only to the common path of churches, but also to the common path of religions. Fundamentalism is a challenge that calls for theological analysis and continuing efforts.

b. Question 4: How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in the study?

The Church of Lippe along with a number of its parishes can also offer positive experiences in exercising their public responsibility. We appreciate the fruitful cooperation with several Free Church communities in the general area of working with and for refugees, and on the issue of protecting the climate.

The Church of Lippe has had initial experiences with international Bible study classes and international worship, and sees further work and development of these tasks as part of its future mission.

2. Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany*

While reading the study *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, it became very clear to us that there is still a wide range of ecclesiological views among the member churches of the WCC and among the churches participating in the Faith and Order Commission. However, we noticed that only a part of this spectrum is represented in the study. This is also reflected in the selection of the Bible passages that were quoted. Our own perspective, which can be characterized as Congregationalist, is almost completely missing. Matthew 18:15-20 plays a key role in this perspective.

Our view of the Church is based on the individual congregation as an independent unit. We do not have a central authority over several congregations. Our supra-regional associations of congregations have no authority to issue instructions to their congregations. Leadership is legitimized by the grassroots (the assembly of parishioners). Nevertheless, we also have binding supra-local structures such as regional and national unions and the Mennonite World Conference, which ensure continuity.

By contrast, in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* we encounter an understanding of

the Church that has clear hierarchical features (see for example §§48–51). This understanding of the Church is exacerbated by the notion that only Christians, but not the Church, can be sinful and act sinfully (see §22, 2nd bullet point). We cannot share this view because of the crimes that were justified, approved and committed in the history of churches. Here we find that the study lacks the distinction between the visible and invisible Church.

The understanding of the Church that we find here is expressed in a concept of ministry which also has strong hierarchical characteristics. This is an understanding of ministry from which the Anabaptist-Mennonite community has (consciously) distanced itself. The origins and history of our Anabaptist-Mennonite church family have made us critical of the bond between church and (state) authorities. This critical stance is accompanied by skepticism towards the amalgamation of leadership and power within the Church as well, which always harbors the risk of the abuse of power.

We do not yet see a convergence between the two poles of the Congregationalist-functional and sacramental-hierarchical understanding of the

*Prepared by the Theological Working Group of the Association of German Mennonite Congregations (VDM), and submitted by the Chairperson, Pastor Corinna Schmidt.

Church in the study. In our opinion, further work and a striving for mutual understanding are necessary here.

For us, a possible path for undertaking further efforts would be the distinction between the visible and invisible Church, which is not adequately made in the study. We believe that this also gives rise to the risk that one (or several) of the institutionalized, visible churches may hastily equate itself (themselves) with the one, invisible Church of God, thereby absolutizing its (their) own views. Even our own tradition has not been free from this temptation.

Another aspect of the topic of ministries is the role of women in the Church, and particularly the question of the ordination of women. Further work needs to be done on this as well.

We are aware that the study represents an attempt to achieve more unity among the churches. But it is also clear to us that there can be very different views of how unity is conceived. From our Congregationalist perspective, institutional unity and even a unification of different churches seem necessary. This does not exist even within our own Anabaptist-Mennonite community. We understand the principle of “unity in diversity” very well and see unity progressing wherever one church recognizes Jesus Christ in the other. Thus, for us unity becomes visible wherever we worship together, walk together with other churches and bear witness together – in the common service of the churches in and for the world.

For us, this service of the church(es) in the world is not only a consequence of faith, but belongs to the essence of the Church. Thus, for

us shared witness in ethical questions is just as relevant for, and is perhaps a more important sign of, the unity of the Church as the mutual recognition of ministries. We gratefully look back on the Decade to Overcome Violence as an example of shared witness and shared service in the world. We welcome the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, which clearly demonstrates that churches are walking together in their witness.

We carefully read the section of the study on baptism. This states that there is an increasing convergence between the churches in their understanding of baptism, which we cannot ascertain. However, we did notice that the characteristics of baptism mentioned in §41 all harmonize well with the practice of baptizing mature people and adults. This therefore raises the question of why the churches which specifically refer to these points to ascertain convergence, continue to adhere to the practice of baptizing minors.

We are grateful that the ecumenical encounters and experiences over the past decades have enriched our understanding and praxis of the Lord’s supper. In many of our congregations we see a trend towards a more frequent celebration of the Lord’s supper and towards a heightened appreciation of the aspect of communion at the Lord’s supper. At the same time, we would like to note that, in our view, worship without the Lord’s supper (“liturgy of the Word”) is also full-fledged worship.

We are pleased about the appreciation of inter-religious encounters and dialogue which we saw in §60, and would like to encourage our brothers and sisters at the WCC to take further steps in

this. Here we see each other walking together and therefore – as we understand it – in unity with all those who converge on this point.

We would like to thank the Faith and Order Commission. The study has encouraged us to re-examine our ecclesiological questions and bring them up for discussion.

3. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

December 22, 2016

Dear Rev. Dr. Mateus,

It is my pleasure to send to you from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) a response to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. This convergence text is a significant accomplishment, and we congratulate you on reaching this momentary resting place in the sustained ecclesiological discussion which the Faith and Order Commission has shepherded to this point. We are in your debt for this patient, hopeful, and inclusive work.

It happened that this text was first submitted for member church comments just as the ELCA had appointed an Ecclesiology of the Global Church Task Force, charged with “reviewing the nature and ecclesiology of this church in the light of the past twenty-five years of significant developments in its ecumenical and global self-understanding and relationships.” The work of this task force culminated in August 2016 when our highest decision-making body, the triennial Churchwide Assembly, adopted changes to our constitution which more prominently affirm our participation in the global communion of The Lutheran World Federation and declare, “This Church confesses the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity throughout the world” (ELCA Constitution 3.02).

This ecclesiology task force was asked to coordinate responses to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. The results of their work are submitted here. One result of this decision concerning process was that the task force was not able explicitly to take into account another action of the 2016 Churchwide Assembly, which commended to this church an ecumenical text produced in collaboration with the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist*, and received the 32 Statements of Agreement from this *Declaration*. These processes had proceeded on parallel tracks, and together they represent the deep ecclesial seriousness of this church as we enter this year of the 500th Reformation anniversary.

We look forward to the further advancement of ecumenical understanding which the next steps in receiving *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* will produce.

We send our best wishes for your continued work and our prayers for God’s blessing in this holy season.

With all best wishes,
Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton,
Presiding Bishop

Introduction and summary comments

In reviewing and responding to the document as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a church with a strong and vibrant confessional heritage and tradition, it has been important to keep in mind that it is a multi-lateral, ecumenical document rather than a Lutheran one. *TCTCV* draws upon theological insights and language from a variety of traditions. In light of this, a certain methodological approach was adopted. The ELCA's response is not grounded in an evaluation of whether the document conforms to Lutheran theological or linguistic formulations. Rather, this ELCA response, in addition to affirming areas that are consistent and congruent with the tradition, identifies areas in which the content of the document seems contrary to or inconsistent with the essence of the Lutheran confessional tradition.

The response to the document is significantly informed by Article VII of the Augsburg Confession on "The Church." Article VII states in part, "The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. For the true unity of the church, it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments."

The Church: Toward a Common Vision (TCTCV) synthesizes bilateral and multilateral dialogues to provide a text that intends to initiate a new stage in ecumenical conversation. *TCTCV* privileges two ecumenical commonplaces: communion ecclesiology and ecclesial recognition. Further, it articulates a brief but incisive consideration of the interrelation of Trinity and church.

The ELCA welcomes *TCTCV* as a means by which to see our deepest concerns realized about the communion of the baptized, as well as to see the ways that communion-ecclesiology underscores the Augsburg Confession's definition of the church as the assembly of the baptized (*congregatio fidelium*) in which the Word and sacraments are rightly administered.

Several features of *TCTCV* stress matters that deserve more exploration, since they might either unnecessarily complicate ecumenical reconciliation or place ecclesial unity in something other than the promise of the Triune God, made in the crucified Jesus. These features are especially present in the relationship *TCTCV* proposes between Trinity and church, the relationship between church in God's "economy" and the wider "economy" of creation, how the document justifies legitimate diversity, and discussion of the church as sacrament. Each of these has important results for the construction of mission and ecumenical reconciliation. We note also that nowhere in the document does *TCTCV* give an account of ecclesial disunity.

We affirm that, like *BEM* (1982) and the responses from member churches of the WCC,¹ this document is evidence of the ongoing dialogues that embody the ELCA's commitment "towards a common vision" of the church, as well as the reality of the church as a *koinonia*. These actions in and of themselves are a visible unity of the church

1. *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, vols. 1–6, ed. Max Thurian, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986–1988).

in communion in all of its “legitimate diversity” (§44). We note with special appreciation in the development of this document the participation of Catholic theologians, as non-members of the WCC, throughout the dialogues, the inclusion and input of new member churches at the Faith and Order meeting in 2009, and the intentional engagement with the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox in 2011, all of whom engaged in responses to the 1998 *The Nature and the Purpose of the Church*, the predecessor document to *The Church: Toward a Common Vision*. TCTCV itself represents the work and visible unity of the church in its life and witness even in the midst of its “still divided communions” (§42).

Chapter 1: “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church”

Chapter 1 lifts up the church’s historical and continuing dedication to “proclaiming in word and deed the good news of salvation in Christ, celebrating the sacraments, especially the eucharist . . .” (§5). Here the document is in continuity with Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, and the ELCA response affirms and celebrates this statement of convergence. There are also other references to the word and sacraments in other places in the document (e.g., §29).

Secondly, chapter 1 includes a section entitled “The Importance of Unity” (§§8–10). Indeed, there are references to the unity of the church throughout the document (e.g., §§37 and 68). All of these considerations lead to the question of what the “full” unity of the church requires. Considering what the document refers to as “legitimate

diversity” (§28), what is the relation of unity to structural union and/or uniformity? Article VII of the Augsburg Confession suggests that unity should be grounded solely in the pure teaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord’s supper. Thus, organizational and structural matters concerning the unity of the church are secondary to unity regarding the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. A future design that embodies and expresses the unity of the church needs to be advanced for conversation and reflection.

In §6, one sentence declares, “At times, the cultural and religious heritage of those to whom the Gospel was proclaimed was not given the respect it deserved, as when those engaging in evangelization were complicit in imperialistic colonization, which pillaged and even exterminated peoples unable to defend themselves from more powerful invading nations.” While this statement is certainly correct, it does not take into account those whose experience of the slave trade was somewhat different. In this regard, an additional sentence or reworking of the current sentence would be in order.

The document is clearly compatible with Article IV of the Augsburg Confession on “Justification.” In particular, §§14 and 61 reflect and embody the theological truth “on which the church stands or falls.”

Finally, there are a series of italicized paragraphs throughout the document that detail theological issues where convergence has not yet occurred. These are very significant because they

collectively constitute the agenda for continuing ecumenical discussion and dialogue in pursuit of the “full” unity of the church. The ELCA, recognizing that the journey towards unity has many miles to go, affirms the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* as representing another significant milestone on the journey and encourages the continuing processes of ecumenical dialogue, cooperation and fellowship.

Hermeneutical comments to chapters 1 and 2

TCTCV makes use of two hermeneutical devices that are important for a Lutheran response. The first is the reiteration of “gift and call” around the unity of the church and parallel concerns. The second is the use of “recognition” as the means by which ecclesial unity comes about. These two devices are hermeneutical because they shape the way that *TCTCV* presents the ecumenical and missional task. Both of these devices mask a considerably knotted set of questions about the relationship of human and divine action. To the first: “gift and call” asserts that God brings about the unity of the church, but this gift remains a task that the church must accomplish. The repetition of this idiom can paper over fractures and divergent views that repeat throughout the entire locus of ecumenically divisive topics.

Comments on chapter 1: “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church”

1. We affirm the centrality of *koinonial* communion for understanding the church and its mission. Although this has not been language

traditionally used by Lutherans, it has come to prominence in recent years through ecumenical dialogues and in particular The Lutheran World Federation’s study of communion as an ecclesiological concept and its adoption of “communion” to define its self-understanding.²

2. We appreciate the question raised regarding what kind of community the church needs to be in order to carry out Christ’s mission, and affirm the connection between Jesus’ ministry as proclaiming good news to the poor and the church’s ministry of proclaiming this kingdom in word and deed. We would like to see preaching specifically listed in the description of those things in the church’s internal life that empower the churches’ “evangelistic vocation” (§6). Martin Luther emphasized the preaching of the Word as itself a “means of grace” alongside the “visible Word” of the eucharist. Indeed, in Lutheran teaching, the sacrament itself is the life-giving body and blood of Christ because of the word of promise attached to it.³

2. *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue X*, ed. Randall Lee and Jeffrey Gros (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2005); *The Church as Communion: Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology*, ed. Heinrich Holze, LWF Documentation 42 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1997).

3. See, e.g., Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII. Lutheran confessional writings in English are best found in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

3. We agree that a major challenge for the Church is how to proclaim the gospel in a way that awakens a response in the different contexts, languages and cultures of the people who hear that proclamation” (§6). This is a particularly urgent challenge in the ELCA, which remains largely European-American and middle class in spite of efforts to become a more diverse church.

4. We agree that visible unity requires that the churches be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” For Lutherans, this presence is visibly marked by the right proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, the heart of which is the proclamation of the gospel of justification. This is the basis on which the ELCA has been able to join into full communion relationships with a number of other denominations, who are not all in such relations with one another. Thus, the ELCA affirms both in its teaching and full communion relationships the WCC’s challenge to the churches “to recognize that the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body” (§10).

Comments on chapter 2: “The Church of the Triune God”

1. As one of the communities that historically have called the church a *creatura evangelii* or “creature of the gospel,” we appreciate the document’s affirmation in §14 that the church is centered and grounded in the gospel.

2. We affirm Mary as symbol and model of the church, in that she was the first to hear and respond to the good news of the incarnation (§15). Martin Luther wrote that Mary teaches us, with her words and by the example of her experience, how to “know, love, and praise God.”⁴

3. We affirm the role of the Holy Spirit as bestowing faith and charisms on individual believers, as well as also equipping the church with the gifts it needs to minister to the world. In explicating the third article of the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther wrote that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.⁵ We affirm in particular the statement’s lifting up of the Holy Spirit working through the “living voice of the preached Gospel,” “sacramental communion, especially in the Eucharist,” and ministries of service (§15).

4. We affirm the sensitivity with which Israel is treated in the statement in a non-supersessionist way as the people of God (§17).

5. We agree with the statement’s affirmation that “all members of the Church” are called to be a prophetic, priestly and royal people. The concept of the “priesthood of all believers,” which is attributed to Luther, was intended not only to

4. See, e.g., Martin Luther, “The Magnificat,” tr. A. T. W. Steinhaeuser, in *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, vol. 21, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956).

5. Martin Luther, “The Small Catechism: The Creed.”

affirm the common ministry all Christians share through their baptism, but the one spiritual standing all Christians share through their baptism. The concept came to be used to challenge the divine institution of ordination and reduce it to purely functional terms, but this is not what Luther intended by the concept.⁶ The Lutheran Confessions teach that the office of ministry is a divinely instituted office, set apart by God for the regular and faithful proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments, so that believers “may obtain this justifying faith” (Augsburg Confession, Article V), and be strengthened for their ministry in the world. Thus, we agree with the statement that both the royal priesthood of the whole people of God and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the church and are not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives (§20).

6. We affirm the statement’s description in §21 of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and the church as the body of Christ, emphasizing that the church can do nothing apart from the initiative and continued guidance of God, including the good works of believers. And we affirm the use of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in showing the basic consensus on this truth between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

7. Together with §23, we affirm that the church is both a divine and a human reality; however,

6. For more on this, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops: Public Ministry for the Reformation and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

we also affirm that the church, in its humanness, is capable of sin. The statement is very careful to speak of sin only in the “lives of the believers” and not in the body of the church itself, out of deference to those traditions which cannot affirm that the church, as the body of Christ, is sinful. Many Lutherans are comfortable making the affirmation that the church, and not simply its individual members, can and has sinned, and as a body, can and must repent. (Consider, for example, the LWF’s asking forgiveness at its 2010 Assembly in Stuttgart for past actions against the Mennonites and their continuing legacies.) Therefore, we acknowledge that the church as a whole, and not only its members, must be called to repentance, renewal and reform (§22).

8. Lutherans affirm the call to remove obstacles to the embodiment of the fullness of truth and life bestowed on the church by the Holy Spirit, specifically those cultural and other human differences we have allowed to divide the body of Christ. This is an area where Lutherans recognize that they need renewal and reform (§22).

9. With reference to §24, there is flexibility in the Lutheran tradition on the form/structure of the church, and the criteria by which churches discern the best form or structure of their ministries (for Lutherans, the doctrine of justification).

10. In §25, as Lutherans, we would wish to emphasize that the mission of the church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come *to know the love of*

Christ Jesus in their lives, as well as *to know and love* Christ Jesus.

11. We affirm the statement's acknowledgement that the church transcends what can be visibly seen in its structures and members (§26). For Lutherans, the primary visible marks of the church are the Word and sacraments of baptism and eucharist.

12. In §27, the statement asks whether the WCC member churches who do not use the language of "sacrament" in describing the church can nonetheless speak of the church as "an effective sign of God's presence and action." We can answer in the affirmative if this language is understood with reference to the ministry of the Word, in the same way that Philip Melancthon has no objection to calling ordination a sacrament on the same basis.⁷

13. In §28, we question whether the word "legitimate" is the best choice here, since it is a legal, not a biblical term. We wonder if there is a better word to reflect the intention of the drafters in this section, such as "faithful" or "upbuilding."

14. In reference to §30 (in italics), we agree that positive steps need to be taken toward a set of common criteria or means of discernment regarding the question of what kinds of diversity build up the body of Christ, and what kinds divide the body of Christ.

7. See Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII.

15. We agree (§31) that the ecclesiology of communion provides a helpful framework for considering the relation between the local and universal church. The ELCA, in its own ecclesial self-understanding, speaks of the interdependency of its three expressions (congregation, synod [diocese], and church-wide [national] expressions) in this way: "Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church, and therefore lives in a partnership relationship with the others."⁸ Lutherans do not teach that the office of bishop is essential to the structure and reality of the local church (in this case, the synod), and yet we affirm the need for oversight and the connective role that bishops can play in unifying the church in these three expressions.

Comments on chapter 3: "The Church: Growing in Communion"

1. We agree that chapter 3 on the nature of the church still touches on central issues that clearly manifest "legitimate diversity." Recognition of the authority of the office of ministry and its work within various church bodies can unify or divide and dampen the witness of the faith. Those outside of the visible church (whether they be "people of living faiths and ideologies" or those who are uncommitted to any form of ideology) very much see the church and its leadership as responsible for the legitimacy of its faith. Thus, we welcome and

8. Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (2016), 8.11. http://download.elca.org/elca%20resource%20repository/constitutions_bylaws_and_continuing_resolutions_of_the_elca.pdf?_ga=1.152773567.768957096.1468504337

commend to our members and congregations the need of the whole church for public “self-examination, penitence, conversion (*metanoia*), reconciliation and renewal” (§36).

2. We appreciate the recognition of multilateral statements that address issues related to the “fundamental aspects of the life of the Church” in its “journey towards God’s gift of communion” (§37). We particularly note the reference to the WCC statement from Porto Alegre (2006), which recognizes the church as “a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God’s grace to all people and serving the whole of creation.”⁹ However, §37 does not seem to do justice to the issues and themes of those wide ranging ecumenical conversations, combining them into one rushed paragraph.

3. We appreciate the inclusion of divergent views of “sacraments” and “ordinances,” and a recognition that the *sacrament* “indicates God’s saving work” (§44). This resonates with our own tradition and understanding of God’s word as a visible “sign” in Article XIII of the Augsburg Confession. These acts of God move us outward into the world

9. “Called to be One Church,” §2, in *Growth in Agreement III*, ed. Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Thomas F. Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), 606–607.

where we are not only “signs of the love of Christ” but where Christ once again encounters the persons doing the works of mercy towards the outcasts: feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, etc. (Matt. 25:31–46).

4. We recognize that there are still church-dividing issues centered on the nature of the Church, specifically the understanding of apostolicity and its role in establishing the authority and organization of the ministry of the church (§47), as well as the issue of primacy among the patriarchates (§55). These have been important discussions between Roman Catholics and Lutherans internationally and in the USA,¹⁰ between members of the Anglican and Lutheran communions,¹¹ and The Episcopal Church and the ELCA.¹² This is also an issue that divides Lutherans themselves. In this regard, we agree that *TCTCV* provides a framework for continued dialogue on the order of ministry (§45 and §46), its authority over the sacramental life of the church (§40), to pass on the faith (§38), and to exercise oversight (§48) within our broader ecumenical relationships. The ELCA and some

10. Most recently from the international dialogue, *The Apostolicity of the Church. Study Document of the Lutheran - Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006), e.g., §281, 282, and from the U.S. *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation*.

11. The Porvoo Declaration (1993), http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/102178/porvoo_common_statement.pdf.

12. An Agreement of Full Communion - Called to Common Mission (1999), http://download.elca.org/elca%20resource%20repository/called_to_common_mission.pdf?_ga=1.211944210.768957096.1468504337.

ecumenical partners have already experienced a “differentiated consensus” over some of these matters, especially over the recognition of gender equality in regards to ordination and the office of ministry. *TCTCV* might better read “Christians disagree as well over *previous historic* restrictions of ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament to men only” (§45).

5. While acknowledging what is said in chapter 2, we regret an important omission in this chapter regarding “Ministry within the Church,” which is “the ministry of the baptized” and the “authority of the laity.” Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession holds that Church is “the assembly of all the believers.” Without laity there is no church. While §55 refers to “primacy” of bishops, the ELCA understands that the “primacy of decision-making (jurisdiction) and teaching” does not merely “extend” to the whole people of God, but is part of their identity, calling and ministry. The ELCA reflects this understanding and commitment in its constitution and structures (ELCA Constitution 3.02; 4.01). The section on ministry would better reflect our understanding of the Church if it located the particular ministries of overseer, presbyter, and deacon, which are particular ways of rendering service, within the larger ministry of the whole church as people of God. Here, we appreciate the important role of the laity with their own “ministries and charisms” as recognized in *Lumen gentium* (LG §31).¹³ We would agree that “author-

ity in the Church in its various forms and levels [including lay and ordained], must be distinguished from mere power” (§55). The authority of Christ does not solely rely upon what might be construed as institutional religious leaders. In fact, Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession raised the Lutheran concern for mixing of spiritual authority and temporal power, whatever its form.

6. We commend for further study *TCTCV*'s recognition that the body of Christ, “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” walks together as a synod / as conciliar in its “local, regional and universal” manifestations in order create and increase faith throughout the whole church (§53). This ecumenical order reflects how the ELCA understands itself as the three expressions of the church: congregation, synod, and church-wide office together as the “assembly of all.” This “walking together” in truth and love is a theme already utilized within the ELCA as accompaniment and could prove fruitful in further conversations.

7. Finally, we also affirm that this document underlines the “already but not yet” church that is “the activity of the Holy Spirit, guiding the whole process” (§21). Previous ecumenical conversations have also come to confirm this belief.¹⁴ *TCTCV* reflects the continued commitments of the ELCA as an inherently ecumenical church.

13. *Lumen gentium* (1964), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/

[vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

14. *The Apostolicity of the Church*, §292, 293.

Comments on chapter 4: “The Church: In and For the World”

1. We note that the final chapter is at once the most compressed and the most tentative: it raises a number of extremely complex and unresolved theological issues on which ecumenical reflection is still developing. We affirm the acknowledgment of these topics as essential to ecclesiology and emphasize the need for ecumenical (and inter-religious) engagement to continue to advance the discussions.

2. In particular, we affirm the twin recognitions that, “Today Christians are more aware of the wide array of different religions other than their own and of the positive truths and values they contain” and that today “Christians recognize religious freedom as one of the fundamental dimensions of human dignity” (§60). It is the experience of the ELCA that our ecumenical vision is being enriched and expanded by inter-religious engagements of many kinds. While we recognize also the theological challenges which Christians face in these encounters, this church is committed to deepening the relationships which arise in inter-religious collaborations and to exploring the theological implications of religious diversity. We encourage ecumenical forums to include awareness of religious pluralism in all aspects of their work and especially to expand theological explorations beyond questions of “who can be saved.”

3. We affirm the inclusion of a section on “the moral challenge of the Gospel” (§§61–63). We appreciate also that the achievement of the

Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is used again in this section, with the specific purpose of stating the agreed basis in God’s gracious action from which Christian ethical reflection begins. Further, we appreciate the recognition in this section that Christians collaborate with those from other religious traditions and from none in the quests for both individual and social flourishing.

4. In regard to future ecumenical dialogues, we affirm the need to examine the “challenges to convergence” presented by differences on moral issues. Yet we caution that, however urgent such differences are in our contemporary contexts and however highly charged are the questions they raise, conversations that begin from disagreements run the risk of obscuring the common ground that Christian traditions have identified on matters of first importance.¹⁵ From this starting point, dialogues need to examine not only particular variances in ethical understandings but also the related questions of how divisive such diversities must be considered. They need also to attend to frameworks and considerations that would support continuing diversity in ethical discernment.

15. See, e.g., the “First Ecumenical Imperative” identified by the Lutheran - Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and affirmed as the first “commitment” in the Common Prayer for the Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017: “Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced” (*From Conflict to Communion* §239, [Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH and Paderborn: Bonifatius GmgH, 2013]).

5. We note that the section “The Church in Society” (§§64–66) is less a conversation starter than an indication of conversations which must be pursued and of active engagements which must be nurtured. Thus, there is no italicized paragraph to push the discussion further. Still, no vision of the church could end without this outward orientation. The challenge implicitly is given that such an orientation must be carried out in all ecclesial thought and life.

Finally, we recall with gratitude not only the original impact of the great convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* but also its continued unfolding in the life of the church. We thank the Commission on Faith and Order for the long process of patient listening and leadership which now bears fruit in this text, and we pray for all Christians the growth in communion which this document seeks to invite and inspire.

4. Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Inter-Orthodox Consultation

Paralimni, Cyprus, 6–13 October 2016

Introduction

1. We participants in the Inter-Orthodox Consultation which took place in Paralimni, Cyprus from 6–13 October 2016, coming from Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, are grateful for the opportunity to enter into a serious and respectful study of Faith and Order text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*.¹ We recognize this text as the product of a long and careful process, conducted by theologians from various church traditions and confessions represented in the WCC Commission on Faith and Order.

2. The Inter-Orthodox consultation reflected on a number of responses to *TCTCV*, including an official response from the Russian Orthodox Church and others responses from Orthodox theologians and theological faculties. It is clear that *TCTCV* is not meant to replace existing ecclesiologies, but rather to contribute to a better understanding of ecclesiology and to bring them closer for the sake

of the unity of the Church. Participation by the Orthodox in the process of theological discussion surrounding *TCTCV* should not be interpreted as an acceptance or affirmation of everything contained in the text. We affirm that the fact that the Orthodox Church participates in bilateral as well in multilateral dialogues never implies any theological concession in matters relating to Tradition, ecclesiology and faith.

3. By its nature as a Faith and Order convergence text, *TCTCV* is an eclectic presentation of perspectives on ecclesiology from different Christian traditions. As such, its methodology, vocabulary and theology differ from Orthodox ecclesiology at many points and in significant ways. At the same time, the active participation of Orthodox in the preparation of the text is evident; and there is a significant degree of convergence with Orthodox ecclesiology.

4. *TCTCV* is a valuable tool for helping Christians of different traditions and confessions expand their understanding of ecclesiology and grow closer to one another. It is useful for this stage on the ecumenical journey, precisely for the reason that it presents ecclesiology in ways that

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013).

are both familiar and foreign to each community. By drawing together multiple perspectives and stating them in ways that are not necessarily the traditional expressions, the text offers each tradition the opportunity to see with the eyes of the other and therefore to better understand both itself and the others. *TCTCV* is a useful tool for discussion and growth in relationships between Christians.

5. We are hopeful that the present response constitutes a worthy representation of Orthodox reactions to *TCTCV*. This response does not intend to constitute a comprehensive Orthodox ecclesiology, but rather to offer a few insights emanating from our churches' Tradition. It is offered to the WCC Faith and Order Commission as a contribution to its further work, and is respectfully forwarded to our Churches for their consideration, further elaboration and responses.

Chapter 1: God's Mission and the Unity of the Church

6. We affirm the emphasis throughout the text on the responsibility of the Church to follow Christ's command to make disciples of all nations (cf. Matt. 28:19). The proclamation of the Gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ through restored communion with God, other human beings and the creation, is a joyful privilege.

7. This core feature of Orthodox identity was emphasized in the Message of the Orthodox Primates Synaxis in 2008:

. . . we underscore first and foremost, the importance of the duty of Mission for the life of the Church, and in particular for the ministry of us all, in accordance with the final commandment of the Lord: "you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The evangelization of God's people, but also of those who do not believe in Christ, constitutes the supreme duty of the Church. This duty must not be fulfilled in an aggressive manner, or by various forms of proselytism, but with love, humility and respect for the identity of each individual and the cultural particularity of each people. All Orthodox Churches must contribute to this missionary effort, respecting the canonical order.²

It is important that Christ's command to make disciples of all nations not be used by any group as a justification for the proselytism of other Christians.

8. For historical reasons, Orthodox churches have sometimes been unable to carry out effective mission efforts; but this should not be understood as an indifference to the proclamation of the Gospel. This is one area in which the Orthodox Church is challenged by this document to be faithful to her own missionary theology and heritage.

2. Message of Orthodox Primates of the Orthodox churches (12 October 2008, Phanar), §3. See <http://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=en&id=995&tla=en>

9. In §6,³ we welcome the affirmation that the Gospel has been embodied in the language and culture of the various peoples where the Church has been established. The life of the Orthodox Church, with its many different cultural expressions of the Gospel, while maintaining a unity of faith, is a witness to this reality. These various expressions of the Orthodox Church in different contexts reflect the diversity and beauty of the One Church. As Christians we are challenged to discern together how this process will continue in the 21st century, as the Church engages the dynamic cultures in which it finds itself and proclaims the Gospel in places and to peoples where the Church is not yet established.

10. We would like to express a caution about the expression “new way of being the church” in §7. We understand that this reflects the technical vocabulary of the emerging churches, expressing the need to find culturally appropriate ways of being the church in the 21st century. However, it is very important that this “new way of being the church” truly be “faithful to what has been received from the beginning.”

11. Paragraphs 9 and 10 identify the challenges related to churches’ being able to “recognize in one another the authentic presence of . . . the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” This is a serious concern for the Orthodox; and it cannot be solved by avoiding it and assuming that churches

3. All references to paragraphs (§) in this document are to *TCTCV* paragraphs.

already do recognize one another as church. It is not possible for the Orthodox to move forward on the ecumenical journey without greater consensus on this matter.

12. With sorrow we must say to our ecumenical partners that it has become much more difficult to recognize other Christian communities as churches because of the radical “changes in doctrine, practice and ministry” (§9) that have been made. Even more troubling than the changes in particular practices are the changes in hermeneutics and epistemology used to justify them. When the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church are reinterpreted and reconstructed in order to support positions directly contrary to what has been believed and taught at all times, everywhere and by all, it becomes increasingly difficult to recognize these Christian communities as churches. Therefore basic affirmations such as the “conviction that Scripture is normative” (§11) and the profession of the creed (§22) become meaningless.

Chapter 2: The Church of the Triune God

13. Although chapter 2 reflects progress in the use of terminology and has, to some certain extent, followed the proposals of the Agia Napa Consultation (2011), from an Orthodox point of view further theological elaboration is desirable.

14. We affirm the use of biblical teaching and the guidance of Holy Spirit for the ecclesiological insights over the course of history, as well as the importance of “living Tradition” (§§11 and 38).

Yet, throughout the text, this “living Tradition” does not really seem to have been understood by our ecumenical partners, despite the significant WCC consultations that have elaborated this very important theological notion. A weak ecumenical memory has contributed to this problem.

15. We affirm the Trinitarian perspective of the Christocentric vision of the Church. The Church, as the Church of Christ, is also the Church of the One God in Trinity. We appreciate the further references to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church as the Giver of gifts for the common good, although the role of the Spirit in the life of the Church should have been more deeply elaborated.

16. From an Orthodox point of view, greater attention should have been given to the content and the meaning of “mutual accountability” (§18). Certainly, “mutual accountability” should reflect the basic principles of the constitution and rules of the WCC concerning relations between the member churches, as well as the Toronto, Evanston and Montreal Statements.⁴

4. For the Toronto statement see <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement>; for the Montreal statement, see the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order (Montreal 1963) report on “Scripture, Tradition and Traditions,” §39, in *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, Faith and Order paper No. 159, ed. Günther Gassmann (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993); for the Evanston statement, see the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches report, “Our Oneness in Christ and our Disunity as Churches” (Evanston, Illinois, New York: Northwestern University, 1954).

17. We appreciate the use of biblical language for the Church as people of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit, as well as the fundamental criteria of faith and sacraments of initiation to become members of this Body.

18. We affirm the confession of the marks of the Church as expressed in the Nicæan-Constantinopolitan Creed (381): “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.”

Nevertheless:

a) The oneness of the Church is presented in a very general and insufficient manner and can easily be misunderstood. In a multi-religious environment, for instance, the affirmation that the Church is one because God is one could lead to misunderstandings. Not enough emphasis is given to the fact that the unity of the Church is achieved and maintained through the confession of one and the same apostolic faith, participation in the sacraments and apostolic succession.

b) The holiness of the Church is only vaguely presented, and the reason for its essential holiness is not specified, nor is it plainly stated that sin is absolutely excluded from its nature.

c) The Catholicity of the Church is not founded on the “abundant goodness of God,” as it is stated (§22), but according to Orthodox ecclesiology it is based on the confession of the one faith in the mystery of the incarnate Christ; in one Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and in the participation in the Holy Eucharist.

d) Apostolicity in the text (§22) is based mostly on the fact that “the Father sent the Son to establish it [the Church],” and “the Son, in turn, chose and sent the apostles and prophets.” Although it is admitted that “infidelity in worship, witness or service contradicts the Church’s apostolicity,” nevertheless it is not clearly stated that the apostolicity of the Church consists not of apostolic succession simply through ordination, but also through confessing the same apostolic faith.

19. We welcome the affirmation of the Church as *mysterion* according to New Testament teaching (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16), although the notion of the Church as mystery (*mysterion*) may be expressed differently in other Christian traditions, as explained in §26. We encourage further theological reflection on the notion of the Church as mystery (*mysterion*).

20. We focused as well on the issue of legitimate diversity. It is noted that “diversity in faith, in worship and in moral and ethical practice has limits”⁵; but beyond them diversity becomes division. For the Orthodox understanding, the limit to legitimate diversity is the one apostolic faith. In this context, we affirm what the text states (especially in the question following §30 “Legitimate and divisive diversity”) that “two things are lacking: (a) common criteria, or means of discernment; and (b) such mutually recognized structures as are needed to use these effectively.”

21. Although §§31–32 are concerned with the communion of local churches, the understanding

5. Agia Napa Document, 2–9 March 2011, §25.

of local church does not correspond to Orthodox ecclesiology.

Chapter 3: The Church: Growing in Communion

22. We appreciate that *TCTCV* stresses the dialectics of the eschatological-historical nature of the Church in anticipating the kingdom of God, guided by Holy Spirit to its full eschatological realization. But from the Orthodox point of view, it should not be understood in the sense that the Church will be fully realized only at the end of time (*eschata*), while remaining an incomplete and sinful reality in any given time of its history (§33).

23. The Orthodox Church identifies itself with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church as it is expressed in the Nicæan-Constantinopolitan Creed. This identification is to be seen both ontologically and historically. Ontologically, this reality could be articulated using a different theological terminology of being, i.e., the notion of subsistence. Historically, this identification is expressed in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*: “as the prophets have seen, as the Apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the teachers have set forth in dogmas, as the whole world has understood, as grace has shown forth, as truth was demonstrated, as falsehood has been banished, as wisdom was emboldened, as Christ has awarded: thus do we believe, thus we speak, thus we preach Christ our true God”⁶

6. See http://oodegr.co/english/ekklisia/synodoi/synodicon_of_orthodoxy.htm or <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/religion/3262978/posts>

24. The crucial point for us is the historical identity of the Orthodox Church with the Church instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church of the Apostles, the Church of Ecumenical Councils, and the validity of apostolic succession expressed in and safeguarded by the historic episcopate which “teaches correctly” (cf. D. Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom).

25. In response to §35, the Orthodox affirm that the Church is holy. Being the Body of Christ, the Church cannot sin despite the sinfulness of its individual members. Therefore, we strongly affirm that there is a “continual need for Christian self-examination, repentance (*metanoia*), conversion, reconciliation and renewal” (§36).⁷ At the same time, in the course of history one can discern how distortions in faith and order led to separations of some ecclesiastical communities from the one Church.

26. Therefore, one of the urgent issues for the Orthodox is further study on the question of the “limits of the Church.” That question pertains to many important ecclesiological and pastoral issues, such as the recognition of sacrament of baptism outside the Orthodox Church. The varied practices among the Orthodox worldwide testify to the still unsettled nature of this question, despite

7. This quotation proposes a slight revision: “penitence” is replaced with “repentance” as a better translation of the Greek term *metanoia*. “Repentance” and not “conversion” is the English translation of “*metanoia*.”

canonical norms that have been in place since the late 4th century, as the Agia Napa report states.⁸

27. The Orthodox accept the historical names of other non-Orthodox Christian churches and confessions that are not in communion with them. The Orthodox believe that their relations with them should be based on an objective clarification of the whole ecclesiological question, particularly to the issues related to sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession.

28. It is in light of the Agia Napa statement that we consider chapter 3 section B “Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry.” The restoration of communion between the Orthodox Church and non-Orthodox Christian churches and confessions requires unequivocal and unambiguous agreement about the fundamental principles of the life of the Church, as it is expressed in “The Church: Local and Universal” (1990) quoted in *TCTCV* §37: “The ecclesial elements required for full communion within a visibly united church – the goal of the ecumenical movement – are communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making; and in common witness and service in the world.”⁹

8. Agia Napa Document, §13.

9. “The Church: Local and Universal,” §25, in *Growth in Agreement II*, 868.

29. *TCTCV* admits that “these attributes serve as a necessary framework for maintaining unity in legitimate diversity” (§37). Accepting this statement, we stress that legitimate diversity cannot include any diversity in dogmatic and moral issues.

30. Following the report of Agia Napa consultation,¹⁰ we stress that the Church’s authority/*exousia* (cf. Matt. 28:18), stemming from that of the Lord who emptied himself, is different from the world’s authority. The exercise of authority within the Church, and of the Church in the world, in the name of Christ and by the Holy Spirit, must be a service (*diakonia*) of love, with no domination or coercion (cf. Mark 10:45; John 13:1-16).

31. We support the statement of *TCTCV* that “authority in the Church in its various forms and levels, must be distinguished from mere power” (§50). We appreciate the reference in the text to authority in the Church, which is to be understood as a service of love (*diakonia*) for the growth of church *koinonia* in faith, love and witness (*martyria*) (§49), and also the recognition of the sources of authority (Holy Scripture, Tradition, worship, Ecumenical Councils and local synods), as well as the reference to the lives of saints and the witness of monasticism during the historical course of the Church (§50). The communion of believers or any similar formula is not the appropriate definition of the Church. We agree with what the text affirms elsewhere: that witness, sacraments and *diakonia* (service) are main aspects of being a church. WCC

10. Agia Napa Document, §30.

member churches should seek a common understanding of the normativity of the ecumenical councils, based on the work already done by the WCC Faith and Order Commission.

32. We want to assert that there is no *episkopé* without the bishop. In the New Testament, the person of the bishop defines the function of *episkopé* (see §§48 and 52).

33. In contradiction to all references in *TCTCV* regarding the possibility of recognizing any authority to multilateral ecumenical dialogues and common statements as their production, for the Orthodox it would not be possible to recognize “a certain kind of authority” (§50) to them. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no respect for the outcome of the ecumenical dialogues.

34. Commenting on §55 regarding primacy, synodality and conciliarity in the first millennium, we have reservations concerning the historical description of these issues.

Chapter 4: The Church: In and for the World

35. We as Orthodox understand mission in terms of the essence of the Church: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. In our response to *The Nature and Mission of the Church*,¹¹ we noted that

11. *The Nature and the Mission of the Church*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, 2005, WCC, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-nature-and-mission-of-the-church-a-stage-on-the-way-to-a-common-statement>

the connection between mission and catholicity was emphasized, while the connection between mission and unity was in need of further reflection and elaboration. In *TCTCV*, this connection was acknowledged. Furthermore we would like to underline that in the Orthodox understanding catholicity cannot be based on contextual circumstances, as expressed in §65.

36. An adequate definition of mission still needs further clarification. As in our response to *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, we would like to emphasize the importance of service (*diakonia*) in mission. We understand *diakonia* as it is expressed in the Gospel of Matthew: “Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me’” (Matt. 25:45). However, the Church cannot be reduced to a diaconal organization. We call for deeper theological reflection on *diakonia*.

37. We cannot affirm the teaching of salvation without believing in Christ and baptism. Therefore, the way that *TCTCV* refers to religious pluralism in §60 cannot be accepted by the Orthodox, as it goes against the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). With respect for human dignity and dialogue with people of other religions and faiths, one may search for “whatever elements of truth and goodness are present in other religions” (§60).

38. For the Orthodox Church moral issues are “church dividing” (§63) within the ecumenical movement. This is not because of a legalistic fixation on a moral code; it is based on the belief that the moral teaching of the Church is rooted in theology and Christian anthropology. Christian moral norms are not simply philosophical, social and cultural constructs: They express fundamental realities about the relations between God and human beings. This is particularly true in the area of human sexuality, which has become so very controversial. The text repeatedly suggests the gospel as the fundamental source for moral norms. We fully agree with that; but we would caution against any conflicting understanding of law and gospel which would make the gospel an antinomian principle. We must not use the gospel as a license for behavior that is not consistent with Christian identity in Jesus Christ. The reference that “*koinonia* includes . . . also shared moral values” (§62) in a convergence document could be understood as a project aimed at transforming the confessional Christian communities, which are called to change or even neglect their traditions.

39. We would strongly affirm the need for Christians to “be accountable to each other with respect to their ethical reflection and decisions” (§62). In this regard it is very difficult to understand how some Christian groups can make ethical and moral decisions which are radical departures from the unbroken Christian tradition of 2000 years, disregarding the objections of other Christians, even those within their own communions. Flagrant violations of the principle of mutual accountability

reflect an absence of love and make the ecumenical journey more painful. As a result, those Orthodox who participate in the ecumenical process are subjected to criticism and pressure from within their own tradition.

We praise God the Father who “placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:22-23).

5. Uniting Church in Sweden

The Uniting Church in Sweden is a new church that emerged from three traditions, Methodists, Baptists and Mission Covenants deciding to form a new church in Sweden. The Uniting Church in Sweden is in its very DNA a converging ecclesiological body, a uniting church. In its theological foundation documents, it is said that the Uniting Church in Sweden understands itself as a temporal provisional arrangement in time while waiting for the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. So, both internally and externally, convergence among Christian churches is an essential factor showing how the Uniting Church in Sweden understands ecclesiology. It was formed by three denominations that shared a strong commitment to the ecumenical movement and understood the work for the visible unity of the Church of Christ as a formative part of the essence of being a church.

From that perspective, we find the emphasis on the Church as communion, *koinonia*, to be a very important ecclesiological concept. This is an ecclesiology that has its foundation in the Trinity of God. God is communion and the Church of Jesus Christ is communion. As sisters and brothers in the Church of Christ, we are not only in fellowship with each other; but we are parts of one another. The Church is called to be one body because all who are baptized in Christ have part in God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ. This is an ecclesiology that sees ecumenical commitments

as defining characteristics of what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ. We believe that *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* is an important part of the common vocation we have as churches in fellowship in the ecumenical movement to call one another to unity in faith and deeds; and to explore further what *koinonia* means for our common pilgrimage towards a common vision of the Church of Jesus Christ.

With this background, it seems natural to think that a convergence text on ecclesiology would be very interesting for the Uniting Church in Sweden. But the document has not been received with great enthusiasm in the Uniting Church in Sweden. Rather, there is a tone of disappointment in our church; and questions have been raised such as "Is this all we can say together as the ecumenical movement?" and "Have we not got further on our way to a common vision of the Church?"

In the founding document of the Uniting Church in Sweden it is said that the mission of the church is twofold: to proclaim the gospel and to practice the service of love among humans. These two sides of the mission of the church are so intertwined that they cannot be separated from each other. While we recognize that these two aspects of the church's mission are present in the document, we notice a dichotomy between them which we are not satisfied with. It is the almost classical idea in the ecumenical movement that there is a

gap between “faith and order” and “life and work” that needs to be overcome. This gap is reflected in the very structure of the document, where the first three chapters reflect a “faith and order agenda,” whereas the fourth chapter, which is considerably shorter than the three previous chapters, reflects a “life and work agenda.” This whole structure conveys a message that the “life and work issues” are something we can deal with after we have dealt with the dogmatic questions of the Church. When it comes to ecclesiology, it seems as if the document is saying that dogmatic questions are more formative than ethical questions.

One example of the problem can be seen in §20 where it says that the “mission which Jesus entrusted to the eleven in Matthew 28 entails ‘a ministry of word, sacrament and oversight given by Christ to the Church to be carried out by some of its members for the good of all. This triple function of the ministry equips the Church for its mission in the world.’” We find that the correspondence between the words in the text, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,” and oversight is a rather strange interpretation. What Jesus refers to in Matthew 28:20 has more to do with the ethical education that we find in the gospel according to Matthew, i.e., in the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5, 6 and 7. In our interpretation of the words in Matthew 28, there is more emphasis on the tasks of deacons than on the persons who exercise oversight, who are called bishops in many ecclesiological traditions.

The same problem appears in §31 where there is a list of the distinctive characters of the local church. The words that say that in a local church,

“the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to” can be interpreted such that the local church is called to do the actions of love and service to its fellow human beings. Witnessing to the redemptive work of Christ can be done in different forms. But we still feel that the text emphasizes the epistemological aspect of Christian faith. God is identified as creator and revealer, not as redeemer or savior, in §62. This also conveys a message in which the epistemological dimension of faith gets emphasized in a way that we find unfortunate. What humankind needs most is salvation, not revelation. It is as if the basic question that Christian faith addresses is an epistemological question of how we can understand that the epistemological claims that Christian faith raises are true. This is an important question, but not the most important one. The basic question of Christian faith is not a question of knowledge, but a question of trust. How can I have trust in life as a human being in a world where there is so much evil?

The Uniting Church in Sweden is formed by three denominations with a strong pietistic heritage. We are formed by churches that came into being partly in opposition to a Christianity that many would call lukewarm, and in which the members of the Lutheran state church were seen as less committed to the Christian faith. In the pietistic revival that formed our traditions, the key question was put to every individual: Do you live the new life in Jesus Christ? Are you born again? The last question refers to John 3:3. This is more than a cognitive question. To be a Christian is much more than just considering certain facts as true. It

is to come into Christ, to live life in a new sphere and interpret one's own and the whole world's life in the context of God's work in the creation and in the new creation.

From such a perspective, we ask ourselves whether the ecclesiology reflected in the document overemphasizes the intellectual aspects of Christian faith. We believe that there is need for a different kind of integration between the first three chapters and the fourth. Let us explain further: To engage in the work for the liberation of every human being who lives in poverty is not an option for the Church of Jesus Christ. It is one of the Church's defining characteristics, because the poor are not someone else; they are our own kin (Is. 58:7). As stated in §66, the Church is comprised of persons from all socio-economic classes; but even so the poor have a special place in the Church because our Lord and Savior became poor (2 Cor. 8:9). In this respect we are not satisfied with the language in §64. Here people who are in need are being mentioned. They are the others, "them." It is said that the Church is called to be a voice for those who are voiceless. But we are not called to speak for someone else. We are called to empower those who are considered voiceless so that they find their own true voice and speak for themselves. First and foremost, we need to understand that Jesus not only cared for the blind, the lame and the leper, and welcomed the poor and the outcast. Jesus was one of them.

Our Lord is not someone who, from a privileged position, took on other persons' problems: He became one with them. Their hardships became his hardships. That means that the poor are not at

the margins but in the very center of the Church. So it is not the poor that need the Church. The Church can only be the Church of Jesus Christ if it is the Church of the poor. If the Church does not realize that the poor are at the very center of the Church, then the Church is something else than the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. This is crucial for the ecumenical movement. If we are to reach a common vision of the Church, an ecumenical ecclesiology, then we need to focus upon our poor and suffering Savior. He has been on the side of the poor and those we call the marginalized. If we are somewhere else, he is asking us why we are not where he is.

So we cannot relegate the social ethical issue to a separate chapter in our ecclesiology. There are not two altars. There is only one altar, the altar of Jesus Christ. In our church many local churches have learnt the importance of ecumenical concerns by meeting immigrants that come to Sweden in large numbers. Then the ecumenical concerns are not doctrinal problems, but pressing issues of how to facilitate living together. So maybe one problem for an ecumenical movement looking for a common vision is the fact that the unity of the Church as a goal is too narrow. Maybe we need to look for the unity of the whole of humankind, of the whole world that God Jesus so loved (John 3:16).

In §49 there is the only reference to the concept of *kenosis* from Philippians 2. It is discussed in the context of leadership and authority in the Church. This is an important concept. But we want to highlight the statement on ecclesiology made by the WCC 9th assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006, *Called to Be the One Church*: "The Church

participates in the reconciling ministry of Christ, who emptied himself, when it lives out its mission, affirming and renewing the image of God in all humanity” (§10). The concept of *kenosis* in Philippians 2 is described as the mind of Jesus Christ. To be the Church of Jesus Christ is to be an instrument for his mind. The kenotic mind of Jesus Christ can be interpreted as God’s boundless hospitality. Jesus reconciled humankind by going away to prepare a place for his disciples (John 14:2). Jesus’ death is an invitation to humankind to live in God’s *koinonia*. We believe that we, as the Church of Jesus Christ, are called to meet each other with the mind of Jesus Christ, which means in a kenotic way. God asks us in what way we can go away to prepare place for each other and for our fellow human beings. This concept of *kenosis* is an ecumenical mindset.

This also provides a pattern for the Church to handle the plurality inside the Church. The Church is called to handle differences with the mind of Jesus Christ. This means that we are also called to go away in order to prepare room for the other, all the human beings that God created, that God loves and that Jesus Christ died for. We are called to be part of God’s mission, *missio dei*, to make room for every human being in God’s communion. To understand the Church as a prolonging of the incarnation, to be sent by the Son as the Son was sent by the Father (John 20:21), is to relate to others in the way God relates to the world in the kenotic outreach from God that is the center of Christology. God is calling the Church of Jesus Christ to be a part of this kenotic mission in the world. As mentioned previously, the

Uniting Church of Sweden understands itself as a provisional arrangement while waiting for the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. So we are ready to “go away” in order to prepare room for something else.

One key concept is the question of what kind of unity we are to search for. Often in the ecumenical movement the question of eucharistic hospitality, or being able to meet one another at the same table of communion, has been the description of the unity we are longing for. We believe that this ambition is not bold enough. The goal of the ecumenical movement should be that the world may believe, as Jesus prays in John 17:21. That means that it is the world which can judge how successful or unsuccessful our ecumenical efforts have been. It is when the world believes that our unity is credible. Again we want to emphasize that faith is more a question of trust than of regarding something as true. A church that can testify to the world so that the world may trust God’s work in creation and salvation is a credible and unified Church of Jesus Christ. In a much loved eucharistic prayer in Sweden, we ask God to show us the mystery of the Lord’s communion table: one bread – one humanity.

The words in §30 are about the calling of Christians to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of liturgy, custom and law; and to foster legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological methods and formulations, in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole. Plurality is primarily a gift. It is in line with our belief in God’s incarnation to believe that the gospel needs to find

unique expressions in different social and historic contexts. We believe that an apostolic ministry needs to reflect the plurality of humankind. Plurality and diversity are in themselves a blessing to the churches and to the ecumenical movement. One of the central aspects of keeping orthodoxy is to do exactly what the document says: to treasure and celebrate the richness of the legitimate plurality within the Christian tradition. One of the key tasks for those who exercise oversight in Christ's church is to safeguard the openness to plurality against every tendency to reject any expression of legitimate diversity of the Christian faith. Such rejections might be the most serious heresies that the churches have to oppose. Such heresies threaten to undermine people's trust in the gospel.

Maybe we are more helped if we understand orthodoxy in its original sense, to give God right praise. Orthodoxy is what helps the people of God to praise God in a right way. Everything the Church does to build up trust in God is orthodox. In that way we cannot separate orthodoxy from orthopraxy. They are so intimately connected that the whole idea that they are separated must be questioned. We believe that the conversation on moral issues discussed in the paragraph in italics after §63 is crucial for the ecumenical movement and needs to be in the center of the ecumenical agenda. When ethical issues get to the center of the ecumenical agenda, it helps us give to every matter the right proportion. Ethical matters are not more important than doctrinal ones; nor are the doctrinal matters more important than the ethical ones. They are part of the same Christian theology; and we can only deal with them in a good way if we

see the strong connection between them. Orthodoxy, then, is every act that a Christian church does that builds up trust in the Christian faith and helps people to praise God in a proper way, out of thankfulness for what God gives us through God's work in the creation and salvation.

So our suggestion is that chapter 4 become chapter one in the ecumenical movement's search for a common vision of the Church of Jesus Christ. In our understanding of ourselves, we are prepared to leave our Church, to cease to exist as a denomination. We have done that before and we are prepared, we want to do that again and again for the sake of the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. In a kenotic way, we want to go away to prepare way for a wider, deeper and more hospitable Church. We believe that this is what the churches should call one another to do in the ecumenical movement. We recognize that this document is a step on the way towards a common vision of the Church. We hope that our response is a contribution to the ongoing and necessary conversation in search of a common vision for the Church, and ultimately for the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ.

21 December 2016

6. Union of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches in Italy

The Waldensian Evangelical Church (Union of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches in Italy) receives with gratitude the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and acknowledges all the hard work and ecumenical experience that has gone into it.

In particular, it seems positive to us that topics such as the theological and spiritual meaning of religious pluralism, the ethical responsibility of churches and their relationship with society have become part of an ecclesiological treatise. The paper shows that these are still initial steps, but it is very encouraging to be moving in this direction.

Anyone who knows the history of ecumenical reflection in the field of ecclesiology cannot be surprised by the attention given to the problems of ministry in this paper as well. The kind of Protestantism to which our churches belong has developed models of unity that do not require a common ministerial structure for full church fellowship (*comunione ecclesiale*). We think that the insistence on this point has so far considerably slowed down the journey toward unity. In particular, we do not think that the tripartite structure of ministry is required by God or is essential to the existence (*esse*) of the church.

For the same reasons, a discussion on a “primatial” structure of Christian unity seems to us to be premature and dangerous. It is premature because putting the matter of primacy before the testing of lived forms of unity means giving an inappropriate and anti-evangelical priority to the matter of power in the church—because it is about power, despite all that can be said about authority as service. It is dangerous because it occurs while there is already a primatial structure in Christianity, that of the Roman papacy, which in history (even recently) showed all its divisive potential. Appealing to the proposals of, in particular, *Ut Unum Sint*, concerning new and different forms for the exercise of primacy, presupposes acknowledging the Roman papacy as an ecumenical structure of unity. The obsessive recurrence of this theme hinders rather than fosters the path toward church unity.

We would also like to point out – without surprise, but also without any satisfaction – that the ministry of women is only mentioned in passing, and to put on record our disapproval. In our view, it will be extremely difficult to reach a consensus on the theology of ministry without clarification on this point.

These general considerations inspired the following answers to the questions in the introduction.

Answer to question 1

The document contains many elements of interest. In particular, we welcome the explicit inclusion under ecclesiological problems of the expressions of *koinonia* in the ethical and social field, as well as in the matter of religious pluralism. We are aware that this makes the path towards unity even more complex because ecumenical experience on these issues is only beginning. On the other hand, these are the areas in which *koinonia* needs to be lived today. So they are an integral part of a real-life ecclesiology.

Furthermore, we think that aiming for a ministerial structure common to the different churches, *de facto* in the form of bishop-presbyter-deacon, is problematic. We recognize that there is a long tradition in the ecumenical movement – and in particular in the Faith and Order Commission – of focusing on this point. However, in our opinion, this tradition represents a weakness on the ecumenical journey. Our churches are thinking about forms of unity that accept and enhance different ministerial structures. We are sorry to have to repeat what we stated over thirty years ago with regard to the Lima document: When the question of ministry, or of a particular ministry (like *episkopé*), is seen as the focus of unity, church unity is already at risk.

We wonder if the ecumenical movement should not reflect on this fact: While there is a significant agreement on the doctrine of God, on the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, on the doctrine of the Trinity and of salvation, there is not the same agreement on the theology of ministry. For this reason the ecumenical journey is called

into question. Should we not acknowledge the problems related to this situation? Should we not ask ourselves if the matter of the ministerial structure of the church is not completely secondary in the New Testament, compared to other questions concerning the content of the message?

Answer to question 2

It is difficult to answer this question. On the one hand, the paper maintains a broadly descriptive component, including (rightly) the noting of persistent disagreement. On the other, it seems that the point on which we are being asked to express consent, or not, is a specific understanding of ministry. In our view, this approach does not represent a contribution to the development of unity.

Answer to question 3

The paper states (rightly) that no church can reflect separately from the others on the major issues confronting us today. It is necessary to explore the dimensions of *koinonia* which have not received due attention. We agree with the indications of the text along these lines.

Answer to question 4

Our churches have never thought that the ministerial structure of other churches may represent, in itself, an obstacle to deepening fellowship. We are not sure that the document will be able to increase the area of consensus. We recognize that it describes more than our churches consider they are able to do. Nevertheless, this fact in itself does not create any difficulty.

Answer to question 5

Considering that a consensus on ministry cannot, and must not, represent the linchpin of fellowship, we should not seek one single model but reflect on possibilities and conditions for a plurality of ministries. In this context of differentiated recognition, we consider it urgent to undertake serious reflection on the ministerial role of women.

In addition, in order to enlarge the horizon of comparison, it will be necessary to raise ethical issues as an ecclesiological issue. After all, it is in this field that churches experience divisions caused by different opinions, which also depend on different hermeneutics for reading scripture.

Accordingly, the further study that will lead churches towards a common vision of fellowship must aim for a triple widening of horizons: tackling the question of ministries from a different angle; putting ethical issues on the ecclesiological agenda; and, first and foremost, examining approaches to scripture (addressing conflicting interpretations).

7. Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

December 2016

An ad hoc committee of Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) has reviewed the World Council of Churches (WCC) document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Our thoughts have been vague and various, as we have attempted to write down something that would make sense to you, the reader. The response from Quakers in Britain in the British Yearly Meeting (BYM) *A Spirit-led Church*¹ speaks to us very well. In particular, British Friends expressed how the spiritual treasures of our Quaker way sustain us in the world today. “At the heart of our Quaker faith is the vision of a church unmarred by bitter ruptures, held together in bonds of love. Yet unity does not consist in uniformity of belief or practice, but rather in a joyful acceptance of difference.”

There are several sections in the WCC document that we feel are praiseworthy and reflect why Friends were involved with the World Council of Churches in the beginning. Quakers highly value the work of the WCC and helped in its founding because of the strength that interfaith action can

bring to our witness for peace, social justice and the environment. The WCC position at a global level, including its observer status at the UN, gives voice to our collective concerns in a way that no others can.

To Quakers, convergence does not necessarily consist of a uniformity of belief or practice but rather of a mutual recognition between people, expressed in care and joyful acceptance of difference. Such an affirmation of diversity is rooted in our historic understanding of the universal ministry of Jesus. In section 1.2 of the British Quaker document *A Spirit-led Church*, the answer to the question “What is the Church” is “. . . a gathered community of mind and heart, where each soul journeys into the love of God.” Canadian Quakers would agree. It has also been our experience. There were great schisms in Quaker meetings in Canada about belief and about the authority of the Bible and the existence of pastors. In the 1950s, Canadian Quakers came together, under the leadership of young Quakers, to form one united Yearly Meeting. Differences in theology and doctrine remain; but we are one united Yearly Meeting. We strive to be “. . . a gathered community of mind and heart, where each soul journeys into the love of God.”

1. *A Spirit-led Church* <https://quaker-prod.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/store/faf7609fe3e4bc23509a18dd13c500048cd0c8086568d4cd61a1159e3237>.

This British Quakers document emphasizes another positive aspect of the WCC document: its emphasis on being open to other faith communities outside the traditional Christian community. This, too, is consistent with Friends ways and *A Spirit-led Church* makes this very clear in section 4.1: “. . . for in our openness we may discern the face of Christ in unfamiliar places.” Canadian Quakers share this hope.

Section 4 of *A Spirit-led Church* also suggests the need for “a new language to express a sacred vision of life.” In section 4.2, the document acknowledges the problematic nature of traditional Christian expression. As we work together and endeavour to understand each other in the interfaith community, it would help to get to “the meaning behind the words.” As section 4 of the British Quakers document concludes:

Our task as people of God is not to castigate or condemn people’s desire for a new way of speaking about faith, but to offer prayerful support for those who seek that eternal light which is in each one of us. In this task what matters is unity in our desire to seek the right spiritual path rather than a conformity of words.

Quakers in Canada support the responses from Quakers in Britain to the five questions posed by the WCC in Paper No. 214. We would also join in posing the question suggested at the end of their response: “How can we learn to recognize the Holy Spirit at work in each church’s life?”

We conclude with a paragraph from Friends World Conference, 1952:

Our peace testimony is much more than our special attitude to world affairs; it expresses our vision of the whole Christian way of life; it is our way of living in this world, of looking at this world and of changing this world. Only when the seeds for war – pride, prestige and lust for power and possessions – have been purged from our personal and corporate ways of living; only when we can meet all men [sic] as friends in a spirit of sharing and caring, can we call upon others to tread the same path.²

Gale Wills, Gini Smith, Lesley Read,
Anne Mitchell, CYM ad hoc committee

2. *Faith and Practice, Canadian Yearly Meeting*, 114, 4.18.

8. Church of Norway

Introductory remarks

The Church of Norway would like to extend our sincere thanks for the Faith and Order Paper No. 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, and the invitation to give our response to the document. The Church of Norway Synod 2016 (hereafter “the Synod”) understands the document to be a major convergence text in the ecclesiological dialogue process following *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, WCC, 1982).

The Synod understands its task to be to offer a response to the questions formulated in the introduction to the document. However, some comments to some of the different chapters of the document, as well as general comments, are given. Furthermore, the Synod finds it relevant to present the process in which the document has been treated within the Church of Norway.

The process in Church of Norway

The Christian Council of Norway in collaboration with the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International relations had the text translated and published in Norwegian¹. The Christian Council of Norway will be publishing its own response to *TCTCV*.

Upon reception of the document, the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations in Church of Norway asked its Theological Commission to give its comments to the document. As the Theological Commission regards the document as a major text on the understanding of the church, and seeing that Church of Norway itself is undergoing major changes in its relations to the state of Norway, the Commission recommended sending the document on an internal consultation within the Church of Norway. Thus, the document has been widely distributed, and all diocesan councils, faculties of theology and church-related educational institutions were invited to give their response to the document. In addition to the questions posed by Faith and Order, a question was asked on the relevance of the document to the Church of Norway’s work on a new church order.

Nine responses were received, four coming from educational institutions and five from diocesan councils. In addition to the comments of the Theological Commission, these responses formed the basic draft of the response from Church of Norway. The Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, the National Council and the Bishops’ Conference then treated the draft, before the final text was agreed by the Synod in April 2016.

1. See <http://www.norgeskristnerad.no/doc//skriftserie/nr%2018%20-%20kirken%20.pdf>

To the questions:

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The Synod finds that the document gives us a good opportunity to maintain an Evangelical Lutheran understanding of the church in our own context, as the document points out that the church is a creation of the gospel (*creatura evangelii*). Based on this, the Synod understands it as necessary for the church to have an ordered ministry for the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. This can be done in different ways, but the Synod supports the criterion presented in *TCTCV*, that the form of the ministry must be appropriate to the Gospel. The Synod also appreciates that the document highlights that all baptized are part of a holy priesthood, and are therefore equal in the eyes of God, even if they are called by God to offer different types of service. However, the document could have been clearer on the fact that the church is not, and has never been, a fully perfect entity, and that this belongs to the very being of a church created by the gospel.

Even if the text does not provide a traditional presentation of a Lutheran understanding of the church, it is still compatible with important views in Lutheran ecclesiology. The Synod would have liked to see further treatment of the role of baptism in the understanding of the church, although we are aware that this has been treated more thoroughly in other documents. Overall, we find that the text expresses convergence with a Lutheran understanding of the church. Among the many

themes that could be pointed out concerning this convergence, is the understanding of the local worshipping community as a basic unit for the church, which corresponds well to a Lutheran understanding of church, as expressed in CA VII. The Synod finds that the understanding of the universal church as a “fellowship of local churches” (§31) is a good starting point for understanding the ecclesiological status of churches and ecumenical communities. The use of *koinonia* and communion in the document gives helpful insights for understanding the very essence of being church. The implicit inclusion of diversity in understanding communion is helpful also within the Church of Norway.

The text seems to be part of a general trend within ecclesiological discussions of recent years. While confessional traditions have been the starting point in earlier discussions, this text establishes a larger, ecumenical perspective. An important premise for this development is a renewed consciousness about eschatology, where the church is understood as a sign and foretaste of the Reign. To this new orientation belongs a new reading of the scriptural passages on the church, which contributes to the overcoming of former confessional separations, and the opening up to convergence and differentiated consensus on the understanding of the church.

The missional understanding of the church, as expressed in §14, is of particular interest to the Church of Norway. Understanding mission as part of the essence of being church has been a major theme within the church in recent years. The document does not merely point to a missional

ecclesiology, but gives content to such an understanding of the church throughout the whole document.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

Church unity is a central theme in the New Testament and in the ecumenical movement, as well as in our church. Visible unity is a goal, but also a challenge, globally and locally. The Synod is therefore grateful that the Faith and Order Commission presents a convergence text focusing on this theme. The Synod regards *TCTCV* as a useful tool for the on-going theological and ecclesial work to promote visible church unity. The most important contribution of the document is to remind us that the subject of the church is the Trinitarian God, and that the fellowship of the church – *koinonia* – is a gift. Understanding the church as a missional and diaconal community provides an opportunity for churches to continue to grow together, and at the same time keep their own distinctiveness. The understanding of what the church *is*, and the understanding of what the church *does*, have often been treated separately. It is therefore satisfying to register that these two dimensions of the understanding of the church largely seems to be integrated, e.g., as expressed in the document: “. . . service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the Church” (§58).

The Synod does, however, find reason to point out that some work remains. It is important to note that differences between churches are not all confessional divisions, but are differences based on other issues, such as culture, gender, class,

ethnicity, sexual orientation and others. Often this is expressed with good intentions, through expressions like the church being “up against” or “facing” injustice, exclusion, crises, illnesses and the like. These concepts can also be read as if they are ethical challenges from outside. But, in reality, these challenges are to be found in the middle of the church community, and the church itself is part of this reality. Thus, this challenge to church unity comes from within the church.

TCTCV presents an understanding of what it is to be church that is more capacious than many confessional understandings are. It provides each church with useful resources for their own reflections on what it means to be church, a process that can lead to an increased understanding of other churches’ ecclesiologies, again leading the churches closer to a common understanding of what the overall vision, identity and mission of the church is. Whether the text actually contributes to growth in unity will depend on the reception process of the churches. It is to be hoped that *TCTCV* will be received in a way similar to that of the Faith and Order document *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, where the responses provided useful tools for further work on visible unity.

On another positive note, we would like to highlight the pilgrimage motif, which runs through the document as a whole, particularly in chapter 3. The church is necessarily a moving community, subject to changes. According to this understanding, it anticipates the Reign of God, although not being the full realization of the Reign. The pilgrimage motif could also have been adapted to chapter 4, with regards to the moral challenge of

the gospel. When facing difficult ethical questions, it is important to note that churches' responses to moral challenges have changed in the course of history. This is the case whether the challenges are about global injustice, care for creation, or principles for interpreting how personal and collective morals respond to the gospel of Christ (§§63–64). In this context, it is important to hold onto a double commitment: to consider the changing premises, as well as the commitment on the apostolic faith of the church.

According to the Synod, *TCTCV* shows that there is a potential for greater unity among the churches when it comes to most ecclesiological questions. At the same time, it also becomes clear from the text that the greatest difficulty today is the question around ministries in the church, including questions around ordained ministries. It may seem that for many churches the structure of ministries is a basic requirement for greater unity. In this regard, *TCTCV* continues the *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* document's proposal of a threefold ministry as a future model for the churches. However, as long as the churches that actually have a form of threefold ministry understand the different ministries in different ways, and as long as there are many churches that don't operate with a threefold ministry, we believe it is important not to lock the dialogue on ministries to the one question of a threefold model (§§45–47). Even if one thereby would obtain a certain convergence among the historic churches, this could exclude a number of younger churches where such an understanding of ministry is not considered useful. From a Lutheran point of view, it is also

unfamiliar to put such a weight on authority and obedience when it comes to the theology of the ministry (§§48–51).

The Church of Norway consecrates ministers to five distinctive ministries, which in our context has been considered a useful way of organizing the ordained ministries. On this background, we find that the document does not sufficiently discuss whether a certain pattern of ministries is actually necessary for the unity of the church. From a Lutheran point of view, it is important to insist that there are certain *functions* that the ministry of the church needs to take care of; but the *form* of the ministries can vary. This corresponds to the document's observation: "There is no single pattern of ministry in the New Testament At times the Spirit has guided the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs (cf. Acts 6:1-6)" (§46). The Synod finds that this should question the assumption that agreement around a certain model of ministry should be necessary for church unity.

A particular challenge in the discussion on ministry is the question of ordination of women. The issue is briefly mentioned in §45; but the Synod misses a more thorough treatment of it. This issue is often not dealt with in ecumenical documents, although the question is of great importance to many churches. Discussions around women in ordained ministry, access for women to church leadership and questions around gender equality are generally not found in the document. The calling to "defend human life and dignity" (§64) should also include defending the dignity of women, thereby dealing with questions of gender equality.

The Synod also finds it problematic that the document treats ordained ministries without thematizing that all Christians are called to serve in the church in different ways, and that the Holy Spirit equips them to do so. In this sense, the document takes a step backwards compared to *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, which bases its discussion of ordained ministries on a theology calling all believers to service (*BEM*, Ministry, §5). Further work on lay ministry, as well as lay participation in church leadership, would be welcomed.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

In a time when the Church of Norway is facing great changes in relation to the state, resulting in different reforms and on-going work with a new church order, *TCTCV* represents a potential resource in many ways. First of all, the text challenges the Church of Norway to ecclesiological reflections around the many reforms, and around a new church order. One challenge already mentioned is connected to the ordained ministries of the church. But *TCTCV* also presents a vision for the church's being both local and universal which could help give a holistic direction to the Church of Norway's work in these areas. *TCTCV* underlines that the different sides of the church's identity and mission are interdependent. For example, "The Church's mission in the world is to proclaim to all people, in word and deed, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ (cf. Mark 16:15)" (§59). This can be understood as an incitement to let a missional approach influence everything

the church does. "Missional" is here understood in a broad sense, holding the proclamation of the gospel and the service to the world (*diakonia*) together.

It is, however, also at this point that the unity between what the church is and does should be expressed more clearly. When the document says: ". . . Christian communities cannot stand idly by in the face of natural disasters which affect their fellow human beings or threats to health such as the HIV and AIDS pandemic" (§64), or that the church must be in solidarity with the poor, it misses the fact that the church itself is victim to natural disasters and AIDS, and that the majority of Christians in the world lives in poverty. This is nicely formulated at a different place in the document: ". . . as an historical reality, the Church is made up of human beings who are subject to the conditions of the world" (§34). These conditions mean a lot more than the variety of beliefs and practices.

The text inspires the Church of Norway to take up challenges on a number of areas, such as increased work on climate justice, peace and recognition of the distinctiveness of other confessional traditions. A particular challenge the document reminds us of is our relationship to other religions and faiths. The text suggests a positive and inviting approach to other religions and people who are not members of the church, which is much appreciated (§§25 and 60). Perhaps an even clearer definition of respect and dialogue could have been applied. When Abraham is referred to (§§17 and 18), Abraham could be understood primarily as the ancestor of the Christian church, while

Abraham is in fact an important symbol of fellowship, e.g., in the dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims. In relation to dialogue in a multi-religious context, ethical guidelines for mission and evangelizing could also have been explicitly mentioned. Otherwise, it is a strength that the document includes individual, personal and collective views on the responsibility for social justice (§64).

The pilgrimage perspective of the document challenges us to reflect upon the church as something preliminary, as being on the way towards a goal. For an established church, it is close at hand to think in static terms. *TCTCV* helps us to think of the church, and of ourselves, as always being on the way, towards something different and greater. This is important knowledge for the individual, as well as for the church as an institution. Reflections on the church as *koinonia* and communion move the Church of Norway into a greater understanding of the church as a living and diverse community.

In the middle of the Church of Norway's work on a new church order, the Faith and Order text leaves us with a particular challenge when it comes to the understanding of *koinonia* and communion. The text warns against understanding a particular cultural expression of the gospel as the only authentic one. This is a clear challenge for Church of Norway as a historical majority church in its own context, both when it comes to the church's preaching and service in a society undergoing major changes, and when it comes to the church's structures.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches that can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The Church of Norway finds itself involved in, and committed to, a number of ecumenical relationships on different levels. In general, there should not be a problem with forming closer relationships with churches that can acknowledge this document's understanding of the church. At the same time, the description of the church as it is provided in the text is too broad to provide a satisfying basis for full church communion, e.g., when it comes to eucharistic communion.

Also, the understanding of ministry represents a challenge. It would be a greater hindrance if some churches see a certain model of ministry as a requirement for unity. This would be particularly difficult if it meant to submit to the formal authority and jurisdiction of one universal ministry as a sign of unity. Paradoxically, there have been ministries for unity which, in themselves, have become hindrances for unity. It is, however, possible to accept the authority of certain ministries as long as this does not require universal jurisdiction over the churches (cf. §56).

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the on-going work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

An obvious issue for the Church of Norway to discuss further is leadership and authority within

the church. This is an issue not only connected to the question of church ministry, but also to decision-making processes, participation and democracy in the church at local, regional and global levels. The Faith and Order document provides ample reflection on ministry and the authority connected to the ministries within the church. However, little is said on questions of democracy and participation, which for the Church of Norway is a major question in a time when its relation to the state is changing, and a new church order is to be found.

A challenge with ecumenical documents is that they can become too general, and thereby obtain support without necessarily solving many problems. A reason why the *BEM* document became significant was that it discussed concrete questions around baptism and eucharist quite in depth. The work on baptismal theology has been taken further, e.g., in the Faith and Order document *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition* (Faith and Order Paper No. 210, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 2011). One could foresee similar processes when it comes, for example, to eucharistic theology, the ministry of the church, and questions of authority and competence within the church. These issues, however, would require a broader starting point for the discussion.

There is a reason to continue to ask what or who is the implicit subject of ecumenical documents, and what worldview they represent and create. As pointed out earlier, the Synod would like to recommend further work on the interconnectedness of what the church *is* and what it *does*. The Synod also believes that it would be helpful

to focus more on the fact that divisions between churches are not necessarily confessional divisions. One area where division between churches – or division within churches – can be found, is connected to questions of moral discernment. The recent study document by Faith and Order, *Moral Discernment in the Churches: A Study Document* may be of help in this regard. It is important that the churches continue to provide safe spaces for discussions on sensitive ethical and moral issues.

The Synod of the Church of Norway treated its response to the WCC document *TCTCV* at its meeting in April 2016. *TCTCV* generally contains many and good biblical passages. However, particularly at one point a discussion occurred around the use of biblical metaphors, where it became clear that in our church we have different ways of understanding such metaphors, in this case connected to the description of the longing for unity in Christ. Some understand the biblical passages used in §69 of *TCTCV*, about Christ and the bride (Eph. 5:25 and Rev. 21:1-22:5), as a sufficient way to describe the longing for unity in Christ, while others experience the metaphor used as problematic, because it makes associations to patriarchal structures that can be perceived as oppressive. The Synod recognizes that the different perceptions of these passages represent an important and interesting challenge for our church. The Synod would therefore like to encourage the Commission on Faith and Order to continue to work with questions connected to scriptural use, gender metaphors and relationships.

General comments

Chapter 4 gives concrete and useful input to an understanding of what it means to be church in the world. Among the feedback papers from faculties and institutions, there was a question about whether the prophetic voice of the Church, as described in §64, could have been even further strengthened. “The Church needs to help those without power in society to be heard; at times it must be a voice for those who are voiceless” is an important statement. The question is whether this should have been strengthened by stating that it is part of the very essence of being church to empower and accompany the voiceless. Thereby, a church fighting for justice could have been included in the previous chapters and seen as part of the essence of being church.

As the chapter now reads, it is somewhat disconnected from the rest of the document. Looking at the previous three chapters, it may seem like the church is primarily about liturgy, sacraments, ministry and church order. From such a point of view, the church’s ministry and service to the world as it is described in chapter 4 could be understood merely as an addition. However, the New Testament’s proclamation of freedom for the oppressed and food for the hungry is connected to the message of forgiveness from sin. Salvation is a totality, understood both physically and spiritually. This understanding seems to be reflected in the early church as a community of sharing (cf. Acts 2:44f, 4:32). Such an understanding of being church, *koinonia*, must therefore be part of our ecclesiological reflections. The Synod would have liked to see a stronger coherence between chapter 4 and the previous chapters,

hoping that this is a challenge that the Commission on Faith and Order can take up, clearly bringing in perspectives from the global South.

The document raises questions about whether the church has a part in sin (§§35, 65), a point that requires further reflection. The injustices that the church, either as an institution or through individuals, has enforced upon people throughout history and still does today must be dealt with. Too many people have experienced the church as oppressive. This duality of the church must therefore not be trivialized.

Concluding remarks

As has been described in the introduction to the document, *TCTCV* was distributed widely within Church of Norway. A number of different points were raised in this internal process, which were then collected and assembled into a joint response.

Some of the points raised have been similar to the opinion of other institutions or dioceses. Others have been more particular in their view. Then there have been issues raised about which there seems to be no agreement. Most of these inputs have been included in the document, as concrete answers to the questions of the Faith and Order document, as general remarks to the document, or as suggestions for further work to the Faith and Order Commission.

The Synod would like to reiterate that among all the responses in the internal process in Norway, the document has received much positive feedback. A strength of the text is that the commission brings in comments and questions to every chapter and subchapter. This makes the reading

of the document dynamic; a theological conversation can unfold and make the content available to the reader. As such, the document therefore has a potential to contribute to the ecclesiological reflections in our church at local, regional and national levels.

In the very specific historical situation the Church of Norway finds itself in the middle of, with an on-going process of separation between church and state in an increasingly pluralistic society, *TCTCV* comes at a crucial time. A major value of the document is the description of diversity as part of the nature of the church. It is important to hold on to this diversity as a value in itself. Church unity takes place with and through diversity. Thus, there must be space for differences among the churches. Therefore, each church does not primarily have to aim to adapt to certain ecumenically agreed models. As each church is local, formed by the local congregation around the Word and the sacraments, the local characteristics are important. With this as a starting point, the unity of the church will carry diversity with it. From this perspective, *TCTCV* serves as an important source of inspiration for Church of Norway's own reflections on how it understands itself as church, both locally, and as part of the one church.

With our deep respect for all the reflections, discussions and work that have been part of the process forming *TCTCV*, we hereby wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the Faith and Order Commission on behalf of the Church of Norway.

Adopted by the Synod of Church of Norway, meeting in Trondheim, 6–12 April 2016

9. Anglican Church of Canada

November 2016

Introduction

1. The Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) formally recognized and welcomed the publication of the much-anticipated Faith and Order Paper No. 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, through Resolution 142 of the 2013 General Synod. Here again we express tremendous gratitude for the years of dedicated effort on the part of many committed ecumenists who have contributed to this important convergence text. The document readily acknowledges at the outset that there is certainly not complete agreement amongst Christians on the subject of the church. However, we are able to speak together in common affirmation of the nature of the church and the ways in which it is called and equipped to participate in God's mission (*missio dei*). We agree that the work of reception that is now underway is a critical part of the ecumenical task, and we are honoured by the invitation to comment on the ways in which this statement comes to bear within our particular locale.

2. The aforementioned Resolution of the General Synod set in motion a process of soliciting feedback from sources across the country in order to prepare a response to *TCTCV* which would take into account the wide range of contexts and

perspectives within the ACC. It must be acknowledged that generating local interest and gathering formal responses was a difficult task. While some responses did eventually come in from theological colleges and seminaries, local councils of churches, diocesan ecumenical committees and theological commissions, and interested individuals, they were of small number and of limited scope. The number of submissions collected was, in fact, just nine in total. This seems symptomatic to us of what some commentators have described as the great perceived sense of "stall" or "stagnation" which the organized ecumenical movement has been facing for some time now. It may also be partly the result of a reduction in resources that are available at the national level for ecumenical work of this sort in many churches. Nevertheless, the valuable contributions we did receive were carefully reviewed and subsequently synthesized into what we hope is a representative Canadian Anglican response. The primary purpose of our response should be seen as a consideration of the ways in which this document speaks into the Anglican experience of being church in Canada today. As such, the nature of this text will not be an exhaustive engagement with *TCTCV* as a whole. Rather, because the World Council of Churches (WCC) has asked its member churches for feedback on five specific questions, these questions themselves will be used to provide the structure for the reflection that follows.

Question 1: To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

3. The ACC, like other Anglican churches, does not understand itself to be exclusively or even uniquely identified with the Church of Christ, but recognizes the elements of Church across a wide spectrum of presently divided Christian communities. The WCC's *Toronto Declaration*, referenced early on in *TCTCV*, proffers the general principle that is shared in some way by all those who take part in the work of the Council, namely that "the membership of the Church is more inclusive than the membership of [one's] own church body" (§10). While the various churches that engage with one another through the WCC each have different ways of framing this conviction according to their ecclesiological self-understandings, the ACC views this statement as entirely consistent with its own ecclesiology.

4. Nevertheless, Canadian Anglicans also strongly agree with the conviction expressed in *TCTCV* that ecclesial communion cannot refer to an invisible or spiritual reality alone (§9); it is something that requires visible marks in order to be recognized. Going back to the 1888 Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, Anglicans identified these core markers as (1) the scriptures, (2) the ecumenical creeds, (3) the celebration of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, and (4) a locally adapted historic episcopate. Our present enjoyment of full communion with The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada began in mutual recognition of the existence of the first three of these essential

markers, and was accomplished by the movement in each of our churches towards each other to accommodate theology and practice to enable mutual recognition of the fourth. It was these four features – and, rather importantly, *only* these four features – that Anglicans have seen as absolutely integral to being Church. For this reason it has been said that Anglican churches have comparatively "minimalist" or "essentialist" terms of unity. However, these are still indeed visible features, and in fact they are ones that accord very well with the same central elements of Church pointed to by the consensus of *TCTCV*: faith, sacraments, and ministry/authority (§§37–47).

5. As a result of these ecclesiological starting points, Canadian Anglicans have long been among those at the forefront of the ecumenical movement. Members of our church were involved in the mission consultations in the 1800s, in the Life and Work movement, and in Faith and Order in the 1920s and 30s. The ACC was one of the founding member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches (1944) and of the World Council of Churches (1948). We place a very high value on our ecumenical relationships, both internationally and locally. The responsibility to be engaged in the ecumenical task has become a central component in the identity of the ACC, and this is reflected in the many different ecclesial partnerships and forums for coordination and consultation in mission and ministry which we participate in and which will be enumerated further below.

6. In our opinion, two of the most important ecclesiological undercurrents described in *TCTCV* are as follows: (a) how to manage a balance between unity and diversity in the Church; and (b) the relationship between the universal and the local aspects of Church (§§28–32). Anglicans have long lived within these two dynamics, and the interplay between them has been at the forefront of their minds. Indeed, we would go so far as to say that contending with these tensions has been an especially paradigmatic feature of the Anglican experience of being Church, especially since the growth of a global Anglican presence and the emergence of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Anglican churches in different parts of the world have typically spoken of the very high value of allowing local diversity in areas such as liturgical development, governance structures, and ethical discernment. At times this has been a source of difficulty; and some relationships, both within and between national Anglican churches, have become strained as a result. However, as the Anglican Primates Meeting in Canterbury in early 2016 has stated in response to present challenges around diversity in teaching about sexuality, there remains quite a widespread desire and effort to continue to find ways to “walk together,” even with some strain.

7. The ACC, in particular, is a church that knows a great deal about both the blessings and challenges of unity in diversity. Canada has a vast geography, with many regional disparities and occasional internal conflicts. Today a significant percentage of our church’s membership is made up of the indigenous peoples of these lands, the

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. From the earliest years of European settlement there were diverse theological and liturgical cultures present within Canadian Anglicanism, reflective of some of the same kinds of regional diversity that existed in the British Isles and in the Celtic church. This has been enhanced by the arrival of many different and more recent settler populations to Canada, including Chinese, South African, Haitian, West Indian, Sri Lankan, Indian, South and Central American, and Pacific Islanders. In the present day there continue to be a number of different expressions of Christian life and worship which make up the fabric of the Anglican family across this large and complex nation.

8. When it comes to the local-universal question, Anglicans generally share a strong appreciation for the need for balance in this regard. However, it is fair to say that we have historically tended to place a certain emphasis or priority on the side of locality, especially in matters of governance. Indicative of this, the Anglican Communion itself is not a global church per se but a communion of self-determining national churches typically referred to as “provinces.” Even within national Anglican churches, such as the Canadian, there is a strong emphasis on the authority of local bishops and local or regional synods.

9. Yet, just like other Anglican communities, the ACC strongly upholds the ecumenical ecclesiological conviction that is pointed to by *TCTCV* that, if it is to preserve catholicity, no local church can be content to remain isolated and self-sufficient

(§31). The authenticity of the church local is in its expression of the church catholic, just as the church catholic includes the diversities of local ecclesial expressions. This is particularly lived out in our patterns of worship – a common *ordo* (liturgical form), the centrality of the eucharist and baptism, and lectionary and other calendrical cycles in which we recognize each other across distinctions of local language and cultural expression. Within the Anglican Communion’s structures, we see this demonstrated by the fact that Canadian Anglicans have remained deeply dedicated to the formal instruments of global Anglican unity such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates Meeting.

10. That commitment is also seen in global ministries. In very concrete ways, Canadian Anglicans of all orders of ministry give leadership to the mission-oriented international Networks in the Anglican Communion, in areas such as mission and evangelism, women’s concerns and human trafficking, eco-justice, interfaith relations, care for vulnerable populations, and relief and development. These international ministries in their turn enrich local Canadian initiatives. The founding of The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada (creating the national “structure” of the church distinct from The Church of England in mission in Canada) was done for the sake of mission, to unite Anglicans within the new Dominion of Canada in order better to undertake mission, evangelism and service. It could be said that the governance locality serves local mission, in the

same way that participation in Communion structures serves Communion-wide mission; in very real ways the interplay of locality and global complement and enrich each other.

11. Growing out of several ecclesiological questions asked by the Anglican Communion’s study document known as *The Windsor Report* (2004), the Anglican Communion Covenant (2009) was a proposal that sought to create an enhanced governance means of maintaining unity and universality between the provinces of the Communion. Many of the churches of the Anglican Communion, including the ACC, expressed reservations about the proposal such that it has not been widely implemented. Nevertheless, the ACC has acknowledged positively the influence that the Covenant discernment process has had in the realm of Anglican ecclesiology. Discussions about our participation in the life of the Communion served to shine a spotlight on existing and newly emerging ministries that serve the unity of the Communion in ways that truly strengthen bonds of affection and action between regions and national churches. These include the Networks, as described above, and newer initiatives like the Continuing Indaba process and the various intentional “companion relationships” between bishops and dioceses across the Communion. Such steps have been affirmed quite enthusiastically in the Canadian context, and can be seen as organic Anglican expressions of a commitment to the universality of the Church that is described in *TCTCV* (§29).

12. Something similar can be said with respect to the ministries that serve the mission of the whole church, nationally gathered, within the ACC. These include the ministries of the Primate, the National Indigenous Bishop, the General Synod, Provincial Synods, and numerous other structures and initiatives encouraging coordination and accountability beyond the level of the local diocese. Although debates on aspects of human sexuality in recent years have led to the testing of these commitments between some parts of the church, Canadian Anglicans have to date also sought to continue walking together even with what are some apparently dramatic and enduring differences between them. The insights of *TCTCV* can be helpful here as well in a kind of intra-ecumenical sense.

Question 2: To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

13. *TCTCV* is an extremely important text in the present search for unity precisely because of the way it undertakes a broad literature review of the recent ecumenical past. The document acts, in effect, as a collected “harvest” of the various joint declarations and agreed statements from the previous decades of ecumenical engagement. This includes references to study documents from within the multilateral context of Faith and Order and the WCC, as well as numerous citations of bilateral dialogues between a range of Christian world communions. The ACC continues to be influenced by the 1982 Faith and Order document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)*, which it

responded to formally in 1985, as well as the various statements emerging from bilateral dialogues involving Anglicans and other Christians which are cited throughout *TCTCV* §§33–57. Within the ACC, these breakthroughs in ecumenical dialogue have enabled common liturgical and pastoral reforms, new partnerships in ministerial formation, engagement in common mission and shared ministry and even full communion relationships.

14. While some may be tempted to express a measure of frustration with the fact that a significant portion of *TCTCV* is devoted to looking back at the ecumenical progress of the past, this is also a critical component of the ecumenical task. More specifically, we see it as an aspect of the essential work of ecumenical reception. There are generations of younger Christians who are largely unaware of the things Christians have been able to say together in the ecumenical golden age of the 1960s to the 1990s about such fundamentals of the faith as baptism, eucharist, ministry, justification and church authority. We agree that it is very important to ensure that the contributions of these earlier dialogues are not lost to history but are consciously looked to as building blocks for the continuing ecumenical movement today. The WCC is uniquely positioned to play an important role in that effort, and we affirm this feature of its work in this text.

15. On this basis we wish to specifically commend the steps that are taken by *TCTCV* to build on the discoveries of BEM (§§40–44). Being able to speak with one voice about baptism allows us to

see in one another's baptisms an undeniable bond to one another through Christ's body. We heartily support the suggestion that is made for churches to consider enacting this convergence through formal mutual recognitions of baptism (§41). Indeed, such recognition has existed in Canada among the Presbyterian, Lutheran, United, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches since 1975. We are now seeing evidence of a broad ecumenical encouragement of what is being termed "baptismal ecclesiology," and efforts to place matters of baptismal identity, ministry, and mission at the heart of efforts of revitalization in ministry and worship.

16. Though we do not as yet share a common eucharist, greater convergence on the meaning of this sacrament, including the liturgical renewal it has fostered in many traditions, has allowed us to experience more fully the ecclesiological role of the eucharist in actively calling us to reconciliation with one another and with all (§43). The ACC acknowledges the policies and practices of our ecumenical partners with regard to the limitations on the possibility of eucharistic sharing. Yet, in light of our shared understandings of this mystery, we feel there may be ways to be more intentional and creative about acknowledging the spiritual communion that is already experienced by Christians through participation in one another's eucharistic celebrations as fully as possible in each given context. These are just two examples, yet they highlight the strength of a methodology that seeks to derive ecclesiological insights on the basis of existing convergence in the area of sacramental theology, and to encourage fresh action because of

them. From a different methodological approach, perhaps the more that we engage in other ministries and actions towards the reconciliation of peoples, including of Christians estranged from one another by forces of oppression and abuse of power, the more we may be drawn towards and strengthened in our commitment to a eucharistic expression of our spiritual union with Christ and with one another in Christ.

17. Another especially helpful contribution of *TCTCV* is found on the topic of the "essential elements of ecclesial communion" (§§37–47), drawn as this is from the work of a wide range of bilateral and multilateral dialogues. The ACC profoundly agrees with the convergence expressed in *TCTCV* around the identification of the essential elements of communion as those of "faith," "sacraments," and "ministry." Of course, these are also the areas where the most significant obstacles to unity are faced as well. For this reason, we feel that the text's later inclusion in the list of a further criteria – that of "common witness and service" (§37) – is very important. We affirm that common witness and service are not secondary to the goals of unity in faith, sacraments, and ministry, but are in fact equally significant expressions of the church's visible unity. The joint work of Faith and Order with Justice and Peace in the 1990s, resulting in the *Costly Unity* documents, was very well received in the ACC and in the Canadian Council of Churches. This important WCC work was very helpful in widening the conversation about ecclesiology to be more inclusive of the life and work of the church in its outward focussed life, not as

just an expression of, or secondary aspect of, the nature of the church, but more fully integrated theologically.

18. Another, more recent example of this is the 2016 General Synod's approval of a reorientation of the ecumenical conversations with the United Church of Canada away from being a chiefly theological dialogue and towards also becoming a coordinating committee for common mission between the two churches. Similar convictions about the centrality of common witness also stand at the core of the Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission mandate in Canada, as well as of the Canadian Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops' Dialogue. By highlighting the ecclesiological content that such efforts in mission and ministry carry, *TCTCV* enables us to understand these efforts as a form of growing communion between the churches and not simply instances of cooperation by them.

19. We would also like to draw special attention to the increasing possibility highlighted by *TCTCV* of churches looking to the leaders and teaching authorities of other communities for insight and direction that can be helpful for Christian ethical discernment across institutional boundaries as a result of our growing relations (§51). The text points to the persons and writings of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and Brother Roger Schutz as examples of this. To these could also be added Pope Francis, especially, for example, in light of the very wide and favorable reception of his ecological-economic

encyclical *Laudato si'* by Christians of quite varied ecclesial locations.

20. A recent Canadian example of what this can look like is seen in the ACC deliberations around the question of exploring a change to the national church canons on marriage to enable clergy to officiate at the marriages of same gender partners. Quite significantly, this consultation process explicitly invited input on the subject from ecumenical partners such as the Roman Catholic Church in Canada and the United Church of Canada, as well as our full communion partner, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. This feedback was received, made public, and included in the report of the ACC's Commission on the Marriage Canon entitled *This Holy Estate*, thereby contributing to the deliberation of voting Synod members in advance of the 2016 General Synod which addressed this issue. Such an intentional invitation of ecumenical partners into our internal synodical discernment process around moral/ethical questions is a notable and, to our knowledge, an almost unprecedented attempt on the part of Canadian Anglicans to take the "real but imperfect communion" we share with other churches with the utmost seriousness. We strongly agree with *TCTCV* that this is a growing edge for ecumenical relations, and one that is possible because of the degree of common ecclesial ground we already share.

Question 3: What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

21. We very much appreciate that the first objective expressed in the preface of *TCTCV* is identified as that of renewal. While this is first a recognition of the ongoing renewal that comes as we grow ever more into the likeness of Christ, a specific call for the renewal of the ecumenical movement is also referenced (p. viii). We are now several years into the second century of the modern ecumenical movement. The work of assessing the achievements of the past and trying to think creatively about new ways forward in the future is an everyday topic of ecumenical conversation today. As has already been mentioned, *TCTCV* spends a good deal of time highlighting much of the tremendous work that has been accomplished through theological dialogue. The importance of these results can hardly be overstated. However much local ecumenical initiatives in shared ministries and missional community work flourish, many who are involved in ecumenical activity today speak of a certain loss of momentum and energy – a so-called “ecumenical winter.” We agree that the churches in Canada, including the ACC, are in need of an ecumenical renewal, and appreciate Faith and Order’s encouragement in this regard, even as we continue to see many other signs that look like a new sort of spring.

22. In calling for wide ranging responses to *TCTCV* from member churches in a manner akin to what was sought decades earlier for *BEM*, we see Faith and Order and the WCC making a serious

effort to promote local ecumenical education and involvement at the level of the grassroots. The Historical Note appended to the end of *TCTCV* speaks directly of this need and desire. One of the official study guides on *TCTCV*, prepared by the Inter-Anglican Standing Committee on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUFO), is an Anglican attempt to serve that same end.

23. Within the ACC, we have also been prompted to consider again how we too might make a renewed effort to keep the whole people of God actively engaged in the living out of our common ministry and service in the unity of Christ, and in the continued search for unity, rather than allowing it to be viewed only as the work of experts and professionals. In the Canadian context, an example of this can be seen in the practice of the Primate of the ACC, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, of regularly pointing to and commending the *TCTCV* text for reference and study by clergy and laity alike in his teaching and preaching in parishes and at events across the country over the last several years. The publication of this text is thus an opportunity to make the urgency of the ecumenical movement come alive again for Anglican Christians, and we celebrate that.

24. The missional focus that is prominent in *TCTCV* prompts us in the ACC to another kind of self-examination. As is well known, the origins of the ecumenical movement were always deeply connected with mission and evangelization, going back to the Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910 and, indeed, before. One of the very

strong points of convergence that is highlighted right from the beginning in *TCTCV* is that the Church exists for mission (§§1–4). Over and over this is reiterated throughout the document. This is why the faith of the Church is important, why the sacraments are important, why the ministry is important, and indeed why unity is important. All of these things are ultimately in the service of God’s mission in and for the world.

25. As has been observed by many, however, the centrality of the missional dimension of the Church seemed to be somewhat eclipsed for a time in some Western contexts, including Canada. As a result of being afforded a privileged place in society for many centuries, it was taken for granted that the Church would have a voice and influence in public discourse. The situation has changed today; and we are discovering that we must now endeavor to re-learn what it is to be a missional Church in the 21st century. Out of this context, the Anglican Communion’s *Five Marks of Mission*, which provide a framework that encourages proclamation, discipleship, service, work for social justice and environmental responsibility, have increasingly become an important formulary statement on the purpose of the Church for both the ACC and for the Communion as a whole. In a manner very similar to the logic of *TCTCV*, they stress the inextricable connection between the existence of the Church and the mission of God. As the ACC undergoes its own adaptation away from a Christendom model of Church, and increasingly towards the recovery of a strong missionary impulse, it would not be a surprise to

see the adjacent call to Christian unity revitalized anew. Thus, the ecumenical convergence of *TCTCV* serves as another key voice beckoning us further in this direction.

Question 4: How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

26. Since 2001 the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) have been in a state of “full communion” as a result of their mutual implementation of the Waterloo Declaration. This agreement was reached after several decades of bilateral dialogues both nationally and internationally, and after an eight year period of “interim sharing of the eucharist.” Now fifteen years on, this relationship has been an immeasurable blessing to both churches. The ACC and the ELCIC remain institutionally distinct, retaining their own bishops and synods and other structures of administration and governance. However, the Canadian scene has also witnessed an increasing number of Anglican-Lutheran shared ministries and joint parishes, the easy transferability of ordained ministers between the traditions, more integrated cooperation in justice and reconciliation both locally and nationally, regular consultations of bishops on various matters, steps towards parallel structures for joint synodical meetings and support of joint national mission projects. All of this came about as a result of the mutual embrace of the greater convergence around faith, sacraments, and ministry that is

pointed to in *TCTCV*. As this full communion relationship continues to develop and mature, and to engage with new challenges and new opportunities, the *TCTCV* account of the Church as being ever called to make its communion more visible (§§8–9) remains a driving force.

27. The ACC has had a close relationship with the United Church of Canada (UCC) going back as far as 1925 when the latter church was formed. The ACC and UCC negotiated an organic union in the 1970s that was ultimately not fulfilled. Nevertheless, the two churches remained in close contact, and enthusiastically entered into a new bilateral dialogue in 2003 aimed at considering the potential of different models of union as well as at enhancing abilities to act together in light of the considerable unity already shared. As mentioned above, the relationship between these two churches was formally renewed once again at the 2016 General Synod, and given a fresh mandate to direct more of its focus and energy towards coordinating common mission rather than dealing primarily with differences in doctrine and praxis. Today there are a number of local Anglican and United Church congregations across Canada which exist as ecumenical “shared ministries,” which share to varying degrees their facilities, members, ministers, finances, and mission efforts. At the national level the two churches work together in many justice and advocacy initiatives, most significant among these being common efforts to contribute to the reconciliation between Canada’s indigenous and settler peoples through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008–2015). *TCTCV*’s model

of the Church as a communion of local churches is useful in this context because it is one that is able to be inclusive of variety of models of unity (§§13, 28, 31). The same can be said for the optimistic appraisal found in *TCTCV* of all that is possible for churches to do together even when they do not yet live in full visible communion (§68).

28. The Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada (ARC Canada) began in 1971. Since that time, the two churches have addressed numerous theological and pastoral issues in conversation together. In particular, they have sought to reflect on the quite significant level of agreement articulated in the agreed statements of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission with respect to how they speak to the Canadian reality and the concrete relationship of the churches. In addition, the bishops’ dialogue of the Canadian ARC relationship (ARCB) has produced joint pastoral guidelines on intermarriage between Anglicans and Catholics, as well as directives for bishops who are receiving clergy from the other church. Today, particularly inspired by the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCUM), these dialogues are both currently focused very purposefully on promoting ways to receive and express tangibly the practical implications for common mission and ministry of the existing theological agreements which these two traditions have come to in dialogue. *TCTCV* encourages precisely this as a needed area of ecumenical work, and suggests the very areas where much of the local Canadian work is being done – discernment on moral issues – as a place where

further forward movement may indeed be possible (§§61–66).

29. Anglican and Anabaptist Christians have had quite opposite histories and theological distinctives which have tended to define them for most of their history. Nevertheless, the post-Christendom experience of the Church in Canada has led to some interesting points of connection between these two communities in more recent years. As a result, the ACC has been pursuing steps to establish a national bilateral dialogue with the Mennonite Church Canada (MCC) for some time, and this was brought to fruition with the affirmation of these plans by the General Synod of 2016. This will represent a new formal ecumenical partner for the ACC, and an opportunity to broaden our ecumenical experience and learning even further. In particular, this dialogue relationship is noteworthy because it will intentionally adopt the “receptive ecumenism” approach as its methodology rather than models which emphasize comparative theology. The broad ecclesiological framework that is outlined in *TCTCV* is reflected in this decision, as these two Christian communities pursue greater relationship and shared action in ministry even with significant differences in areas such as governance and sacramental theology.

30. Beyond these longstanding and formally established bilateral dialogues at the national level, the ACC also enters into ecumenical cooperation with many other Christian communities and multilateral initiatives. In particular we would draw attention to two: the ecumenical social justice advocacy

organization KAIROS Canada, and the work of the Canadian Council of Churches. In many cases these are dialogues that do not necessarily take the form of formal theological discussion or the production of agreed texts; but, because they play out in the realm of ministry to those in need or threatened by systematic injustice, are no less valuable in the building and rebuilding of unity. The aforementioned focus seen in *TCTCV* on the interrelated significance of unity in faith, sacraments, and ministry alongside mission and service is a particular encouragement to this kind of dialogue in the realm of life and work.

31. Local Ecumenical Shared Ministries have been referred to in a previous section as an important part of ecumenical witness in Canada. In mostly rural and sparsely populated areas in Canada, as well as in some urban areas, the mission of God is best served when practical steps are taken to merge particular congregations/parishes, and to share, ecumenically, a ministry that nurtures the Christian community and that furthers God’s mission in that local area. We are now into a new generation of what emerged somewhat as “experiments” in the late 1970s and early 1980s, even as new ecumenical shared ministries are being engaged. An example of a more recent urban development has had to do with ecumenical Urban Native Ministries with the large populations of Indigenous peoples now living in urban areas. Each of our churches has much to learn from these local and intentionally ecumenical communities. Each of these – whether a small town Presbyterian-United Church-Anglican congregation served, perhaps,

by a Lutheran pastor, or an ecumenical ministry with recent immigrant and refugee communities – has the potential to serve as a source of renewal for the *oikoumene*.

Question 5: What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

32. In the late 1960s, the Anglican Church of Canada commissioned a study and released a report on the realities of life in Indigenous communities at that time. “Beyond the Traplines” brought a new awareness of the institutionalized poverty, racism and linguistic spiritual, and cultural oppression experienced by Indigenous, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada. For many at that time, it was a first exposition that called into question the rightness of the “Indian Residential Schools.” In the 1970s, the first national Indigenous Ministries Coordinator was hired, and by the mid-1980s, Indigenous Anglican leaders began a regular set of national meetings, known as “Sacred Circles.” In 1993, one of these gatherings opened time for those who had experienced the abuses of the residential schools to share their stories. At the end of the gathering, then Primate Michael Peers offered the Apology of the Anglican Church of Canada, for our failures to them, and to God in trying to re-create Indigenous people in our own image. The Apology remains an icon of our call to reconciliation.

33. The damage done in the schools was tremendous. Our church participated in a colonial

project designed to stamp out indigenous culture, language, and spirituality. Many of these educational facilities, which operated from the 1870s to the 1990s, were at one time run by the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and United churches on behalf of the Canadian government. Their mandate was to promote the cultural assimilation of indigenous children into the dominant European culture. Instances of various forms of abuse occurred under the auspices of these schools, in addition to the inherently abusive assimilation policy itself which some have called a form of “cultural genocide.” This is a dark chapter in the history of the Canadian nation itself, and in Canadian church history, and one that led to significant harm being done to indigenous communities physically, socially, emotionally, spiritually and otherwise. We are only now beginning to understand the multi-generational effects of the system that took children away from their families, in turn producing adults who had no personal and intimate experience of what it is to be a parent.

34. One more among the many painful consequences of this period is that, contrary to some of its own most deeply held convictions about the importance of local inculturation, the ACC also robbed itself of an opportunity to have its own life enriched by receiving the many gifts of great wisdom and spiritual experience carried by the Indigenous peoples of this land. The year after the 1993 Apology, another Sacred Circle was held. Participants drafted an “Anglican Indigenous Covenant” to guide them in the ministries of healing of persons and communities, and to seek the

self-determination that would support this spiritual movement, inviting others to join as partners in this journey. Over more than twenty years now, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada has been working out our commitments, within that partnership, to serve the commitment to self-determination, healing, and new life.

35. In 2008 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established and was intended to serve as one part of a holistic response to the trauma inflicted on Indigenous peoples at the hands of the state and church together. For six years, hearings were held in different locations across the country to document the testimony of thousands of people who had survived the Residential School system. At the closing of the Commission in 2015, a document identifying 94 “Calls to Action” was issued which included specific calls upon the churches to act for the redress of the destructive legacy of this history. In this process, Anglicans in Canada are experiencing their bonds with other Christians in a different and indeed penitential way as we seek to enact repentance together for the common sins of the Church in this regard.

36. Within the ACC some steps are beginning to be taken which will create structures that enable greater space for indigenous Anglicans to shape the ecclesiology and liturgy of the Church in this land in a way that was previously suppressed. These include, for example, the National Indigenous Bishop, the Primate’s Council of Elders and Youth, the indigenous synodical gatherings

known as Sacred Circle, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples and the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh (a diocesan jurisdiction where ecclesial governance operates in ways that embody greater consistency with the cultural and spiritual heritage of the indigenous people of the region). At the 2016 General Synod, further progress was made towards exploring a model of ecclesial communion which would enable greater self-determination for the Indigenous Anglican Church in Canada, while still preserving communion with the wider ACC. Not only have developments like these given greater dignity and equality to indigenous Christians and their communities, they also provide an opportunity for other Anglicans to learn some valuable lessons about other ways of coming together for council and decision making.

37. On the basis of its own internal learning in this area, the ACC would encourage Faith and Order to give more focused attention to enculturated forms of ecclesial order and governance among indigenous Christians in various parts of the world as part of its future ecclesiological reflections. *TCTCV* rightly acknowledges these sorts of failings of the Church that occurred in various parts of the world (§6), and the Canadian landscape has been shaped by this reality all too deeply.

38. This is a journey – only just begun – in which we are invited and sometimes confronted to think differently about the Church and its nature, purpose and mission. We find ourselves engaging a new set of relational realities, in which the

dominant culture has been confronted with systemic sin, and in which we pray we can be authentic in our journey towards reconciliation, divesting ourselves of the power that might be tempted to make that journey easier for us. We now know that relational justice – organizationally, in governance and ministry – compels reparation and new foundations on which to build, together. To emphasize the choice of words in the title of *TCTCV*: We are in a particularly important time in which we are continually challenged with the need to listen especially to new, formerly oppressed voices if we are to be able to glimpse “a Common Vision” of the Church.

Conclusion

39. A careful reading of the contents of *TCTCV* is a tremendously valuable exercise; and we in the Anglican Church of Canada appreciate greatly the opportunity we have had to draw upon it for the purposes of stimulating conversation and generating new ideas and inspirations for the ecumenical journey. Of course, as the use of the word “towards” in the title suggests, the true proof of its value will be in the way that it encourages the churches to evaluate their ecclesial lives in light of the vision it sets forth, both internally and with one another, and to allow themselves to be moved by it. We are grateful for the guidance it provides as a way of focusing on where the exciting breakthroughs and the enduring barriers lie. We add our prayers to many others as we together contemplate next steps.

40. As a final word of conclusion, we also wish to express our sincere thanks to the many Anglicans from across Canada who contributed their time and thoughtfulness in the service of developing this response. We trust that this is a fair summary of all those hearts and minds.

10. Armenian Apostolic Church, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin

10 January 2017

Dear beloved Brother in Christ,

In your letter, received in August 2015, there is a request to answer the five questions formulated in the Introduction of the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214.

By this letter allow me to respond you, on behalf of the Theological Committee of the Ecumenical Department of Holy Etchmiadzin, through the following themes and clarifications:

1. Marks of the Church: Armenian Apostolic Perspective
2. Challenges
3. Suggestions for further study

1. Marks of the Church: Armenian Apostolic perspective

The perception of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, the marks of the Church of Christ, has a holistic character in the tradition of Oriental Orthodox churches. The national or historical character of these churches must always be borne in mind; they are, par excellence, the churches of

peoples. Representing, as they each do, the wholeness of the life of a people, the Oriental churches perceive the Church not as an institution, but rather as an expression of the total identification of church and people which, in turn, is the genuine expression of earlier ecclesiology. The Church is to be defined in the light of the content of her life, namely in the *history of the people* and the *history of salvation*. The former, with regard to the human response to God's gift, defines the place and the role of the Church in the life of concrete national society; and the latter, relying upon the iconic expression of Christ's life, gives the meaning and life to the institution we are used to calling the "historical" or "national" Church. The two above-mentioned expressions, the *history of the people* and the *history of salvation* will thus serve to introduce, firstly, the historical trends and developments which determined the doctrine of the Church in the Armenian tradition; and, secondly, as the two main factors in the fashioning of the theological signification of the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church.

The nature of the Church in the Armenian tradition is therefore to be understood primarily as the Church of the people of God. The two ancient ecclesiological models, mostly widespread in the

Byzantine theological tradition (i.e., the church of the triune God and the church of *Theoanthropos*), although present in Armenian theology, were less considered as main theological paradigms. Instead of these two ecclesiological models, the perception of the Church as Testament between God and his people remained dominant in the earlier period of Armenian medieval theology. It was, indeed, a way to describe the visible and the invisible, spiritual understanding of the Church. The bridge between the visible, institutional Church and the invisible, mystical body of Christ is, according to the same ecclesiological model, the Christian community. In the Armenian writings of subsequent centuries, we find numerous expressions related to the understanding of the Church as the community (both spiritual and institutional), the Holy League or Testament, Mother, etc. The promise given by Christ to Peter in Matthew 16:18-20 contains the sacred sense of the Church as the community of the people of God. As such, the Church is also Mother, nourishing her children through eucharist, baptism and penitence. This ancient Christian perception of the Church as Mother is associated in the Armenian tradition with that of the Holy gospel as Father: “For we consider the Holy Gospel as our Father, and the Apostolic-Catholic Church as our Mother” (Yeghishe, *History of Vartan and the Armenian War*, 80). The highly spiritualized image of the Church was of the utmost importance for the correct understanding of the Church’s role and place in Armenian theology. One could even say that Armenian ecclesiology per se was strongly linked to the features and developments of Armenian spirituality. Of course, it would not be

correct to insist that the doctrine of the Church in Armenian theology was only concerned with these spiritual/mystical insights. Yet it would be true to say that the two main components of Armenian spirituality, *the centrality of the liturgy or the communal way of prayer* and *the fervent sensitivity to the notion of the local church* did play a definite role in the formative process of Armenian ecclesiology.

The writings of early medieval Armenian theologians reflect the ecclesiology found in the liturgical prayers of this tradition and its theological commentaries. The prayers of the Liturgy of Hours reveal some important fundamentals of Armenian ecclesiology. In one of the prayers of Prime (early morning prayer, approximately 7–8 a.m.), the Church in which the daily service is celebrated is described as one, holy, catholic and apostolic: “Having arrived altogether at the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, let us extend our prayers to the only begotten Son of God, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Vespers or evening prayer, before starting the central or major prayer, addresses the gathered community: “Let us pray for peace and for the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” According to the liturgical commentaries of the tenth century, these prayers essentially depict the historical-institutional character of the Church. Hence, the gathered community prays for the Church and for her fidelity to the apostolic proclamation (apostolicity) throughout the world (catholicity). Yet, from the prevalence of that historical dimension of the Church, we could never reach the authentic theological expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in Armenian ecclesiology.

The Church is also a mystical reality, the heritage of celestial Jerusalem. Her foundations are from the beginning of God's creation. As such, the Church, abiding in this world, reflects and expects the fulfillment of the future kingdom to come. In this sense, it is important to mention that the notion of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church reveals only the mystical and eschatological dimensions in Armenian ecclesiology. The allegory of the passenger, attributed to the Church, is presented by the idea of the haven or harbor of peace. In the daily services and eucharistic celebration, the Church passes through the passion, death, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and is reborn constantly as a community of believers redeemed by Christ. The eschatological glory of the Church is indeed attributed to the *ecclesia orans*, i.e., the praying church/assembly.

In the Armenian tradition catholicity was received as inseparable from unity. Of the utmost importance for the theological interpretation of these two notions were the famous words of St. Paul: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:3-6).

Moreover, the unity described by the apostle has to be understood in the sense of the universal pontificate of Christ. As long as Christians are aware of the Christocentric unity, they are all representing the One Catholic Church, under the guidance of the universal Pontiff, Jesus Christ. Thus the members of the One Catholic Church,

despite their doctrinal, liturgical, canonical, hierarchical, etc., differences, are unified by the same call to hope; looking forward to the same Kingdom of heaven; having the same Lord, Jesus Christ; confessing the faith of the first three Ecumenical Councils; and being baptized by the same baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ. The one catholic Church is indeed the Church, celebrating all over the world the same Christian mystery, the holy eucharist, being called to the same Christian hope. This insistence on hope, one of the three major Christian virtues, echoes the eschatological reality, i.e., the coming of the kingdom of God. In fact, the one catholic Church is called by its very nature and mission to fulfill, at the end of time, the new divine creation, the new heaven and the new earth, flooding out from both the mystical and historical realities of the Church. Therefore, the one catholic Church historically reflects what she is called to fulfill at the end of time, for there is only one catholic Church according to the divine revelation.

The holiness of the Church, as the mystical body of Christ, is closely related to the most important sacraments of early Christianity: baptism and holy eucharist. In the Church, believers receive spiritual sanctity and purification by these two sacraments. In the light of the ecclesiological developments in the earlier Church, Armenian theology in the seventh to ninth centuries reproduced exactly the teaching of the fourth- to fifth-century Church Fathers. In her holiness, the Church is seeking to be faithful to the heavenly Church, the source of all the graces filling the earthly Church. The heavenly Church, the house of saints and

angels, protects the earthly Church as with a great wall erected by Jesus Christ himself. The inseparable union of the visible and invisible aspects of the Church is, indeed, an important theological argument for Armenian theologians. All the mysteries and sacraments of the Church have an exclusively eschatological dimension, bringing the faithful to the limitless sanctity of God. The holiness of the Church is thus the typological and analogical expression of what is called the “angelic sanctity,” the endless process of the purification of all those who are inseparably united with the heavenly Church. It is through this angelic sanctity that the sanctifying grace of the Church is poured out abundantly on all the members of the mystical body of Christ, both living and dead. The holiness of the Church is a visible reality for her members, through all the grace-granting mysteries and, above all, through the invocation of the Holy Spirit during the holy eucharist. Regardless of some later theological interpretations (mostly influenced by Western theological tradition) on the dichotomous understanding of the visible and invisible church, Armenian theology teaches that the heavenly or invisible Church can be distinguished from the earthly or visible Church only in the sense that one is still involved in the struggle to be perfectly conformed to the will of God on earth, while the other has found its transcendent glory with the Lord. The two cannot be separated, since they are organically linked together as one and the same family or communion. In its very essence the Church is called by her universal Pontiff, Jesus Christ, to be holy (cf. Heb. 2:17; 1 John

1:7); and the essence of the holy Church as such implies the union of heavenly and earthly realities.

Apostolicity refers to the common witness of the apostles. This apostolicity is expressed in the life of the Christian Church historically and theologically. The apostles’ experience of God in Christ is transmitted down through the generations in the Church. This transmission is first a historical fact, for the twelve apostles were given the gift of leadership to witness to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and to preach the gospel all over the world. So too, historically, the first image of the apostolic Church is seen in the beginning of Acts, where the apostles, with St Mary and other followers of Christ, are gathered in the name of the risen Christ. These historical facts, as the collective transmission of the apostolic experience, also fashioned the Church’s inner consciousness regarding the true understanding of apostolicity. The Church is called apostolic because of her apostolic faith, founded on the confession of the apostles which later would be formulated as the “canon of faith.” In the Armenian tradition, commitment to that apostolic confession is the most important factor, ensuring the apostolicity of the Church. The Christian Church is founded on the mystical and historical experience of apostles and prophets. Moreover, apostolicity or apostolic succession is a continuity of the Church not with an individual apostle but with the apostolic college as a whole. It means that the Church confesses the orthodox faith, not exclusively with the words of an individual apostle, but rather with the college of apostles, representing the one catholic Church. Apostolicity thus combines both historical and metahistorical/

theological specifications of the apostolate. The Church's commitment to the apostolic faith and tradition rests upon the historical and theological (eschatological) mission and roles of the apostles which are present in the early biblical and patristic sources.

The Church is the continuation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In union with Christ, the Church makes God visible to the world. In her earthly and heavenly missions, the Church reflects the historical and mystical realities of what the apostles experienced in their mission as witnesses and teachers sent by Jesus Christ himself. It is through this apostolic experience that the Church continues to be faithful to her divine call, namely to be holy, apostolic, one and catholic. Expressing the faith and tradition of the college of apostles, the Church, by the guidance of her universal Pontiff, Jesus Christ, and by the grace-granting presence of the Holy Spirit, celebrates the holy eucharist as the most important sign of catholicity and unity.

2. Challenges

The document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, as mentioned in the preface, is a convergence text which does not express or hardly expresses all the living traditions of the different Christian churches. Therefore, its concept of the Church, and particularly its ecclesiology, is not identical to the ecclesiology or ecclesiological tradition of any of the member churches of the WCC. The terminology used in *TCTCV* could be considered as successful. Nevertheless, there are some terms and definitions that need to be more elaborated and clarified. We mention as examples

- a) the definition of the living Tradition of the Church (§11)
- b) the expression *creatura evangelii* (§14)
- c) the prophetic, priestly and royal vocation of the people of God (§§17–18)
- d) the description of the mission of ordained persons (§19)
- e) the insistence on eucharistic ecclesiology (§22)
- f) the lack of certainty and clarity in the definition of apostolic succession (§§21–22)
- g) the insistence on the justification by grace through faith (§61).

a–b) The Holy Tradition of the Church is defined in *TCTCV* as follows: “The same Holy Spirit who guided the earliest communities in producing the inspired biblical text continues, from generation to generation, to guide later followers of Jesus as they strive to be faithful to the Gospel. This is what is understood by the ‘living Tradition’ of the Church” (§11). This is not a sufficient and appropriate definition, for the Tradition is also the inner consciousness and understanding (*phronesis* in Greek) of the Church as mystical body of Christ and collaborator of the Holy Spirit. In this regard, the expression *creatura evangelii* (§14) needs also to be revised: The Church is not only the creation of the holy scripture, but the holy scripture is also a creation of the Church through the sacred Tradition, for it was the Church who defined the canon of the holy scripture.

c–d) The terminology used in §§17–19 is not appropriate for the Armenian Apostolic tradition,

namely the expression that the ordained ministers “assemble and build up the body of Christ” (§19).¹ It is understandable that the whole imagery of the given paragraph aims at the explanation of the priestly grace and vocation of all the members of the body, lay and ordained. However, the above-mentioned imagery does not express the ecclesiological tradition of the Armenian Church and should be revised from the point of view of terminology.

e) *TCTCV* seems to be based, in its fundamental views and ideas on the Church, on the theology of communion and eucharistic ecclesiology. Yet this is not the only way to make ecclesiology, given also the fact that even among orthodox theologians it is neither shared by nor normative for all of them.

f) In §§21–22 there are two statements that can not be acceptable for the Armenian apostolic tradition:

1. “Faith in Christ is fundamental to membership of the body. According to the understanding of most traditions, it is also through the rites or sacraments of initiation that human beings become members of Christ and in the Lord’s supper their participation in his body is renewed again and again” (§22). It is to be mentioned that only the faith expressed in the sacraments of initiation or reception (baptism, confirmation and eucharist) is fundamental to membership of the body.

1. *TCTCV* here quotes *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), §13.

Needless to say, this was the practice of the early Church, attested also in the New Testament and the patristic literature of the 1st and 2nd centuries.

2. In §22, the apostolicity of the Church is defined and explained only within the framework of triadology, as a continuation of the work of the Son who, having been sent by the Father, chose and sent the apostles and prophets. Hence, the apostolic succession in ministry, according to *TCTCV*, is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church. According to the teaching of the Armenian Apostolic Church, there should also be the definition of the historical character of apostolicity and apostolic succession, as a common witness of the apostles experienced and expressed at the given historical moment and transmitted down through the generations in the Church.

g) In §61 the teaching of St Paul on justification through faith seems exaggerated, for the apostles explain also the importance of the works of faith (cf. Rom. 2:16, 16:19, 1 Cor. 15:58, Gal. 6:9, James 2:24). It is important to mention that the confrontation between works and faith is reliable only within the context of Christian faith and Mosaic Law.

3. Suggestions for further study

TCTCV invites all of us to seek new strategies and attitudes of ecumenical collaboration in the sphere of doctrine and teaching. This is undoubtedly a positive element of the document. There are also some new and successful terms and definitions which could contribute largely to the construction of new and common theological terminology,

accepted and received by all the member churches of the WCC. In this respect, the document under consideration should include also all the specifics of the member churches' ecclesiological traditions. *TCTCV* is rather a high-qualified theological reflection which implies consequently some essential ideas of individual theologians, instead of taking into consideration the living traditions of the churches.

Thus, our common answer to the question of how far our church is able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement is as follows: The Armenian Apostolic Church cannot approve *TCTCV* in its present form for the reasons presented above. It is only after the revision of the document that it will become possible to search new ways for the common understanding and reception of *TCTCV*.

With love in Christ,

Protoarchimandrite Fr Shahe Ananyan
Director of the Inter-Church Relationships
Department
Holy Etchmiadzin, Catholicosate of All Armenians

11. Evangelical Church of Westphalia*

(Translated from the German)

The Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW) expresses its thanks to the WCC's Faith and Order Commission for the ecclesiological convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV). It marks an important step in ecumenical theological understanding towards a common vision of the Church and the renewal of church life, in accordance with the Church's mission to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world according to God's will (TCTCV §58).

However, as a member church of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), the EKvW regrets that the ecclesiological understanding and the positive experiences of church fellowship as experienced in the CPCE were not expressly included in the study.

The EKvW endorses the CPCE's response to the study of the WCC commission and draws special attention to the following points:

1. The EKvW underlines the fundamental position of the CPCE in its response: it attempts to arrive at convergent ecclesiological statements between different Christian churches and confessions must avoid seeking unification through

compromises or unilateral concessions. Instead, progress is fostered by efforts to discover

functional equivalents and parallels . . . in differing structures and terminologies. The primary aim of hermeneutic efforts is not to unify structures and designations for ministry for their own sake, but to come to a deeper ecumenical understanding of the spiritual realities which are held in common (including the legitimacy and the limits of diversity), and to encourage structures that can be mutually recognized.¹

2. The EKvW particularly underlines the CPCE response regarding the fundamental significance of Israel for the self-understanding of the Church. We consider that the WCC, from its very beginnings until the present day, has neglected the theological substance which the Church acquires from its special relationship with Israel. Omitting this leaves out a fundamental aspect of the New Testament, and leads to a deficient understanding

1. CPCE Statement 3, General Comments, 4, quoted from "Ministry - Ordination - Episkopé," §20 (Leuenberg Text 13, 111). The CPCE response is found at the end of Section 2 of this volume.

* Response approved by the governing board of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia at their meeting on 23 November 2016.

of the Church. The deficiency that results is reflected in the lack of awareness of the temptation of inappropriate arrogance toward God's faithfulness to Israel's election. Like many other regional churches of the EKD, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia has also enshrined the fundamental significance of Israel for the Church in its Church Constitution. This is therefore not something that is marginal but rather a fundamental element that influences our Constitution.

3. Besides these issues, the EKvW expressly sets out – above and beyond the CPCE response – the need for sensitivity in speaking about the sacramental nature of the Church. The authors of the document seem to have been fully aware of this. The concept of sacrament is one of the most ambiguous concepts in theological understanding, resulting in a lack of clarity quickly creeping in and leading to far-reaching consequences for the understanding of the Church. Since sacramentality is not understood in the same way in the various church traditions, the use of this attribute for the Church without further qualifications should be avoided. Although the document does seek to do precisely that, we feel that it insufficiently highlights the objective importance associated with the different perceptions of the Church's sacramental nature.

4. The EKvW requests the Faith and Order Commission to consider how the question of church unity can be more firmly contextualized in the mission of the worldwide church within the *missio dei* based on the relationship of a theology

of creation, pneumatology, and eschatology. The EKvW believes that the unity statement “God's Gift and Call to Unity – and our Commitment,” adopted by the WCC Assembly in Busan in 2013, can foster progress in this regard. Unity as *koinonia*/communion, justice, and peace are understood here in their interrelatedness as central aspects of the new life which God opens up for humankind and all creation in Jesus Christ. At the same time, this all-encompassing view of unity inaugurated by God opens our eyes so that we can confess where the churches are failing in their witness, and where they are not living up to God's all-encompassing plan of salvation in their witness. This embedding of the call to church unity within the common witness of the churches for unity, which is part of God's plan for the transformation of the world, locates the question of the unity of the churches in their common mission to be God's instruments in God's all-encompassing process of salvation, from creation through to its eschatological fulfillment, thereby freeing the churches from being ecclesio-logically self-referential and self-sufficient.

12. Friends General Conference

Greetings and peace to you.

This document is a response to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV, Faith and Order Paper No. 214), from the Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee of North American WCC member body Religious Society of Friends: Friends General Conference. Member bodies Religious Society of Friends: Friends United Meeting and Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) may have responses in preparation as well. Non-member, but eagerly-interested, Quaker ecclesial entities, such as Britain Yearly Meeting or our Christian World Communion, Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) may also offer responses. As is clear from the name, FWCC is a consultative rather than directive body. These bodies each speak for themselves and from their own contexts, unless stated otherwise. Our representative on the WCC Central Committee, Ann K. Riggs, submitted a response to TCTCV as an individual theologian in 2015.¹

The Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee has the responsibility within Friends General Conference to represent Friends General

Conference in relationship with other religious groups, including the World Council of Churches. We have responded to the previous texts in this ecclesiology series: *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper No. 181) and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper No. 198).

(1) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

Friends of the Religious Society of Friends: Friends General Conference might also begin reflection on the church with creation and community, communion or *koinonia* as does *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Our “understanding of the Church and its mission is rooted in the vision of God’s great design (or ‘economy’) for all creation” (TCTCV §1): the Peaceable Kingdom, envisioned in Isaiah’s prophecy and led and manifest by Jesus himself (Is. 9:2-7, 11:1-9).²

Our initial biblical and theological reference points are typically the prologue of John’s gospel (esp. John 1:1-10) and the first chapter of the first Johannine epistle (esp. 1 John 1:1-2:11). “The Light” is a favored theological and biblical symbol

1. Ann K. Riggs, “Reflections on the Global and Ecumenical Breadth of Joseph Komonchak’s Realist’s Church,” in *A Realist’s Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph Komonchak*, ed. Christopher Denny, Patrick Hayes and Nicholas Rademacher (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 221–40.

2. See 19th century Quaker painter Edward Hicks’ numerous depictions of *The Peaceable Kingdom*, now frequently reproduced).

among us. John 1:9 has sometimes been called “the Quaker text”: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” or “He was the true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world.”

We aspire to “do what is true,” to “walk in the light,” the light that the “darkness did not overcome” (John 1:5-7). Because “in him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (John 1:4), in the light we have fellowship, *koinonia*, community with God and one another (cf. 1 John 1) and full human lives.³

We are much more vividly aware of the vulnerability of all life than our immediate Quaker ancestors seem to have been. Friends General Conference holds a strong concern for the endangered well-being of our global environment. And digital communication has brought home to us the fragility of human societies around the globe. As is indicated by the name of our ecumenical ecclesial family, the Historic Peace Churches, we understand faithful human behavior in peace-making, justice-serving, creation-care and tender nurturing of one another’s lives to be essential dimensions of the “walking in the Light” of which the first Johannine epistle speaks, and intrinsic to the Church’s true nature, mission and unity (cf. *TCTCV* §§1, 4, 13, 21, 25, 34, 37, 38, 42, 50, 51, 58, 59, 62, 64, 65, 66, 68). As is intimidated by our name, Friends, we understand faithful “walking in the Light” to be joy and fulfillment, not deprivation. “I have called you friends,” Jesus affirms: “I have said these things to you so that my

joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete” (John 15:11,15). “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23; cf. *TCTCV* §§15, 25, 34, 60).

For all these reasons, we find *TCTCV* much more congenial to our understanding of the Church than earlier versions.

Yet there are also ways we see possibility for further strengthening of the text. The faith entrusted to the saints (Jude 3) concerns the “word of life” (1 John 1:1). In chapters 5 and 6 of his *Journal*, determinative early Quaker leader George Fox recounts the emergence of Friends from the Church of England and the religious turmoil in Britain in 1651–52: he uses the phrase “Word of life” sixteen times to refer to the proclamation of the gospel.

The *Didache* provides insight into an early form of Christianity focused on lived piety. Early apologist Justin Martyr advocated for Christian faith based on the superior lives of Christians. During the first millennium and beyond, the lives and actions of saints and martyrs have been central to Christian self-understanding. Their “sharing of life in Christ” is itself sacrament-like as sign and instrument of God’s love active and near to us. Historically, the most common form of theological writing among Friends has been the spiritual journal, in which the writer recounts their perception of God at work in their lives.

For many today, especially in the global South where the greatest growth in Christian communities is found, the abstractions of documents like *TCTCV* have little significance if they are

3. See Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, iv:20).

not seen as connected with life. For most in our North American community, as well, the “living tradition” of Friends and the ecumenical Church is primarily a “tradition of living,” faithfully received from the past and faithfully adapted to new contexts.

(2) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches? (3) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for? (4) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

Friends General Conference has often felt alienation from churches that focus on ideas or thoughts – “airy notions” – in ways that seem to be disconnected from faithful practices and life. *TCTCV* removes barriers and suggests new opportunities for relationship and shared life.

(5) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

We are gratified by the articulation in §40 that our distinctive methods of community initiation and “communion in the manner of Friends” in “open” or “unprogrammed” worship had been left unconsidered, rather than rejected, by the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* Faith and Order process:

At the same time, while briefly commenting on chrismation or confirmation, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* did not address the other rites celebrated in many communities and considered by some as sacraments, nor was it designed to take into account the view of those communities who affirm that their vocation does not include the rites of baptism and the eucharist, while affirming that they share in the sacramental life of the Church.

We acknowledge the ecumenical task we are called upon to undertake in the question raised following §44:

Sacraments and ordinances

In the light of the convergences on Baptism and Eucharist and of further reflection upon the historical roots and potential compatibility of the expressions “sacrament” and “ordinance,” the churches are challenged to explore whether they are able to arrive at deeper agreement about that dimension of the life of the Church that involves these rites. Such convergence could lead them to consider several additional questions. Most churches celebrate other rites or sacraments, such as chrismations/confirmations, weddings and ordinations within their liturgies and many also have rites for the forgiveness of sin and the blessing of the sick: may not the number and ecclesial status of these sacraments or ordinances be addressed in ecumenical dialogues? We also invite churches to consider whether they can now achieve closer convergence about who

may receive baptism and who may preside at the Church's liturgical celebrations? Further, are there ways in which fuller mutual understanding can be established between the churches which celebrate these rites and those Christian communities convinced that the sharing of life in Christ does not require the celebration of sacraments or other rites?

We note here selected bibliography that may be of service in this task:

Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, original publication 1676, "Propositions" 11–13. Christian Classics Ethereal Library (<http://www.ccel.org/>) provides ready access; Dean Freiday's *Barclay's Apology in Modern English* does not always provide an accurate translation and is inadequate for this purpose

Religious Society of Friends responses to BEM in Max Thurian, ed., *The Churches Respond: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, III (WCC, 1987), Quakers of the Netherlands, 297–9 and Great Britain, 300–2; Response of Friends in Great Britain also published separately as *To Lima with Love* (Quaker Home Service, 1987)

Alan Kolp, "Friends, Sacraments, and Sacramental Living," *Quaker Religious Thought* 57 (1984): 36–51

Jay W. Marshall, "Quakers in Communion," *Mid-Stream*, 27 (1988): 283–293 and "eucharistic fellowship' – are Friends included?" *Quaker Religious Thought* 70 (1989): 28–39

T. Canby Jones, "Quaker Perspective" in Dale R. Stoffer, ed. *The Lord's Supper: Believer's Church Perspectives* (Herald Press, 1997)

Ann K. Riggs, "Quaker Understanding of Baptism," *One in Christ* 36 (2000): 317–37

Pink Dandelion, *The Liturgies of Quakerism* (Rutledge, 2005)

Quaker Religious Thought Vol. 109 (2007): Stephen W. Angell, Paul Anderson, Corey Beals, David L. Johns, Ann K. Riggs, Timothy W. Seid, Kent Walkemeyer. Papers presented at the November 2007 Quaker Theological Discussion Group meetings in San Diego, California, which addressed "A Friendly View of the Sacraments."

Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207–20

Janet Scott, "Baptism and the Quaker Tradition" in Thomas F. Best, *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications* (Liturgical Press, 2008), 81–8

David L. Johns, "Worship and Sacraments," in Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 260–75

Rachel Muers, *Testimony* (SCM, 2015)

Dorothy E Walizer

Co-Clerk

Christian Interfaith Relations Committee

13. Evangelical Church of Greece

The Evangelical Church of Greece warmly welcomes the publication of the convergence document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (*TCTCV*), acknowledging it as a significant ecumenical achievement and a valuable contribution to the quest for deeper ecclesiological convergence among all churches. The publication of such a convergence document on ecclesiology constitutes a historic step forward, for which we are grateful to the Faith and Order Commission.

After having carefully studied and considered the document, the Evangelical Church of Greece is providing below its official response to *TCTCV* from a Greek Reformed Evangelical perspective. Being the oldest Protestant denomination in Greece, and one of the founding members of the World Council of Churches, the Evangelical Church of Greece gladly submits this report, with the hope of contributing to the global ecumenical discussion that *TCTCV* intends to trigger. The structure of this report follows the five questions that the document poses in its Introduction (p. 3), addressing each one of them below.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

There are many aspects of this document which reflect the ecclesiological understanding of our church. Indicatively we mention some of them:

- **The theocentric approach to ecclesiology**, which is found throughout the document, and which roots the nature and mission of the Church in the vision and mission of God. This approach comes in stark contrast to the anthropocentric approach which is sadly found often nowadays, and which often forgets that the Church does not exist either by or for itself; it exists for the glory of God, “from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6).
- **The Trinitarian flow of the document**, which highlights the role of all three persons of the Trinity in the history of salvation and in the identity and mission of the Church.
- **The emphasis on the Nicene Creed** in various parts of the document, as a key point of reference not just on the definition of the marks of the Church, but also as a foundation for confessing the common faith among Christians throughout the world.
- **The emphasis on the fact that “the Church is centered and grounded in the Gospel”** (§14) which underlines the centrality of the holy scripture in the Church.

- **The focus on the Kingdom of God as the ultimate purpose** for which the Church exists and works, as it lives “in and for the world.”

At the same time, there are various aspects of *TCTCV* which differ from the ecclesiological understanding of our church. Obviously, the very nature of such a convergence document means that no church will find its ecclesiology to be identical with that of *TCTCV*. Yet we do believe that in certain cases, a significantly greater level of convergence could have been achieved if some issues were put differently or approached from a different perspective. For example:

a) High church ecclesiology

The ecclesiology of *TCTCV* (including its methodology, theological language and terminology about polity) relies heavily on “high church ecclesiology.” There are those in our denomination who would be comfortable with such an approach, but also many others who would not. In fact, as the Evangelical Church of Greece is a united church (formed by the merge of a Presbyterian denomination and a number of Congregational churches in the early 20th century), it is well aware of the challenges of seeking balance between these two tendencies (“high church” and “low church” ecclesiology).

Nevertheless, it is precisely for this reason that a document like *TCTCV* should have striven to maintain more balance on this topic. If such a balance is crucial towards maintaining unity within a denomination, it is

immeasurably more vital for the articulation of a joint statement on ecclesiology that can be shared by churches of the widest possible spectrum of denominations.

b) Sacramental theology

Similarly, *TCTCV* gives significant emphasis on sacramental theology, and particularly on topics like baptism, eucharist, ordained ministry, oversight, primacy, etc. In fact, about one quarter of the entire document focuses exclusively on these topics, apart from the numerous other references to them throughout *TCTCV*. While all of these topics are obviously important and crucial for the advance of the ecumenical discussion on ecclesiology, nevertheless the proportion given to them will seem foreign to millions of “low church” Evangelicals around the world who would not approach ecclesiology from a sacramental/liturgical perspective.

Thus, from an Evangelical perspective, it would have seemed more appropriate if *TCTCV* had approached ecclesiology in a way and language that would feel familiar for churches holding such a perspective. Or, at least, it would have been appreciated if *TCTCV* had spent an equal proportion of attention on topics like the relationship between bibliology and ecclesiology (e.g., the way in which the authority of the Bible relates to that of the Church); soteriology and ecclesiology (e.g., the way in which the relation between membership in the church and salvation is understood among different churches); and the relationship between mission and ecclesiology (e.g., the way in which “external” and “internal” mission is

understood among the “non-traditional” ecclesiological traditions).

c) Marks of the Church

Standing in the Reformed tradition, our church holds an ecclesiology of Word and sacrament. Therefore, it generally agrees with the definition of the local church as “a community of baptized believers in which the Word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of *episkopé* exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community” (§31).

Two observations need, however, to be made on the above: first while our church refers to baptism and eucharist in sacramental terms, considering them as a means of grace (ECG Statement of Faith, Article 22), it nevertheless has reservations on the use of the term “sacrament” without the provision of a clear definition of what it means (and what it does not mean). The absence of such a definition of this term (or at least a comparative approach to the various definitions among different churches) is a sad omission of *TCTCV*.

Secondly, the reference to bishops in the above statement (as well as in some other parts of *TCTCV*) seems to imply that the threefold ministry is *the* standard way of exercising oversight in the church; all other traditions are mentioned almost as an aside. While we acknowledge that the threefold ministry was the norm for a significant part of church history, and that today it is certainly more widespread than other forms of ministry, nevertheless this does not make it by itself *the*

universal default standard; and it is certainly not the standard that numerous churches throughout the world follow, including our own.

Therefore, for all these churches it would seem hard to agree with the italicized section at the end of §47 which asks whether the threefold ministry can be considered as part of God’s will for every church. Especially for churches adhering to the Presbyterian or Congregational polity, such an approach seems very incompatible.¹

Nevertheless, such churches can certainly agree on a different aspect: that (even without bishops) there *is* a need for a ministry of oversight which goes beyond the boundaries of a local congregation (e.g., for the oversight of broader regions), which is usually assigned to the officers of the local presbytery or synod or “communion.” Thus, one could ask whether this would be an interesting way of seeking ecumenical convergence on the topic of oversight, based not on the presence of ordained bishops, but on the reality that every

1. Such churches (including our own) follow a “twofold” form of ministry, as they only have elders and deacons, and they consider their pastor to be one of the elders. Interestingly, even in such churches the pastor often does have some distinguished tasks restricted only to the ordained ministers (e.g., presiding in the Lord’s supper, being elected as moderator of the denomination, etc.). Therefore, one could argue that this does seem like a “threefold” approach to church leadership (pastor, elders, deacons). Nevertheless, it is significantly different from the traditional threefold ministry model for at least two reasons. First, even in such churches, the pastor is considered as the “first among equals” (not as a higher level of ministry). Second, while many churches use the same terms (e.g., “ministry,” “elders,” “deacons,” etc.), the content of these terms may vary significantly among churches (for example, whether these terms refer to ordained ministers or to lay people serving in such positions).

denomination recognizes the need for a ministry of oversight that goes beyond the boundaries of a local congregation.

d) Apostolic succession

While §47 offers a fair account of the various Christian approaches to this topic, §22 seems to take it for granted that all churches agree that “apostolic succession in ministry . . . is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church.” This is obviously not the case. In fact, all Reformed churches (including the Evangelical Church of Greece) argue that the apostolicity of a church depends not on the presence of apostolic succession in its bishops, but on its faithfulness to the apostolic teaching which is recorded in the holy scripture.

e) The role of the laity

While *TCTCV* acknowledges that the whole people of God is called to be a prophetic people and a royal priesthood (§§19–20), it nevertheless is surprisingly silent in the section on ministry (§§45 ff.) on the role of the laity in ministry. In fact, that section begins and ends with ordained ministry. One would wonder why there is no space or reference to the role of the laity (men and women) in the ministry of the church (e.g., as lay preachers, lay elders, lay deacons and deaconesses, ministry directors, staff and volunteers in the ministries of a local church, etc.).

f) Religious pluralism

The section on religious pluralism (§60) explores “the possibility of salvation for those who do not explicitly believe in Christ.” While it is true that

the above topic has indeed become an area of reflection and discussion among Christians, it is nevertheless alarming to see that *TCTCV* places this question among the possible convergence topics on ecclesiology. The mere inclusion of this topic in that position is disturbing; and our church suggests that it needs to be radically rephrased: with the current formulation it becomes a “red flag” not just for our church, but for most Evangelicals around the world.

The Evangelical Church of Greece is firmly committed to the Biblical proclamation that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through the Son (John 14:6)²; cf. ECG Statement of Faith, Article 16). Therefore, it considers it impossible for someone to be saved without repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. While we obviously acknowledge that God can be (and is) working beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, nevertheless this does not entail that salvation can occur apart from Jesus.

The story of the Apostle Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 is a significant example of this: it is an account that demonstrates how God is working beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. However, in order for this work to be salvific, it requires the proclamation of the gospel by the Church (which responds to its missional calling) and the acceptance of this message by the audience in repentance and faith. If this was not the case, then God would not have needed to call the Apostle Peter to go to Cornelius, or the Apostle Paul to go to the Gentiles. In other words, God’s

2. See ECG Statement of Faith, Article 16

work beyond the visible boundaries of the Church cannot be and is not a substitute the missional mandate of the Church, and the duty of the people who hear the Gospel to respond to God's invitation.

g) *Shared moral values as koinonia*

In §62, *TCTCV* mentions that Christians must promote the moral values of justice and peace in both the individual and the communal aspect of human existence. While this is certainly a part of the mission of the Church, the next phrase in this paragraph takes this a step further, stating that “thus *koinonia* includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based upon the inspiration and insights of the Gospel.”

Nevertheless, it is not clear enough how these shared moral values can constitute *koinonia*, especially if one takes into consideration the fact that moral values can vary significantly among different people or cultures. Even within the same culture, it is quite often the case that what some Christians consider as an element promoting justice and peace may be considered in a diametrically opposed way by other Christians of that same culture. Therefore, the above statement requires further clarification, in order to see if and how it would be true in practical application on specific issues.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The publication of this text is by itself a landmark in the contemporary ecumenical history. The Faith

and Order Commission is laudable for producing a convergence document on ecclesiology, harvesting the fruits of the previous ecclesiological documents that were published during the previous decades, and taking them to the next level.

That being said, it is our feeling that while *TCTCV* can certainly function as an important basis for growth in unity among WCC member churches (as well as among other churches adhering to a traditional ecclesiology), it will, nevertheless, have a harder time functioning as a basis among many other churches who adhere to “non-traditional” ecclesiologies. Such churches include particularly Evangelical, Pentecostal and independent churches, whose perspectives and assumptions on ecclesiology are often quite different from that of *TCTCV*. While we understand that some such churches did take part in some stages of the conversation towards the production of this document, the result seems to imply that their perspective was not adequately represented in the final document.

The Faith and Order Commission will thus need to find ways of engaging in dialogue with such churches, either by working directly with them, or with associations who represent a wide range of them (e.g., the World Evangelical Alliance, the Lausanne Movement, etc.)

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

We appreciate the emphasis that *TCTCV* places on the communal dimension of ecclesiology. We admit that, as Evangelicals, we often tend to focus

more on the individual rather than the communal dimension of Christian life; this obviously has implications for ecclesiology as well. It is thus with joy that we welcome the emphasis that *TCTCV* puts on the communal approach to theology and on the concept of *koinonia*.

This approach challenges us to consider various ways in which our church could inspire a more communal mentality in its members, fight individualism, and strive for a greater balance between the communal and personal dimensions of Christian life. Such a balance would certainly lead to renewal in both the life of the church and the life and worldview of its members.

We also appreciate the reference to the Virgin Mary as a symbol of and model for the Church and the individual Christian (§15). We admit that, as Evangelicals, we have often become silent about Mary, as a reaction to the ways in which we see her being venerated in other traditions. However, silence is not the solution either.

Ecumenical dialogues of the previous years have certainly contributed to a greater level of convergence on the person and role of Mary among different churches. While many issues still remain open, we certainly share the *TCTCV* description of Mary as an example of obedience and determination to follow Jesus and obey God's will at every cost.

In fact, the way in which *TCTCV* describes her in §15 is a wonderful description, which is beautifully articulated in a way that can be accepted by virtually every Christian in the world. Thus we welcome that section, both as a good example of articulating ecumenical consensus on a debated

issue, and as an invitation to all of us to imitate Mary's example in obedience and discipleship.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

Our church agrees with the statement mentioned in §9, according to which "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.'"

According to its Statement of Faith (Article 21), the Evangelical Church of Greece acknowledges one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church in "the innumerable company of saints of every age and nation who, being united by the Holy Spirit to Christ their Head, are one body in Him and have communion with their Lord and with one another." It also acknowledges "as a member of this universal Church every particular church throughout the world which professes this faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him as divine Lord and Savior."

Based on the above article, the Evangelical Church of Greece has always been open to form closer relationships in life and mission with churches that are included in this category. It is in this spirit that our church has already been participating in organizations like the WCC, CEC, WCRC, CPCE, etc.

Thus our church would obviously be open to form closer relationships with churches

acknowledging positively the account of the Church described in *TCTCV*. The extent to which each of these relationships could proceed, however, would depend on the views that these churches would hold on other issues as well. These would include issues of soteriology (how a person can be saved, what the process and order of salvation is, etc.) as well as of bibliology (the consideration of the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and works, its relationship to tradition, to other forms of revelation, and to questions of authority).

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

Many of our observations on this issue have already been covered in the first section of this report. In addition to these recommendations, our church would also offer the following advice on the ongoing work of Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology:

First, the future work on this topic must strive to focus on articulating an ecclesiology that could be shared by both “traditional churches” and “non-traditional churches”; namely, by both churches who have *and* those who have not yet been strongly part of the multilateral ecclesiological discussion. Such churches include (but are not limited to) churches that do not adhere to a liturgical/sacramental/high church ecclesiology, churches originating from a non-Western context (especially churches from the Global South), and Evangelical/Pentecostal churches who are

not members of the WCC but are ecumenically active in other ways (e.g., in inter-Evangelical cooperation).

In order to achieve such a more inclusive ecclesiology, the Faith and Order Commission would need not just to include more such voices around the table, but also to formulate future ecclesiological statements in terms (language, terminology, presuppositions) that would feel familiar to both “traditional” and “non-traditional” ecclesiologies.

Second, an important priority for the future work of Faith and Order would be to find ways to communicate this ecumenical progress to a wider audience than its current one. *TCTCV* stands out as a wonderful theological articulation, written at a high academic level. While this is welcomed by those of us who are theologians, it nevertheless makes the document a hard reading for non-theologians.

However, if this achievement does not find its way towards the grassroots level of all churches, then it will not be “owned” by them. It will remain a significant declaration signed at the highest level, but it will not be understood (let alone shared) at the level of the laity. History has shown that ecumenical progress is not just a matter of achieving significant declarations, but also of raising awareness of them, and explaining what they mean and why they are important to the average believer. Only when the ecumenical conscience becomes the conscience of the laity as well will the Church be able to take major ecumenical steps towards a unity that will be embraced by the whole people of God.

Therefore, our church encourages the Faith and Order Commission to find creative ways to communicate this significant achievement in a language and format that will be simpler, more familiar and more widely accessible to the average believer of every church.

14. First Church of Christ, Scientist

Dear Friends,

We appreciate very much the opportunity for our church to respond to the World Council document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*.

Reading this work, we cannot help but feel it to be an expression of the spirit of Christ. It is apparent from the opening of the general secretary's note, and throughout the document, how much prayer, reflection, and profound devotion have been brought to it. We find it deeply thought-provoking, as we are sure your own member denominations are feeling as they consider the situation of the Christian faith in the 21st century and the present relations between Christians of different traditions.

The spirit of this new text brought to mind the fellowship we have appreciated with the World Council over many years. In our church files, for example, is a vivid unpublished report by a member who attended the 4th General Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden as an invited observer for our denomination. His description of the opening of the Assembly still sings with "common vision":

The processional begins; the King of Sweden enters; the modern Swedish Entrada especially composed for the Assembly embraces the ceremonial dignity of the occasion with long

electronic whines, deep bass brass oompahs and mellow trumpets cantoring in response.

But the hymns, as always, sweep and overcome the heart. Ancient strains express a yearning which transcends all language:

For with Thee is the well of life
Whose waters stay with me in the strife,
Whose enemies would slay me.
For in Thy light shall we see light,
Turning the day from darkest night
The shadows that dismay me.
(*Cantate Domino*, No. 73)

We have all known the shadows; we have experienced the light. It has been this way from the beginning, from the 13th-century day when these cathedral blocks were first set, to this summer day, this remarkable service so many wars and worlds and years beyond.

The Old Testament Lesson is in German; the Act of Thanksgiving and Supplication in English; the New Testament Lesson – the resurrection story from John 20:1-23 – in lovely, liquid French. The Lord's Prayer by all – each in his own language.

In 2017, Christians in all denominations, including Christian Scientists, are living in a very different world from that of half a century ago. The hopeful spirit of the ecumenical movement at the time of the World Council's founding has confronted its own sobering challenges. Yet this makes *TCTCV* (as well as the Council's earlier study *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*) all the more, not less, necessary and significant. No one can know when that "visible unity" of which these publications speak will be achieved, or what form it will take. No one can doubt the urgency, in this time of increased religious tribalism, of witnessing to the common vision that binds Christians together with each other and ultimately with all humanity.

Our own church's founder, Mary Baker Eddy, pointed to the underlying basis for this common vision in a statement written when the denomination's first church building here in Boston was completed in 1894. She wrote, "Our unity with churches of other denominations must rest on the spirit of Christ calling us together." The one "point of convergence" for all Christian churches, she continued, is the Lord's Prayer: "It is matter for rejoicing that we unite in love, and in this sacred petition with every praying assembly on earth . . ."

It is in this spirit that we offer our response to the World Council today.

Sincerely,

The Christian Science Board of Directors
Robin Hoagland A. W. Phinney
Scott Preller Margaret Rogers
Lyle Young

* * *

A Response from the Church of Christ, Scientist

Introduction

Church is central to Christian Scientists' faith. It is not merely a collection of like-minded believers. It certainly is not defined by buildings. Like most Christians, we see church as a divine reality that finds human expression in a fellowship of hearts bound by spiritual experience and commitment. At its most alive and vital, this fellowship is more than a product of personal relations. God – not social circumstance, organizational structures, charisma, ceremony, or, finally, even strongly-held beliefs – is the light that, today as in the time of the first Christians, makes a community of ordinary and imperfect disciples into a genuine church.

TCTCV "calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity . . . hope of reconciliation and healing" (§1). The Church of Christ, Scientist joins in this purpose with the churches of the World Council. We acknowledge that to credibly offer hope of healing and unity to the world requires our own readiness to be spiritually renewed and transformed as a church. We take to heart the general secretary's call to the "fellowship of churches to express the unity of life that is given to us in Jesus Christ, through his life, cross and resurrection so that brokenness, sin, and evil

can be overcome” (p. vi). God’s healing love is the power in this overcoming, as we understand it, in the most direct and tangible way.

Over the past century, the indispensability of this “ministry of reconciliation,” in St. Paul’s phrase, has grown on the consciences of Christians in a tragically divided world. Christian Scientists have been humbled and inspired by the example of many who have lived this spirit of reconciliation in the midst of great challenges – from Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa during and after apartheid, as mentioned in the text, to the praying Christians of the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig prior to German reunification, to the Amish community in Pennsylvania in 2006 after the tragic shooting in their school, and the African-American Christians at the Emmanuel Church in Charleston after the recent senseless killings there. These and countless others, known and unknown, have borne witness to the power of Christ’s Christianity to bind and heal the heart of humanity as nothing else can.

And yet, as *TCTCV* points out, if this purpose of reconciliation is to reach more fully the wider world, it must first reach more effectively to heal centuries-old divisions within and between the Christian churches themselves. In many churches, including our own, the ecumenical movement has brought a deepened perspective on the meaning of Christian faith in other traditions. It has also, in a sense, held up a mirror in which we all as Christians can take a more objective view of our own faith. It causes us to examine ourselves – to be our own spiritual witnesses as churches and followers of Jesus – in a clear and honest light. It challenges us to live our words more fully and humbly to

find our way to a less flawed practice of what we profess.

Christian Scientists have benefited greatly from ecumenical encounters with Christians of widely-varying traditions over the past half-century. While we do not fully share the confessional stance of the World Council’s member churches, these encounters have powerfully reminded us of the extensiveness of our common ground with other traditions on matters of basic Christian concern, including the nature of biblical faith, sin and grace, the spiritual experience of baptism, and, not least, the redemptive mission of the Church in the world.

In the early 1960s, two representatives of our church spoke on Christian Scientists’ faith and practice at the World Council’s Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. Later in the decade, the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations of United Presbyterian Church in the United States gathered Christian Scientists and representatives of a number of other denominations for a series of theological dialogues extending over a period of four years.

These frank conversations included the presentation of written papers and explored areas of both agreement and difference in an atmosphere of “mutual attentiveness and support” very similar to that described in *TCTCV* (§36). As one of the Presbyterian participants in these discussions summarized, “a conviction was generally held and variously expressed that all who called themselves Christians are today experiencing new urgency to be reconciled to one another. This urgency . . . was

eloquently ascribed to the prompting of the Spirit common in some way to all Christians.”¹

We are grateful this “prompting of Spirit” continues to be felt by many faithful Christians, and for the desire of many, as the convergence text puts it, to “see more movement in the reception of ecumenical dialogues” and “more dimensions of the call to unity” (p. v). In recent years, the renewal of patient, substantive dialogue between Christian Scientists and the National Council of Churches, USA, has helped to broaden perspectives in a new generation of Christian Scientists.

One of our members serves as Head of Ecumenical Affairs for the National Council and on the board of the North American Academy of Ecumenists. Several are active in the NCC Convening Tables on Faith and Order, Peace and Justice, Christian Education, and Interreligious Dialogue. We participate annually in the National Workshop on Christian Unity. In a period when faith has become the object of resurgent religious polemics in many parts of the culture, the persistent willingness of Christians with significant differences to seek honest understanding through prayer, action, and quiet dialogue has been to us a light shining in darkness.

TCTCV speaks of both “consensus” and “legitimate diversity” in a pluralistic church. Some in the World Council’s communions may question whether the differences between our church’s teaching and theirs are within the range

1. *Report of the Consultation between members of the Church of Christ, Scientist, and members of the United Presbyterian Church, USA*, Princeton, New Jersey, March 20, 1964. (From our church files.)

of legitimate diversity. Some of the differences between us are semantic; but others are serious and substantive, and we respect the commitment to doctrinal integrity reflected in such concerns.

Honest mutual understanding on these theological differences will not in itself bring about the “visible unity” sought by the World Council and its member churches. Nevertheless, this kind of understanding is an imperative of “the charity called for by Christ himself,” as the convergence text states (§60), and it can bring its own surprising fresh insights and blessings.

Indeed, precisely because of the differences between us, the faith and witness of Christians in the older traditions raise searching questions for Christian Scientists, and vice versa. As obscuring misconceptions are cleared away and we come to know each other “even as also [we are] known” (1 Cor. 13:12), these very questions may become our gift to each other; “not a principle of unanimity or unilateralism,” in the general secretary’s words (p. vi), but opening new windows into the Christianity we share.

Five Questions

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

Christian Scientists’ faith is rooted historically in the New England Congregational tradition. Simplicity of worship, equality in congregational life, and the profound Puritan emphasis on inward grace over outward forms are in our spiritual DNA.

We have no ordained clergy. Our sacrament service includes an invitation to the congregation to kneel in silent communion with God, but no other outward rite or ceremony. The denomination's founder had a distinctly Protestant view of Christian history and the continuing need of churches for spiritual revitalization and renewal. She recognized the importance of broad institutional structures in sustaining church life but also wrote that "The real Christian compact is love for one another."

While we do not embrace doctrinal or creedal statements of traditional Christianity, we adhere to certain religious tenets as basic to our faith. These include the following:

1. As adherents of Truth, we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal Life.
2. We acknowledge and adore one supreme and infinite God. We acknowledge His Son, one Christ; the Holy Ghost or divine Comforter; and man in God's image and likeness. ...
3. We acknowledge Jesus' atonement as the evidence of divine, efficacious Love, unfolding man's unity with God through Christ Jesus the Way-shower; and we acknowledge that man is saved through Christ, through Truth, Life and Love as demonstrated by the Galilean Prophet in healing the sick and overcoming sin and death.²

This is the context in which we respond to *TCTCV*. The Christian Scientists' perspective represents one of the "differing sensitivities regarding continuity and change in the Church" that the text seeks to reconcile. We share and appreciate the Council's recognition that the "same intent – to obey God's will for the ordering of the Church" – can be found and felt in very different views on the nature of both God's will and church order (14–15).

We share other basic assumptions stated or implied in the text as well, for example:

- That "membership in the Church of Christ is more inclusive than membership in [our] own church body" (p. 8). Without this recognition, clearly, no common vision is possible. Yet this recognition may require rethinking the meaning of "membership in the Church of Christ" and shedding the tendencies toward legalism and narrowness that have so often afflicted church life and undermined its good intentions through the ages. Many have noted the great damage these tendencies have done to the moral credibility of Christianity in this century, especially in the United States and Europe, and particularly among the young. We all need divine wisdom along this line.
- That "believers are vulnerable to the power of sin, both individually and collectively." Our own denomination

2. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, 497.

has struggled as much as any with the “grievous impact” of sin in church life. We certainly acknowledge the need for on-going “Christian self-examination” and repentance, even as we recognize that God’s power and grace are as essential in the healing of churches as in the healing of individuals (§36).

- The ecclesiological understanding of our church is that the struggle with and surmounting of sin is possible only because God and His activity are ultimate reality, while sin is the lie that denies the total governance of a perfect God and ensnares the sinner.
- That God’s Church can be understood as both a divinely-established reality, “already” complete and universal, and a work in progress “not yet” fully realized in human experience (§33). The vision of the “church universal” – of what a true church can and finally must mean in the life of humanity – has always called forth the deepest commitment of Christian hearts. Christian Scientists see this vision of the Church, in the largest sense, not as an inspiring social ideal to be realized at some point in an indefinite future, but as the present spiritual structure of being itself the expression of God’s all-encompassing love for his creation which needs to be seen, felt, and experienced in the here and now. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer urgently affirmed from his own

quite different standpoint in the darkest years of the Third Reich – a period when Christian Scientists’ churches in Germany were also suppressed – “the relation of the Church to the world is determined entirely by the relation of God to the world” (*Ethics*, p. 204).

More distant from Christian Scientists’ understanding are the assumptions in *TCTCV* on church polity, tradition, and authority. Like any number of movements which trace their heritage to the Reformation, we look to original or “primitive Christianity” as normative. Humbling as this ideal is, it is explicit in our church’s founding purpose and still grounds our practice, values, and understanding of the nature and spirit of Christ’s Church. This perspective naturally influences our view of the early ecumenical councils and post-biblical structures of governance.

Finally, as one of “those Christian communities convinced that the sharing of life in Christ does not require the [outward] celebration of sacraments,” we are grateful for the text’s acknowledgment that this difference, significant as it is, does not preclude genuine spiritual fellowship (p. 26).

In the long term, such fellowship flows from the substance of faith behind the symbols which express it. The symbol on our official church literature, a cross and crown, points to the shared foundation of all Christian faith – the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. In the infinite meaning of our Savior’s life and overcoming of death is found the basis for the richest interchange between our respective churches.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

A loved hymn by a longtime Christian Science healer and teacher opens “Jesus’ prayer for all his brethren: /Father, that they may be one, /Echoes down through all the ages” The hymn goes on to voice the eternal reality and ever-widening reach that Christian Scientists find expressed in our Master’s words:

One the Mind and Life of all things
For we live in God alone;
One the Love whose ever-presence
Blesses all and injures none . . .

Day by day the understanding
Of our oneness shall increase . . .³

TCTCV gives occasion for Christian Scientists “to reflect upon [our] own understanding” of the oneness of heart and spirit Jesus prayed for in his followers. It challenges us to look beyond our denominational boundaries, to listen and learn from others, and to recommit to “greater unity” and the honest fellowship of understanding so needed in the larger community of churches at this time (p. 2).

The long, careful process of dialogue and deliberation from which the text emerged is especially moving to us. Because we stand outside traditional church perspectives in certain respects,

3. Violet Hay, “Jesus’ prayer for all his Brethren,” music by George Tyson (Boston: Christian Science Publishing Society, 1932), no. 157.

this example in itself may be more significant than any specific point of convergence as a “basis for growth in unity” between our church and others in the coming years. Perhaps above all, it illustrates the sheer moral effort involved in seeking to truly understand a faith which is not one’s own: the willingness to lay aside preconceptions, to grapple with unfamiliar language and angles of vision, to respect rather than rush to judgment, to look beyond disagreement to the depths of meaning a differing faith perspective may have for those who hold it. *TCTCV*, like *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, is a stroke on the canvas of this “moral effort,” seeking to understand others’ faiths.

In the most meaningful ecumenical encounters, as many have observed, “deep speaks to deep.” The depths of Christian experience, meaning, and insight communicate across barriers of doctrine, denomination, tradition, and culture. Dialogue of this character does not come from the submergence of theological particulars in a lowest common denominator of practice or teaching on which all may concur. It happens when Christians are sufficiently “gathered in [Christ’s] name” (Matt. 18:20) to seek the God-unfolded unity that changes perceptions – and hearts – from within. This is the *koinonia* in which Christian Scientists can fully join.

The Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon put it plainly in a speech on Christian unity in 2008: “the heart of this movement (with its dialogues and assemblies and councils and documents and general secretaries) is prayer. The image often used is a simple one: Since God is the center, the closer we draw to God (or better, the closer we are drawn to God),

the closer we draw to one another. . . . Prayer is crucial, indispensable, foundational because unity is a gift, but it is a gift that must be received,”⁴ He added to this in a talk at our own church here in Boston a few years ago: “By the way, this gift of unity is not easy to receive!”

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The vast changes in society in our lifetime have challenged those who care about the life of churches to think about them more deeply, to re-examine what church really is and means, or can mean, for humanity in this brave, new, somewhat dystopian world. Christian Scientists have felt this challenge as acutely as others. Many of us, when confronted by difficulties in our congregations, have pondered and prayed for a deeper understanding of church, and experienced in some measure the spiritual and practical renewal this deepening brings about. For those of us in positions of responsibility in the denomination, renewal in the life of our churches is an earnest, continuing prayer.

TCTCV reminds us of the great scope and seriousness of Christian thinking on this subject, and of our own calling to this history as members of the Church of Christ.

The first congregation of Christian Scientists in 1879 initially took the name “Church of Christ.” The word “Scientist” was added to distinguish the

congregation from others nearby, but the underlying commitment remained the same.

The first “Rules and Regulations” of that congregation set forth the spiritually radical nature of this commitment. The fervent description of the church’s observance of communion, for example, speaks volumes:

The Sacrament shall be observed once in two months by a short interval of solemn and silent self-examination by each member as to his real state of love towards man and fellowship and communion with Christ, – As to whether he is growing in the understanding and demonstration of Truth and Love, coming out from the world and being separated from error, growing less selfish, more charitable and spiritual, yea, walking worthy of his high calling. By silent prayer, after the manner that casts out error and heals the sick, for these church members, and by sacred resolutions to partake of the bread that cometh down from heaven, and to drink of his cup of sorrows and earthly persecutions patiently for Christ’s Truth’s sake, knowing that if we suffer for righteousness we are blessed.

Reading this illumined description over 130 years later, Christian Scientists may find it both inspiring and chastening. Many of us, in our own experience of church, have found ourselves transformed and lifted up. Sometimes we have felt encircled by love, like Paul after the stoning in Acts 14:19-20, or spiritually “brought forth into a large place,” as described in Psalm 18:19. Some of

4. Keynote Address by Dr. Michael Kinnamon, National Workshop on Christian Unity, April 14-17, 2008, Chicago, Illinois.

us have been healed physically in church services. Divine light does that, and church is, or can be, the community where hearts are opened to this light.

On the other hand, we have also struggled with the same downward pulls and centrifugal tendencies that all churches have. Some among us have broken with the church organization or with fellow members. Some have minimized their participation in the collective life of the church, missing its indispensable significance to the practice of their faith. No doubt all of us at times, caught up in the busy demands or simply the ordinariness of daily living, have reduced the “bread that cometh down from heaven” to secondhand rhetoric or grey routine.

The waning of love and inspiration, division, self-centered conflict, discouragement, worldly pride: this is the conventional mindset that has darkened the life of churches since at least the messages to the seven churches in Revelation; and Christian Scientists have hardly escaped the necessity of coming to grips with it. The only real answer to this narrative, as we are increasingly coming to learn, is in the same limitless source of spiritual light that inspired the congregation in 1879: reawakening to the simplicity and great dimension of original Christianity.

In recent decades, our denomination has also experienced similar demographic trends that many others have. As the Lutheran historian Martin Marty recently pointed out, however, decline can also present a spiritual opportunity. In the case of Christian Scientists, it has prompted many of us to look more searchingly at ourselves; to ask

questions we might not have considered in more complacent periods; to see where we have come short; and to turn to God’s gracious leadings to find ways to narrow the gap.

A scholar and church member who served for many years here at the denomination’s headquarters put it this way in a study on the denomination several years ago: “I find many Christian Scientists growing wonderfully in spiritual strength and depth as they face today’s challenges.” He went on: “I think of Jesus saying to his disciples before the crucifixion, and therefore before the resurrection, ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’”

We do not believe that the conventional narrative is inevitable or all-determining. The renewal of churches comes through the rekindling of divine light in their inner life. We appreciate the quiet charity of *TCTCV* in its discussion of the concerns that confront all church institutions and the flocks they nurture.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

When live embers from a long-burning fire are brought together, their shared heat increases and renews the flame. In the cold thin air of a relentlessly secular culture, the shared light of churches is enormously valuable and needed, and for similar reasons. The natural fellowship and unity of Christians broadens vistas, nourishes hope, and magnifies their voice. In the wider life of humanity, the

authentic spiritual witness of Christian churches – not divided into fading embers, but aflame with light and love – literally makes civilization possible.

Christian Scientists welcome closer relations with other churches as prayer and mutual understanding open the way. We are represented on an official observer basis in the National Council of Churches, and many of our members over the years have participated in state and local councils of churches. We are grateful for the fellowship that has been extended in a variety of ecumenical settings. It is accurate and probably necessary to add that Christians in some doctrinal traditions are understandably more reluctant to “acknowledge in a positive way” our understanding on questions relating to church than we are to honor theirs.

We do not issue official church statements on social and political issues as many denominations do, and this, too, limits in some directions our participation in interdenominational initiatives. The newspaper long published by the church, *The Christian Science Monitor*, reports and editorializes on these issues, but these editorials do not represent official church positions. Neither the church nor the *Monitor* endorses or advocates for candidates for office. Members as individuals make their own decisions on these matters, and there is a wide spectrum of views among us, often even within a single congregation, on many of the specific issues on which the World Council and National Council have taken positions. The *Monitor*'s mandate, “to injure no man, but to bless all mankind,” guides the denomination's policy in the public realm.

Christian Scientists recognize the moral imperative not to “stand in isolation,” in the words of *TCTCV*, from the urgent “struggles of humankind as a whole” (§62). Many of our members are active in civic and humanitarian causes. The church itself has organized war relief efforts in the past and continues to contribute to the charitable endeavors of others. While *The Christian Science Monitor* is not a church organ in the narrow sense, the ethic it embraces of principled, compassionate engagement with the world is indicative of Christian Scientists' values and outlook. The church's commitment to the newspaper, which is now published online, reflects the conviction that the Christian mission of healing extends not only to individuals but also to the “healing of the nations.”

In one of his last speeches, in 2010, the late Czech president Vaclav Havel noted that humanity in this century is “living in the first atheistic civilization, in other words, a civilization that has lost its connection with the infinite and eternity.” The statement puts the purpose of *TCTCV* in sharp relief. Closer and truer relations between churches are not a product of ideological or organizational rapprochement. They are impelled by our connection with the infinite. We all – in all our varying churches – need each other, and humanity needs our common vision as Christians of one heart and spirit and ultimately one Church.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

Mary Baker Eddy wrote of the relation between church and the Christian ministry of healing, “Jesus established his church and maintained his mission on a spiritual foundation of Christ-healing.”⁵ As the World Council study group on mission and healing noted in 2010, the ministry of Christian healing is a subject on which Christians are divided. This ministry still needs to be seen in its full spiritual dimensions. It is not the caricature often pictured in popular media. It does not fit the stereotypes common even in many religious circles. This ministry is not referred to specifically in *TCTCV*, but it deserves to be understood by serious Christians in a more serious way, especially in its broader connection with the spiritual vitality of church life.

This is obviously a subject close to Christian Scientists’ hearts. Our church in a tangible sense is built on “a spiritual foundation of Christ-healing.”

Experiences of Christ-healing brought most of our congregations into being. For many of us, similar experiences in our own lives have been life-transforming. The renewal of this ministry in Christian life and practice is a distinctive element in our church’s mission and witness. Rededication to Christ-healing has been the focus of two of the denomination’s annual meetings in recent years. A letter from church officers to members explained: “One glance around the globe today makes it poignantly clear that Christ-healing remains as needed to heal the grief and ills and evil of the world as it was centuries ago.”

As such statements suggest, we do not see Christ-healing as a minor or secondary aspect

of Christianity. Like those in a number of other church traditions, we do not see it as the product of human faith or belief, or as a rare divine intervention for a fortunate few. Healing as Christian Scientists understand it is God’s love experienced. It is as significant for Christian practice as it is prominent in the gospel record. In Jesus’ healing ministry, the spiritual and the practical were indivisible; the Word was “made flesh” in the meeting of human need. In this perspective, the prayer or communion with God that heals is not marginal to Christian life. It is, in the deepest sense, an inner experience of “sacrament” through which the presence and actuality of God are known.

A Christian Science practitioner and teacher from Germany put it memorably in describing his own earlier healing of a condition deemed incurable after lengthy hospital treatment:

A suddenly illuminated understanding of God, accompanied by deep joy, had made prayer capable of bringing results. This experience comprised three essential points of the Christian Scientist’s faith: the influx of the divine Spirit, the birth of the Christ in human consciousness, and the resurrection to a new life.⁶

Christian Scientists can by no means claim to have fully grasped the heights and depths of meaning to which these words point. We often feel how much more we have to learn in carrying out this

5. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, 136.

6. Friedrich Preller, “Christian Science: Its Healing Message for Men and Nations,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (7 December 1956); <https://cslectures.org/preller/cs-its-healing-message-for-men-and-nations-preller.htm>

ministry, especially in a culture where technology predominates and spiritual experience is widely discounted. And yet, imperfect as our practice and witness are, the experiences of healing in our lives, the insights gained – and yes, the difficult lessons learned – are not discountable. The resurrection to a new life that many of us have felt or glimpsed, in some measure in these experiences does not stop with the healing of the body; it redeems and renews and brings forth other, often unexpected, fruits in our lives to the degree that we are open to its spiritual influence. The same is true in its renewing effects in the spiritual life of churches.

As for “what advice” we might have for the Commission on Faith and Order, it would seem presumptuous for us as an outsider to the process to offer counsel on a dialogue that has been undertaken with such careful thought and devotion over so many years. We are not sure whether or on what basis the subject of Christ-healing might be included in this dialogue going forward. The Consultation on Faith, Healing, and Mission in Accra in 2002 is a helpful precedent. Yet one of those hard lessons we mentioned is that it is far easier to talk about healing than to practice it in the spirit of Christ. For any meaningful dialogue on this ministry, the actual work of healing in this spirit must prepare the heart.

Conclusion

At Wednesday testimony meetings in our congregations, people often rise to give thanks for what their church has meant to them. Many of our congregations are small, the silences sometimes feel long, and a casual visitor or passer-by might

wonder why anyone would want to attend a meeting like this when there are so many other more entertaining things to do. But when there is love and trust, and the usual self-concerns are laid aside, people feel free enough to share what Jesus called their “treasure . . . new and old” (Matt. 13:52) – his description in a parable of the kingdom of heaven. Then these meetings feel like church. The goodness of God is felt, and fills the empty space between us, and in our hearts.

TCTCV reminds us why we love church. It reminds us that there are many in other churches who share this love. Ecumenical encounter that proceeds from this shared love is not merely diplomatic negotiation on theological points. It is church. This is surely where unity between churches starts. While convergence in teaching or practice seems distant, the unity of churches is finally a union of hearts, and the goodness of God already fills the empty space between us.

The point goes beyond ecclesiology in a technical sense. The tenth chapter of Exodus describes a time when Egypt was covered with “a thick darkness,” so that the people “saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days; but all the children of Israel,” the narrative emphasizes, “had light in their dwellings” (Ex. 10:22, 23). At a time when much in contemporary society would impose a thick darkness on the human spirit, and many cannot see who they are and why they matter in a universe of empty space, church is a light in humanity’s dwellings, where all of us can recognize ourselves and each other in our full worth and stature in the image and likeness of God.

The letter to the World Council that begins this response quotes from a report written by our church's representative at the WCC 4th General Assembly in Uppsala. The report includes a further description that feels as meaningful and alive in 2017 as it must have in 1968. The writer comments:

After a day that has turned grey with ceremony and parliamentary procedure, a series of brief, brilliant Czech cartoons shown in the evening unexpectedly restores life to the assembly. The final cartoon in the series somehow sums up the need of the assembly and the perfectly realistic aspiration of mankind in one word. The cartoon opens with people secreted in a grey maze or hive. Workmanlike and obedient, they move through an incredibly complex machine of tunnels, runnels, and gears. But then, one by one, they emerge. They rise slightly from the ground; they discover they have wings. They flutter and soar off lightly into blue sky like thousands of butterflies, over fields and green trees and flowers. One word appears at the end – “Fly!” It is both a need and a promise.

The writer drew out the moral of the parable in the largest terms for the future of Christianity and all humanity:

. . . a wind is rising across the earth and [human beings] are stirring in their long sleep.

They are waking to thoughts and feelings that belong to them as individuals whose primary loyalty is to the fullness of life and meaning. They realize they no longer must use the second-hand thoughts prescribed by race and age and social and family custom . . . they know that it is not really ordained in the structure of the universe and manhood that man must starve and slave – either literally in the Third World or spiritually in the affluent society. They are beginning to sense, somehow, that in some way it is the joyous destiny of man, individually and collectively, to fly.⁷

Some of the language reflects that earlier time, but the spirit it catches is more timely than ever in our troubled century. It is the common vision that brings churches together. It is the vision that shone forth on that morning at the sea of Tiberius when everything changed for those disciples and the world. It is a wind still rising in the human heart today.

7. “Looking back at Uppsala: Notes by a Guest at the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches.” (From our church files.)

15. Uniting Church in Australia

Introduction

The Uniting Church in Australia rejoices with the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches for the great achievement of the convergence text, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. We give thanks for the long and faithful process of study, reflection, prayer and writing that culminated in *TCTCV*, and for the worldwide community that has taken part in the work of the Commission. It is the labour of many years, and the Uniting Church celebrates this work, and the immensely valuable growth in convergence it represents.

The Uniting Church appreciates the concluding Historical Note which outlines the detailed process and thorough discussion leading to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. It provides an important framing of the text. We are, as a church, very much an outcome of the ecumenical movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The ecumenical movement of this time deeply shaped our Basis of Union (BU). This 1971 document has guided the Uniting Church since our formation in 1977, and it is one to which we turn in part as we respond to the questions the Faith and Order Commission has invited churches to consider in our official response.

(1) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

We affirm with the text that the Church and its mission are rooted in God's vision for all creation, namely the kingdom of God promised and embodied in Jesus Christ. The Basis of Union of the Uniting Church speaks in terms of "that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation" (BU, §3).¹ What Jesus wanted in relation to the Church carrying out his mission was that it be a community of witness, a community of worship, and a community of discipleship. The Uniting Church strongly affirms this basic orientation.

The text speaks of the Church as an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom while awaiting its full realization. We find this understanding fundamental. In the Basis of Union we describe the church as "a pilgrim people." This has become an oft-repeated affirmation in the Uniting Church, one which is an understanding reflected also in *TCTCV* (§35). It is important for us to be reminded of the deep eschatological sense of this idea of pilgrimage, that we are "a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal" (BU,

1. Uniting Church of Australia, Basis of Union (1971), <https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/histdocs/basisofunion1971.pdf>

§3). The unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity we claim as marks of the church are convincing only if understood in terms both of a real “already” and a significant “not yet.”

The Uniting Church strongly affirms that the whole people of God are called to be a prophetic, priestly and royal people “serving as instruments for the establishment of God’s reign.” The text is helpful in reaffirming both lay and ordained in saying, “the royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the church.” (§18). The Uniting Church holds that “all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ” (BU, §13). The Uniting Church endorses lay people as having an equal role in the decisions of the church by virtue of our baptism into the one body of Christ; within the Uniting Church, lay people can be elected to leadership roles in all councils of the Uniting Church.

The Uniting Church agrees that the Church was called into being by God, not to serve itself, but to seek God’s will for the transformation of the world. While the Basis of Union does not take up this issue apart from some theological affirmations relating to reconciliation and service, the 1977 Statement to the Nation is another significant document of the Uniting Church which continues to inform its involvement in social issues. It states, “A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church. In the Uniting Church our response

to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs.”²

In the expression of the Mission of the Church in History (§6), we find much that resonates with our more recent thinking, explorations and learning. Of primary significance are our reflections arising from the covenant formed between the Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). One example of this can be seen in our recent revision to the preamble to our Constitution. This revised preamble recognizes that the first peoples of Australia, the traditional owners and custodians of our land, had encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonizers. It also acknowledges the complicity of the churches which came into union in the construction of the dominant Australian culture, and the propagation of a distorted view of history so that, “As a result of this denial, relationships were broken and the very integrity of the Gospel proclaimed by the church was diminished.”³ The Assembly of the Uniting Church adopted this revised preamble in 2009.

We have also learned much from, and continue to be challenged by, our commitment to being a multi-cultural church. Many different peoples, from many different cultural backgrounds come together to make up the Uniting Church. This brings us great joy and richness in our diversity. It also poses us many challenges. Particularly, the challenges for all of us of respecting the cultural and religious heritage of all those to whom

2. Statement to the Nation, 1977.

3. The Revised Preamble to the Constitution, 2010.

the gospel has been proclaimed (§6) is an important part of our more recent reflections as a church.

(2) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The text is appropriately aspirational in its presentation of the Church. It encourages churches to see themselves in what is presented; and much of what is said can be readily affirmed. In doing so it invites churches to grow towards the unity that is described or sought. The title itself, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, seems to us to be both invitational and a recognition of the process and the difficulties of moving towards unity.

All churches affirm the need to proclaim the faith and to remain true to the apostolic witness. We see significant agreement concerning the two sacraments of baptism and eucharist. This broad agreement can be a basis for growth in unity, although the questions of who can preside at the church's sacraments remain a significant barrier to greater unity between churches. We recognize that our practice of allowing, in certain circumstances, lay presidency at the church's sacraments presents an obstacle to other churches with whom we would seek to be in closer communion. We would observe that the issue of who presides at sacraments is tied both to what presiders and people are doing (for example, who calls the Spirit), and the issue of how we describe the local church and its relationship to those who provide oversight. We believe that it would be helpful for further work to be done on these inter-related issues.

The question of religious pluralism is an important one we are dealing with as a church, and it is a matter in common to many churches in our context. Particularly, the discussion in the text of the difference between Christian witness and proselytism provides a helpful basis for explorations of greater unity (§6 n. 4). Moral issues are another contentious area, for us and for other churches. There is a diversity of judgments within our church as to how to respond to some issues, such as in relation to sexuality and leadership. Such matters have put our internal unity to great tests. It has taken much careful and respectful listening to recognize each other's point of view and to struggle together as a church. We believe that reflecting and praying together as churches about these complex issues is important work towards unity.

It is possible for the churches to agree on many basic approaches, which is important to recognize, affirm, rejoice in and continue to explore. We find this to be true of such matters as God's concern for the poor and marginalized, God's will for justice and peace, God's concern for those who suffer due to disease and natural disasters. It is significant, in these areas of agreement, that churches can together express their concerns, and can act together for God's reign to become more of a reality on earth. Unity is both a gift of God and something to be worked towards. The Uniting Church seeks to be an active participant in growth towards greater unity among the churches and sees this text as a valuable tool in the process.

(3) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The text challenges the Uniting Church to focus on God's mission. While this focus is clearly recognized, in practice there is a tendency in our life to be diverted by worry about finances, church property and personnel issues. Keeping God's kingdom inaugurated by Jesus Christ in the forefront of our church life is a necessity. We find that this text does that well, and challenges us to do the same. The Uniting Church in Australia is conscious of the importance of Christian unity to the mission and nature of the Church, and we remain fully committed to participation in ecumenical structures and in seeking fresh ecumenical initiatives.

Proclaiming the gospel of Christ in ways that awaken a response is a particular challenge for the Uniting Church. We recognize much of our context in this text, particularly in chapter 4, and we appreciate the challenge to be joining together with other churches to search for ways to carry out our evangelical task better, using approaches that are appropriate to us as a Uniting Church. There is the need for responsible evangelization in the face of these challenges – those we share with others around the world, and those particular to our own context – that are respectful of the integrity of all, yet which seek for people to be open to the fullness of life in Christ, become his disciples and serve God's reign.

While the text says that there is widespread agreement among churches of different traditions about the place of ordained ministers, this is an issue for us both internally and in our relationship

with others. The Uniting Church is strong in its recognition of lay leadership within its life, with strong lay participation in all councils of the church. In addition to this, the realities of the Australian context results in lay-led congregations, especially in rural and remote areas of the country. In many places this is driven by the difficulties of placing ministry in so many isolated locations with large distances between population centres; and there are many such congregations who would value the presence of an ordained minister, if this were to be possible. In some places, however, this has resulted in some congregations not recognizing the importance of ordained ministry. Those who are ordained are formed and set aside for leadership in ministry in a way that is not exactly the same as lay people, even though some lay leaders exercise a ministry that includes word, sacrament and oversight. There are those who are working through the Uniting Church understanding of ordained and lay ministry and may have some insights to share with the wider Church in due course.

The ministry of oversight is an area where we are deeply challenged by the understandings of the text. We have an understanding of the ministry of oversight, which we seek to find in personal, collegial and communal ways, but without a personal episcopate. This is an understanding inherited from our parent churches and, although the possibility of creating a form of personal episcopacy has been a subject of church-wide discussion a number of times in our brief life, we have preferred to work with the challenge of making our councils more effective in the exercise of episcopal oversight. It is

the councils of our church that are responsible for those matters that are under the care of bishops in episcopal churches.

These questions around the place and understanding of ordained ministry and oversight are closely connected to questions of authority in the Church, as discussed in §§47–53. Part of our concern about oversight is related to our understanding of authority and power. The text rightly says, “All authority in the Church comes from her Lord and head, Jesus Christ.” Authority in the Church can be understood and exercised correctly only in the light of Christ and his self-giving leadership. We conclude that ecclesial authority conforms to the self-giving, servant leadership that we see in Jesus Christ. The power and authority of Christian leadership needs to be different from that of the world (§49). The distinction, rightly made in the text, between authority in the church and “mere power” (§50), however, is a complex and problematic matter with which we struggle. We would acknowledge that our church has a deep unease about the exercise of authority and the related questions of oversight.

The threefold ministry of deacon, priest and bishop may be considered as normative by many churches (§46); but the Uniting Church in Australia accepts this pattern of ministry as an ecumenical challenge rather than as a clear and self-explanatory norm. We see faithfulness to the apostolic witness as essential. We have a diaconal ministry (Deacons), and a presbyteral ministry (Minister of the Word), though as complementary ministries that are not in any hierarchical relationship to each other. Although we do not

have a Ministry of Bishop, we see our expression of *episkopé* through our councils of congregation, presbytery, synod and assembly as the focus for the ministry of oversight in our church. In practice, the authority of our councils is exercised in personal, collegial and conciliar forms dedicated to “maintaining continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life.” The conciliar and collegial dimensions of the ministry of oversight in our church are strongly expressed, with the move to consensus decision-making a consequence of our commitment to these dimensions of our practice. Personal expressions of the ministry of oversight are carried out by many individuals who exercise specific roles within the life of the church, such as presidents, moderators, general secretaries, chairs of presbytery, presbytery ministers and leaders of committees. We can acknowledge that our practice has some weaknesses, such as the time we take to make decisions and the regular gaps that open up between the discernments offered by different persons and bodies within the life of our church. Perhaps the most important weakness is in the area of prayer support for the ongoing discernments that guide our ecclesial decisions and actions, at least when compared to the ideal bishop.

On the question of wider ministries of oversight, such as a universal primacy, we would acknowledge the importance of the ministries exercised through such bodies as the World Council of Churches as well as the potential for global Christian witness through the Bishop of Rome and other transnational leaders of churches. We affirm that the Word of God can be effectively proclaimed in relation to specific global issues

and situations by an individual spiritual leader, not least because of the shape and scope of today's mass media. A critical value of a universal primacy is the potential for intervention and reform where whole sections of the universal church fall into some form of apostasy or corruption. We are not persuaded that a universal primacy is the only, let alone the best, preparation in church polity to meet this kind of eventuality.

The Uniting Church is challenged to practice servant leadership in all its councils and ministries. The text's discussion of local, regional and universal levels of the ecclesial life is an important reminder to us of the need to constantly enrich and strengthen our sense of being a communion of councils in communion worldwide with the universal Church. We have been from the outset an inter-conciliar church, but we sometimes find it hard to negotiate the dissonance in understanding and practice between different councils of the church. We also struggle to gain an acceptance by all our members of the oversight of the councils of the Church, either through avoidance of engagement or through secular approaches to disputes leading to litigious actions. In parts of our church, there are congregations with a strong understanding of the church at a local level, with a great emphasis on congregational autonomy without respect for the authority of other councils.

The Uniting Church seeks to be a church that is in and for the world (which may link with some of the issues noted above). We are known for our advocacy and community service activities. In an increasingly multi-faith environment, we have worked to foster positive relationships with those

of other religions. We affirm the place of other religions in Australian society and stand against those who would discriminate against others on the basis of religion. The Uniting Church is seeking to find appropriate ways to witness to Jesus Christ as well as to value people of other faiths. Moral questions, especially in regard to human sexuality, have been divisive in the Uniting Church. We continue to struggle with holding together in the Church people who have different convictions on these matters. Nevertheless, many in the Uniting Church value the fact that this issue can be raised and discussed even if agreement is not achievable at this time. The Uniting Church is challenged not to overemphasize one issue and neglect other social issues on which it could have a positive influence. The call to holiness in the text is a challenge to us; and we see real value in exploring the fuller meaning of holiness.

(4) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The Uniting Church is seeking to form closer relationships with other churches that can acknowledge the description of the Church described in this document. The Uniting Church is currently engaged in dialogues with the Anglican, Lutheran, Salvation Army and the Roman Catholic churches. It is endeavouring to renew a dialogue with the Greek Orthodox Church. There are formally recognized relationships at the local level with the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church and the

Churches of Christ. There are several bilateral partnerships with churches in the Pacific, Africa and Asia, including the China Christian Council.

The Uniting Church provides strong support to the National Council of Churches which puts it in touch with nineteen churches across Australia. Similarly, the Uniting Church is involved in state councils of churches. The Uniting Church has membership with the Christian Conference of Asia and the Pacific Conference of Churches, as well as the World Methodist Council and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. It also belongs to a fellowship of United and Uniting Churches. These organizations link it with many churches in our region and around the world. The text will provide a common statement that will assist with these connections.

(5) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology.

There is a range of matters that the text raises which call for further discussion. From a Uniting Church perspective, Faith and Order could note the following:

1. The notion of visible unity could be developed through specific examples and models of practice. Visible unity could involve organic union or joint arrangements based on the recognition of being part of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” Further reflections on the achievements

and limitations of past and present attempts to express visible unity will be helpful.

2. The Uniting Church has ordained women to the ministry of Word and sacrament since the Union in 1977, following the practice of the three uniting churches, which all ordained women. Explaining this, the Assembly of the Uniting Church said:

We therefore declare, without reservation, our belief that the practice of the Uniting Church in Australia in ordaining both women and men to the ministry of the Word is fully in accordance with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we beseech those members of other Churches, or even of our own Church, who have not yet reached this conclusion to think again.⁴

The Uniting Church strongly encourages Faith and Order to continue to work towards the acceptance of the ordination of women in all its member churches.

3. The role of ordained ministry is given prominence in *TCTCV*. More could be said about the role of lay people, especially concerning lay ministry and the lay calling to be Christ’s witnesses and representatives in the world.

4. “Why does the Uniting Church in Australia Ordain Women to Ministry of the Word?” (Social responsibility and Justice Committee for the Assembly Standing Committee, Uniting Church in Australia, 1990) in *Theology for Pilgrims*, ed. Rob Bos and Geoff Thompson (Uniting Church Press, 2008), 562-615.

4. In regard to continuity and change, the text raises the ways that some churches emphasize commitment to continuity while others emphasize commitment to change. We find the discussion of the separation of legitimate and divisive diversity to be a significant challenge, which raises questions particularly as to what criteria might be articulated. We would find it helpful if the Faith and Order Commission were able to develop some common criteria, or some discussion of common means of discernment to aid churches in their reflections on these questions.

5. The relationship between the local worshipping congregation and the universal Church is touched upon in the text. It would be desirable to state ways in which the local church can be linked to the universal Church.

6. There is a great deal of common understanding in regard to the two sacraments of baptism and the eucharist (§38). Further work on other rites of the church would be helpful to the churches in seeking greater unity. Within the Uniting Church, we only regard baptism and the eucharist within our sacramental understanding; but further work on the place of other rites within the churches could be helpful in leading to a fuller level of mutual recognition. In our particular context, we have ministers act as agents of the state for marriages. This increasingly seems to be a carry-over from a more Christendom approach to church-state relations. We are aware that other churches live in very different contexts, with very different understandings both of the place of various rites in the church

and of church-state relationships. We would find a valuable fuller elaboration by the Faith and Order Commission on common understandings of other Christian rites.

7. Discussion as to how *episkopé* is best exercised could be significant and useful. This would involve the threefold interplay between the personal, collegial and conciliar. As we have noted, we emphasize collegial and conciliar aspects of *episkopé* more than the personal component and so do not have a personal office of bishop. But further elaboration of different aspects of *episkopé* and their inter-relationship, together with more discussion on authority and its relationship to power, could be valuable.

8. While the Uniting Church does not give the Pope primacy, Faith and Order could explore how the churches might have closer links with the papacy. This discussion of the place of the papacy is of particular significance in the discussion of the Church's being in and for the world. The Pope because of his position has a particular ability to speak out to a global audience. If there were closer connections with the Pope, it might be possible for greater unity in the declarations we already endeavour to make where there is much common ground. While some social issues are divisive, there are others where a common witness is possible and desirable. For us, the WCC already functions in this way: a role of making a witness common to all of the churches that make up the council. An extension of the unity and strength of such a voice would be valuable particularly if such connections

could also be forged with other global Christian leaders.

The Uniting Church values this text and hopes that it will foster increased dialogue and unity among the churches. We recognize, in receiving this text that, as with *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the process of reception of the text can be as important as the process which led to its production. We commit ourselves to continue to reflect on the material presented and how it might lead us further on a journey to greater unity.⁵

5. With thanks to the Rev. Dr. Christopher Walker, National Consultant Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship, the first primary writer of this response; the Rev. Dr. Sandy Yule for his comments on several versions; and to other Members and Associated Members of the Christian Unity Working Group and Doctrine Working group for their suggestions.

16. Evangelical Church in Baden*

Preliminary note

The Evangelical Church in Baden (EKiBa) would like to express its thanks for the study *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.¹ As a Protestant territorial church which has been confessionally united for almost two centuries,² and which has historical experience of the convergence of different liturgical and confessional traditions, we see this study and the method of convergence documents as offering important prospects for further ecumenical understanding.

The following response assumes that convergence texts never fully coincide with a partial ecclesiology, but are intended as sounding boards to identify opportunities for further steps toward deeper and visible unity. With this in mind, we would like to contribute a confessionally united

church's specific perspective on the common vision of the Church to the ecumenical discussion.

The first section of the response will briefly outline the context of the "United Ecclesiology of Baden," before we address the questions for consideration in the subsequent sections.

Context: the Evangelical Church in Baden

The Baden Church Union has diverse roots: On the one hand, political considerations and state interests played a role in it; and on the other hand, it was fostered by the ecumenical ecclesiological visions of rulers and theologians. Thus, it could fall back on early ecumenical visions influenced by the Enlightenment, such as those of the Elector Palatine Karl Ludwig.³

Moreover, people who had been driven out of other European regions and had settled in Baden

1. References are to the German translation of Faith and Order Paper No. 214: *Die Kirche: Auf dem Weg zu einer gemeinsamen Vision. Eine Studie der Kommission für Glaube und Kirchenverfassung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen (ÖRK)* (Gütersloh/Paderborn, Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Bonifatius 2014).

2. "Confessionally united" signifies that this church represents a complete union of rite and confession, as can be seen in the Preamble of its Church Constitution; <http://www.kirchenrecht-baden.de/document/27489#s100.100.00004>

3. Karl Ludwig, Elector Palatine (1617–1680; ruled 1649–1680), who had to rebuild a largely devastated, confessionally heterogeneous and religiously wild country after the Thirty Years' War, had an international biography (childhood in English and Dutch exile; his maternal grandfather was the King of England) and a corresponding intellectual perspective. He corresponded with Leibniz and Spinoza, and fulfilled his vision of tolerance and reconciliation through the construction of the "church of [religious] unity," the Konkordien church in Mannheim.

* This response was prepared by a working group of the Advisory Board for Mission and Ecumenism and adopted by the College of the Evangelical High Church Council on 14 March 2017. Without quoting each of them verbatim or in detail, we gratefully borrowed some passages from the response of the CPCE (December 2015), as well as contributions by Prof. Dr. Michael Plathow.

brought their own impulses for piety with them. Finally, church elders took up impulses from the Reformation anniversary in 1817 and (through signature campaigns) demanded a union from their church leadership.

Thus, the authorities, theologians and synods were equally involved in the actualization of the union.⁴ When it was founded (on 21 July 1821 in Karlsruhe), the Evangelical Church in Baden defined itself as “friends with all Christians throughout the world” (Document of Union §10). It is therefore ecumenical in the literal sense.

Since then its history has demonstrated this in manifold ways,⁵ particularly at the institutional level, through the full table-pulpit-ministry fellowship it declared with the churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (CPCE).⁶ The same article of its Constitution enshrines cooperation with the World Council

of Churches (WCC) and the duty to overcome church-divisive differences.⁷

This was put into practice, for example, through an agreement with the Archdiocese of Freiburg (together with the Moravian Church in Baden, the United Methodist Church in Baden, and the Catholic Bishopric of the Old Catholics in Germany) on “Joint Church Weddings,” the so-called Form C (1974), and through the signing of a “Framework Agreement on Ecumenical Partnerships” between parishes (2004).

Finally, the eucharistic hospitality for all baptized Christians practiced by the Evangelical Church in Baden is the most obvious testimony to its ecumenical orientation.

Against this background, we will answer the questions asked by the Commission.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The wide variety of ecclesiological insights and metaphors in the New Testament noted in §§11 and 12 of the study is very important to us as a confessionally united church and is one of the foundations of United ecclesiology: “Legitimate diversity is not accidental to the life of the

4. The consensus on the Baden Agreement on the Lord’s Supper (Document of Union §5) was reached at the Union Synod in July 1821 not by formal vote, but by a *magnus consensus*: The assembly president gave about five minutes to raise objections. A “reverent silence” reigned; the Union was perfect!

5. For example, the United Church of Baden was a leader in the constitution of the Arnoldshain Conference (AKf), which has been continued and further developed in the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) within the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Further examples can be found at www.ekiba.de (keyword “Geschichte”) and in the *Kleine Geschichte des Protestantismus in Baden* (Karlsruhe, 2013).

6. Church Constitution, Art. IV [1].

7. “1 The Evangelical Church in Baden is part of the community of the World Council of Churches. 2 Together with it, it seeks cooperation with all Christian churches and communities. 3 As a United church, it is committed to overcoming church-divisive differences and to making visible in its ministry to the world the unity of the Church enjoined in Christ” (Church Constitution, Art. IV [2]).

Christian community but is rather an aspect of its catholicity” (§12).

The Evangelical Church in Baden sees itself as a (particular) church of Jesus Christ, as formulated in the *Confessio Augustana* (CA, 1530) in Article VII, and as the Leuenberg Agreement (LA, 1973) affirmed in our times in Article 2: “agreement in the right teaching of the Gospel and in the right administration of the sacraments is the necessary and sufficient prerequisite for the true unity of the Church.”

The standard for all its preaching is “the message of justification as the message of God’s free grace” (LA 12): God’s justifying and liberating action is witnessed in the preaching of the gospel and celebrated in the sacraments.

This ecclesiological self-understanding (the Church as *creatura verbi*) can be found in the study, for example in §14, which emphasizes that the foundation of the Church is the proclamation of the gospel, which leads people to faith and incorporates them into the body of Christ through the sacraments. The results of important bilateral dialogues (§14, footnote 3) also demonstrate that this approach is ecumenically promising. The description of the role of the Holy Spirit (§16), who makes possible the preaching of the gospel, fellowship in the eucharist and the filling of ministries and services, is also a reminder of the foundation of ecclesiology in CA 7 and 14 which is important to us.

A special characteristic of the Evangelical Church in Baden is “that the confessions⁸ refer to

8. These are the three symbols of the ancient Church, the Augsburg Confession, Luther’s Small Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Theological Declaration of Barmen.

the *sola scriptura* and are expressly linked to unrestricted research into the Scriptures implied in this principle.”⁹

Accordingly, the Evangelical Church in Baden is “committed to examining its confession time and again against the Holy Scriptures and to witnessing to it and keeping it alive in doctrine and order,” as the last paragraph (6) of the Preamble of its *Church Constitution* states. Article 58 [2] of the *Church Constitution* therefore decrees: “The principles of the legislation [of the regional church] must accord with the Holy Scriptures according to the understanding of the . . . confessional documents.”

Based on this, the ecumenical discussion and the common search for criteria for distinguishing between enriching and divisive diversity (following §30) is an important concern for our church.

It also forms the basis for an attitude of mutual accountability in ecumenical relations on the way toward growing in communion.

In summary, it can therefore be said that the Evangelical Church in Baden finds the key points of its basic ecclesiological understanding present in this document.

9. Dorothea Noordveld-Lorenz, *Gewissen und Kirche* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 53, footnote 192. The fundamental §2 of the Document of Union of 1821 states: While the *Confessio Augustana* “once again loudly demanded and asserted the lost principle and right of unrestricted research into the Holy Scriptures as the only sure source of Christian faith and knowledge,” in “Luther’s Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism [it was] actually applied.” In view of this, it is in the “principle and right of unrestricted research into Holy Scripture . . . [that] the pure foundation of evangelical Protestantism should be sought and found.”

2. To what extent does this text provide a basis for growing unity among the churches?

We consider *koinonia* (*communio*) ecclesiology, which guides the convergence text and was developed from the doctrine of the Trinity, as something that can lead to ecumenical progress. It encourages faith, prayer and action.

The trinitarian *koinonia* (*communio*) ecclesiology not only enjoys acceptance among the member churches of the WCC; it is also compatible with the *communio* ecclesiology of Vatican II.¹⁰ It forms a bridge between ecclesiology and the shared responsibility of the churches for the world (§§62–67). As confessionally united churches, we share the experience that communion is not simply the merger of existing churches in their current form. The life of *koinonia*, in the broadest sense of the word as explained in §13, changes what it means to be Church.

Koinonia ecclesiology can thus serve as a basis for growing unity among the churches if it also takes into account the model of unity in legitimate diversity. A difficulty for the ecumenical discussion, however, lies in the abundance of different interpretations of the concept of *koinonia*.

The Trinitarian *koinonia* ecclesiology is explained in §§13–16 in an easily understandable and biblically-founded manner. However, from the Reformation standpoint, it is irritating that a section on Mary's function as a role model for the Church

10. See, for example, "Ökumenisch weiter gehen! Die Impulse des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils aufnehmen und weiterführen," ed. M. Kappes (Leipzig: J. Oeldemann, 2014), 14ff.

and the faithful is integrated into this Trinitarian explanation (§15). For Protestant ears, this suggests the danger that a misunderstanding could cause a Quadrinity to arise from the Trinity. It would be helpful to discuss the chapter on Mary and her significance as a "symbol and role model for the Church and every single Christian" in a different context.

We see an opportunity for growing in communion in the attempt to formulate a baptismal ecclesiology (§41) and achieve an increasing mutual recognition of baptism.¹¹ In our view, this opens up a new approach to the possibility of eucharistic hospitality.¹²

We are aware that, at the same time, dialogue with churches of the Anabaptist tradition must continue, since for them the issue of baptism in the ecumenical discussion is not the easier approach for achieving more fellowship (compared to questions of the eucharist and ministry), but the one which is more difficult for them.

Indeed, it has been our experience, particularly in cooperation for practical efforts for peace

11. The so-called "Magdeburg Declaration" on the mutual recognition of baptisms (2007) was an important step in this respect, which continues to have an impact on the churches involved. See also the lecture by Konrad Raiser, "Ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe: Die ekklesiologische Bedeutung der einen Taufe," given at the 222nd General Assembly of the ACK on 12-13 March 2008 in Erfurt; https://www.oekumene-ack.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Themen/Raiser_Taufe_MV_2008-03.pdf.

12. In connection with the reception of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, our regional church dealt with a request from the ecumenical community concerning the exclusion of baptized children from the Lord's supper. Subsequently, it opened itself up to a practice of the Lord's supper where children are also invited.

undertaken with Mennonite brothers and sisters in our region, that we naturally perceive ourselves as baptized Christians following Jesus, and that we as a regional church have been significantly enriched by the Mennonite tradition and their witness.

The convergence achieved with regard to baptism should also cause the significance of baptism as the “ordination of all believers,” and thus as their calling to build up the Church and serve the world,¹³ to be taken seriously.¹⁴ “It is only within the context of this ‘ordination’ of all the faithful for witness and ministry that the special ordination for the service of the spiritual ministries has its special place.”¹⁵ Although this perspective is mentioned in §§18-19, it is almost completely overlooked in the statements on the ministry within the Church (§§45–57). Here there could have been a great opportunity for progressing on the difficult path of convergence on questions of ministry.

Finally, we highly agree with §§28–30 that mutual accountability is a significant ecumenical instrument for overcoming divisions on the one hand, and for appreciating and cultivating differences – for example, in liturgy, piety and theological method – in such a way that they contribute to catholicity, on the other. In our tradition, the role of the pastoral ministry is less crucial.

13. Konrad Raiser, op. cit., referring to the WCC study document *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (No. 76).

14. Following, for example, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (No. 5) as well as the Second Vatican Council’s constitution on the Church.

15. Konrad Raiser, “Ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe.”

The controversial (in a good sense) discussion on “Luther 2017,” which originated in the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), and the organization of the Reformation Decade are for us good examples of successful mutual accountability. The striving for a healing of memories with the Protestant Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church particularly shows that progress can be achieved through an awareness and recognition of the perspectives of the respective other churches on the past, and by enquiring about continuity and renewal against this background.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

A common vision of the Church that aims at communion (*koinonia*) in preaching, eucharistic worship and responsibility for the world challenges us to a constant appreciation of one another, to recognition and possibly change.

In the Evangelical Church in Baden, we have experienced how, through the ecumenical rapprochement between different confessions over the past 30 years, liturgical traditions of other denominations have enriched and changed our own liturgical practice. For example, the use of baptismal candles and the celebration of the remembrance of baptism on Easter night were unthinkable a few decades ago. Appreciating this as a gift of ecumenism remains a task for us.

Remembering the tradition of the ancient Church (after and alongside biblical testimony) creates ecumenical fellowship. This is not very present in our congregations and at our services.

The same holds true for the example of Mary, as evidenced by the gospels: rediscovering her role from a Protestant perspective as well could enhance the life of common worship.

In our Reformation tradition, we are committed to the priesthood of all believers and understand baptism as an ordination of all believers, so to speak. We will continue to seek ecumenical discussion on the specific function of the threefold or (in the Reformed tradition) fourfold ministry in the service of unity.

The study describes the actualization of the missionary dimension of the Church, which “is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion [*koinonia*] which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom” (§13). This is a task which can be accomplished only in communion with other churches. To this end, we will seek cooperation and communion with other churches time and again, particularly within the context of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

We seek common action and a common voice of the Christian churches in the religiously plural and secularized world: in deed (*diakonia*) and word, in evangelization and interreligious dialogue.

For the Evangelical Church in Baden, the granting of eucharistic hospitality is an important sign of closer relationships and an act which

strengthens the common ministry. However, it is not mentioned in the list of issues on the sacraments which should be clarified (§44). From our standpoint, this is unfortunate since it serves as the *practical* recognition of legitimate diversity between those churches which would like to describe the Church itself as a “sacrament,” and those which find this inappropriate – although they of course do not deny that the Church should be understood as a sign of God’s presence and action (§27).

In §51 the study describes the spiritual authority of Christian leaders whose impact extends beyond their own ecclesial community, and gives – inter alia – Bishop Desmond Tutu and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew as examples. We recognize that the authority of these leaders is also valid in our context, and would like to add witnesses to the faith and influential theologians from our context such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothee Sölle. The common reference to the spiritual authority of individual personalities which transcends confessional boundaries is an ecumenical opportunity and strengthens the common witness of the churches.

Finally, the binding partnership agreements between congregations of different confessions and joint church weddings (Form C) mentioned at the beginning have reinforced ecumenical relations and concrete cooperation. We would like to develop these further.

5 (a). What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion?

As a guide toward a common vision of the visible unity of Christian churches, the invitations to

further dialogue in italics are particularly helpful and should be discussed further in an ecumenical conversations at all levels.

We consider further discussion of the following aspects to be necessary:¹⁶

- the legal status and the justification of regulations on church structure and ministries (§24), and therefore the question of how continuity and change in the Church relate to God's will (§22);
- the basic decision-making authority of all the baptized and their participation in decisions (§20). For an essentially presbyterial-synodal church such as the Church in Baden, the participation of the so-called laity in the leadership of the Church is fundamental;
- the understanding and attribution of the *sinful Church* and the *Church of sinners* (§§6, 22);

16. Moreover, while studying the text, the meaning of some terms was not clear to us:

- "Unity" in different contexts and meanings (from "Toronto" to the ministry of primacy in §55 and *passim*);
- "Element" (§§25, 37, 60): Is element an "essential quality," a "characteristic, form of expression" or "feature" (etc.)?
- "Factors" (§39): Are these "authorities on [Christian] witness" or . . . ?
- "Rites" (§40): liturgical acts . . . ?
- "Values" (§§62, 64, 65) – in different contexts and meanings: social values (§62), values of the kingdom of God (§§64 and 65) . . . ?

- the relationship between "local churches" and the "universal Church" (§§31, 32);
- the understanding and attribution of an "ecumenical council" on the one hand and the "universal ministry of Christian unity" on the other. The latter could also be organized as a group of three or by rotation. It should be "exercised in communal and collegial ways" (§56) and be subject to the former;
- the relationship between the certainty of one's truth and tolerance in religious and secular pluralism (§60);
- the understanding of "faithfulness to . . .": although this (beautiful!) expression is favored several times in the study (§§22 ["infidelity"], 24, 38, 39, 42, 47 ["faithfulness to the Gospel"]), the danger that reformations – which are necessary and inevitable precisely for the sake of faithfulness to the gospel – could be impeded should at least be taken into account.

5 (b). What advice could your church offer to the Faith and Order Commission for the ongoing work in the area of ecclesiology?

1. The really urgent advice we would like to offer to the Commission is: It is necessary to take note of and appreciate the Leuenberg Model as a model of reconciled diversity and growth in fellowship. The fact that a convergence study does not mention Leuenberg is completely incomprehensible and a missed opportunity.

2. It is equally important to examine and evaluate the regulations and experiences of the United churches from an ecclesiological perspective. These are churches which have already breathed life into a common vision of the Church within their contexts and which have oriented themselves toward the model of organic unity. Here we have in mind both the Lutheran-Reformed unions in our context as well as broader denominational unions such as the Church of South India.

3. In this context, the relationship between multilateral ecumenical discussions and bilateral dialogues – with their respective strengths and weaknesses – should be questioned. Can structures be conceived in which the results of both forms of ecumenical discussion can be related to each other in a way which is even better and mutually beneficial? Here too, the question arises of how the contribution of the United and Uniting churches can be better appreciated in these discussions and in the implementation of their results.

4. In our opinion, it is also important to continue working on the mutual recognition of baptisms and to hold more in-depth discussions about whether further-reaching agreements on eucharistic hospitality can emerge from a baptismal ecclesiology.

5. Although the study emphasizes that “the royal priesthood of the whole people of God and a special ordained ministry are . . . not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives” (§20), and that “the faith experience of the whole people, the

insights of theologians, and the discernment of the ordained ministry” must cooperate for a contemporary proclamation of God’s word (§39), the call of the entire people of God to witness and ministry plays almost no role in the chapter on the ministries within the Church. In view of the convergence achieved with regard to baptism, however, new perspectives could arise for the mutual recognition of different traditions, in line with a baptismal ecclesiology. What is very important for us here is, for example, the question of recognizing the ordination of women.

6. Moreover, the authority of the ecumenical council, above all with regard to the historical Ecumenical Councils of the early Church, and with regard to the ministry of primacy, is discussed (§§53, 54, 56). The discussion of a future Ecumenical Council which would represent, nurture and foster the unity of the churches at a global level remains equally important.

7. The question of the connection between inner-Christian convergence and the dialogue between religions, which is only touched upon in the study, requires further discussion. It would also be desirable to take a closer look at the relationship between the Church and Israel (§17), for example with the help of the CPCE study *Church and Israel* (Leuenberg Documents 6, 2001).

8. The topic of the Church in the world is examined only briefly in chapter 4. An important concern of the ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace – which was announced only after the

completion of the study – is to conceive of the search for the unity of the Church and the mission of the churches in the world as being interconnected. This inner connection between an “ecumenism of unity” and an “ecumenism of justice,” and the ecclesiological relevance of the search for justice and peace should be further developed in ongoing work.

Final note

1. The convergence statement *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has impacted our congregations because it was associated with the so-called Lima Liturgy. We hope that liturgical material for congregations can be developed from this declaration of convergence as well, possibly in connection with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

2. The end of our Document of Union of 1821 notes the experience that jealousy between the churches has disappeared and that “the anxiety with which they guarded their teaching on [confessional] differences has disappeared . . .” (§10). We hope that similar experiences can be had time and again on the way toward a common vision of the Church, that the convergence statement *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* may be received in many member churches, and that the ecumenical movement – of which we, the Evangelical Church in Baden, see ourselves as part – may progress further on the way to unity.

17. Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)*

The text authored by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, defines the conclusion of a discussion process regarding ecclesiology which began in 1993. Because of the comprehensive involvement of WCC member churches during the production of this document, the Commission on Faith and Order ascribes the same status and character to this document as it does to the convergence statement *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper No. 111, 1982). *TCTCV* is a convergence text, which builds upon the 2011 study text *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition* (p.46).

Before it was possible to present this text to the churches for their comments, two previous versions were also sent to the churches for their response. This lengthy discussion process regarding the understanding of the Church is a clear indicator of the degree of controversy among WCC member churches concerning questions of ecclesiology. At the same time, reaching an agreement on this question is of vital importance for the main objective of the Commission on Faith and Order, “to serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common

life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe” (By-laws of Faith and Order, art. 3.1). In its understanding of unity, the convergence text follows the biblical image of the body of Christ in 1 Cor. 12:12-13 (Preface, p. vii). Against this background, the current ecclesial division is described as “abnormal.” In order to work through these divisions and lead churches to advance in fellowship, the convergence text, in the view of the EKD’s Advisory Commission, proposes two fundamental objectives: challenging the churches to live out the ecclesial life more fully through a new focus on their common vision; and reaching a theological agreement on the subject of the Church (Preface, p. viii).

The following four chapters develop a common vision of the nature and mission of the Church, by firstly discussing the origin of the Church, which is rooted in God’s mission (chapter 1), and secondly, the nature of the Church as the Church of the Triune God (chapter 2). These reflections upon the ecclesiological foundations of the Church are followed by considerations about the conditions and structure of the Church as it grows in communion (chapter 3), concluding with a debate about the role of the Church as a sign

*Response by the Advisory Commission on Worldwide Ecumenical Affairs, approved by the Council of the EKD on 15 September 2017.

and mediator of God's love in the world (chapter 4). In its style and content, the study reveals that the churches' common vision of the nature and mission of the Church is the precondition for the Church's growth in communion, as well as being the precondition for the expression and structure of the Church's missionary vocation within, and for the benefit of the world.

1. The Church as *koinonia*

At the centre of the understanding of the Church, as set out in the convergence text, is the idea of the Church as communion (*koinonia*). Since the publication of the Lima papers, *koinonia* ecclesiology, which became particularly prominent in the ecumenical world at the 5th World Conference on Faith and Order (3–14 August 1993), has recently become, once more, a prominent influence.¹ In principle, the convergence text follows this approach. The Church is defined as a “divinely established communion” (§13), whose “source is the very life of the Holy Trinity” (§§1, 67).

Both the nature and the mission of the Church are determined by its position in God's great design for all creation, which is to establish the kingdom of God (§§1, 25). The “vision of God's great design” (§1) and, thus, the vision of the future kingdom of God are the central reference points for both the departure and destination

of ecclesiological considerations. The ecclesiological objective of the convergence text is, in the view of the Advisory Commission, to gain a common understanding of the Church, on the basis of a common understanding of the Church's hope in the kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ. The subtitle of the study, “Towards a Common Vision,” which indicates that this vision is a shared one, clearly invokes a theological concept of vision. This Christian vision is not one in which humanity designs their own future. It is a vision which is given to them in the words of Christ's message that the kingdom of God is near, and that it will, as has been promised to them, be realized by God himself.

The Church is described as being grounded in the economic-trinitarian actions of God within creation; in the sending of his Son through incarnation to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity; and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. God's design becomes manifest in this saving activity, the objective of which is “God's restoration of *koinonia*” (§1). Despite the fact that in many Reformation churches, an ecclesiology based upon a Christological and pneumatological rationale is more common than a trinitarian one,² the Advisory Commission welcomes this recourse to the most commonly used symbolic text in the ecumenical world, the Nicene Creed, as a suitable starting point³ for deepened ecumenical communion (*koi-*

1. Cf. *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, Faith and Order Paper No. 164, ed. Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann (Geneva, 1994). However, the emphasis on *koinonia* ecclesiology presupposes a receding of other ecclesiological approaches, such as the understanding of the Church as presented in the Leuenberg Agreement.

2. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) pointed to these facts in its statement (p. 8).

3. The Evangelical Church in the Rhineland bases its commentary on this argumentation (p. 3).

nonia). However, it remains unclear to the Advisory Commission whether or not a characterization of the Church as “a reflection of the communion of the Triune God” (§§23, 25) as outlined in 1 Cor. 13:12 will emphasize the underlying opacity of this “enigmatic” image or whether it is understood as describing a precise analogy. It is only in the first case that this image, in the view of the Advisory Commission, would sufficiently showcase the difference between the pilgrim Church and the communion between God and individual, or the communion amongst people that is only perfected in the future kingdom of God.

However, from the Advisory Commission’s point of view, the definition of the Church as “sign and servant of God’s design for the world” (the headline of §25ff.) should be welcomed. Using this definition, the description of the Church as a “sign and instrument,” which is widely established in ecumenical ecclesiology, is given a new nuance. According to an Evangelical understanding, the description of the nature of the Church as an instrument is an appropriate one where it relates to the ministry of the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament. However, it is crucial that the Church, in itself, is not the protagonist of God’s process of salvation. This is emphasized by the description of the Church as a “sign and servant.”

The nature and mission of the Church are portrayed using biblical-ecclesiological images such as the people of God, the body of Christ or the temple of the Holy Spirit. For a more detailed definition of the specific *koinonia* character of the Church or the specific character of the Church as

communion, the Advisory Commission points to the image of the body of Christ as a central element (as found in the Preface, p. vii; and qualified even more emphatically in §13). Here, it is most decisive that “believers are united with Jesus Christ” through the Holy Spirit, in the communion of the body of Christ, the head of which is Christ himself, and share in his “living relationship with the Father” (§13). On this basis, the text regards the Church as the prophetic, priestly and royal people of God. The convergence text, however, explains the correlation between the communion with Christ, which the members of the body enjoy, and the prophetic, priestly and royal mission of the people of God from the perspective of a covenant-theological rationale (cf. §§17–19), rather than with reference to the Christological foundation of the Church. The Advisory Commission welcomes the fact that the convergence text includes, albeit not explicitly, the doctrine of the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king. Gleaned from early Christian writings by John Calvin,⁴ this doctrine was adopted by Lutheran, and later, even by Roman-Catholic ecclesiology, thus significantly impacting the ecumenical world.

The convergence text states that the Church “is centred and grounded in the Gospel, the proclamation of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Son

4. Cf. Euseb von Caesarea: *Kirchengeschichte* I, 5; idem: *Demonstratio Evangelica*: IV, 15 and VIII. A more detailed portrayal of Calvin’s discovery of this early Christian theologumenon is Thorsten Jacobi, “Das dreifache Amt Jesu Christi als Bezugspunkt christlicher Ethik bei Fragen am Lebensende,” in Martin Schindehütte & Martin Illert, eds., *Theologische Dialog mit der Rumänischen Orthodoxen Kirche, Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau* 97, Leipzig 2014, 273–298).

of the Father” (§14). The convergence text records that a number of churches therefore consider the Church to be a *creatura evangelii*. This also applies to the Lutheran, United and Reformed churches which are affiliated with one another in the EKD. This constitutive role of the word of God for the Church is, however, subverted in the way that it is worded as “a defining aspect of the Church’s life” (§14, emphasis added), that it is “a community that hears and proclaims the word of God.” In fact, it is the missionary commission of the Church as *koinonia* – as the convergence text indicates by describing the Church as “community of witness,” “community of worship,” “community of discipleship” (§2) and “pilgrim community” (§35) – which is built upon the foundation of the Church, itself hearing and obeying God’s word. Only in this way is it possible for the Church to be, by its very nature, “missionary, called and sent out to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom” (§13).

Finally, according to the convergence text, the term *koinonia* also defines the objective of the churches’ ecumenical quest. It seems appropriate to consider that the biblical notion does not only refer to a communion of individuals and groups, but likewise, to a communion of fellowships, communities and churches. With regard to the quest for *koinonia*, the convergence text “presupposes that communion is not simply the union of existing churches in their current form” (§13). Rather, *koinonia* implies some communality in sharing and partaking. The convergence text connects this purpose of *koinonia* with the objective

of visible unity, to which the WCC is committed. This objective 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’” (§9). However, this carries the implication that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church cannot be recognized, in its entirety, in one single church. On the one hand, this insight follows on from a distinction between the local church and the universal Church, as described in the convergence text, according to which every local church is wholly Church but not the whole Church. On the other hand, the Advisory Commission believes that a visible, constituted, universal Church is not exclusively identical to the body of Christ, into which all Christians are baptized. From an Evangelical perspective, the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church of Jesus Christ cannot be recognized in an unmediated way, but only through the pure proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments as they were originally instituted. For it is in these practices that Jesus Christ makes himself present, in the power of the Spirit, as the crucified and risen Son of the Father. By referring to these *notae ecclesiae* as distinctive marks, the Advisory Commission is able to agree with the statement in the convergence text, that the churches’ recognition of one another as authentic Church may “in some instances depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry within any given community” (§9). These are certainly great challenges “for churches on their journey towards unity” (§9).

2. The essential attributes of the Church

The considerations regarding an understanding of the “Church of the Triune God as *koinonia*” (Chap. II.B) are followed in §§22–24 by an elaboration of the four attributes of the Church according to the Creed of Constantinople (381 CE). The Advisory Commission emphatically supports the fundamental declaration that the Church’s unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity “are God’s gifts to the Church” and “are mutually interrelated” (§22). The Advisory Commission observes that the semantics employed here in the use of the term “gift” as an “an-economic,” relational occurrence differs from the concept of the “selfless gift” (Jacques Derrida), which is frequently adopted in diverse ways in an Evangelical setting.⁵ For this reason, the Advisory Commission emphatically concurs with the basic principle that these attributes are given to the Church and that the Church’s existence is to be understood as a given and predetermined reality. However, it cannot, on account of its understanding of the gift as an exclusive act of God, unreservedly agree with the consideration explained in this context, that the believers are “constantly called to actualize” these gifts (§22). Therefore, the Advisory Commission believes that an understanding of the attributes as gifts, to which believers are called to bear witness in the life of the Church, would better correspond with the Advisory Commission’s interpretation, as similarly set out in the CPCE’s ecclesiological

5. Cf. *Die Gabe Zum Stand der interdisziplinären Diskussion*, ed. Veronika Hoffmann, Ulrike Link-Wieczorek, Christof Mandry (Freiburg, 2016).

study “The Church of Jesus Christ,” in the chapter addressing the essential attributes of the Church.⁶ Given such an interpretation, the conundrum discussed in Latin European Christendom since Reformation times, which clearly surfaces in the convergence text (§10), becomes irrelevant; that is, the question as to whether the attributes are marks of the Church in which we believe or the Church which we experience. Within Evangelical understanding, the Church is not a *civitas platonica*, the marks of which are, in principle, invisible, but rather, the Church of Jesus Christ which, as the convergence text emphasizes, is founded upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, and which can be recognized by and in the pure proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments as they were originally instituted.

a) The attribute of unity

The Advisory Commission emphatically concurs with the document’s statement that the unity of the Church is constituted upon the unity of the triune God himself: “The Church is one because God is one” (§22). The causal connection between the foundation and that which is founded, as stated here, entails that the Church maintains its *unity* by *differing* from its divine foundation. In contrast to the interpretation put forward in the document, the Advisory Commission therefore does not think that the existence of a multiplicity

6. Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich (eds.), *Die Kirche Jesu Christi. Der reformatorische Beitrag zum Ökumenischen Dialog über Einheit*. 4., rev. edition, in: Leuenberger Texte No.1, Leipzig 2012.

of churches stands “in contrast to this oneness” (§22), provided that the churches are established on the very same foundation. For this reason, the unity of the Church cannot be sought primarily through its structure. The Reformation churches solved this matter by identifying the unity of the Church as it corresponded to its *truth*. The true unity of the Church is constituted by a concurrence in the doctrines of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.⁷ The Advisory Commission does however affirm the convergence text in its argumentation that “current divisions within and between the churches stand in contrast to this oneness” (§22.1). Likewise, the Advisory Commission does not consider the unity of the Church to be uniformity. Such an understanding is also rejected by the convergence text, as it finds “a wide variety of ecclesiological insights” in the New Testament (§12). It also describes legitimate diversity in the life of the Christian community as “an aspect of its catholicity” (§12) and as “a gift from the Lord” (§28). According to the convergence text, such diversity is legitimate, in the sense that the proclamation of the gospel requires expression in a diversity of “languages, symbols and images that are relevant to particular times and contexts so as to be lived authentically in each time and place” (§28). The Advisory Commission welcomes this appreciation of culturally conditioned, interpretive forms, and likewise affirms that legitimate diversity is threatened wherever Christians declare

7. Cf. *Confessio Augustana*, Art. VII: “Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum.”

their own cultural way of proclamation to be the sole authentic form, forcing it upon other cultures (cf. §28). However, the assertion that legitimate diversity might destroy the gift of unity if it “goes beyond acceptable limits” (§30), is felt to be too sweeping a statement and needs to be qualified. In effect, the document avoids addressing any remaining divergences concerning the issue of the ordained office, in particular the office of the bishop, in terms of the unanswered question regarding the limits of legitimate diversity.

b) The attribute of holiness

Within the document’s text, the Advisory Commission emphasizes that the Church’s holiness is rooted in God’s holiness: “The Church is holy because God is holy” (§22). As has been seen during the discussion concerning the attribute of unity, it is clear, here, that the causal relation implies the interminable self-differentiation of the Church from its divine foundation. Therefore, the Advisory Commission emphasizes the following: The holiness of the Church cannot be sought in itself, in its members, nor in its words and actions, but solely in God’s actions which evoke faith within the Church. In the opinion of the Advisory Commission, the implications of this deserve to be more clearly highlighted within the document than they are at present. The “holy words and actions” as well as the “holy men and women” (§22) can, in the eyes of the Advisory Commission, only be those who are transparently open to God’s holiness and thus vessels of his holiness in faith. It is only with regard to the Church itself

that one may speak of “essential holiness” (§22), since the Church is greater than and different to the sum of its members. This is why, even though sin “contradicts this holiness” (§22) in the personal lives of believers, the “great sinner” may still serve as an image for the holiness of the Church (cf. Luke 7:36-50),⁸ on account of her faith in the forgiveness of sins, according to Reformation belief. The text of the document however, makes mention of this narrative in a different context (§35). The Advisory Commission, on the contrary, considers it wrong and perilous to define holiness on a purely personal level as “greater authenticity in relationship with God” (§50), which the convergence text does at a later stage in the document, and urges extreme caution regarding the ensuing deduction of the personal authority of “those in ministries of leadership” or “communities” (§51) within the Church.

c) The attribute of catholicity

The Advisory Commission welcomes the Christological interpretation of the attribute of catholicity within the text of the document: “Where the whole mystery of Christ is present, there too is the Church catholic” (§22, with reference to Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn*, 6). Through recourse to the foundation of the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 3,11), the document avoids the pitfall of a constricted, purely confessional or spatially

8. In their responses to this document, several churches have emphasized this point, e.g., The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches SEK and the Evangelical Church in Hesse and Nassau.

extensive perspective concerning catholicity, as well as an inefficacious contrasting of spatial and temporal catholicity. The attribute of catholicity is rather to be assigned to the Church purely because the mystery of Christ extends beyond all churches and, at the same time, comprehends all that the Church is founded upon. The Advisory Commission appreciates the recourse to statements made by Ignatius of Antioch, upon which the document bases its Christological interpretation of the attribute of catholicity, and is, at the same time, aware of the different effects that these statements have had within the various confessional families, which it welcomes as an expression of vibrant diversity within the Church of Jesus Christ, diversity toward which it aims, rather than striving for homogeneity. In this sense, the Advisory Commission would like to make mention of the suggested translation of the attribute “catholic” as “all-embracing” for the ecumenical context, which was presented in the ecumenical revision of the German text of the Apostles’ Creed in 1971.

d) The attribute of apostolicity

The Advisory Commission agrees with the text of the document: it is solely the sending of Christ which founded the Church and constituted the apostolicity of the Church. Apostolicity, in turn, is the term which refers to the Church’s own sending: “The Church is apostolic because the Father sent the Son to establish it” (§22). In the words of the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 5:18f.), the Advisory Commission therefore differentiates, in principle, between the word of reconciliation, which is the

gospel of Christ itself, and the apostolic *ministry* of reconciliation. In light of the serving nature of this ministry, the Advisory Commission believes that the characterization within the text of the document of the apostolic office as “overseeing,” and its description as the “foundation” of the Church (§22), are open to misunderstanding. For this reason, the question arises, in the view of the Advisory Commission, to which extent the historic “apostolic succession in ministry” is able to “serve” the apostolicity of the Church (§22). However, the Advisory Commission emphatically affirms the calling of the Church to “be ever faithful to these apostolic origins” (§22). Analogous to the findings of the discussion concerning the attribute of catholicity, the Advisory Commission also believes that faithfulness to apostolicity can be maintained at all times, without a temporal extension of an historic succession in ministry, wherever “the whole mystery of Christ is present” (§22). The apostolic ministry, which makes manifest the mystery of Christ, is thereby realized, in accordance with the correlation of the word and ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18f.), through our testimony to the word of reconciliation, in which – as the Advisory Commission is convinced – all members of the Church share, in the same spiritual authority of faith. The diverse functions that believers perform when exercising this authority are reflected in the doctrine and practice of the ordained ministry, in correlation with the church community. The Advisory Commission agrees with the statement articulated within the text of the document (§24) that the diverse conceptions of the interrelation of this doctrine concerning the office (including the

possibility of an office of universal unity) with the understanding of the Church as *koinonia* do not necessarily affect the communion (*koinonia*) of the churches with one another.

3. On communion in worship and eucharist

The convergence text expresses clearly that communion with God and amongst people emanates from the worship service.⁹ The Advisory Commission appreciates the approaches developed in the ecumenical dialogue of the 20th century, especially on the side of the Orthodox churches,¹⁰ who emphasize that it is not the Church that “does” the worship, but that, on the contrary, the worship service is an act of God for the benefit of the people, which constitutes the Church. The worship service is accurately understood to be a dynamic event which builds communion between God and the people of God, as well as fellowship between the individual participants (§67). The Advisory Commission agrees with the statement of the convergence text that the communion established in worship is related to the communion of Christ’s disciples, as manifested in their fellowship within discipleship,

9. “The eucharist does not support an individualistic understanding of salvation. Whoever gains a share in the body of Christ, that is the gift of the Lord’s Supper, is connected, together with all those who take part in the celebration, to the body of Christ, the church.” (Die Eucharistie. Das Sagorsker Gespräch über das heilige Abendmahl (Arnoldshain VI), publ. in: *Kirchliches Außenamt der EKD*, Studienheft 8, Witten 1974, 24.)

10. Amongst others, the liturgical-ecclesiological approaches of Nikolai Afanasiev and Alexander Schmemmann need to be mentioned here.

witness (cf. §3) and service.¹¹ Within this definition, the Advisory Commission recognizes the three indispensable and inseparable fields of action of the Church: *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*.

The communion which worship produces between the concelebrants is consequently larger than the fellowship of those present (cf. §31). The communion which is experienced in worship involves rather “fellowship with Christians of all times and places” (§67). It is precisely in its catholicity that the Church, as a worshipping community, is “an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom” (§33). In the view of the Advisory Commission, describing the Church as an eschatological reality can release critical potential to evaluate the characteristic features of churches as historically evolved institutions. In this sense, the Advisory Commission means to point out that there is a discrepancy between the understanding of the Church as an *eschatological* reality and the acceptance of the secular historical criterion of a *historical* succession within ordained ministry (as described in §47). Whoever consistently interprets the worship service as being an eschatological event, in which all Christians of all times, in all locations, are united must also agree that the criterion of “succession” is thereby already fulfilled, pneumatologically, in every worship service.

Likewise, in accordance with the position put forward by the Community of Protestant Churches

in Europe, the Advisory Commission would like to see the definition of the Church’s calling as an eschatological reality complemented by a reference to the “categorical distinction between the kingdom of God and the Church.”¹² In the view of the Advisory Commission, this categorical distinction seems necessary in order to apply consistently the insight that is presented in the convergence text regarding “The Church”: the fundamental tension between the Church “already anticipating the kingdom, but not yet its full realization” (§33ff.), rather than solely focusing on one side or the other. It is this distinction between the Church and the kingdom of God that also leads the Advisory Commission to adopt its particular position regarding the issue of the sinfulness of the Church (cf. §27).

It is, in particular, the Church’s self-differentiation from the kingdom of God (a reality that is anticipated and portrayed in the worship service but which will be realized in the future), that, in the view of the Advisory Commission, is constitutive for the eschatologically transformative power experienced in worship, as asserted by the convergence text. In this statement, the Advisory Commission recognizes an idea that is also essential in Evangelical spirituality and expressed, in particular, in the treasury of songs of the Evangelical churches as church members praise, pray and remember Christ.¹³ The Advisory Commission also

11. “The eucharist therefore not only calls us to unite with the Lord through faith and love, but also to demonstrate brotherly love towards the members of the community, which is the fundamental trial of love for all people.” (Die Eucharistie. Das Sagorsker Gespräch über das heilige Abendmahl (Arnoldshain VI), publ. in: *Kirchliches Außenamt der EKD*, Studienheft 8, Witten 1974, p. 24.)

12. *Gemeinschaft der Evangelischen Kirchen in Europa*: GEKE Statement p. 6.

13. “The eucharist is a potent power for the transformation of every Christian, the Christian community and thereby the surrounding world, towards that which is good and holy.” Die Eucharistie. Das Sagorsker Gespräch über das heilige

agrees with the statement that the transformative power present in the service works, in particular, through the eucharist celebrated in doxology, *anamnesis* and *epiclesis* (§42; cf. §6), which “transforms both the elements of bread and wine and the participants themselves” (§42). In this way, it is possible to guard against an all too narrow understanding which would reduce the way that Jesus Christ makes himself present in the eucharist to simply the words of consecration, and to instead emphasize the significance of the whole of the liturgical context. In accordance with the New Testament (Eph. 5:32), the convergence text describes the relationship between Christ and the communion of the Church as a “mystery (*mysterion*)” and interprets the relevant statement as an ontological utterance concerning the sacramental quality of the Church (§26). The Advisory Commission however, regards the description of the relationship between God and the Church as a “mystery” (*mysterion*)” not as an ontological qualification of the Church. Rather, it believes that this biblical statement emphasizes that the Church’s relationship with God cannot be subordinated to a particular function.

4. Office and authority in the Church

It is on the basis of the convergences in the concepts of the Church, which are expounded in chapter 2 of the convergence text, that an understanding of office and authority, which is particularly poignant in an ecumenical context, is addressed in chapter 3 and discussed in relation to the question

Abendmahl (Arnoldshain VI), publ. in: *Kirchliches Außenamt der EKD*, Studienheft 8, Witten 1974, p. 26).

as to how the Church can grow in communion. The fundamental elements for this communion are cited as faith, sacraments and office. While *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (cf. “Ministry,” 1–4), as well as many other of today’s documents developed in bilateral dialogues, use the calling of the people of God or the calling of all Christians to testimony and service as a starting point for the discussion of the office, the convergence text proceeds from the description of the differences regarding the understanding of the ordained office and then addresses the understanding of authority and its exercise, with a simultaneous consideration of the ecumenical councils, before finally concluding with a treatment of the question concerning a universal office of Christian unity in the form of a personal primatial ministry (cf. §56f.). In contrast to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, which focuses on the fundamental issues of a theology of the office, the convergence text thus heads towards the controversial question of a universal, personal office of unity and the collegial and synodal implications of its integration into church structures. While this issue is important for the relationships between the churches of the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church, one should not forget that the question of the universal primatial office is not an urgent problem for many WCC member churches. The description of the future challenge to reach an agreement insinuates that a personal primatial office is necessary and desirable and “may be included in Christ’s will for his Church” (§57). While, in the view of the Advisory Commission, it seems possible to ascertain the issue of

a universal ministry of unity, it is not possible to justify a necessity *iure divino*. In any event, “any such personal primatial ministry would need to be exercised in communal and collegial ways” (§56), which clearly seems to be the shared conviction of all the churches represented in Faith and Order.

As regards the issue of the nature and order of the office, the Advisory Commission welcomes the statement that, in the shared foundation of the New Testament, there is “no single pattern of ministry in the New Testament” (§46). The forms of ministry were developed in part through the power of the Holy Spirit due to challenges which arose from the given context (with reference to Acts 6:1-6); and “various forms of ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Spirit” (§46). Furthermore, the text states that, in the period that followed, the pattern of “three related ministries . . . became the generally accepted pattern” (§46). It is indeed evident that the distinction between the office of supra-regional oversight (*episkopé*), or else of the offices of bishop, presbyter or local pastor and deacon evolved successively in post-apostolic time. Accordingly, this differentiation can also be found in the order of the office, or offices, in the member churches of the EKD. Thereby, the ministry of *episkopé* is partly assigned to bishops and partly to church presidents and superintendents. In the opinion of the Advisory Commission, the historically evolved differentiation between *episkopé*, local pastor’s and deacon’s offices does not exclusively necessitate a *threefold* structure. Nor does the Advisory Commission conclude that it is only in this way that the structure of the office corresponds to God’s will. The question directed

at the churches as to “whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills” (§47, italic text), cannot therefore, from the perspective of the Advisory Commission, be simply affirmed.

The Advisory Commission is, however, in full agreement with the statement that “all authority in the Church comes from her Lord and head, Jesus Christ” (§48), who evidenced his authority in his teaching, his exorcisms, his forgiveness of sins and his guidance towards the way to salvation (cf. §48). It is this ministry to people which constitutes the authority of Jesus Christ, whilst the authority of the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*), which serves the unity of the Church in proclamation and faith and “needs to be exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways” (§52), consists of following Christ in this ministry (cf. §48). The important statements regarding the synodality or conciliarity of the Church and of church life at local, regional and universal level made in this context (§53), are, in the view of the Advisory Commission, essential for an understanding and realization of the apostolicity of the Church. For further work on the issue of the office, and in particular the burning question concerning the recognition of the offices, as well as the issue of the conditions of a valid ordination, it would be helpful to consider, together, how to take into account the fact that the gospel was clearly passed on and evoked faith in churches with very diverse office structures.

5. Church in the world and for the world

The Advisory Commission welcomes the discussion of fundamental issues regarding the relationship

between the Church and the world which are addressed in chapter 4, in particular the relationship between the Church and other religions (§60), as well as the Church's commitment to moral challenges (§61ff.). It is important that, together, we recognize "religious freedom as one of the fundamental dimensions of human dignity" (§60). The convergence text puts to the churches the following, very relevant question:

Within today's context of increased awareness of the vitality of various religions throughout the world, how may the churches arrive at greater convergence about these issues [i.e., the possibility of salvation outside the Christian faith] and cooperate more effectively in witnessing to the Gospel in word and deed?" (§60, italic text).

In the view of the Advisory Commission, however, a further question would need to be asked concerning whether or not congruence regarding this religious-theological issue is a necessary requirement for the co-operation of the churches during interfaith gatherings.¹⁴

In its discussion regarding the moral challenge of the gospel (§§61–63), the convergence text offers, in its description of moral values, an important starting point for the co-operation of the churches, both in and for the world, and thus also within interfaith gatherings. By drawing

14. For the most recent discussion of the views of the EKD on this issue, see the EKD's foundational text of 2015, "Christian Faith and Religious Diversity - A Protestant Perspective."

on the concept of values, the convergence text employs a term which is able to mark cross-cultural convergences regarding that which is desirable for human life, and asserts the same as a moral compass for the conduct and actions of humankind. Within the ecumenical movement, peace, justice and the integrity of creation have been determined as a basic orientation for ecumenical action. In this respect, the convergence text speaks of the values of the kingdom of God (§64f.). Beyond the differences that exist concerning individual questions of morality (including, in particular, questions relating to marriage, sexuality and family), the churches can, together, advocate these values and identify, within interfaith gatherings, the extent to which these values are shared across religions.

With regard to the explanations regarding the topic of the Church and the world, the Advisory Commission can unreservedly affirm the points that have been made concerning this topic in the CPCE's statement. When understood as a matter of principle, the arguments in the convergence text can be seen as

running in the wrong direction, since they start out from the assumption of an antagonism between the Church and society, rather than encouraging Christians to actively and constructively participate in the development and consolidation of constitutional and participatory conditions in society and to accept political and social responsibility--with a supportive church at their side.¹⁵

15. Statement of the CPCE: Stellungnahme der GEKE, p. 8.

6. Conclusion

With regard to the issues directed towards the churches in the introduction of the convergence text, the Advisory Commission can thus summarize:

- The ecclesiological understanding presented in the convergence text corresponds, on many points, to the understanding of the Advisory Commission, although a clearer distinction between the Church and the kingdom of God would appear to be desirable.
- By presenting a convergent understanding of the Church, the text offers an essential requirement for the growth of unity amongst the churches. Nevertheless, in order to reach further agreement, the relationship between this understanding of the Church and the substantial differences regarding the question of the sacraments and, in particular, the order of the office or offices, would need to be clarified. The text refers this responsibility to the churches for further reflection. Without undertaking further joint work, however, it does not seem realistic to expect further growth in communion. Likewise, the Advisory Commission believes that it is an important requirement for additional, successful work regarding these issues that socio-ethical differences found within the churches as well as between churches are not used to question afresh theological understanding once it has been jointly reached; and that further work is undertaken to intensify church communion in witness and service.
- The Advisory Commission believes it to be of fundamental importance that the unity of the communion during the worship service becomes ever more visible, in particular the celebration of the Lord's supper. In the introduction, the convergence text rightly denotes the eucharist as being a most eloquent expression of unity and communion. Presently, the main impediment for eucharistic fellowship lies in the lack of recognition of the offices. With regard to the question of adaptations which might serve the life and renewal of the churches, the Advisory Commission considers the convergence text to be an important stimulus for clarifying, within an ecumenical context, that and in which way the office and offices of the member churches of the EKD are ordered according to their New Testament foundations, so as to serve the nature and mission of the Church.
- The convergence text is a helpful basis for the prompting of greater dialogue between the churches that share it, concerning divisive topics, and also to intensify co-operation.

18. United Methodist Church

July 2015

We welcome *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* both for the evidence of genuine convergence it represents and for the guidance and encouragement it offers to the churches as they consider how they might more fully receive, understand, and respond to God's gift of community. The United Methodist Church, through its Committee on Faith and Order, has already entered into conversation with *TCTCV*'s key themes in a proposed study document that we hope will lead to a deeper shared understanding of the reality of the church among United Methodists. That study document relates central affirmations of our doctrinal heritage and the findings of contemporary ecumenical discussions.¹

The present response prepared under the auspices of the Office of Christian Unity and Inter-religious Relationships in consultation with our Committee on Faith and Order, and reviewed and approved by the Council of Bishops, aims

1. The proposed study document, *Wonder, Love, and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church*, may be found at <https://www.la-umc.org/newsdetail/wonder-love-and-praise-sharing-a-vision-of-the-church-8983325>. Some passages from the text of that document have been incorporated into the present response. A compendium of ecclesiological teaching in our United Methodist heritage may be found at https://www.gbhem.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DOM_Nature_Mission_Faithfulness_of_Church.pdf

to address the five questions we have been asked to consider (*TCTCV*). We have tried to focus on what we take to be the more important points to be made from the standpoint of our tradition and contemporary situation.²

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

Because of the way it informs our responses to each of the remaining questions, our treatment of this first question is of the greatest length. It is organized around three main themes.

I. The Church as a Gift of the Triune God

In the classic creeds, the church is mentioned immediately after the Holy Spirit. In the Apostles' Creed they are affirmed literally in the same breath: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church . . ." In the more widely used Nicene (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan) Creed, "We believe

2. We would also take this opportunity to commend to the attention of the Faith and Order Commission the thoughtful and detailed appraisal of *TCTCV* offered by British Methodist ecumenical scholar David Carter: "The Church Towards a Common Vision: Commentary and Appraisal," *Ecumenical Trends* 42/6 (June 2013): 1–9. This article is an individual theological appraisal and not an official response from the Methodist Church in Britain; but it draws upon the heritage and ecumenical experience of that body as well as upon that of the Methodist tradition more generally.

in the one holy catholic and apostolic church” comes just after the profession of faith in the Holy Spirit, who is described as “the Lord, the giver of life.” Evidently, in the judgment of the makers of the creeds and of those who have affirmed their faith with them through the centuries, the church has something to do with the Spirit’s giving of life. As the early Christian writer Irenaeus of Lyon declared succinctly: “Where the church is, there also is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and all grace.”³

One luminous sentence in the first paragraph of *TCTCV* speaks to this point, and at the same time provides a key to the understanding of the church that the document as a whole presents: “Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (§1).⁴

It is *communion* that the Spirit gives, and that animates – or we might say, creates – the church. In the Greek of the New Testament, the term is *koinonia*, a word that is properly translated in a variety of ways depending on context and usage, including “communion,” “sharing,” “participation,” “partaking,” “fellowship,” and “community.” The “communion of the Holy Spirit” of 2 Cor. 13:13, the “sharing in the body of Christ” of 1 Cor. 10:16, the “becom[ing] participants of the

divine nature” of 2 Pet. 1:4; all involve this reality of *koinonia*.⁵ The “gift by which the church lives” is simply the love of God poured out for us, decisively in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, a love in which we are invited to share. The life of the church is a sharing in the life of the triune God, and the mission of the church is to communicate that possibility to a world in need – to serve as sign and servant of God’s saving presence to the world.

Aspects of our own Wesleyan heritage resonate deeply with this affirmation of the centrality of *koinonia* to the life and mission of the church. When John Wesley, in a late sermon on “The New Creation,” wished to portray the final goal of human life – the end for which we are created, and to which we are to be restored through Christ – he used these words: “And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!”⁶ For Wesley,

5. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of [note: or “and the sharing in”] the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Cor. 13:13 NRSV). “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16 NRSV). “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4 NRSV). Further passages are cited in the brief discussion of the term *koinonia* to be found in *TCTCV* §13.

6. John Wesley, “The New Creation,” *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 510.

3. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III, 24, 1.

4. In parenthetical references to passages in *TCTCV*, the paragraph of the printed English version will be given.

and for his followers, we are given a foretaste of this goal, and more than a foretaste, here and now. Salvation is “a present thing,” Wesley declared; the term rightly embraces “the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.”⁷ Human beings are “created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and to enjoy [their] Creator to all eternity.”⁸ Wesley’s understanding of our “fallen” state involves the distortion or loss of those capacities for knowledge, love, and joy – in short, for communion with God and with one another – and salvation involves their recovery and their eventual fulfillment in glory, when (as his brother Charles memorably wrote) we are to be “lost in wonder, love, and praise.”⁹ The history of salvation is, as *TCTCV* puts it, “the dynamic history of God’s restoration of *koinonia*” (§1). To the extent that these Wesleyan themes still inform our witness, hymnody, and common life, we United Methodists have ample reason to make our own the affirmation that communion is indeed “the gift by which the church lives,” and the gift that it is called to offer the world.

We United Methodists can readily join in the

affirmation of *TCTCV* that the Church is Spirit-given and Spirit-animated; and that it is a community established by God, grounded in the very life of God, an aspect of the new creation.

We can also join with *TCTCV* in acknowledging clearly that, at the same time, the Church is a very human community, an association of often all too like-minded individuals, and that along with its Spirit-led life it also typically serves human purposes that can be quite distinct from, and sometimes counter to, the purposes of God.

This is recognized in the very first chapter of *TCTCV*, and throughout the text. To say that “the Church is both a divine and a human reality” (§23) is to say that alongside our awareness that the church is a gift of the triune God, “the creature of God’s Word and of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁰ we must place an equally clear awareness of what its human reality implies. We must, in our theology itself, come to terms with the human uses of the church. No one acquainted with the history of the Christian churches from the earliest centuries onward can fail to acknowledge this complex intertwining of human needs, desires, ambitions, and fears in that history. Sometimes it is much easier to recognize those elements in the life of the church in some other place and time than in one’s own.

Some of these common human uses are clearly consistent with the church’s own mission as sign and instrument of *koinonia*. In such cases, we might say that God’s purpose and human

7. John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *Sermons II*, v. 2, 156.

8. John Wesley, “God’s Approbation of His Works,” *Sermons II*, v. 2, 397. In a wonderful line from one of Charles Wesley’s hymns, we are “ordained to be / transcripts of the Trinity” (“Sinners, Turn: Why Will You Die,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* [Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989], #346).

9. “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #384.

10. *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), §10. This paper was, as its subtitle indicates, a precursor to the 2013 text, “a stage on the way to a common statement.”

purposes are aligned, in the meeting of genuine human need and in the service of the well-being of God's creation. In other cases, the human use may be in direct conflict with the divine purpose – as, for instance, when the church is serving, whether unwittingly or deliberately, as the instrument of an ideology of national, racial, ethnic, or gender superiority. *TCTCV* cites here one variety of this misuse: “At times, the cultural and religious heritage of those to whom the Gospel was proclaimed was not given the respect it deserved, as when those engaging in evangelization were complicit in imperialistic colonization, which pillaged and even exterminated peoples unable to defend themselves from more powerful invading nations” (§6). In a later passage in the fourth chapter, *TCTCV* acknowledges that “Christians have at times colluded with secular authorities in ways that condoned or even abetted sinful and unjust activities” (§65). These are welcome, if painful, recognitions. In recent years, the United Methodist Church has been brought to a new awareness that its own history is not free of involvements in events of this sort, much as we may prefer to recall happier stories. To edit out those parts of an account of our past (and present) that do not reflect so well on us is to deceive ourselves as well as others, and leaves us ill-equipped for the careful discernment that our calling requires. In this discernment, the vision of the gift of *koinonia* which is God's will for the church in all times and places is a vital point of reference.

Occasionally the text of *TCTCV* itself seems to reflect a tendency to overlook ambiguities in the churches' past. For example, in its subsection

on ministry, we find the claim that the “threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon . . . can be seen to have roots in the New Testament” (§46). As it stands, this claim appears to us to overstate the case. Are those three terms used together at any point in the New Testament writings to designate three distinct and coexisting offices or roles, as the idea of a “threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon” would imply? Just what is being claimed here may need clarification – or modification. At another place in the text, in the course of a very helpful discussion of conciliarity as a means of decision-making and oversight, the text claims that “ecumenical synods enjoyed the participation of leaders from the entire Church; their decisions were received by all as an acknowledgement of the important service they played in fostering and maintaining communion throughout the Church as a whole” (§53). Many present-day historians (as well as some in earlier eras) would view this as an idealistic portrayal in several respects, overlooking the realities of conflict, coercion, and exclusion that also marked the emergence of what we regard as the mainstream Christian tradition, just as they have marked more recent centuries. These are not mere scholarly quibbles: at issue in such instances is the extent to which the churches are willing together to acknowledge the human contingencies of their own histories, and thus to face present and future decisions with a fuller awareness of the influences of the same human element.

II. Community of Salvation and Community as Sign

The second chapter of *TCTCV* indicates how this emerging vision builds upon familiar motifs found in scripture and frequently cited in the churches' traditions. The text notes at the outset that the Bible does not set forth one normative model or understanding of church. There is no blueprint in the New Testament to be followed – no “systematic ecclesiology” (§11) – but scripture as a whole does offer abundant resources for our thinking about the ways God works to establish or restore communion with and among humankind. Some of these scriptural images and concepts have had influential roles in the history of Christian thought and practice, though the weight given to particular leading images has varied from one time and place to another. Others have received relatively little attention. Three that have been frequently cited and explored in contemporary ecumenical discussion – “people of God,” “body of Christ,” “temple of the Holy Spirit” – are revisited in this text. Together, they help to make the point that *koinonia* is the gift of the triune God, and also that our realization of and response to that gift may take different forms. The invitation here is to explore the richness and variety of images, metaphors, and ideas that the biblical writers used to portray the character of the new community God is creating.

Among the standards of doctrine of the United Methodist Church are the Articles of Religion brought into the union of its two constituent bodies in 1968 by the Methodist Church, and the Confession of Faith brought into that union by the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Each

contains an article on the Church, along with other material relevant to the subject. The two principal articles are these:

First, from the Articles of Religion, Article XIII - Of the Church:

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

And from the Confession of Faith, Article V – The Church:

We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.

The first definition, from the Methodist Articles, is essentially a reproduction of the corresponding article (XIX) in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (1563), based in turn upon Article VII of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530). It identifies the church (*ecclesia*, in the Latin version of the Anglican and Lutheran texts)

as a “congregation of faithful men” (“and women,” we might add to be true to the sense today, or we might render *coetus fidelium* more literally as “congregation of the faithful”), assembled by and for word and sacrament. Although some classical Protestant doctrines of the church derive from this basic affirmation the conclusion that there are two essential “marks” of the church – authentic proclamation of the word, and proper administration of the Sacraments – others identify three such marks: in addition to word and sacrament, there is the mark of faithfulness itself, or discipleship, or discipline, or of a common life ordered by the promises of God. It is this latter scheme that has been more influential in Methodist understandings of the church’s life and mission.

The second definition, reflecting the Evangelical United Brethren heritage, contains basic elements of the first, but enriches it in several ways. (As with the “faithful men” of the first definition, we would today want to say that the word is preached “by women and men divinely called” or “by persons divinely called.”) It makes more explicit the element of faithful response – the third “mark” – with such terms as “redemptive fellowship” and with reference to the church’s mission; and it also includes the adjectives from the Nicene Creed identifying the church as “one, holy, apostolic and catholic.”

A noteworthy feature of the first-quoted article – and, by implication, of the second, which builds upon it – is that it offers a definition of the *visible* church. A distinction between the “visible church” and the “invisible church” was common at the time of the Protestant Reformation, with

roots going back much farther. As conventionally understood, the visible church was an actual community, a local congregation of professing Christians or a larger body incorporating many local congregations, who hear and affirm the word rightly preached, partake of the sacraments, and support the church’s ministry. The invisible church was understood to be the totality of persons who are actually saved, or on their way to salvation. This company is “invisible” in the sense that no one but God knows with certainty who is included in it. It was commonly assumed (and often asserted by theologians and preachers) that with a few exceptions the members of the invisible church, the truly saved, were also professing Christians, members of the visible church; but that the visible church also contains (to use John Calvin’s words) “a very large mixture of hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance.”¹¹

The perspective of many Christians and of many Christian communities on this matter has shifted in more recent years. *TCTCV* §25 represents widespread, though not unanimous, convergence here among the churches involved in Faith and Order:

Since God wills all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4), Christians acknowledge that God reaches out to those who are not explicit

11. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke, 1962), volume 2, p. 288 (IV, 1, 7).

members of the Church, in ways that may not be immediately evident to human eyes. While respecting the elements of truth and goodness that can be found in other religions and among those with no religion, the mission of the Church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come to know and love Christ Jesus.

What such a statement allows (in what is perhaps a necessarily quite cautious way, as a later note [§60] suggests) is the possibility that persons who are not “explicit members” of the church may yet be, in some sense, members of the church, participants in the one *ekklesia* of God, sharers in the communion God offers. If God is reaching out to those beyond the actual, explicit Christian communities in ways hidden to us, and if they are responding to God’s love in positive ways, then perhaps we need a more flexible and expansive concept of “church” than we have been accustomed to using. The church, in the sense of the one *ekklesia* of God, the community of salvation, may not be coextensive with the churches that we know. Those churches that we know participate in that sense of *ekklesia* (however imperfectly), but their distinctive task is to be the explicit sign and servant of God’s salvific self-giving to humankind – to be, as some traditions would find it natural to say, a sacrament – through their worship of God, their care and nurture of those who come to faith through their witness, and their service to God’s reconciling and redemptive purpose.

John Wesley lamented the fact that many professing Christians of his day seemed at best

to have “the form of godliness, but not the power thereof” (cf. 2 Tim 3:5), not because God had decreed their exclusion from salvation, but because they were refusing to use the grace they were given by the God who “wills all people to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4). At the same time, Wesley was unwilling to believe that the multitudes of people who were *not* professing Christians – for example, the large numbers of the poor in England who were alienated from the church and felt excluded by it, or the millions around the world who had never heard the gospel – were utterly deprived of God’s grace on that account, for reasons beyond their control. On the contrary, he was convinced that Christ died for all; that the guilt of “inbeing sin” that may have been incurred through the fall of our first parents had been cancelled for all; and that grace was available to all. A lesson we United Methodists want to take to heart from Wesley is that we need, on the one hand, to exercise a realistically self-critical capacity when it comes to the quality of our own life and witness as Christians, to be alert to the dangers of self-deception and aware of our own permanent need for repentance and renewal; and, on the other hand, to be open to the presence of God in our neighbors, including our non-Christian neighbors, and open to the love of God that may come to us through them.¹²

“Legitimate diversity in the life of communion is a gift from the Lord,” affirms *TCTCV*

12. Cf. “Called to be Neighbors and Witnesses: Guidelines for Interreligious Relationships,” *Book of Resolutions 2012*, 269–279.

§28. No reference to “the Church” in the singular should be taken to imply that differences have no place in the Christian community. The fact that the triune God is the source of our communion should remind us that it is a dynamic, relational unity, not a monolithic uniformity, that is to be sought. The gifts of the Spirit differ in character (1 Cor. 12:4-7) and are exercised in different ways for the common good. Also, human beings and their cultures differ from one another in manifold ways, and these differences enrich our *koinonia*. Particular actual churches – local congregations, historical Christian traditions and their various strands and organizational groupings – have their own ways of being church. They are free to differ, and to some extent they must differ, in order to relate to the situations in which they find themselves and in order to realize their particular gifts. “Legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones, to be imposed upon Christians of other cultures” (§28).

How legitimate diversity may be distinguished from illegitimate diversity is a question still seeking a clear answer in an ecumenical context, as *TCTCV* acknowledges (§30). An abstract principle may be agreed upon, such as that illegitimate diversity is that which undermines the unity of the church; but a formula of this sort is readily susceptible to misuse. In a comment on the issue, the text ponders what may be needed:

Though all churches have their own procedures for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate diversity, it is clear that two things

are lacking: (a) common criteria, or means of discernment, and (b) such mutually recognized structures as are needed to use these effectively. All churches seek to follow the will of the Lord yet they continue to disagree on some aspects of faith and order and, moreover, on whether such disagreements are Church-divisive or, instead, part of legitimate diversity. We invite the churches to consider: what positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible?¹³

As the text implicitly acknowledges later on (§63), its statement here that “all churches have their own procedures for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate diversity” may not be entirely accurate. There would seem to be divided judgments within a number of the churches at present on this very point – that is, as to whether or not a particular difference in doctrine or practice constitutes legitimate diversity – and, for some, no workable means of resolving the question. In such a situation, the same things may be needed that the text finds lacking in the ecumenical context: “(a) common criteria, or means of discernment, and (b) such mutually recognized structures as are needed to use these effectively.”¹⁴ A church that finds itself in these circumstances may need to ask itself the same question our text poses to the churches together: what positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible? In tackling that question, it may be helped by

13. *TCTCV*, italicized section following §30.

14. *TCTCV*, italicized section following §30.

entering into the ecumenical conversation on this subject, becoming acquainted with the approaches other churches have taken to discerning the limits of diversity, learning from their experience, and re-examining its own approach in that light.

In this connection, some further exploration of the concept and reality of “reconciled diversity” might be productive.¹⁵ Though used in various ecumenical contexts over the past almost fifty years, the term does not seem to appear in *TCTCV*. It has been given new currency by Pope Francis’s use of it in his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and on subsequent occasions. He has enunciated the principle that unity in reconciled diversity is the work of the Holy Spirit. It does not come about because we have decided to overcome our divisions, but because God is not allowing our divisions to have the last word.¹⁶

III. Faith, Hope, and Love

Throughout the chapters of *TCTCV* there occur triadic descriptions of what the church is called to be and do. For example, in a brief exposition of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and of corresponding passages elsewhere in the

15. See Carter, “Unity in Reconciled Diversity.”

16. With regard to some of our differences, e.g., on ethical issues, the term “reconciled diversity” may sound too final, as if we were content to “agree to disagree” and no longer to explore the questions on which we differ. “Reconciled diversity” should not be applied too readily in such cases. On such matters, perhaps we need to make it clear that it is not our *differences* that are reconciled, but rather that we are being reconciled (by God!) despite our differences, and that we hope to be led to fuller understanding and to fuller life together as we continue the journey.

gospels, the text states that in order to carry out Jesus’ mandate, the church was to be “a community of witness, . . . a community of worship, . . . [and] a community of discipleship” (§2). Throughout its history, it goes on to observe, the church has been engaged in “proclaiming in word and deed the good news of salvation in Christ, celebrating the sacraments, especially the eucharist, and forming Christian communities” (§5). Again, “the Holy Spirit nourishes and enlivens the body of Christ through the living voice of the preached Gospel, through sacramental communion, especially in the Eucharist, and through ministries of service” (§16). Quoting from an earlier ecumenical study, it affirms that the church “reveals Christ to the world by proclaiming the Gospel, by celebrating the sacraments, . . . and by manifesting the newness of life given by him, thus anticipating the Kingdom already present in him” (§58). And the conclusion of the text declares (§67):

The unity of the body of Christ consists in the gift of *koinonia* or communion that God graciously bestows upon human beings. There is a growing consensus that *koinonia*, as communion with the Holy Trinity, is manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (in all its forms, including ministry and mission).

In its exploration of the image of the church as the people of God, the text relates this triadic structure in the life and mission of the church explicitly to the classic doctrine of the “threefold office” of Christ as prophet, priest, and king: “The

whole people of God is called to be a prophetic people, bearing witness to God's word; a priestly people, offering the sacrifice of a life lived in discipleship; and a royal people, serving as instruments for the establishment of God's reign." For emphasis, it adds: "All members of the church share in this vocation" (§19).

This is, in our judgment, an important point of ecumenical convergence. There is a parallel in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* which describes the laity as

all the faithful...who by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are constituted the people of God, who have been made sharers in their own way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ and play their part in carrying out the mission of the whole Christian people in the church and in the world.¹⁷

A similar approach is taken in Orthodox ecclesiology, and can be found in a growing number of ecumenical documents. For example, the International Commission on Methodist-Catholic Dialogue stated in its Brighton report (2001): "Because Christ's followers are incorporated into him through baptism, they share in his priestly, prophetic and royal office, together as a communion and individually each in their own way."¹⁸

17. In *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), 48–49.

18. "Speaking the Truth in Love," §§35–36, cited in *Synthesis: Together to Holiness: Forty Years of Methodist and Roman*

From a United Methodist standpoint, these connections could be carried further, enriching our understanding of the nature and calling of the church as *koinonia*. John Wesley urged the early Methodists to proclaim Christ "in all his offices."¹⁹ The reference was to the doctrine of the three offices (or threefold office, *munus triplex*) of Christ, as priest, prophet, and king. In the Hebrew scriptures, the role or work of the Messiah (the Christ, the anointed one) is pictured in a variety of ways, with these three commonly judged to be the most

Catholic Dialogue, ed. Michael E. Putney and Geoffrey Wainwright (Lake Junaluska, NC: World Methodist Council, 2011), §73.

19. Wesley declares, "We are not ourselves clear before God, unless we proclaim him in all his offices. To preach Christ, as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, is to preach him, not only as our great High Priest, 'taken from among men, and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God;' as such, 'reconciling us to God by his blood,' and 'ever living to make intercession for us;' – but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom,' who, by his word and his Spirit, is with us always, 'guiding us into all truth;' – yea, and as remaining a King for ever; as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood; as restoring those to the image of God, whom he had first re-instated in his favour; as reigning in all believing hearts until he has 'subdued all things to himself;' – until he hath utterly cast out all sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness" ("The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse II," *Sermons II*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 2, 37–38). See further from the "Large Minutes" of 1745: "Q. 19. What is the best general method of preaching? A. To invite, to convince, to offer Christ, to build up; and to do this in some measure in every sermon. The most effectual way of preaching Christ is to preach him in all his offices; and to declare his law as well as his Gospel, both to believers and unbelievers." A further short exposition of the three offices (and our need of them) is to be found in Wesley's note on Matthew 1:16 in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*.

prominent. Found in early Christian writings, the idea that Jesus fulfills these three roles together comes into our United Methodist heritage more directly both from Wesley (with Anglican theology and John Calvin in the background) and from the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), which was an important part of the doctrinal heritage of the Evangelical United Brethren.

The threefold office seemed to have particular resonance for Wesley, as it matched up with his understanding of salvation – of what we are saved *from* and of what we are saved *to*. If we are meant “to know, to love, and to enjoy [our] Creator to all eternity,”²⁰ and if in our present problematic state – a state of misery, as Wesley says – we are unable rightly to exercise those capacities for knowledge, love, and happiness, then what we need is nothing less than a regeneration of those capacities. We need to be set free from our bondage to ignorance, lovelessness, and hopelessness (or from our captivity to lies and distortions, from misguided loves and misplaced hopes). We need to be born again, and nourished in a new life in “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21 KJV). This is the possibility that Christ brings to us, and that the Holy Spirit actuates in us. Wesley wanted his preachers to keep that comprehensive vision in mind, and not to settle for reductionist, “one-office” accounts of salvation. The realization of the *koinonia* for which we are created, and of which the church is to be both sign and servant, involves being freed from those conditions (both external

20. John Wesley, “God’s Approbation of His Works,” *Sermons II*, v. 2, 397.

and internal) that make us miserable, and entering into the harmony of knowledge, love, and joy with the triune God and with all creation.

TCTCV testifies to a convergence among the churches on the point that to proclaim Christ in all his offices is not just the work of preachers. It is the work of the whole church, the calling of the whole people of God, personally and corporately; it is the general ministry of all Christians. For their part, United Methodists have acknowledged this fact and its implications in a number of ways – for example, in affirming that the critical and constructive theological reflection that this work requires is likewise a task and responsibility of the whole church, to be undertaken both individually and communally: “As United Methodists, we have an obligation to bear a faithful Christian witness to Jesus Christ, the living reality at the center of the Church’s life and witness. To fulfill this obligation, we reflect critically on our biblical and theological inheritance, striving to express faithfully the witness we make in our own time.”²¹ Although it informs and shapes the life and mission of the whole people of God – or, perhaps, *because* it does so – this threefold pattern also informs and shapes the ordained ministry. “From earliest times,” *TCTCV* observes, “some believers were chosen under the guidance of the Spirit and given specific authority and responsibility. Ordained ministers ‘assemble and build up the Body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by

21. “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task,” *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 79–80 (§105).

celebrating the sacraments and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry” (§19).²²

Accordingly, the United Methodist Church, at its uniting conference in 1968, adopted an account of the ordained ministry which describes it as a “specialized ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order.”²³ This new formulation, which does not appear in the official depictions of ordained ministry in either of the predecessor denominations, reflected the influence of contemporary ecumenical conversations as well as the established patterns of a number of other Christian communities. The account set down in the 1968 *Book of Discipline* corresponds closely to that just quoted from *TCTCV*:

Ordination is the rite of the Church by which some are entrusted with the authority to be ministers of Word, Sacrament, and Order:

1. To be ordained to the ministry of the Word is to be authorized to preach and teach the Word of God.
2. To be ordained to the ministry of Sacrament is to be authorized to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
3. To be ordained to the ministry of Order is to be authorized to equip the laity for

22. The internal quotation is from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Ministry, §13.

23. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1968* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1968), 107 (§302).

ministry, to exercise pastoral oversight, and to administer the Discipline of the Church.²⁴

It should be said that this commonly-recognized triadic pattern in the church’s ministry is something distinct from the “threefold ministry” of ordained deacons, presbyters, and bishops in historic succession that is claimed by some Christian communities, and that *BEM* proposed to the serious consideration of all the churches in their quest for visible unity. The churches’ responses to *BEM* indicated that we are far from any convergence on this point, and that it may be unwise to link the mutual recognition of ministries to any agreement on this or any other particular arrangement of ministerial offices or system of governance. The approach to the issue in *TCTCV* reflects this situation. In *BEM*, the “burden of proof” seemed to be placed on the churches that do not follow the threefold-ministry pattern: they “need to ask themselves whether the threefold pattern as developed does not have a powerful claim to be accepted by them.”²⁵ Presumably in light of responses received to this challenge, in *TCTCV* the question is posed more equitably. “We are led to ask if the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the church in its realization of the unity which God wills” (§47). This is a complex issue that continues to be seriously pursued in a variety of ecumenical dialogues and relationships in which United Methodists and other members

24. *Book of Discipline*, §309 (pp. 109–10).

25. *BEM*, Ministry, §25.

of the Methodist and Wesleyan traditions are involved. There is strong agreement among the churches on other key points concerning authority and leadership in the church, for example, that virtually all churches include in their structure some provision for a ministry of general oversight (*episkopé*), and that all ministerial leadership in the church is to be exercised “in a personal, collegial, and communal way.”²⁶ Further exploration of the character of leadership in the church may lead to new understandings of its form, not presently envisioned.

In the United Methodist Church, although we have deacons, elders (presbyters), and bishops, we do not have a “threefold ministry” in the sense in which that term is used in certain other traditions. We ordain deacons and elders; we do not ordain bishops, who are elected from among the elders to exercise a special supervisory role.²⁷ Further, we do not at present practice “sequential ordination,” in which a person to be ordained as an elder must first be ordained as a deacon. In the early years of the United Methodist Church, as in the Methodist Church prior to the union, sequential ordination was the practice: the ordained diaconate was conceived as a step toward ordination as elder, roughly coinciding with one’s probationary membership in an Annual Conference. An elder was given “full authority for the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order,”²⁸ and there was no separate parallel

formulation for the ministry of the deacon, which was seen essentially as a limited authorization to participate in the same activities.

The idea of a “permanent diaconate,” that is, of deacons who would be ordained to that office not as a stage on the way to ordination as elders but rather in order to exercise a distinctive regular ministry as deacons, was gaining traction in a number of churches already at the time the United Methodist Church was formed. (“Permanent deacon” and “transitional deacon,” though common terms in this discussion, are technically misnomers, since in a pattern of sequential ordination elders do not cease being deacons.) After a number of experiments over the years (including the unordained office of Diaconal Minister), the United Methodist Church established a permanent ordained diaconate in 1996, and at the same time abolished the practice of sequential ordination. In our current polity, prospective deacons and prospective elders are on separate “tracks,” and the language indicating the character of the ministry to which each is ordained – in the case of a deacon, a ministry of “Word, Service, Justice, and Compassion,” and in the case of an elder, a ministry of “Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service” – is intended to indicate that although there may be common areas of responsibility there are also distinct areas in each that the other does not share.²⁹ Because this structure for the ordering of ministry is relatively new – as is the accompanying innovation establishing an “Order” of Deacons and an “Order” of Elders as collegial bodies composed

26. *BEM*, Ministry, §26. The language is echoed in *TCTCV*, §52.

27. *Book of Discipline 2012*, §402.

28. *Book of Discipline 1968*, §313.

29. *Book of Discipline 2012*, §§329.1.

of all those ordained to those respective offices – how these arrangements will fare in the long run remains to be seen. The situation is complicated by the fact that United Methodism also features a number of recognized ministerial offices and roles that do not require ordination, some of which involve the principal activities normally associated with the ordained offices, a situation that gives rise to much perplexity both within and beyond the United Methodist Church. Further reflection upon the ecumenical discussion, and continued consultation with a wide range of our ecumenical partners, will be vital to any responsible progress on these seemingly perennial issues. We have significant insight and testimony from our own experience to offer in the ecumenical forum, such as that coming from our readiness to adapt to new situations and our firm and irrevocable commitment to the full participation of women in ministerial leadership in all its forms. But there can be no doubt that we also have things to learn from the experience of others. We may find, among other things, that a reaffirmation and exploration of the triadic pattern of “word, sacrament, and order” in the development of a fuller constructive theology of ministry would have advantages both ecumenically and in the life of our own community.

IV. Church and Churches in Context

In addition to the three themes just discussed, a fourth point raised in *TCTCV* resonates strongly with our own ecclesiological experience, both historically and at present. The last chapter of *TCTCV*, on the Church’s relation to the world – and on the churches’ relations to the world – exposes an

aspect of the ecumenical task and challenge that has recently become more evident. This chapter speaks of the differences among the churches on such issues as the salvation of non-Christians, on moral norms, and on the Church’s role in society. On each of these matters, the observations and the counsel of *TCTCV* are sober, restrained, and realistic. Much work remains to be done as we seek to discern together what constitutes “legitimate diversity,” and even as we seek to explore questions as to how, and by whom, that sort of decision may rightly be made. Questions of authority once again come to the fore, as the relationships among ecclesiology, polity and governance, ethics, and a number of other fields become more complex and at the same time potentially more mutually enriching.

The aspect of the task that has become more evident in all this is highlighted by the extent to which the differences in question are, as noted earlier, differences *within* as well as *among* many of the churches in the ecumenical dialogue. The bearing of the ecumenical quest upon the actual, internal condition of its participant churches may never have been so clear.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

One of the most important contributions of this document is its offering an ecclesiological framework within which the churches can pursue further the key ecumenical issues regarding ministerial leadership. The chapter on ministry in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* did not have the benefit of this framework. In our judgment, *TCTCV* both

shows some welcome attention to the criticism *BEM* has received on this topic and offers some constructive reconsideration and reformulation of concepts. Most importantly, the centrality of the concept of *koinonia*/communion in *TCTCV* appropriately contextualizes and relativizes issues of both order and polity, in ways that the document itself may not yet fully reflect. We hope it will lead to further exploration, in a fully ecumenical forum, of the possibilities that have been broached by some recent phases of the discussion of the future of *episkopé* that have been stimulated by *Ut Unum Sint*, and specifically, the vision of Christian unity as a “communion of churches” outlined in the report of the Group of Farfa Sabina.³⁰ Such a vision may permit an opening for a fuller theological recognition and appreciation of the various forms of the life of the church, especially at what might be called its intermediate levels, between the Church universal and the local congregation: denominations, national and regional judicatories, and so forth.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

Two points in particular might be mentioned, in a provisional response to this question.

First, the rich and extensive treatment of the theme of community in *TCTCV* challenges the United Methodist Church to seek a renewed

understanding of the relationship between two contexts of community: the intimate, interpersonal context (symbolized in Methodist tradition by the “class meeting”), and the broader societal context in which the church works for social justice and the common good.³¹ Methodists have sometimes seen a close and positive relationship between the two, but have also sometimes seen them as competing, if not opposing values.

Second, *TCTCV* may well challenge us to deepen our understanding of the mission of the Church. The achievements of *TCTCV* in this regard, in response to the ongoing discussions within and among the churches in the years of Faith and Order work on the topic, are considerable. In its first chapter, “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church,” *TCTCV* affirms (§1):

The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world. Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.

30. Group of Farfa Sabina, *Communion of Churches and Petrine Ministry: Lutheran-Catholic Convergences*, trans. Paul Misner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

31. A more expansive vision of the latter context, related to the WCC theme of “justice, peace, and the integrity of creation,” is evident in some recent United Methodist statements and programs.

Citing the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20 in the next paragraph (§2), *TCTCV* comments:

This command by Jesus already hints at what he wanted his Church to be in order to carry out this mission. It was to be a community of witness, proclaiming the kingdom which Jesus had first proclaimed, inviting human beings from all nations to saving faith. It was to be a community of worship, initiating new members by baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. It was to be a community of discipleship, in which the apostles, by proclaiming the Word, baptizing and celebrating the Lord’s Supper, were to guide new believers to observe all that Jesus himself had commanded.

In light of this comprehensive, theologically rich understanding, United Methodists may be led to reflect further on their own current official statement of the Church’s mission: “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”³² Without the sort of theological and ecclesiological context suggested by *TCTCV*, that statement is susceptible to a number of reductive readings. The eventual United Methodist reception of *TCTCV* might inform a reexamination of that statement, with an eye toward the

church’s next deliberate re-articulation of its understanding of the mission of the Church.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The statement may help us identify and express more clearly the ecclesiological context within which we find ourselves achieving common understanding and shared practice on such matters as sacraments and ministry, and working on a mutual understanding of polity. It could also offer further help on common ethical witness.

However, we also wish to be attentive to the witness and experience of churches that find themselves in serious tension with the account of the church in *TCTCV* on one or more points, especially where these tensions may suggest that *TCTCV* has not yet moved as fully into 21st century realities as it might. Our United Methodist traditions have important (though often neglected) links both to Protestant Pietism and to older and newer Christian families that emphasize the renewing presence and power of the Holy Spirit. If we can acknowledge, retain, and strengthen those links, our own critical appropriation of *TCTCV* may be enriched by them.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

32. *Book of Discipline 2012*, §120. For an exploration of this statement and its implications, see *Grace Upon Grace: The Mission Statement of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1990); <http://www.umglobal.org>, including numerous critical responses.

Issues relating to ministerial leadership – for example, ordination, *episkopé*, forms of authority in the church – certainly call for further discussion, and *TCTCV* provides needed resources for that. As mentioned above, revisiting the Ministry chapter of *BEM* in light of *TCTCV* may be a very fruitful enterprise, for example, in explicating further the significance of the three key adjectives “personal,” “collegial” and “communal” used in *BEM* to characterize the proper exercise of ordained ministry, and relating these to broader ecclesiological considerations. Much of the discussion of the future of the Petrine office prompted by *Ut Unum Sint* is also relevant here. It has been observed that some churches stress the “personal” aspect of ministerial leadership and of the exercise of *episkopé* in particular, while others stress the “collegial,” and others the “communal.” These emphases are often tied to distinctive forms of polity, though the relationship is not always a neat and tidy one.³³ Each emphasis has its strengths and liabilities; each may be called forth by a given set of circumstances, and may be more, or less, adaptable to subsequent situations and contexts.

In this connection, we would again support the calls that others have made for further ecumenical discussion and reflection focusing upon what might be called the intermediate manifestations of “Church,” i.e., those denominations, national and regional structures and judicatories, etc., into

which the “local” churches of various Christian traditions and families are organized. Such reflection is likely to lead also to a recognition of the importance of what older ecumenical discussion called “non-theological factors,” or what has been referred to above as the human uses of the church. *TCTCV* represents some welcome progress in this area, but further exploration of “the nature of the unity we seek” will depend to no small degree upon the sober and patient realism with which we confront these facts.

33. See Geoffrey Wainwright, “A Primatial Ministry of Unity in a Conciliar and Synodical Context,” *How Can the Petrine Ministry Be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?* ed. James F. Puglisi (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans., 2010), 293.

19. Church of Ireland

The Church of Ireland welcomes the WCC Faith and Order Commission's document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, recognizing that it is the fruit of a committed, deep and sustained dialogue on issues of fundamental importance for the whole Church.

The report well reflects the stated primary purpose of the Commission itself, "to serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe" (p. vii).

We note that the Commission has sent *TCTCV* to the churches with the objective of assisting the processes of renewal in the Church and of theological agreement (p. viii), and we wholeheartedly endorse these objectives.

Aware of the depth of the ecumenical and theological engagement that lies behind *TCTCV*, we recall that the Commission's 1982 report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was a similar major Faith and Order milestone that encouraged new steps on the Churches' common pilgrimage in search of the fullness of that unity which is God's gift and calling for the Church.¹

Background

The concluding Historical Note section in *TCTCV* provides a very helpful oversight of the development of thinking and priorities within the Faith and Order movement since its first World Conference in 1927. That history has led to this latest document with its emphasis on the theme of *koinonia*, which came to the fore at the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993 at Santiago de Compostela, and also following the further study of ecclesiology particularly reflected in Commission's report, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, which was presented to the 2006 WCC Porto Alegre Assembly.

TCTCV describes itself as a "convergence text," that is, "a text which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues considered, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study" (p. 1). It is thus in status the successor to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

Looking ahead

We see *TCTCV* as representing an effective statement of where the churches currently find themselves on the journey of Faith and Order. It therefore presents an opportunity for reflection both on the journey so far and on possible directions for the future. To this extent, it is indeed more than a "study document," allowing a time

1. *The Canberra Statement*, WCC Seventh Assembly, 1991.

for serious reflection on the direction of the ecumenical journey into the years ahead.

As mentioned above, the World Conference on Faith and Order held in Santiago de Compostela in 1993 placed a characteristic stress on the theme of *koinonia*, communion, in understanding the nature of the Church itself. This signalled a more dynamic approach when compared with earlier models based on a more static, institutional concept of the Church. The theme of *koinonia* is rich in terms of highlighting relational dynamics and potentially allowing more space for ecclesial diversity itself, reflecting the diversity in the supremely relational and loving *koinonia* of the Holy Trinity (§67).

However, the Church, by virtue of being a considerable assembly of people, will always be an institution and will need structures in order to function effectively in the world.² Nonetheless, the Church must not be governed by an authoritarian or institutional mentality. As the churches seek to be more faithful to Christ and his way, they will inevitably find themselves drawn more closely to one another.

Behind the whole process of the search for visible unity lies the operation of the Holy Spirit and, going forward, the Church is called to such a faithful following of the Spirit as *TCTCV* sees undoubtedly exemplified in Mary. (The document refers to Mary as “the Mother of God,” [§15], although we would prefer to render the term “*Theotokos*” more accurately as “Mother of

God incarnate,” not least for the sake of clarity in interfaith dialogue, in which the title, “Mother of God,” is liable to be easily misunderstood.)

The ordained ministry

Regarding the ordained ministry, we welcome the affirmation at §20: “Agreed statements are making it clear that the royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the church, and not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives.”

We also note the observation, in light of the challenges over issues relating to ordained ministry in ecumenical dialogue, that if differences such as those relating to the priesthood of the ordained prohibit full unity, overcoming those differences must be an urgent priority (italicized note after §5).

We would urge imagination and courage in taking creative steps of faith in this endeavour, for the sake of greater visible unity through reconciled ordained ministries.

Authority

We agree with the Commission that authority in the Church must be distinguished from “mere power” (§§49f.). The kind of authority which is exercised in the Church must reflect the kind of authority found in Christ, whose authority was not based on office or position, but on the power of the truth itself.

We affirm with *TCTCV* that “service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the Church”

2. Cf. *Report on Institutionalism*, Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, 1963; Faith & Order Paper No. 37.

(§58). Indeed, we would suggest that it lies at the heart of all authority in the Church.

However, the document seems to suggest that authoritative decisions in the Church are necessarily to achieve consensus:

Decision-making in the Church seeks and elicits the consensus of all and depends upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, discerned in attentive listening to God's Word and to one another. By the process of active reception over time, the Spirit resolves possible ambiguities in decisions (§51).

Yet we believe that the Church can err (Articles of Religion, 21); this refers to more than mere "ambiguities in decisions."

TCTCV raises the subject of the possibility of a form of universal primacy:

Partly because of the progress already recorded in bilateral and multilateral dialogues, the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order raised the question 'of a universal ministry of Christian unity'. In his encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II quoted this text when he invited Church leaders and their theologians to 'enter into patient and fraternal dialogue' with him concerning this ministry (§56).

TCTCV, we believe, is correct to indicate, in this connection, the importance of distinguishing "between the essence of a ministry of primacy and any particular ways in which it has been or is

currently being exercised." Clearly, there are many issues to be addressed in relation to this subject.

The catholicity of the Church

Regarding the local Church, we affirm the statement in *TCTCV*: "Each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church. It is wholly Church, but not the whole Church."

Regarding the whole Church, among the greatest challenges which it faces today is the need to respond to changing cultural contexts and moral attitudes. We therefore recognize a serious challenge in the document's observation that *koinonia* "includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based upon the inspiration and insights of the Gospel" (§62).

We affirm *TCTCV* when it indicates that the "essential catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differences are allowed to develop into division" (§22).

Regarding the use of the expression "Church as sacrament" (§27), we understand what is meant: that is, that the Church is an effective sign of God's presence in the world. But we can also see that for various reasons others may find difficulty with the expression. It should therefore be used with ecumenical sensitivity.

We appreciate what *TCTCV* has to say about evangelization in the context of interfaith relations, in indicating that this should always be respectful of those who hold other beliefs. It is appropriately stated that sharing the good news of Christ, and calling others to embrace that good news, is nothing less than "an expression of respectful love"

(§60). This is an important aspect of the outreach of the whole Church with the one faith to the whole world.

Questions and responses

Five particular questions have been addressed to the churches in *TCTCV* (3) and, following our comments above, we now set out our responses to those specific questions in brief.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The Church of Ireland finds its Anglican ecclesiological understanding well reflected in *TCTCV*.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The Church of Ireland considers that this will largely depend on how the various denominations receive the text; but is of the view that *TCTCV* has considerable potential to deepen ecumenical life and thereby foster Christian unity.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The Church of Ireland sees *TCTCV* as challenging it in various ways, including calling it to

- a deeper reflection, both as a denomination and ecumenically, on the document's broad themes
- a clearer understanding of the limits of

“legitimate” diversity in the Church (cf. p. 17, italicized section)

- new models of leadership and *episkopé* (cf. p. 19, italicized section)
- yet more prophetic witness in the world
- the developing and resourcing of new approaches to mission (§§6f.; §22)
- more effective ways of dealing with divisions over moral issues
- a deeper dialogue with other Churches and faith communities in Ireland.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The Church of Ireland is ready to explore all possibilities for closer relationships with Churches identifying with the thrust of *TCTCV*.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

Moral discernment and eucharistic sharing, in particular, are major issues in our current context that require special attention at this time. The Church of Ireland suggests that the Faith and Order Commission draw out the major themes emerging from the responses to *TCTCV* and focuses on these in the next phase of its work.

20. Orthodox Church of Finland

After a careful study, the Orthodox Church of Finland welcomes with pleasure the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. We consider the text to be an important ecumenical step and a significant expression of the serious and committed joint theological work of the multitude of churches in the service of the unity of the Church. *TCTCV* is a long-awaited result of ecumenical search for over two decades for basic ecclesiological principles.

This statement of the synod of the bishops constitutes the official response of the Orthodox Church of Finland to *TCTCV*. The statement is divided into six sections. First, we present concise answers to the five questions proposed to the WCC member churches in the introduction of the very document itself. As a conclusion, we offer some remarks of a more general character.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

Early Christian theology is highly valued and keenly cherished by the Orthodox Church of Finland, to the extent that we consider the early tradition as indispensable to our understanding of the Church. We identify in the text many ecclesiological expressions consistent with the fundamentals of the apostolic and patristic tradition. With pleasure

we recognize to what a great extent the document really reflects the Orthodox self-understanding.

In accordance with the key points of *TCTCV*, the Orthodox Church of Finland presupposes the characterization of the Church as found in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and understands *koinonia* and synodality as originating from the very essence of the Church. The nature of the Church as holy, apostolic and catholic interrelates with, and is indivisible from, her institutional structure and ministerial order. Administrative institutions and ministry of the Church cannot be separated from her very being.

The “historic episcopate” (§47) and the threefold ministry are fundamental for the Church in her fidelity to fullness of the gospel and the apostolic tradition. Concerning ministry, we want to repeat what was said in our comment to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*: “The Orthodox Church has always insisted that the ministry is a permanent and constitutive element of the life of the church. At the same time it is a central part of the apostolic tradition . . . The fullness of the apostolic faith cannot be realized in the church without the threefold ministry.”¹

1. *Churches Respond to “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, ed. Max Thurian, Vol. II. Faith and Order Paper No. 132 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 28.

We understand “ministry of oversight (§52) to be personal in its nature, i.e., linked to the consecrated order of bishops. It is therefore impossible for us to speak of *episkopé* without the person of the *episkopos*. Thus, in the Orthodox Church *episkopé* is always exercised by the *episkopos*, and may not be replaced by other forms of church governance.

In paragraphs such as §§29, 31, and 53, the document voices the structure of the Church in an Orthodox manner. We can easily relate to the way the document articulates the communion of local churches in the universal Church, the importance of *episkopé* in the service of – and, we would add, as constitutive of – the unity of the Church, and eucharistic communion as a focal expression of that unity, since – as spelled out in the introduction of the document – “visible unity finds a most eloquent expression in the celebration of the eucharist, which glorifies the Triune God and enables the Church to participate in the mission of God and the transformation and salvation of the world” (p. 2). As Orthodox we share the view of a basic unity between the faithful and eucharistic communion as a visible expression of this faith: *koinonia* means both the sharing of faith and eucharistic communion. The eucharist means participating in the very life of the Church within the framework of the apostolic faith, and includes for the Orthodox always a mutual recognition through liturgical commemoration of those sharing in the *koinonia*. For us as Orthodox, it is difficult to denote positive forms of durable unity without eucharistic communion. Therefore,

it would be hard for us to reconcile such understanding of *koinonia* with our understanding of the nature of the Church.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The question of growth in unity relates to the first main attribute of the Church as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: oneness. We find the document valuable in its capacity to express fundamental convictions which churches and denominations hold about the Church. The text thus offers a basis for expressing a great deal of unity.

However, the document witnesses also to the remaining lack of unity in specific questions. This state of affairs is summed up in the crucial issue of a possible “legitimate diversity,” a concept that the document has not been able to specify sufficiently. From our point of view, growth in unity comes true only when the crucial, church-dividing issues are dealt with. Stages of growth in unity can only be outlined with relation to dividing issues. Paragraph 24 summarizes the reality in which we live with our divergent ecclesiological views, convictions and teachings.

The document’s value lies nonetheless precisely in spelling out these divergent views against the background of commonly shared views of the Church. It thus presents itself as a valuable tool for the churches to proceed on the common path together. For instance, reading *TCTCV* together locally would certainly help the churches and their members to clarify where they disagree and agree. But in order to get further than that, the

document should also be considered as a point of departure for getting beyond the theological terminology used in the document and towards discerning possible divergent theological realities undergirding different churches' practices and stated beliefs. It is crucial to spell out how differently different church traditions may understand the theological concepts used in ecumenical documents, such as this one now under scrutiny. Being aware of the variety of readings of the traditional attributes of the Church, we Orthodox cannot content ourselves with simply reaffirming what the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed says of the Church. Thus, it is only by digging deeper into the components constituting the unity of the Church as expressed in *TCTCV* that the document will truly contribute to growth in unity.

In our local setting we have learned through ecumenical conversations with churches, mostly of Protestant traditions, to engage in precisely this kind of reflection on the realities behind the language we use. We will continue in the process of ecumenical learning from each other, at the same time also learning new things of ourselves, from this point on through the help of a thorough ecumenical examination of *TCTCV* in our bilateral and multilateral discussions with non-Orthodox churches and denominations.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The document challenges our church to critically examine ourselves with regard to our view of what could be a genuine diversity in a positive way. It

thus encourages us to learn to discern the possible varieties of the "catholic" tradition in other churches, but inversely also to have the courage and responsibility to challenge these churches whenever we find that tradition lacking.

The document is also an opportunity for genuine self-examination of our faithfulness to the faith we hold. For the sometimes static Orthodox ethos, the document works as a reminder of the Gospel's call to missionary work as well as to works of charity among the poor and vulnerable. The very nature of the Church also contains a social dimension, as the quote from St John Chrysostom clearly spells out (§67). This might be for us the main point of self-critique: Do we as a local Orthodox church express faithfully the life we proclaim? Are we as traditional in our life as we say our faith is? Despite the ecological dimension of Orthodox theology and the ecological emphases of our church's recent statements, do we really follow what we say as a church we should do?

One central theme in the document is the transformation of the world corrupted by sin as an element that separates, excludes and violates. The document challenges us to scrutinize our views and practices with the aim to discern such sinfulness and thus unfaithfulness to the redemptive work of Christ. Do we, for instance, truly acknowledge the gifts of lay people? What role may women have in the Church? It is hard to deny that the Church has not always resisted the temptation to give in to certain primarily cultural traditions that in effect have made women a marginalized part of the body of Christ.

Self-criticism is called for also on a broader inter-Orthodox level. Are we Orthodox as eucharistic in our practices as we claim our theology to be? Do local Orthodox realities around the world always truthfully reflect and thus proclaim the life of the triune God? In many places the local situation contradicts basic Orthodox convictions of one church in one place under the ministry of one bishop, the vision also brought forth by the document. It says something of the value of *TCTCV* from an Orthodox perspective that the document, for its part, reminds us of our own fundamental convictions.

In addition to a renewal of a genuinely ecclesiological way of life and thinking among us Orthodox, it is our hope that *TCTCV*, by pointing to shared convictions about the reality of the Church, would also foster loving and respectful coexistence among the churches in the different contexts around the world. As a minority Orthodox church in a country officially defined within the communion of Orthodox churches as a canonically Orthodox jurisdictional area, we venture the claim to have the specific minority experience. Our own history compels us to understand and sympathize especially with non-Orthodox minorities in majority Orthodox countries. We are aware of the challenges a minority status pose on the pastoral care of the church's members, and share with other Christian minorities the continuing need of recognition of one's integral ecclesial status, which majority churches occasionally run the risk of overlooking, often unintentionally.

4. How far is your church able to form relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

As a local Orthodox church, we experience our *koinonia* with other Orthodox churches as a central feature of our ecumenical life and action. This communion in effect excludes any possibility of acting in isolation or alone. Ecumenical steps taken by us here in Finland have a pan-Orthodox dimension in the context of this specific *koinonia*.

But just as our life locally is lived in communion with Orthodox churches around the world, so the life of the churches with whom we share our daily life as fellow Christians also has a real impact upon us. This is particularly the case for a minority church such as our own, living side by side, to the point of being intertwined (for example in the case of mixed marriages) with, especially, the majority Lutheran church. For this reason, we welcome the progress towards the greater appreciation of the catholic tradition that has been made in the ecumenical movement, including the concrete steps taken by the Nordic Lutheran churches with the Anglican Communion in the past thirty years.

For its part, *TCTCV* strengthens this tendency of a deeper appreciation of the life and patterns of the Church as formulated during the first centuries of her history. It will thus also contribute to a strengthening of our already close relationships with other Christian traditions in our country. In Finland we have a long tradition of witness and dialogue with other Christian churches and denominations through the Finnish Ecumenical

Council. Healthy inter-church relations have laid foundations to dialogue also with people of different religions in Finland, especially Jews and Muslims. We believe that as Orthodox Christians we are obligated to grow in our awareness of religious diversity and to make concrete acts of common witness in support of peaceful co-existence in our society.

At the same time, we also must note that, in and of itself, *TCTCV* will not take our churches to the point of resolving our differences which the text itself describes. As we pointed out already at question 2, in the context of the good ecumenical relations we enjoy in Finland, the document could serve as a tool in our local setting for reflecting on the question of how and where we locate ourselves in relation to the document.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

In the document, the question of unity closes around the issue of “legitimate diversity.” As §30 says, it is a crucial question in finding ways to create and sustain genuine unity. As it stands, the document does not bring any fundamental new insights or breakthroughs in this respect. The issues that split the churches in the first place are still there (and mentioned in the document). There is consequently a need to continue to spell out criteria for discerning authentic Church tradition, in order to appreciate diversity in the Church

within legitimate liturgical, theological and spiritual boundaries.

As stated in the Inter-Orthodox Pre-Assembly Consultation of the WCC 10th Assembly, “Christian communion is not a mere abstraction or simple social awareness, but by God’s grace a sharing in the very life of Christ, which begins for us at Baptism and is maintained through our Eucharistic life in the church.”² Biblically and ecclesio-logically sound “legitimate diversity” is therefore possible only if the churches in *koinonia* share apostolic faith and order.

In this connection, we would like to underline, as the Orthodox often do in ecumenical contexts, the need for a further appreciation and integration of the experience of the main church traditions of the first millennium into the process of ecumenical rapprochement. In the following we suggest some themes for further reflection related to this concern of ours.

The role of scripture and its subsequent reception

Paragraphs 11 and 12 cast diversity in the churches of today backwards into the biblical witnesses. While accepting the principle of “unity without uniformity” as a historical fact and ecclesiological principle, we are reluctant to interpret the present ecumenical setting of Christian division as somehow originating from the apostolic and early Christian era. Diversity of catholic expressions of apostolic faith in the early church cannot be

2. *Resource Book. World Council of Churches 10th Assembly, Busan, 2013* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 129.

equated as such with later diversity of Christian churches and denominations.

We find it crucial that the Bible and the Church are juxtaposed as expressions of apostolic tradition. The manner of discussing the biblical foundation of the church in *TCTCV* brings about the question of the authority of biblical interpretation in the service of the unity of the Church. Who gets to say what is the authentic biblical faith? Ultimately the document leaves open the question of authority in defining the continuity of and fidelity to the apostolic faith. As Orthodox, we perceive the Bible as born in and from the Church, that is, as formed and created in the same apostolic tradition that the Church manifests in its essence and mission. Consequently, the Church has the authority and responsibility to interpret scripture with loyalty to the faith and tradition of the apostolic era as well as of that of subsequent centuries. Here the ministry and role of the *episkopos* “in the service of maintaining continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life” (§52) is of crucial importance.

The question of primacy

The crucial issue of primacy, mentioned in §57, is also linked to the question of “legitimate diversity.” The text spells out with clarity the Orthodox understanding and historical origins of primacy as a pentarchy of the ancient patriarchates (§55). Even if the breakdown of communion between the see of Rome and other ancient patriarchates did dramatically change the realization of classical pentarchy, the canonical justification of primacy is still binding to the Orthodox Church. In the present moment it is not, however, entirely clear

how the primacy of honour of certain sees should be interpreted in the changing situation of global Christianity. A determining factor in ecumenical rapprochement is the question of primacy of the bishop of Rome. For the Orthodox, the bishop of Rome as the historical *primus inter pares* naturally has a significant role in the service of unity of the church. The dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church has shown that the idea of primacy of the pope is not problematic in itself, but the manner how his universal ministry fits in with collegial aspects of primacy and actual jurisdictions of ecclesiastical provinces is problematic. Ecumenical reflection on this issue will also promote its ongoing theological treatment among our Orthodox churches, helping us to maintain inter-Orthodox serenity in our quest for mutual understanding of primacy among local Orthodox churches.

Evaluating the legacy of the Reformation

The forthcoming celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation urges us to ask ourselves how to evaluate its legacy, but so also does *TCTCV*. The classical question of the role of Church tradition in this respect has not lost its urgency, to which the tendency to evaluate anew some ethical issues, especially in the churches of the Reformation, bears witness. Well known ethical issues also have the capacity to deepen already existing divisions between the churches. They must therefore remain on the ecumenical agenda in the foreseeable future (cf. §62).

Further elaboration is needed to develop conceptual tools to discern the extent to which the

Reformation truly reformed church life in line with that living tradition of the Church referred to in §§11 and 38. Here the question of the ordained ministry and its link to the sacramental character of Church life is crucial. The Orthodox should also allow themselves to be challenged by the theological insights of the Reformation. Integrating the legacy of the Reformation into the theological labours of the churches outside of it is of crucial importance for any future success of the ecumenical movement.

Besides a theoretical approach to this issue, we also call for an evaluation of the ecclesiological importance of the traditions more or less abandoned by the Reformation. For instance, the commemoration of the saints, including the Mother of God, can hardly be restricted to devotional practices only, but should rather be considered as a vital part of the life of the Church. Thus, the ecclesiological dimensions of the actual modes of Church life need further elaboration.

The relation to “new” church movements

Even if we Orthodox recognize in *TCTCV* fundamental aspects of apostolic and patristic ecclesiology, and how they are reflected in the present ecumenical reality, we are well aware that not all Christians find this kind of approach meaningful. In our global ecumenical reality there are new church traditions, such as Pentecostal and independent churches, that might not find it as important to deal with the same questions as those churches that take history seriously from a theological point of view. It would be important to find a common language and means of theological

work for churches with different approaches to the ancient church tradition.

General remarks

We are happy to recognize in *TCTCV* explicit expressions of the fundamentals of the apostolic and patristic ecclesiological tradition. Some parts of the document express a view of the Church in ways that the Orthodox can recognize as key elements of Orthodox ecclesiology. In that regard, *TCTCV* indicates that ecumenical appreciation of the early Christian tradition has clearly progressed after the decades following *BEM*. *TCTCV* can therefore be seen as a step forward in coming closer to the apostolic and patristic understanding of the Church. In that sense, we deem the document as promoting unity among the churches.

Despite its comprehensive understanding of early Christian and Orthodox theology, the text also manifests other ecclesiological approaches of different confessions and churches. The coexistence in the document of various, and in many cases incompatible, ecclesiologies clearly illustrates that Christians do not share a common understanding of the Church. The present division of churches cannot be appreciated by us as an expression of legitimate diversity in unity. The text openly displays that, even if the churches share a common awareness of the elements of the ecclesiology of a unified church, these very fundamentals themselves are perceived in diverse manners. According to the Orthodox Church of Finland, concrete and visible unity of the Church, the desired goal of the ecumenical movement, can be achieved only when unity in the interpretation

of these ecclesiological fundamentals prevails. A serious theological approach towards reaching that unity is therefore needed in clarifying various contested aspects of ecclesiology.

As a convergence text, *TCTCV* manages to point out the challenges on the way towards unity; yet it does not quite succeed in connecting theology with actual problems hampering further progress. Sadly, we still face many of the old church-dividing issues.

Thus, the usefulness of the document depends to a large extent on how it can inspire further ecumenical elaboration in confronting these issues both in national and international theological forums. It is our wish that *TCTCV* would become a common tool for WCC member churches as well as for other Christian movements in their effort to search for an enhanced common understanding of the nature of the Church.

Archbishop Leo of Helsinki and All Finland

21. Jamaica Baptist Union

1. The Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU) through its Faith and Order Commission offers a formal response to the World Council of Churches' publication *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* as part of our commitment to the ongoing ecumenical work being done, and as part of our ecclesial understanding of the nature and mission of the Church both local and universal. We consider it a privilege to join with others in the faith in shaping a common understanding of the visible unity of the Church to which we are all called. The JBU wishes to affirm areas of common understanding and seek for greater discussion on selected areas of our common work and witness. We view this document as both instructive and challenging, as it calls for renewal in our expressions and embrace of the other, in order to give the visible unity for which Jesus prayed.

2. We concur with the statement that "agreement on ecclesiology has long been identified as the most elemental theological objective in the quest for Christian unity" (*TCTCV*, p. viii). Hence, we laud the efforts of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order in its attempt to bridge this gap by calling the Church to visible unity. As part of the Church universal, and in our quest for visible unity, we approach this process with the understanding that "the Holy Spirit enables the church to hear the Scriptures afresh and so to be renewed

in every generation."¹ It is our understanding that as the scriptures are heard afresh and guided by the Spirit the Church will constantly be renewed. As such, the Baptist church, together with other churches, must open herself to listen to the scriptures and the Holy Spirit in our generation.

3. In this response, we seek to summarize the main points of interest in each chapter and offer brief comments from the perspective of the Jamaica Baptist Union, which comprises over 330 churches in Jamaica and Haiti. Our formal response is made with the intention to contribute positively to the ongoing discernment of the nature and mission of the Church as we seek a common vision/visible unity.

4. Chapter 1: "God's Mission and the Unity of the Church"

We commend the approach taken in the paper as chapter 1 broken into three sections focuses on: (a) the Church in the design of God, (b) the mission of the Church in history, (c) the importance of unity.

The JBU joins in affirming that "the mission of the church is rooted in a vision of God's great

1. Baptist World Alliance, *We Baptists*. Study and Research Division (Franklin, TN: Providence Publishing Corp., 1999), 24..

design (or “economy”) for all creation: the “kingdom” which was both promised and manifested in Jesus Christ” (§1). We further agree that the Church was called to be a community of witness, worship, and discipleship (§2). We concur that the “origin of the Church is rooted in the plan of the Triune God for humankind’s salvation” (§3); and that “the mission of the Church ensues from the nature of the Church as the body of Christ, sharing in the ministry of Christ as mediator between God and his creation” (§4). Additionally, we acknowledge the unique “challenge for the Church to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in a way that awakens a response in the different contexts, languages and cultures of the people who hear that proclamation” (§6). The churches of the Jamaican Baptist Union are intimately aware of the unique challenge raised in §6 of *TCTCV*, given our history of enslavement and colonization, and have much to reflect and share from our varied experiences on our journey to self-understanding.

The challenges to the Church’s mission and self-understanding that chapter 1 outlines are issues that as churches of the Jamaican Baptist Union we struggle with among ourselves and within our varied ecumenical groupings. The issues such as religious pluralism, communication, emerging churches, global secular culture, as well as relevance have not escaped us. They prompt us to ongoing introspection and call us to hear afresh the Spirit and the scripture as we proclaim the kingdom of God. Coupled with this is the inability of some churches within or outside ecumenical groupings to “recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of

Nicaea-Constantinople (381) calls the ‘one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church’” (§9). This inability amongst us and others has not served the work and witness of the church in Jamaica or across the world very well and is a contributing factor to the issues raised in §7 and §6. If there is to be a visible unity, the Church must come to a renewed understanding of who we are as “Members of the body of Christ” and be willing to walk the journey together. The JBU continues to remain open to the Spirit as we seek for greater self-understanding and to find ways to embrace others as they embrace us.

5. Chapter 2: “The Church of the Triune God”

This chapter, which comprises the larger section of *TCTCV*, invites us to reflect on (a) discerning God’s will for the Church; (b) the Church of the triune God as *koinonia*; (c) the Church as sign and servant of God’s design for the world; (d) communion in unity and diversity; and (e) communion of local churches. Throughout this chapter, the paper seeks to lay the foundation for the Church as communion and how scripture and tradition guide the Church in her self-understanding on issues of faith, and her expressions/structure with regard to order. While the Church has agreed on the normative nature of scripture – and as the JBU we affirm the authority of scripture in all matters of faith and practice – we hold that there is still room for us to reflect as the JBU on the “living tradition” and its value to faith and practice. However, we hold that tradition must be subjected to the Spirit of scripture. Nevertheless, we are open to embrace others who differ in their

self-understanding; we do not see this as a major obstacle towards visible unity.

Given our struggles as Baptists throughout the Reformation and later colonization, as the JBU in particular we affirm together with other Christians that “legitimate diversity is not accidental to the life of the Christian community . . . but an aspect of our catholicity . . . and that salvation is incarnational” (§12). However, legitimate diversity must find root in the image and mission of God in Jesus Christ. Hence, we do not dismiss diversity within the communion, but see diversity as an expression of *koinonia* into which we are all called.

We concur that the Church is a “divinely established communion” and it is in this *koinonia* that the Church finds her common understanding and life. Therefore, the Church is and ought to be a reflection of the triune God who calls her into the divine *koinonia*. The Church in communion “does not belong to herself and does not exist for itself . . . hence the Church by nature is missionary” (§13). The visible unity of the Church that we seek is manifested in “the proclamation of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ” (§14).

In the *koinonia* we affirm “that the whole people of God is called to be prophetic people . . . a priestly people, offering the sacrifice of a life lived in discipleship and a royal people serving as instruments for the establishment of God’s reign” (§19); that “all members of the body, ordained and lay are interrelated members of God’s priestly people”; and that “Faith in Christ is fundamental to membership of the body” (§21). This is critical to our self-understanding as Baptists and is very much reflected in our expression of faith and order. For

the JBU, *koinonia* is grounded in faith in the triune God, and lived out in a community of priestly and royal people.

We also concur with the understanding expressed in §31 that “each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be Church; it is wholly Church, but not the whole Church.” Upon this premise the JBU understands and orders ministry. Therefore, the autonomy of the local church does not preclude her from the wider communion. The fullness of God’s mission will be made manifest when the Church sees itself as part of the universal *koinonia*/Church of Jesus Christ scattered in various places and forms.

From our history we have witnessed firsthand how cultural and other differences have divided the Church and how this has served to undermine the unity we seek. The scattered Church must be allowed to experience and express her self-understanding of God in her varied cultures and languages, and we acknowledge that no cultural expression is more authentic than the other. As Baptists we continue to affirm that the local church is autonomous under the authority of Jesus Christ, and that authority resides within the collective voice under the lordship of Jesus Christ. While we acknowledge other groups with varied structures/understandings, we hold that all authority is entrusted, not inherent or intrinsic. Yet the Church in her common mission may need to see this as part of her diversity and a means of learning from the others.

6. Chapter 3: “The Church: Growing in Communion”

Chapter 3 invites us to reflect on (a) already but not yet, and (b) growing in the essential elements of communion: faith, sacrament, ministry. The focus under these headings has been some of the most controversial and divisive for the Church. We are once again reminded that the Church exists in two forms: the “already” and the “not yet,” in that the Church is an eschatological reality, anticipating the fullness of the kingdom but living in the reality of present. Hence, the Church can rightly be characterized as “a pilgrim community [contending] with the reality of sin” (§35). We wish to note that, for us as Baptists, referring to the Church as sinning does not take away from her holiness, as sin relates to the human condition and holiness to the divine. Holiness, we agree, “expresses the Church’s identity according to the will of God, while sin stands in contradiction to this identity” (§36). And even “[though] sin is contradictory to the true identity of the Church, it is nonetheless real” (§35).

Given the convergences on baptism, eucharist and ministry, there is no need to explore these issues in-depth. We confess that as Baptists we have made great strides in our self-understanding and our embrace of others. Notwithstanding, there lingers the debate amongst us with regard to sacrament vs. ordinance. This document calls for us to clarify more explicitly our self-understanding on this issue, as at present both expressions are used. We engage in two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s supper and do so in obedience to Christ’s word and example. However, there may be the

need for us to reflect together on how we view and engage others who perform other rites as we move towards a fuller mutual understanding.

The document outlines that the ministry within the local church and the ecumenical community struggles with the acceptance of the ordained ministry, as some “do not consider ordained ministers as ‘priests,’ nor do some understand ordination in sacramental terms” (§45). There is also disagreement “over the traditional restriction of ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament to men only” (§45). However, the New Testament offers us “no single pattern of ministry . . . concerning how ordained ministry is to be understood, ordered and exercised” (§46). And the debate surrounding the threefold pattern of ministry, *episkopos-presbyteros-diakonos*, continues to be divisive. The JBU must continue to wrestle with our understanding and seek for unity amidst the plurality of understandings, given that the New Testament did not outline a single pattern but offers a range of patterns for the believing community. The issue then becomes: can we see God at work in the varied approaches to ministry and affirm the same in each other?

The above issue draws us into the debate on authority within the Church. We acknowledge and affirm that the Church’s authority comes from the head – Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding, we understand the debate with regard to the different sources of authority and the weight to be accorded to each. In light of this, we concur with the statement that “Authority within the Church must be understood as humble service, nourishing and building up the *koinonia* of the Church in faith,

life and witness . . . it is a service (*diakonia*) of love, without any domination or coercion” (§49). And those who seek to draw from or exercise the various sources of authority must be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We, like other Christians, acknowledge that all authority is entrusted through the people and not given inherently.

On the issue of the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*), we hold the view that “each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in the communion of the Church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the whole Church is synodal/conciliar, at all levels of ecclesial life” (§53). While we do appreciate that churches share varied views and structure on this issue, this does not warrant a disregard for the other. What is critical in our quest for visible unity is a common understanding of Christ as head of the Church who offers leadership through the power of the Holy Spirit; therefore the Church is always called, no matter the order/structure, to open herself to the leadership of Christ through the Spirit.

7. Chapter 4: “The Church: In and for the World”

The final chapter focuses on (a) God’s plan for creation: the kingdom; (b) the moral challenge of the gospel; and (c) the Church in society. The need for us to reaffirm an understanding of the Church’s mission as outlined is vital to our visible unity: our mission is “to proclaim to all people, in word and deed, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ” (§59). Further, we welcome the call to see evangelization as constitutive of justice and peace. Given the religious pluralism which exists and the claims

of salvation outside of belief in Jesus Christ, we as Baptists hold to the teaching that salvation is found in Jesus; while we are called to evangelize, evangelism must be done in a manner of respect and love.

We agree that current happenings/developments have led the Church to reflect on issues of morality. This debate has not always served the Church well. It has been and continues to be a source of division regarding “what principles of personal or collective morality are in harmony with the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (§63).

We affirm that the Church in society is impelled to “work for a just social order, in which the goods of this earth may be shared equitably” (§64).

Response to general questions

8. (1) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The Jamaica Baptist Union takes the position that “the church is a community of professing believers who have found new life through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.”² Our self-understanding as Baptists is generally in line with the views expressed in *TCTCV*. Even though there are differences in our emphasis in some areas, we see these as legitimate diversity based on doctrinal constructs while we remain united in the mission of Christ in the world. We hold that the Church of Jesus consists of the called up, called out and calling assembly. Therefore, we are the body of Christ and members

2. *We Baptists*, 3.

of each other connected and affected by the other. We concur with St Augustine, “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things charity.” And while we often spend much time debating the non-essentials, through this document the Church is being called to find unity in the essentials grounded in the mission of Jesus and his love.

9. (2) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The paper both affirms and challenges the local church in her self-understanding. It calls the Church to see and embrace the fullness of her being the people of God scattered throughout the world, diverse in structure and expression, yet one in her faith and mission. It is to this visible unity of oneness that the Church is being challenged to grow and that growth/movement begins with the local church.

In a world where ecumenism is on the decline and where other groupings have become suspicious of main-line churches, there is the need for us to re-examine our approach to ecumenical dialogue. The churches of the JBU and across the world must engage in introspection to determine whether there is a need to redefine ecumenism and how it is organized. Recounting our history, we are of the view that the visible unity we seek for the Church must emerge from what we call grass roots ecumenism; while we commend the work of WCC and other such organizations, the work of ecumenism must be from the bottom up. It therefore means that as Baptists we must encourage our congregations to become part of this grass roots

ecumenism, where churches in communities work together by and under the power of the Spirit of God to effect the mission of Jesus in the world.

Further, we are called to pause and examine critically issues of diversity. Are our diversities and distinctives legitimate when they lead to Christianity based on denominational affiliation rather than the mission of God? Through *TCTCV*, we are forced to ask ourselves as Baptists if the distinctives that served us coming out of the Reformation continue to serve the same cause in light of our present realities; or are they only hindrances to greater unity? Is there need for us hear the scriptures and Spirit afresh within our generation, so as to once again advance the work and witness of Jesus Christ?

10. (3) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The churches of the Jamaica Baptist Union still see themselves as a group of believers on a journey to greater self-understanding and expression. As such, there are and will continue to be areas for adaptation and renewal in the life of the church. As Baptists, there is need for us to see that our self-understanding is not the only expression of legitimate diversity, and that we must seek at all times to affirm and embrace others who work and witness in the cause of Jesus Christ. There will also be the need for us to strengthen our efforts to engage other Baptist groups locally, and to have conversations with other indigenous churches as we find ways to serve together. Steps in that direction have been taken with the resuscitation last year

of our local Fellowship of Baptists (a forum that involves Baptist groupings outside of the JBU); and, more recently the establishment of bilateral relationships with the Pentecostal City Mission, an indigenous church founded in the 1920s.

11. (4) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the church described in this statement?

Throughout its history the JBU has sought and continues to seek out ways to facilitate and engage in ecumenical discussions and understanding through our work with the Jamaica Council of Churches and other regional groupings as well as international organizations. It is our belief that our faith in Christ compels us to seek visible expression of *koinonia*, and this is what we aspire to.

12. (5) What aspects of the life of the church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

In light of recent trends, the following areas warrant further discussion as they offer the greatest challenge to the visible unity of the Church. These include: issues relating to legitimate diversity, religious pluralism which offers other means of salvation, and the moral challenge of the gospel and its implications.

There is need for a continuous reflection on the human construct of denominationalism. We once again reiterate that, while denominationalism

offers distinctives and diversity, it also comes with the challenge of putting one over or against the other. The visible unity that we seek must continue to challenge us to guard against any human construct that seeks to facilitate disunity within the Church. We take note of the current trends among the emerging churches which are down-playing denominationalism. The emerging churches offer us a perspective for deeper reflection, as they are increasingly finding a new sense of unity through mission and crisis. There may be need for us to re-examine our approach and begin to see mission, as outlined in *TCTCV*, as the means and the expression of the unity of the Church, where the greatest unity is found in the midst of the everyday reality/crises of a people.

The journey towards visible unity calls us to see theological education as a vehicle that can facilitate this process. Theological education within the Caribbean enables mutual interaction, but also sees the insertion of denominationalism which militates against unity. There is need for the church to show in deeper ways our common identity; and seminaries offer opportunities to stimulate, promote and model the visible unity of the Church.

As we seek to engage with each other through the WCC, there is need for the Church to reflect on current geo-political and global realities and the implications for the Church. Christianity which was exported from traditional centres of mainline denominations is experiencing a shift as there is a move away from these traditional centres/groupings. This shift is driven by a renewed self-understanding and contextual realities which

have nothing to do with denomination. The move suggests people are coming together to address their realities. Thus, denominationalism continues to lose its place in the midst of oppression and injustice, which have no color or creed. Contextual realities are fostering the breaking down of denominational barriers. This demands that the Church affirms the place of distinctives but never allows distinctives to discount the one common mission shared by all, that is, the mission of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The WCC through this engagement does acknowledge that the “the unity of the body of Christ consists in the gift of *koinonia* . . . [which] is manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service” (§67). While we acknowledge that “the liturgy, especially the celebration of the eucharist, serves as a dynamic paradigm for what *koinonia* looks like in the present age,” it is important that greater focus be given to *koinonia* as unity in service, as witnessed in this document. It is in this area that the Church finds greatest consensus and one that offers us the opportunity for visible unity. Issues relating to sacramental life will continue to hit the walls of long-standing doctrinal positions and be legitimized as diversity. Therefore, the Spirit calls for us to see again Jesus offering himself fully to a group of diverse disciples gathered in the upper room. The Church is being called again to wait together, as God through Jesus pours upon us afresh his vision for mission. The Church must engage the process, opening herself to the Spirit

and listening afresh to scripture. This means a willingness to open traditions, creeds and other doctrinal understandings to the voice of the Spirit and scripture as we seek to be faithful to God in our present age.

22. Roman Catholic Church*

Introductory appreciation

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has presented a convergence document addressing one of the most divisive issues that has led Christian communities to separate from one another over the course of history: their differing understandings of the nature and mission of the Church. The overcoming of such division and the restoration of unity was a principal concern of the Second Vatican Council. Its Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio* (*UR*), expressed the Catholic conviction that division “openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel” (§1).¹ For this reason, Pope John Paul II was able to state in one of the opening paragraphs of his ecumenical encyclical *Ut unum sint* (*UUS*): “At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself *irrevocably* to following the path of the

ecumenical venture, thus heeding the Spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the ‘signs of the times’” (§3).²

The official Vatican response to the Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (*BEM*) (1987) stated “It is our conviction that the study of ecclesiology must come more and more into the centre of ecumenical dialogue. . . . We believe that without serious attention to the broader questions of ecclesiology there are disadvantages not only for the study and understanding of the content of *BEM*, but for our ecumenical progress as well.”³ Quotations such as the three just given are but a small sample of many official statements which suggest that the Catholic Church welcomes the results of the rather intense work of giving “serious attention to the broader questions

1. *Unitatis redintegratio*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

2. *Ut unum sint*, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html

3. *Catholic Response to BEM*, I. Introduction, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/dialoghi-multilaterali/dialogo/commissione-fede-e-costituzione/risposta-cattolica-a-bem.html>

* [The footnotes in this document have been edited to aid the reader. They differ from the original, official document—Ed.]

of ecclesiology” which *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* seeks to express.⁴

A preliminary word should be said about the preparation of the response that is to follow. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity consulted with both episcopal conferences and with theologians, and gave attention also to responses prepared by lay persons, academic study groups and ecclesial movements. These reports were gathered and analyzed by a small drafting team whose work was then submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for its observations and approval. This type of process, which can sometimes be rather lengthy, expresses an important aspect of the self-understanding of the Catholic Church. The voice of the laity, the special competence of theologians, and the guidance of those who have been called to exercise a unique doctrinal authority imparted to them through episcopal ordination all collaborate in the discernment of the authentic interpretation of revealed truth. The following response will reflect this self-understanding, as will be clear not only from its having drawn upon the voice of the people and of Catholic scholars but also from the various citations of and references to official Catholic teaching. Our response thus reflects the initial reception process of *TCTCV* that has been taking place in Catholic communities throughout the world, the continuance of which we intend to promote. Such an approach to reception and discernment seems to have been endorsed also by *TCTCV* §39.

4. *Church: Towards a Common Vision*, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>

Status and importance of the document

TCTCV is significant for several reasons. The first is the nature of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, which is of special importance because it involves theologians from virtually all theological traditions: Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Protestant (of many types) and Pentecostal. Although the Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, Catholic theologians appointed by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have participated fully, as voting members, in the Faith and Order Commission since 1968, working on all of its texts since then, including *TCTCV*. Popes have continually given their support to Faith and Order, and commented favourably on its work, as Pope John Paul II did on *BEM* in a number of addresses during the 1980s, and in his 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint* (§§42, 71, 45, 76). He opened his remarkable description of the Petrine ministry in that encyclical with a quotation from Faith and Order’s Fifth World Conference, held in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, at which the process leading to *TCTCV* began in earnest (cf. *UUS* 89, note 148). While sometimes more tangible results are achieved, and perhaps can only be made, in bilateral dialogue, such as the 1999 Lutheran and Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, a multilateral dialogue can make progress on questions which might present initial difficulties to churches on different sides of a particular issue in a bilateral dialogue.⁵

5. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

Convergences discovered in multilateral dialogue, such as that made by *BEM* in 1982 and now by *TCTCV* in 2013, might be useful for communions in bilateral dialogue on those issues, since those same communions are aware of the wide participation of representatives from various churches in the work of Faith and Order; and some are even represented in the commission.

From a multilateral perspective, *TCTCV* deals with what is perhaps the central ecumenical question, the nature and mission of the Church. Many bilateral dialogues have dealt with ecclesiological questions. A multilateral approach, involving theologians from a broad range of Christian traditions, is able to give an indication of how widely the convergences it has uncovered are acknowledged across the Christian world. *TCTCV* is also ecumenically important because it stems from, and is in continuity with, the previous landmark text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, which it often cites, and with the official responses to *BEM* which identified key areas on ecclesiology for further study.⁶ Its ecumenical importance stems, too, from the fact that *TCTCV* draws upon the progress of many bilateral dialogues regarding the Church, including a number involving the Catholic Church, thus giving some indication of progress being made in the broader ecumenical movement.

Faith and Order affirms that, like *BEM* before it, *TCTCV* is a “convergence” text, “that is, a text

which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues considered, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study. Rather [it expresses] how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the Church, showing the progress that has been made and indicating work that still needs to be done.”⁷ This description not only indicates how the Faith and Order Commission considers *TCTCV* to be a significant achievement, but also immediately suggests its limitations. While it presents a remarkable degree of common thinking on a wide range of important issues, it does not claim to have reached full consensus, the full agreement on all issues which is necessary in order to achieve full visible unity among the churches. Nevertheless, if the churches agree to the convergences presented in *TCTCV*, a very significant step forward in a continuing process towards visible unity will have been taken.

TCTCV takes up some of the major suggestions for future work by Faith and Order relating to ecclesiology made by the 1987 Catholic response to *BEM*. These include the call for further clarity on sacrament and sacramentality, on apostolic tradition, and on the nature of authority in the Church.⁸ Developing a response to this new convergence text provides the Catholic Church with another opportunity to contribute to that degree of further convergence and agreement on doctrinal issues required for full visible unity. At the same time, it calls us to further reflection about what *TCTCV* §30 calls “a fundamental principle governing unity and diversity,”

6. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text>. (cf. *TCTCV*, Preface)

7. *TCTCV*, Introduction.

8. *Catholic Response to BEM*, 6–9.

the statement appearing in the letter sent after the gathering of the disciples and their leaders in Jerusalem to resolve potential tensions within the primitive Christian community concerning whether Gentile Christians need observe Jewish legal prescriptions. The result of that communal discernment was expressed in the following words: “For it has seemed to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials” (Acts 15:28). To what extent must this biblical injunction be part of the journey towards visible unity today?

Hopes and objectives of the text

The Faith and Order Commission expresses hope that this result of many years of dialogue will serve the churches

(1) by providing a synthesis of the results of ecumenical dialogue about important ecclesiological themes in recent decades; (2) by inviting them to appraise the results of this dialogue – confirming positive achievements, pointing out deficiencies and/or indicating areas that have not received sufficient attention; and (3) by providing an occasion for the churches to reflect upon their own understanding of the Lord’s will so as to grow towards greater unity.⁹

Two distinct but deeply interrelated objectives are given as the rationale for requesting study and official responses to the material contained in *TCTCV*.

9. *TCTCV*, Introduction.

The first is renewal. As a multilateral ecumenical text, *The Church* cannot be identified exclusively with any one ecclesiological tradition. . . . the theological expressions and ecclesial experiences of many churches have been brought together in such a way that the churches reading this text may find themselves challenged to live more fully the ecclesial life. . . . The second objective is theological agreement on the Church.¹⁰

These hopes and objectives offer Catholics the opportunity to entertain the proposal of an approach to ecumenical progress which has been designated with the name “receptive ecumenism.”

Receptive ecumenism is a process whereby churches reflect, first of all, on what they may be able to learn and be enriched by from the thinking, life, and experience of communities from which they are currently divided. Without in any way calling into question the teaching of *Lumen gentium* (*LG*) 8, often reaffirmed in official documents, that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, can the “many elements of sanctification and of truth” to be found outside her confines offer insight and enrichment in the area of ecclesial reflection and practice to Catholics and, moreover, concerning what constitutes that unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17?¹¹ *Ut unum sint* 10 not only quotes the text of *Lumen gentium* 8, to

10. *TCTCV*, Preface.

11. *Lumen gentium*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

which we have just referred, but also cites another conciliar text concerning the fact that,

though we believe that [separated Churches and Communities], suffer from defects, they have by no means been deprived of significance and value in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.¹²

Pope John Paul II related this fact to another teaching of *Unitatis redintegratio*: “The Second Vatican Council made it clear that elements present among other Christians can contribute to the edification of Catholics: ‘Nor should we forget that whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brothers and sisters can contribute to our own edification’ (UR 4).”¹³

Uncovering ecclesial foundations commonly held

One of the values of *TCTCV* concerns the insistence by Popes John Paul II (*UUS 22*), Benedict XVI,¹⁴ and Francis¹⁵ that what unites Christians

12. *UR 3*.

13. *UUS 48*.

14. Benedict XVI (General Audience, 18 January 2012), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120118.html

15. *Evangelii gaudium 246*, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

living in communities so long divided from one another is much more than what divides them. In particular, by the action of the Holy Spirit we are united in our faith in Jesus Christ, sent by the Father to reconcile us in him. *TCTCV* intends to show that common agreement can also be uncovered in the area of significant ecclesiological doctrines. In the formation processes that occur in every one of our churches, when comparing ourselves to others, is not the emphasis most often placed upon points of difference and disagreement? This new convergence text provides an opportunity to begin our ecclesiological assessment of one another with the many convictions, based on Scripture and Tradition and confirmed in ecumenical dialogue, that are held in common. These could then offer a positive and charitable foundation for addressing the questions about which we do not yet agree. The thirteen italicized paragraphs are presented in *TCTCV* as invitations to discover if and to what extent the convergence on or even agreement about a significant number of broad ecclesiological convictions might provide a new framework for viewing and, perhaps, resolving at least some of the issues that have proven so difficult to agree upon in the past.

One method employed in recent decades within the ecumenical movement might be described as the hermeneutical approach of seeking differentiating consensus. Just as Catholics have achieved a fundamental consensus on the core of the doctrine of justification by faith with Lutherans and, subsequently, with other Christian communities, by identifying what might be called the hierarchy of truths about justification by faith, to which diverse

explanations of the central truths can be seen as compatible, there is no inherent reason why such an approach could not also be applied to ecclesiological doctrines. This need not endanger the Catholic conviction which Pope John Paul II expressed when he taught, “The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence to all the content of revealed faith in its entirety. . . . A ‘being together’ which betrayed the truth would thus be opposed both to the nature of God who offers his communion and to the need for truth found in the depths of the human heart” (*UUS* 18). But adherence to revealed faith in its entirety does not preclude a certain degree of diversity, even in the expression of that faith, as the Holy Father clarified: “Indeed, the element which determines communion in truth is *the meaning of truth*. The expression of truth can take different forms” (*UUS* 19).

In *Ut unum sint* 38, Pope John Paul II wrote:

In this regard, ecumenical dialogue, which prompts the parties involved to question each other, to understand each other and to explain their positions to each other, makes surprising discoveries possible. Intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality. Nowadays we need to find the formula which, by capturing the reality in its entirety, will enable us to move beyond partial readings and eliminate false interpretations.

It seems that *TCTCV* has sought to achieve something similar to what Pope John Paul II has

called for on issues such as the relation of the need to struggle against sin, on the one hand, and the effect of grace producing holiness in the midst of the Church, on the other. No community denies the New Testament teachings about the need for ongoing conversion and, at the same time, the call to live and the possibility of living holy lives. Other examples could be mentioned, such as *TCTCV*'s rejection of placing the royal priesthood of the whole people of God conferred at baptism in contrast to a special ordained ministry. The convergence text claims that these simply cannot and must not be considered as mutually exclusive alternatives (§20).

General aspects in harmony with catholic thought

- Concerning the overall structure and content of *TCTCV*, it can be said that in many points one can see harmony with Catholic doctrine about the Church. In general, there seem to be few points in which it diverges from Catholic doctrine in such a way as to close the door to future dialogue. The major points of divergence fall into the category of the “invitational paragraphs.” There are no glaring divergences in the main body of the text. This point is itself highly noteworthy and lends credence to the very notion of a “convergence text.” Obviously, the structure of the Faith and Order text is the fruit of an astonishingly patient, dialogical, and arduous process.

As a result, the division into four central chapters on “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church,” “The Church of the Triune God,” “The Church: Growing in Communion,” and “The Church: In and For the World” has an underlying logic. This structure makes for an easy and highly fruitful comparison with the ecclesiological teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

- In general, the Commission on Faith and Order in *TCTCV* focuses upon the fact that Christ’s prayer for unity implies that Christians have a responsibility to work for unity if they are to be true to an expression in the prayer that all of them frequently pray, having been so taught by Jesus himself: “Thy will be done.” This can be seen as reflecting an important principle of Catholic ecclesiological doctrine, that is, that certain aspects of Church life are to be considered as determined by God’s will. This was conveyed in Catholic theology by the traditional Latin expression *iure divino*. Of course, *TCTCV* was not able, at this stage of multilateral dialogue, to apply this principle to issues such as the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, or to the ordination of women. But ultimately, once it is agreed that God has a design for the nature and mission of the Church as *TCTCV* proposes, further reflection on how God’s

will applies to such issues needs to guide our dialogue about them.

- The focus not only on God’s plan but also on the contemporary world stimulates all churches to become more attentive to the urgency of the visible unity of Christians. The underlying theological perspective that puts the accent on the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus for the salvific transformation of the world presents the Church as a sign and instrument at the service of the great plan of God (*oikonomia*), the divine mission that aims at reaching every person and every expression of social life.
- *TCTCV* recognizes that communion derives ultimately from the salvific activity of the Holy Trinity, which makes possible the communion of human persons in the Church (chapter 2). This is brought about unsurpassably by the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As is well known, the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 for the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II identified the ecclesiology of communion as one of the Council’s dominant themes.¹⁶ The theme of communion is profoundly related to the Council’s understanding

16. *Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod*, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/final-report-of-the-1985-extraordinary-synod-2561>

of unity, as expressed in a special way in *Unitatis redintegratio* 2, which states: “It is thus, under the action of the Holy Spirit, that Christ wills His people to increase, and He perfects His people’s fellowship in unity (*communione perficit in unitate*): in their confessing the one faith, celebrating divine worship in common, and keeping the fraternal harmony of the family of God.” The 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* places the ecclesiology of communion at the heart of the Catholic understanding and practice of ecumenism.¹⁷ Moreover, the seemingly unhesitating acceptance by *TCTCV* of the view that the three essential elements of communion concern faith, worship, and ministry of service is especially welcome. If many churches, through their processes of reception, can accept this way of describing the fundamental elements of communion, a major step forward will have been taken.

- The understanding of the Church as communion which finds its source and its supreme model in the mystery of the Holy Trinity also has an immediate and strong anthropological relevance. As *TCTCV* §1 states, “According to the

Bible, man and woman were created in God’s image (cf. Gen. 1:26–27), so bearing an inherent capacity for communion (in Greek *koinonia*) with God and with one another.” Thanks to this, it is easier to see how the Church is placed at the service of the person, of the whole of humanity and of the entire creation.

- The text emphasizes the essentially missionary nature of the Church, in its plea for Christian unity (chapter 2); in its dynamism as “the pilgrim people moving towards the kingdom of God” (chapter 3); and in its insistence on the Church as an agent of God’s love, expressed in evangelization, in interreligious encounter, and in a more vigorous engagement with social realities (chapter 4). This ecclesiological theme has been at the heart of Catholic doctrine in texts such as *Lumen gentium*, *Ad gentes*,¹⁸ *Evangelii nuntiandi*,¹⁹ *Redemptoris missio*,²⁰ and *Evangelii gaudium*. For decades the theme of a “new evangelization” has been encouraged in official teaching and has guided pastoral activity in the Catholic Church.

17. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_25031993_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism_en.html

18. *Ad gentes*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html

19. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html

20. *Redemptoris missio*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html

- Using as its point of departure both Scripture and Tradition, *TCTCV* aims at elaborating an ecclesiological vision that could be widely shared, coherent but not uniform, respecting legitimate diversity, but at the same time attentive to acknowledging the divergent points that require further study.
- The accent placed on the co-responsibility of all the baptized and on the common priesthood, together with the attention dedicated to the specific role of ministry, conceived (in line with *BEM*) in its triple dimensions – personal, collegial, communitarian – is significant and may be considered as in harmony with recent initiatives of Pope Francis in his promotion of needed reforms within the Catholic Church.
- The underlining of the *kenosis* of Christ, as a paradigm for ecclesial life and for the ecumenical journey in particular, is an indispensable reference point for an authentic exercise of ministry (cf. §49). The explicit treatment of authority, including the exercise of authority at the universal level by ecumenical synods and by a ministry of primacy, are helpful passages which hopefully will open a path for more substantial agreement about these themes in the future.
- The invitation extended to the churches to live as a people on a journey implies constant conversion and renewal

(*ecclesia semper reformanda*), a theme underlined by Vatican II in *Unitatis red-integratio* 7 and by Pope John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* 16: “In the teaching of the Second Vatican Council there is a clear connection between renewal, conversion and reform.”

- We appreciate the insistence that unity is above all a gift of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit and therefore the choice of emphasizing that the Church of Christ is one, rather than acquiescing in the multiplicity of churches. Catholic ecclesiology fully shares the conviction that the goal of the ecumenical movement is full visible unity, which is affirmed several times in the text, but which needs to be explored in a much more complete and adequate way.

A resource to assist the Church *in via*, in her ongoing journey towards unity

Obviously the above given points of complementarity with Catholic doctrine do not exhaust Catholic teaching about the Church. The reader should be advised that the Catholic appraisal of *TCTCV* which we offer here intends to respond to the specific nature of that convergence text, which makes no claim to deal with all relevant aspects of ecclesiology, but rather to build upon some fundamental ecclesiological convergences which have emerged in the churches’ responses to *BEM* and in subsequent ecumenical dialogues about the nature and mission of the Church. Thus, if our response

does not take up some quite specific themes, such as, for example, the teaching about the ministry of the successor to Peter as expressed in Vatican I and II, in *Ut unum sint*, and in the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith's reflection on the ministry of the successor of Peter (1998),²¹ it should not be presumed that these topics are not of great importance, some even considered essential by the Catholic Church for the reestablishment of visible unity. But *TCTCV* does offer, in its harvesting of scripture, Tradition, and the results of multi- and bilateral dialogues on ecclesiological themes, a valuable compendium of the progress that has been made in uncovering greater common ground in ecclesiology. Such common ground may hopefully serve as a platform for further agreement during our present intermediate state in which the churches are "on the road" (*in via*) towards that full visible unity which constitutes the aim of the WCC and of the Faith and Order Commission, and which we believe must remain the essential goal of the ecumenical movement. Our hope is that the further knowledge and reception of this text and its use in theological faculties and in the formation programs of all of our communities, not only involved in the preparation for ordained ministry and other forms of pastoral service but also in the widest possible scope of the membership of our communities, will enliven, in the years ahead, the aspiration and commitment of all Christians

21. Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, "The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19981031_primato-sucessore-pietro_en.html

to act in promoting the more complete realization of Christ's prayer that all his followers be one.

CHAPTER 1:

God's Mission and the Unity of the Church

In the context of the entire document, which can be considered by the Catholic Church as a "convergence" document, the first chapter stands for the remarkable level of convergence, which can be regarded as reaching almost a "consensus."²² Such a substantial accord is particularly meaningful as the chapter provides a strong framework for the content of the whole document.

The focus of the chapter – highlighting the trinitarian foundation of the Church, its missionary nature rooted in the *missio Dei*, the ministry of Jesus Christ who manifests the Kingdom of God, the work of the Holy Spirit who nurtures communion within the Church, the vocation of the Church to spread the gospel and be an instrument of God's love for the world, and the call to unity – reflects Catholic teaching about the Church as it has been expressed in documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly in *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et spes*, and *Ad gentes*, as well as in some more recent Encyclicals such as *Dominum et vivificantem*²³ and *Redemptoris missio* by Pope John Paul II and *Evangelii gaudium* by Pope Francis.

22. Responses sent to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity from Episcopal Conferences, ecumenical bodies and theologians highlighted the strong substantial convergence, describing it in very positive terms.

23. *Dominum et vivificantem*, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.html

Many statements affirmed by *TCTCV* – both in their content and formulation – can be fully endorsed by the Catholic Church; in light of the principle of the “hierarchy of truths” it can be affirmed that the more substantial aspects of the life and mission of the Church present a significant deep convergence, even sometimes consensus, with Catholic theology.

Some statements of this chapter, however, need further clarification or reflection in order to affirm such convergence; most of them, however, refer to less foundational aspects and therefore do not affect significantly the general positive evaluation about the level of convergence of chapter 1.

A. The Church in the design of God

The first part of the chapter presents such a strong convergence on the most fundamental theological truths about the Church that the first statements of *TCTCV* can be read in parallel with the main affirmations of the Second Vatican Council regarding the nature and mission of the Church.

The most fundamental convergence is the trinitarian origin of the Church: the Church exists by the grace of God as part of His design for all creation and plays a decisive role in the economy of salvation; its mission is rooted in and flourishes from the *missio Dei*.

TCTCV affirms that “the Church and its mission is rooted in the vision of God’s great design (or ‘economy’) for all creation: the ‘kingdom’ which was both promised by and manifested in Jesus Christ.” Even after the fall, which damaged our relationship with God, He continued to offer to human beings His *koinonia* which “found its

irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.” The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue its life giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry” (*TCTCV* §I).

The statement expresses the same understanding of the Church as affirmed in the Conciliar Dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*:

The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men [and women] to a participation of the divine life. Fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave men [and women] to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation, in view of Christ, the Redeemer . . . He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ.²⁴

The Decree *Ad gentes* (*AG*) on the missionary activity of the Church reaffirms the same teaching, framing it more explicitly within the missionary dimension of the Church rooted in the Trinity, stating that:

The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. . . . it pleased God to call men [and women] to share His life, not

24. *LG* 2.

just singly, apart from any mutual bond, but rather to mold them into a people in which His sons, once scattered abroad, might be gathered together (cf. John 11:52) (*AG* 2).

The affirmation that the Church is rooted in the Trinitarian Mystery brings it to the very heart of the mystery of the *koinonia* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *Koinonia* is the source of the life and mission of the Church; it impels Christians to be a sign of such *koinonia* for the world. The Catholic Church recognizes a deep convergence on the understanding of the Church as communion. The document *TCTCV* affirms: “Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (*TCTCV* §1). The truth that the *koinonia* of the Trinity is the source and, in an analogous way, the model of the *koinonia* that human beings can manifest among themselves is not only strongly emphasized by Catholic documents, but also clearly linked with the need to foster unity among Christians (cf. also comments on *TCTCV* §8); in the words of Pope John Paul II:

The faithful are *one* because, in the Spirit, they are in *communion* with the Son and, in him, share in his *communion* with the Father: ‘Our *fellowship* is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’ (1 John 1:3). . . . To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the

Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father’s plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ’s prayer: ‘*Ut unum sint.*’²⁵

There is also an important convergence in the affirmation that the ministry of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, manifests the kingdom of God. The document *TCTCV* provides (cf. §§2 and 4) a sound biblical description of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ to proclaim the kingdom of God, and the way he called his disciples to be a “community of witness,” a “community of worship,” a “community of discipleship” proclaiming the gospel to the world (*TCTCV* §2). The same emphasis on the “word,” “works” and “presence” of Christ to make the kingdom manifest on earth is found in *Lumen gentium* (3 and 5), as is the recognition of the key elements of the Christian community, which are intertwined and could, in fact, also be listed in a different order: discipleship, worship and witness.

Following the teaching and the example of Jesus, the proclamation of the kingdom and evangelization is the primary vocation and mission of the Church (cf. *TCTCV* §4 with *LG* 3 and 5, and also *AG* 6 and 9). The proclamation of the Word and evangelization, the liturgy and eucharistic worship, prayers, charity and solidarity with the poor, commitment to justice and peace and a lifestyle shaped by the gospel are elements through which the Church fulfils its mission (cf. *TCTCV* §4; *LG* 5 and 17; *AG* 6–9). This shared

25. *UUS* 9.

vision of some of the fundamental dimensions of the mission of the Church is a further significant convergence.

The Holy Spirit as a vital reality of the Church, and the experience of Pentecost at the heart of the Church is a fundamental truth affirmed both by the Faith and Order document and by Vatican II documents: “The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the morning of Pentecost for the purpose of equipping them to begin the mission entrusted to them” (*TCTCV* §3). The Conciliar Dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* affirms: “When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father” (*LG* 4), then offering a profound description of the work of the Spirit who descends upon the disciples empowering them for their mission.

The trinitarian approach – as well as the biblical foundation – are very much appreciated and constitute the unifying principle of chapter 1; at the same time a deeper reflection on the relationship between Jesus Christ and the kingdom, as well as a wider consideration of the presence and role of the Holy Spirit in the community of the faithful would have been welcome in the *TCTCV* text. It is the Holy Spirit, in fact, who guides the faithful to the whole truth, nurtures in them unity in diversity, dwells in them and adorns them with His fruits and gifts (cf. *LG* 4 and 12).

B. The mission of the Church in history

The second part of the chapter also presents many similarities and convergences with the Catholic perspective on this issue, especially in presenting history as the place where the Church is called to fulfil its mission by virtue of the incarnational aspect of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes* (*GS*) affirms regarding Christians: “United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man [and woman]. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.”²⁶

The document *TCTCV* affirms that the Church, in its task of proclaiming the gospel of salvation and making disciples in every corner of the earth, has sometimes encountered difficulties (hindrances or even resistance and betrayals) and challenges, especially in bringing the gospel to different contexts and cultures (cf. *TCTCV* §5); at times we Christians, as messengers, have been faithful up to martyrdom, at times we have failed to bring the good news with due respect (cf. *TCTCV* §6). Catholics appreciate that the document recognizes so many Christian martyrs. We also appreciate that the document recognizes that Christians were not always prompt or even able to bear due witness to the gospel; Vatican II

26. *Gaudium et spes* 1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

documents acknowledge as well the difficulties and possible failures that the Church can meet in this task (cf. *AG* 6 and 13).

In a world that is increasingly and dramatically in need of healing and reconciliation, faithfulness to the gospel and attentiveness to the ways in which it is announced must be a constant concern for all Christians. Catholics encourage one another to recognize failures that they were responsible for, as well as expectations and challenges they were not able to meet. This has been the inspiration for the Catholic Church asking forgiveness. Various Popes have addressed different categories of people, in many different ways and contexts, to ask forgiveness on behalf of the whole Catholic Church.²⁷ In a more specific way, the celebration of the Great Jubilee of 2000, precisely because of the meaning of the Jubilee, has been the occasion for the Catholic Church to reflect more deeply on the significance and the implications of forgiveness and mercy, purification and reconciliation, and also led to the publication of the document *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* by the International Theological Commission in 1999.²⁸ During the Great Jubilee

27. It is worth remembering Pope Paul VI asking for forgiveness during the Second Vatican Council and during the solemn celebration of the Abolition of the excommunication with the Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras I; as well, Pope John Paul II, who asked forgiveness more than 100 times in public speeches in various circumstances; and Pope Benedict XVI, who more than once made his own the words of Pope John Paul II; and finally Pope Francis who has asked forgiveness in a very personal way from the communities he has visited.

28. International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html

a privileged moment to make a solemn plea for forgiveness was the Day of Pardon on 12 March 2000, when Pope John Paul II invited:

Let us forgive and ask forgiveness! While we praise God who, in his merciful love, has produced in the Church a wonderful harvest of holiness, missionary zeal, total dedication to Christ and neighbour, we cannot fail to recognize *the infidelities to the Gospel committed by some of our brethren*, especially during the second millennium. Let us ask pardon for the divisions which have occurred among Christians, for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken towards the followers of other religions. Let us confess, even more, *our responsibilities as Christians for the evils of today*. We must ask ourselves what our responsibilities are regarding atheism, religious indifference, secularism, ethical relativism, the violations of the right to life, disregard for the poor in many countries. We humbly ask forgiveness for the part which each of us has had in these evils by our own actions, thus helping to disfigure the face of the Church.²⁹

TCTCV continues its reflection by singling out some challenges that the Church today – in a

[vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html)

29. Pope John Paul II, *Homily. Day of Pardon*. 12 March 2000, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000312_pardon.html

world that is in constant evolution and change – is still facing, such as: religious pluralism, secular culture, the development of means of communication, as well as the appearance of the “emerging churches” and the need of re-evangelization (cf. *TCTCV* §7). The careful and attentive listening to the world and to the “signs of the times” has always been a concern for the Catholic Church, particularly after the Second Vatican Council. A common reflection on these issues is always welcome and should be encouraged. As a specific Catholic contribution to the issue, some perspectives are offered to address areas (not developed in *TCTCV*) which deserve deeper consideration.

TCTCV §7 could have been a little more nuanced when affirming that “the Church faces the challenge of a radical decline in membership”: While it is true that the global secular culture affects church membership in many countries, this cannot be considered a worldwide trend as in many parts of the world the Church is very vital.

The word “church” is sometimes used in the document in a theologically imprecise way and raises some terminological questions: (a) the expression “new way of being the Church” – used to describe the “emerging Churches” (*TCTCV* §7) – does not seem appropriate as it is vague and gives the impression that we can make the Church, whereas we receive the Church as a gift from God; (b) the expressions “Church/Churches,” “Church/church,” “forming/establishing Christian Communities” (*TCTCV* §§5, 6 and 7) need to be further explained in their different meanings.

From a Catholic perspective, the term “church” applies to the Catholic Church in communion with

the Bishop of Rome. It also applies to churches which are not in visible communion with the Catholic Church but have preserved the apostolic succession and a valid eucharist, remaining true particular churches. Other Christian communities which have not preserved the valid episcopacy and eucharist are called “ecclesial communities.”³⁰

On a deeper level, a theological reflection on the transformative power of the gospel could have been included. Because of its rootedness in the Trinity, the Church is transcendent, but its mission is to be the “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (cf. Matt. 5:13–16) so as to transform the world from within. The Church must constantly be vigilant, even self-critical, about its effectiveness in spreading the everlasting freshness and the transformative power of the gospel to every context, bringing the hope of Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI affirmed:

Again, we find ourselves facing the question: What may we hope? A self-critique of modernity is needed in dialogue with Christianity and its concept of hope. In this dialogue Christians too, in the context of their knowledge and experience, must learn anew in what their hope truly consists, what they have to offer to the world and what they cannot offer. Flowing into this self-critique of the modern age there also has to be a self-critique of modern Christianity, which must constantly

30. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (6 August 2000), §17.

renew its selfunderstanding setting out from its roots.³¹

A further area to be considered is the need – particularly in contemporary times – for a proclamation of the gospel that will be, first and foremost, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. To evangelize is to shape a personal, intimate discipleship with the Lord. Encountering Christ, and being transformed by His love, will enable his disciples to authentically encounter their neighbours in their hopes and needs, and to offer a credible witness to the world in justice, solidarity and charity, thus being accountable both to the gospel and to the world. In the words of Pope Francis:

The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? . . . What then happens is that ‘we speak of what we have seen and heard’ (1 John 1:3). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us.³²

31. *Spe salvi* 22, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html

32. EG 264. Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, focuses this personal dimension of encountering Christ in the experience of the pilgrims during the

As a concluding remark on this part of the chapter, it is important to note that Christians have always affirmed the strong conviction that, despite all difficulties, the Glory of God will be manifested. The affirmation of *TCTCV* that “God’s grace, more powerful than human sinfulness, was able to raise up true disciples and friends of Christ in many lands and establish the Church within the rich variety of many cultures” (*TCTCV* §6) echoes the words of *Lumen gentium* that the Church, “By the power of the risen Lord . . . is given strength that it might, in patience and in love, overcome its sorrows and its challenges, both within itself and from without, and that it might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light” (*LG* 8).

C. The importance of unity

The last part of this chapter constitutes a very important section as it makes the vital connection between unity and mission, rooted in the biblical vision, and oriented towards the need to bear witness to Jesus Christ before the world. The

Jubilee year and describes the legacy of the Jubilee in terms of “the *contemplation of the face of Christ*. . . . ‘We wish to see Jesus’ (John 12:21) . . . Like those pilgrims of two thousand years ago, the men and women of our own day – often perhaps unconsciously – ask believers not only to ‘speak’ of Christ, but in a certain sense to ‘show’ him to them. And is it not the Church’s task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium?” (NMI 15–16, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html)

concluding paragraphs also raise the fundamental question about the vision and the criteria for unity.

The most fundamental convergence is found in the affirmation that unity among Christians is vital for fulfilling the Church's mission of proclaiming the good news of reconciliation in the Lord, and that this is a biblical mandate (cf. *TCTCV* §8). Unity is a gift from God which calls upon human responsibility to preserve it.

The Catholic Church, since the Second Vatican Council, and increasingly in its recent documents, has emphasized the importance of unity and the link between the unity of the Church and the mission of the Church to proclaim the gospel of salvation, as clearly stated by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (*EN*):

As evangelizers, we must offer Christ's faithful not the image of people divided and separated by unedifying quarrels, but the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church The division among Christians is a serious reality which impedes the very work of Christ.³³

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical on the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church *Ut unum sint*, fervently calls all Christians to be one,

33. *Evangelii nuntiandi* 77, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html

reminding us of the scandal of divisions among us, not only from the perspective of evangelization, but also from the more fundamental perspective of doxology: "In the verse of John's Gospel which is ecumenism's inspiration and guiding motif, that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21) – the phrase *that the world may believe* has been so strongly emphasized that at times we run the risk of forgetting that, in the mind of the evangelist, unity is above all for the glory of the Father" (*UUS* 98).

The Catholic Church appreciates the clear and honest way in which §§9 and 10 raise the question of visible unity and point to the difficulties that ecumenical reflection still has to face in order to reach a convergence in this area. *TCTCV* affirms: "Visible unity requires the churches to be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (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" (*TCTCV* §9). The document then presents the major ecclesiological positions held by the various Christian traditions (*TCTCV* §10).

From a Catholic perspective, mutual recognition is not sufficient to achieve full visible unity. This is why the affirmation that the mutual recognition of the churches may "depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry" (*TCTCV* §9) needs to be clarified ("developments" would have

been a more appropriate word). Catholics appreciate that churches have been called to change; however, from a Catholic perspective some things can be subject to change, while others cannot. Discernment here is extremely necessary so as to reflect on what change really is and to what extent it can take place. The Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* explicitly urges us “to undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform” (UR 4) in order to be faithful to Christ’s will and to be meaningful for the world. This was, in fact, the major concern for the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, as expressed by Pope John XXIII in his opening speech to the Council, *Gaudet mater ecclesia*.³⁴ He reminded the Conciliar Fathers that the Council had “not to be concerned only with antiquity” because “the Christian, catholic and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciences in the faithful” in “perfect conformity to the ancient doctrine,” but also “measured in the forms and proportions of a Magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.” It must be affirmed that the unchangeable deposit of faith should never be excluded from its historical formulation and expression. Similarly, in different local contexts there can exist different liturgical rites, disciplines, and forms of spirituality and Christian life that do not diminish the unity of the Church but rather reveal its complex beauty. Pope John XXIII, addressing the issue of Christian unity in his Encyclical *Ad Petri cathedram*, strongly

34. *Gaudet mater ecclesia*, <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>

affirmed: “The common saying, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors, must be recalled with approval: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.”³⁵ The Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* further specifies that: “All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth” (UR 4).

Regarding the different ecclesiological positions delineated in the document (*TCTCV* §10), the Catholic Church’s understanding is clearly expressed in the Conciliar Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure” (LG 8). Although the Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* reaffirms the Catholic conviction that only the Catholic Church is the “all-embracing means of salvation” (UR 3) – meaning that none of the essential ecclesial elements is missing in the Catholic Church³⁶ – it better qualifies the ecclesial value of the elements of truth and sanctification that can be found outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: “Some and even very many

35. *Ad Petri cathedram* 72, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_29061959_ad-petri.html

36. This is the sense of the expression “fullness of the elements of sanctification and truth” (UR 3) that, according to Catholic teaching, is found in the Catholic Church.

of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church . . . All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ” (*UR* 3).

Pope John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* significantly reaffirmed these teachings, emphasizing that those elements “constitute the objective basis of the communion, albeit imperfect, which exists between them and the Catholic Church. To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them” (*UUS* 11). “It is not that beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community there is an ecclesial vacuum. Many elements of great value (*eximia*), which in the Catholic Church are part of the fullness of the means of salvation and of the gifts of grace which make up the Church, are also found in the other Christian Communities” (*UUS* 13). These statements show that the Magisterium of the Catholic Church clearly recognizes that the visible boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church are not coterminous with the boundaries of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” Church as professed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

At the conclusion of chapter 1, the Faith and Order Commission addresses key questions: “How can we identify the Church which the Creed calls one, holy, catholic and apostolic? What is God’s will for the unity of this Church?” (*TCTCV* §10, italics).

These are fundamental questions that deserve ongoing reflection and discussion. *TCTCV* represents a great deal of shared insights about the

Church, as expressed with such concepts as *missio dei* and *koinonia*, which provide some important criteria for mutual recognition. On the other hand, however, *TCTCV* does not claim to give all the criteria for full visible unity; it calls us and invites us, building on the common shared elements, to move to more specific criteria that are necessary for full visible unity. Reaching agreement on the criteria for the mutual recognition of “full ecclesiality” would significantly advance our journey together towards visible unity. The Catholic Church strongly encourages the Faith and Order Commission to continue the discussion, in the conviction that the responses from the other Christian traditions to *TCTCV* will offer a valid help in fostering the necessary reflection.

Chapter 1 has shown that there is a great deal of agreement on the topic of God’s mission and the unity of the Church.

CHAPTER 2

The Church and the Triune God

A. Discerning God’s will for the Church

Certain important ecclesiological convictions on which many churches today are united are identified and highlighted in this section. These are based upon scripture, although some pertinent testimony from witnesses such as patristic writers or ecumenical councils is also cited. This is necessary and opportune in order to describe adequately the mystery of the Church as a plurality of ecclesiological perspectives that are compatible with unity, without denying the bounds of legitimate diversity.

The Church, as a reflection of the communion of the triune God, is called to manifest in this world the salvation and mercy of God made present in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Its mission is to make Christ known. Some New Testament texts use the term *mysterion* to designate both the salvific plan of Christ (Eph. 1:9; 3:4–6) and the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32; Col. 1:24–28). This section on “the mystery of the Church” has many parallels with *Lumen gentium* and other ecclesiological texts of Vatican II.

Welcome is the significant convergence here with *Dei verbum* (DV)³⁷ on the acknowledgement of the normative status of scripture and the “great importance” of the “living Tradition” of the Church. The Conciliar text states: “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God, as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit” (DV 9). Magisterial teaching on tradition offers something that is not offered in *TCTCV*: “Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.” This opening section of *TCTCV* also recalls Pope John Paul II’s widely appreciated formulation of the need

to study together “the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God” (*UUS* 79).

The following four sections, namely “The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*,” “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World,” “Communion in Unity and Diversity” and “Communion of Local Churches” emphasize that the Church is an effective means of communion with God and among human beings. This dovetails with *Lumen gentium*’s famous description of the Church as “a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people” (*LG* 1).

B. The Church of the triune God as *koinonia*

The initiative of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The first of these subdivisions affirms the initiative of God, the Father and the Word and the Holy Spirit, who generates the Church. The biblical notion of *koinonia* becomes central to the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the Church, although it would have been of more assistance had it been developed in a more extensive manner in the document. It reiterates *Lumen gentium*’s stress on the people of God as well as the vocation of the whole people of God to share the offices of Christ. The definition of the Church as “a community that hears and proclaims the word of God” (*TCTCV* §14) echoes the description given by the Second Vatican Council

37. *Dei verbum*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html

in the opening words of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei verbum*, “Hearing the word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently.”

Mary is seen as a model for all believers in her reception of the Word in faith and her openness to the work of the Spirit in her life (*TCTCV* §15). Such a consideration of Mary within the framework of God’s initiative in establishing the Church resonates well with the Second Vatican Council’s decision to include its Marian doctrine within an ecclesiological setting. Mary as a symbol and model for the Church and the individual Christian connects well with *Lumen gentium*, which presents Catholic Marian doctrine in Chapter VIII as a conclusion to its account of ecclesiology (cf. *LG* 63–64; ARCIC report on Mary;³⁸ Groupe des Dombes).³⁹ Furthermore, this reference to Mary recalls the 1990 study document of Faith and Order, entitled *Church and World: Unity and the Life of the Church in the World*, that highlights her role as recipient of the Word of God, as a contemplative and faithful disciple, a witness at the foot of the cross and a companion of the disciples at Pentecost.⁴⁰ All of these themes remain important to contemporary Catholic teaching about

Mary. Pope John Paul II writes: “If the mystery of the Word made flesh enables us to glimpse the mystery of the divine motherhood and if, in turn, contemplation of the Mother of God brings us to a more profound understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation, then the same must be said for the mystery of the Church and Mary’s role in the work of salvation.”⁴¹

Reference to the Holy Spirit is a key factor for the journey together towards a common goal of visible unity. If all the churches are faithful to the promptings of the Holy Spirit within their own communities, then those promptings will draw all Christians into unity in the fullness of time. At the Second Vatican Council, it was affirmed “under the action of the Holy Spirit, that Christ wills His people to increase, and He perfects His people’s fellowship in unity: in their confessing the one faith, celebrating divine worship in common, and keeping the fraternal harmony of the family of God” (*UR* 2). This pneumatological aspect is central because the Holy Spirit guides the whole unfolding of salvation history to its final recapitulation where God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28), an indivisible unity.

The prophetic, priestly and royal people of God

The threefold characterization of God’s people as prophetic, priestly, and royal is briefly stated and it is asserted that all members of the Church share in

38. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Consultation, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2004), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20050516_mary-grace-hope-christ_en.html

39. Groupe des Dombes, *Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints* (Paris: Bayard éd.-Centurion, 1999).

40. *Church and World: Unity and the Life of the Church in the World*, Faith and Order Paper No. 151 (1992), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/fait-and-order/vi-church-and-world/church-and-world>

41. *Redemptoris Mater* 30, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html

the corresponding functions. Vatican II also used this classic threefold distinction to describe the life and activities of all Christians as well as the functions of the ordained ministry. This triple function of the ministry is essential for the life and mission of the Church in the world. These three functions correspond to what chapter 3 will later identify as the essential elements of communion, that is faith, worship and service. Vatican II made this threefold account familiar to Catholics when it applied it to the activities of the people of God as a whole (*LG* 10–12), the hierarchy (*LG* 25–27), the laity (*LG* 34–36), and the presbyterate.⁴²

This section starts with a brief treatment of the relationship of the Church to Israel (§17), stating both the genuine newness of the new covenant, but also the decisive importance in God’s plan of salvation of the covenant with the people of Israel, to whom he will always remain faithful (cf. Rom. 11:11–36). This is fundamental. It is impossible to understand fully the nature of the Church without understanding her relationship to Israel, because this relationship is part of her very identity. *Nostra aetate* (*NA*) asserts that Christians discover their links to the “stock of Abraham” when they “[search] the mystery of the Church.”⁴³ As Pope John Paul II expressed it, Judaism “is not

‘extrinsic’ to us but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion.”⁴⁴

However, for this reason this relationship should have been explained more fully and more precisely. Indeed, Israel is the first to be called “assembly (*qahal-ekklesia*)” (Num. 20:4; Deut. 23:1ff.; Neh. 13:1; see also *LG* 9), “community” (Ex. 12:3.6; Lev. 4:13; 9:5) and, of course, “people of God” (Judg. 20:2; 2 Sam. 14:13). Israel is the first royal priesthood (Ex. 19:5–6). The Church is not the “messianic” or “new people of God” (*LG* 9) by replacing Israel, but by bringing together Jews and Gentiles, that is by being both *ecclesia ex circumcissione* and *ecclesia ex gentibus*. More specifically, the Church is the people in whom the Gentiles are made co-heirs (*sun-klèronoma*) to the promises of Israel (Eph. 3:6). The Church “draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree” (*NA* 4) onto which the Gentiles have been grafted (Rom. 11:16–21). In this movement, the first people of God maintains a specific status, since, according to the prophecies, the nations come to Zion (Is. 2:2–3; Jr. 16:19–21; Micah 4:1–4) and not vice-versa. This is why we do not simply pray for mankind to discover Christ but, as the Catholic Church expresses it during the Easter Vigil: “We pray that the whole world may become children of Abraham and inherit the dignity of Israel’s birthright.”⁴⁵

For this reason, the Church is called to be, still now and not only at its origin, in a

42. *Presbyterorum ordinis* 4–6, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html

43. *Nostra aetate* 4, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*) 839, https://www.vatican.va/archive/eng0015/_index.htm

44. Pope John Paul II, Address in the Roman Synagogue, 13 April 1986, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1986/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19860413_sinagoga-roma.html

45. *Daily Roman Missal*, 486; see also *CCC* 528.

living relationship with the Jewish people. Since it touches a dimension that is interior to the identity of the Church, this relationship is not to be considered strictly speaking as “inter-religious” but as “intra-familiar.”⁴⁶ One of the issues at stake is the full integrity of the unity of the people of God. The parting of the ways in the first centuries within the chosen people between the majority of Jews who did not believe in Jesus as Messiah and those who did, and then between Judaism and Christianity, is often considered to be the first wound to this unity and the source of all following divisions in the Church.⁴⁷ If this is the case, in a mysterious way, the full unity of the Church will not come about without healing the original wound, without reconciliation with the people of the old covenant.

A fuller vision of the people of God would give even more substance to what follows (§18): an emphasis on the responsibility of all believers, of all members of the people, to participate in the life and mission of the community, a description of the interrelation between those who are ordained and the other faithful and a reference to *BEM*'s explanation of the essential tasks of the ordained as “a ministry of word, sacrament and

46. See Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews (PCPCU), “*The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable*” (Rom. 11:29), §20, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostri-aetate_en.html

47. The idea originated in the writings of Nicholas Oehmen (“Le schisme dans le cadre de l’économie divine,” *Irenikon* 21 [1948], 6–31), Emmanuel Lanne (“Le schisme en Israël,” *Irenikon* 26 [1953], 227–237) and Paul Démann (“Israël et l’unité de l’Eglise,” *Cahiers sioniens* No. 1 [03/1953], 1–24).

oversight.” This resonates well with Vatican II, where the triad prophet-priest-king is a fundamental structuring principle of chapters III and IV of *Lumen gentium*.

The growing ecumenical agreement on the ministry is summarized with a welcome insistence that “the royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the Church, and not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives.” This was also emphasized in *Lumen gentium* (§10), which, while noting a difference in kind not in degree, in the two ways of sharing in Christ’s priesthood, also insisted on their complementarity. In the instruction *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests* in reference to *Lumen gentium* 10, we find the following:

The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood “though they differ essentially and not only in degree . . . are none the less ordered one to another; [since] each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.” Between both there is an effective unity since the Holy Spirit makes the Church one in communion, in service and in the outpouring of the diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts.⁴⁸

48. *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html

Body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit

Two biblical images of the Church as body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit are here well integrated. We appreciate how sacred scripture helps us to understand the Church and how this became a common heritage for Christians in the ancient Church. There is a strict relationship between Church and eucharist: “Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 23).⁴⁹ Taken together, §§13–22 lead to the conclusion that the Church is not simply the sum of believers but is, as the fruit of divine initiative, “both a divine and a human reality” (*TCTCV* §23).

We also appreciate how well this expression in *TCTCV* harmonizes with Vatican II’s *Lumen gentium* 8 on the church as a “complex reality.” This explains why it is suitable to think of the Church in sacramental terms (cf. *LG* 1). A similar rationale can be found in *Lumen gentium* 8: “As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (Eph. 4:16).”

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church

The following section, commenting on the four *notae ecclesiae* of the Nicene Constantinopolitan

Creed (one, holy, catholic and apostolic), sees them not only as gifts originating in God’s initiative, but also as tasks that believers have not always faithfully brought to realization. In faith, these are recognized as both the work of the Holy Trinity who makes the Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic and as qualities which Christ calls the Church to maintain and further realize in history.

In the apologetic appeal to reason, these characteristics can be presented as signs or “notes” showing the Church to have a divine origin and mission (cf. *CCC* 811–812). This paragraph ends with reference to “features” of the churches’ lives, which in fact are the shared “elements” of truth and sanctification that ground real but imperfect communion between the still divided churches.

We appreciate that “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” is an expression from the tradition from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that is embraced by all the churches. It has been part of the unfortunate story of Catholic theology that these marks have at times been used in an exclusive manner, as if pertaining to the Catholic Church alone. Conciliar teaching (cf. *LG* 15) as well as the post-conciliar Magisterium clearly recognize that these “notes” are present also in other churches. While *Dominus Iesus* (*DI*) was received with some tension, its fundamental idea was that these ecclesial notes are not entirely absent from other churches, but that they are fully present in the Catholic Church.⁵⁰ It states:

49. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 23, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html

50. *Dominus Iesus*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curial/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html

“In connection with the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the unicity of the Church founded by him must be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith. Just as there is one Christ, so there exists a single body of Christ, a single Bride of Christ.”⁵¹ We are grateful that *TCTCV* sees the essential marks of the Church as our common heritage.

The oneness of the Church comes from the will of Jesus (cf. *UR* 1) as expressed in the gospel (John 17:21). Current divisions within and between the churches stand in contrast to this oneness. This reminds us of the eschatological dimension so much present in our common ecumenical quest.

The holiness of the Church is said to proceed from God the Trinity’s holy gifts to it (Eph. 5:26–27). One sentence attributes sin to the lives of believers, thus seemingly suggesting that the Church itself is sinless. This recalls the Council which stated that it is “at once holy and always in need of being purified” (*LG* 8), needing “perennial reformation” (*UR* 6); its being without spot or wrinkle is to be seen as a goal rather than an already achieved reality (*UR* 4).

That the Church is catholic is described first in terms of the fullness of God’s gifts to it and to its destination to the whole world. A later statement that “catholicity . . . refers not simply to geographic extension but also to the manifold variety of local churches and their participation in the fullness of faith and life that unites them in one *koinonia*” (§31) might usefully have been

anticipated in §22. The latter description is very similar to the description of catholicity in *Lumen gentium* 13.

The Church is apostolic (§22) because its ground is the mission of the Son and his sending of those who preached the apostolic gospel that enkindles faith. This gospel needs specification as a definite message centred on Christ’s death and resurrection (Gal. 1:1–9, 3:1–5; 1 Cor. 15:1–8; kerygmatic proclamations in Acts), by which the Church is founded, unified as the *congregatio fidelium*, and built up as apostolic. The Church’s ministry does not cause faith and holiness, but does bring the message and its sacramental enactments to bear on believers’ lives. Ministers with the responsibility of oversight, to be treated below especially regarding their succession from the apostles (see analysis of *TCTCV* §§24 and 52), apply criteria found in scripture and Tradition to protect the authenticity of word and sacraments and so to serve continuity in the characteristic of apostolicity.⁵²

The last part of this section (§23) draws valuable conclusions from §§13 through 22 on the Church grounded in the triune God who endows the Church with the grace of salvation in which believers have communion. This corrects the model of the Church as a voluntary society built up by believers making their faith commitments. When §23 states, “Thus the Church is both a divine and a human reality,” this last sentence is

51. *DI* 16.

52. Cf. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity (1995–2006), “The Apostolicity of the Church,” §78 and J. Ratzinger, “The Ministerial Office and the Unity of the Church,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (1964), 42–57.

similar to the statement in *Lumen gentium* 8 that “the Church is a single complex reality that combines both human and divine elements.”

We also share the thought on continuity and change and the need to examine criteria for evaluating how change takes place. On the one hand, we hold and respect the unchanging nature of the deposit of faith. On the other hand, we believe that some things must change. It is through the *sensus fidelium*, the contribution of theologians and the decisive voice of the successors of the Apostles who offer guidance and leadership that the Church succeeds in maintaining identity in the midst of change. The special contribution of theologians is “to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another” (*GS* 62). This reminds us of what Vincent of Lerins explained on Development of Doctrine: “We must believe that which has been believed in the Church always, everywhere and by all.”⁵³ This leads us to differentiate between change that happens in a diachronic and in a synchronic manner: Catholics know what can change and what cannot.

Catholics are not afraid of change, as this is part of the life of the Church. They are aware too of the limits. They are open to the signs of the times; to the promptings of the Holy Spirit; to the guidance of the Petrine ministry in continuity as

53. *Commonitorium*, 2, 6, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm>

an office established in time and to discernment regarding “what the Spirit says to the churches” (*Rev.* 2:29). The gospel invites us to open our hearts to the Lord. “We know that God is the Lord of novelty and always comes to meet us with something new, there is no repetition, he is original in himself.”⁵⁴

Faith itself is subject to interpretation in the context of changing times and places. However, as *TCTCV* correctly states, “These interpretations must remain in continuity with the original witness and with its faithful explication throughout the ages” (§39). To preserve this unaltered continuity of the apostolic faith through history, the Catholic Church sometimes expresses it in defined dogmatic formulas.

Finally, even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions. In view of the above, it must be stated that the dogmatic formulas of the Church’s Magisterium were from the beginning suitable for communicating revealed truth, and that as they are they remain forever suitable for

54. Pope Francis, Homily at Santa Marta, 24 April 2018, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope-francis/mass-casa-santa-marta/2018-04/pope-francis-santa-marta-church-balance-motion.html>

communicating this truth to those who interpret them correctly.⁵⁵

The magisterial teaching of the Church is not created *ex nihilo*, but relies on the written Word of God along with sacred Tradition as on a permanent foundation. There is an inherent and indissoluble interaction between the Magisterium on the one hand and Tradition on the other. While the Magisterium has the responsibility to discern what is the authentic Tradition, it is also bound by Tradition in which the common faith of the People of God has been set forth. The doctrinal development in the Church must always be homogenous and congruent with respect to Tradition.

Here emerges an important theme for further dialogue: Christian communities differ in their understanding of how the divine initiative by the Holy Spirit relates to the human institutional structures and ministerial order of the Church (cf. §24).

C. The Church as sign and servant of God's design for the world

Three questions related to the nature of the Church as a communion are taken up here: may the Church be called a “sacrament” of such communion (§§25–27), how can legitimate diversity be differentiated from that diversity which damages communion (§§28–30), and how does the local

church maintain communion with other local churches throughout the whole world (§§31–32)?

Each of these sections registers some significant convergence. Most seem to agree that the Church is a means and servant in the hands of God to bring about communion, and that God is the one and only author of salvation. The Church is not for herself, but subordinate to her Lord. Similarly, most churches would acknowledge that scripture itself countenances and even supports a certain degree of diversity among local churches. Finally, most Christians, even those of communities which give primacy to the local congregation, would believe that part of the authenticity of the local community is to maintain communion with other local churches.

There are surprising parallels with the ecclesiological doctrine of Vatican II. For example, §25, reflecting on the fact that the Church is sign and servant of God's plan, acknowledges that God wills the salvation of all people and, therefore, that God's grace can touch the hearts of people who are not Christian in ways known to God alone. The Church rejects nothing of truth and goodness in other religions, yet “the mission of the Church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come to know and love Christ Jesus.” These statements are practically identical to similar ones found in *Lumen gentium*, *Ad gentes* and *Nostra aetate*. Nevertheless it is very helpful that this ecumenical statement identifies these disputed issues and invites further dialogue about them.

Paragraph 26 returns to this theme when it notes that some New Testament texts speak of

55. *Mysterium Ecclesiae* 5, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19730705_mysterium-ecclesiae_en.html

the Church in terms of “mystery,” which reflects “a spiritual, transcendent quality which cannot be grasped simply by looking at the visible appearances. The earthly and spiritual dimensions of the Church cannot be separated.”

For Catholic tradition, the use of the word sacrament for Church is related to the fact that the Latin *sacramentum* translates the word *mysterion* and Catholics want to emphasize the Church as mystery. In calling the church a “mystery,” Catholics treat it not as an eighth sacrament, but simply want to emphasize its effectiveness for salvation through the Church. *Lumen gentium* 1 does not say that the Church is a sacrament, but rather that the Church is like a sacrament (*veluti sacramentum*); however, they do not need to imply that the Church is a sacrament. Rather, they would suggest that the Church as a whole has a sacramental nature. The sacramental dimension could help in opening doors towards a sacramentality in rites that we Catholics call sacrament.

D. Communion in unity and diversity

It is helpful that the convergence text considers “legitimate diversity” in the life of communion as “a gift from the Lord.” This is clear in the emphasis that “unity must not be surrendered” (*TCTCV* §29). The discussion of “Communion in Unity and Diversity” in §§28–30 can easily be set in parallel with similar statements of Vatican II and post conciliar Magisterium. It is helpful to recall the words of the same Council: “Far from being an obstacle to the Church’s unity, a certain diversity of customs and observances only adds to her splendour and is of great help in carrying out her

mission, as has already been stated” (*UR* 16). We refer to an attitude of fostering a unity that does not obstruct diversity, and acknowledging and fostering a diversification that does not obstruct unity but rather enriches it. “Legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church’s unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission” (*UUS* 50). This legitimate diversity includes such aspects of the Church’s life as discipline, liturgical practices, theological exposition, and spiritual heritage (cf. *LG* 23d). The Catholic Church acknowledges that “the vision of the full communion to be sought is that of unity in legitimate diversity” (*UUS* 54), and that “our declared purpose is to re-establish together full unity in legitimate diversity” (*UUS* 57). This vision coincides with the convergence reached in *TCTCV*.

The text also helpfully repeats a point from the earlier draft in this regard: “A pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity is one of the important means given to the Church in aiding those with different gifts and perspectives to remain mutually accountable to each other” (*TCTCV* §29). Though the document does not identify the holders of such an office, it may safely be presumed that that is an essential part of the task of those who exercise *episkopé* in the Christian community (cf. *TCTCV* §54). Such an office is surely needed at the universal level of the Church’s life also, and it is worth noting that that is precisely how Catholics would understand the role of the Pope as universal primate. *Lumen gentium* shows how the bishop of Rome, while serving unity, also serves diversity: “Within the Church particular churches hold a rightful place; these churches retain

their own traditions, without in any way opposing the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly in charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity, but rather contribute toward it” (*LG* 13).

The italicized paragraph that precedes §31 is more precise than others, particularly when noting the lack of common criteria among the many various Christian bodies for distinguishing legitimate and illegitimate diversity as well as the lack of “mutually recognized structures” that are needed to use those criteria. This remains true and it probably holds true within those bodies as well as among them.

E. Communion of local churches

We very much appreciate that in the text the ecclesiology of communion is intimately bound to local churches. Their communion is “not an optional extra.” The text speaks of the “universal Church” as “the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world” (*TCTCV* §31). It is worth noting that that is clearly not the ultimate, eschatological meaning of the term, “universal Church,” as when the term is used at the end of *Lumen gentium* 2 to refer to the final gathering that will be established in heaven at the end of time.

Pope Francis offers an engaging explanation of the Church as *communio*:

Everyone can say: the Catholic Church is present in my parish, because the latter is part of the universal Church, it is also the fullness of

the gifts of Christ, faith, the Sacraments, the ministry. It is in communion with the bishop, with the Pope and is open to all, without distinctions. The Church isn’t only the shadow of our bell tower, but embraces a vastness of people, of peoples who profess the same faith, who are nourished by the same Eucharist, who are served by the same Pastors. We feel in communion with all the Churches, with all the small and large Catholic communities of the world!⁵⁶

The Church is a communion of wholes. In this sense, the whole Church of Jesus Christ is in the local church that celebrates the eucharist, proclaims the Word, confesses the apostolic faith, exercises the episcopal ministry, etc. The local church is the realization of the universal Church in a specific place (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). There exists a special relationship of “mutual interiority” between the local church and the universal Church because in every particular church the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.”⁵⁷ “For this reason, the universal Church cannot be conceived as the sum of the particular Churches, or as a federation of particular Churches. It is not the result of the communion of the Churches, but, in its essential

56. *Catechesis on the Creed*, General Audience, 9 October 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131009_udi-enza-generale.html

57. *Christus Dominus*, 11, http://w2.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html

mystery, it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular Church”⁵⁸ The text accurately notes that the various Christian traditions vary widely in how they interpret the term “local church,” which for some specifically means the community led by a bishop “as a successor of the apostles,” whereas for others it is either more local than that, or alternatively more regional. The all-important questions highlighted at the end of the chapter urge us to reflect again on the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations.

Catholics would present in this discussion the conviction that a single congregation or parish, while of major importance for Christian formation, worship, and further sacramental life, must be seen in a wider context, such as was set forth by Vatican II: “A diocese is a section (*portio*) of God’s people entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active.”⁵⁹

The key value of this understanding is that the bishop is sacramentally incorporated into the worldwide episcopal college headed by the Bishop

58. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communio in notio*. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion (28 May 1992), §9.

59. *Christus Dominus* 11.

of Rome. Pope John Paul II’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores gregis* (*PG*)⁶⁰ holds that “this is the source of the Bishop’s role of representing the Church entrusted to him and of governing it by the power needed for the exercise of the pastoral ministry sacramentally received (*munus pastorale*) as a sharing in the consecration and mission of Christ himself” (*PG* 43).

By a personal link, a particular church has a living connection with other churches in the entire Church. *TCTCV* avoids the two opposed mistakes commonly warned against in this discussion, that is, conceiving the local church as a mere administrative subdivision of the universal Church; or conceiving the “universal Church” as the result of a confederation of already existing local churches. Vatican II avoided these errors by stating that, on the one hand, individual churches are formed on the model of the entire Church and, on the other, that the universal Church exists in and out of the local churches (cf. *LG* 23).

CHAPTER 3:

The Church: Growing in Communion

A. Already but not yet

The “already but not yet” nature of the Church is the topic of this introduction. Catholic teaching finds an echo in this concept because the Church is perceived as an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom. The Church on earth,

60. *Pastores gregis* 43, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20031016_pastores-gregis.html

however, is not yet the full visible realization of the kingdom (*LG* 5, 8, 48).

Though the Church experiences “the already eschatological community that God wills,” nonetheless the historical context is that of ever-changing conditions in the world. Our Catholic faith, too, has recognized the profound and rapid changes in today’s world that have impacted even down to “the traditional local communities such as families, clans, tribes, villages, various groups and associations stemming from social contacts” (*GS* 6). These changing conditions have an effect on religion. Therefore, the great challenge, as Benedict XVI states, is that “the same faith might continue to be lived in the present day, that it might remain a living faith in a world of change.”⁶¹

Paragraphs 35 and 36 address the issue that some churches view the “Church as sinning,” while others see the Church as sinless. The Catholic Church teaches: “The Church . . . is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as ‘uniquely holy,’ loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her” (*LG* 39).

Because Christ is sinless, his Body, the Church is also sinless. Yet, individually, all are sinners. Christ came to expiate the sins of people. Thus, the Church, embracing “in its bosom sinners, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified; it always follows the way of penance and renewal” (*LG* 8).

61. Benedict XVI, Homily, St Peter’s Square, 11 October 2012.

B. Growing in the essential elements of communion: faith, sacraments, ministry

The Church growing in communion has three essential elements: “communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in sacramental life; and in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry” (*TCTCV* §37). As a primary concern of restoring unity among all Christians, the Catholic Church expresses a similar vision:

The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by *the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government* and who, combining together into various groups which are held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites. Between these there exists an admirable bond of union, such that the variety within the Church in no way harms its unity; rather it manifests it, for it is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or Rite should retain its traditions whole and entire and likewise that it should adapt its way of life to the different needs of time and place. (*UR* 2, emphasis added)⁶²

For the Catholic Church, “full visible communion of all Christians is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement”,⁶³ and she can confirm that great progress has been made towards

62. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 9.

63. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* §20

realizing this goal, thanks to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Faith

The first element of communion, faith, “is evoked by the Word of God, inspired by the grace of the Holy Spirit, attested in Scripture and transmitted through the living tradition of the Church” (*TCTCV* §38). The Catholic Church nuances this dynamic relationship of faith with scripture and tradition this way:

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church’s full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them. (*DV* 8)⁶⁴

As more churches are professing the Nicene Creed in their liturgies, the topic of tradition is

64. See also the good ecumenical work done in *Confessing One Faith, A Treasure in Earthen Vessels, Harvesting the Fruits*, and the bilateral reports. On the Scripture/Tradition relationship, the quote from Pope John Paul II cited earlier is a helpful formulation (*UUS* 79, 1).

increasingly being discussed amongst churches. The Catholic Church is encouraged by this development. In this regard, it is essential to point out the Catholic teaching in how tradition works: “It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others” (*DV* 10). This threefold process safeguards the deposit of faith with a reliable interpretation of the word of God. The Church also promotes a collaborative effort in examining and explaining scripture by scholars and teachers to nourish the minds and to strengthen the will of the people of God in the love of God (cf. *DV* 23).

Sacraments

The second element of growing communion, the sacraments, has undergone some significant points of convergence due in no small measure to *BEM*, although unresolved issues still remain. The Catholic Church has conveyed a “significant degree of approval” of *BEM*’s statements concerning baptism and the eucharist, while noting that these fall “short at certain points.”⁶⁵ Some of the important unresolved concerns include who may be baptized, the presence of Christ in the eucharist, the relation

65. Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM* Volume VI, Faith and Order Paper No. 144 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1988). Some of the issues that were lacking in *BEM* include “the necessity of baptism for salvation,” the avoidance of “the doctrine of original sin,” and the “image of seal” in baptism. The report also spoke of the need to “say unambiguously that the eucharist is in itself a real sacrifice,” and to express the word “transubstantiation” when describing the change of the elements.

of the eucharist to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and churches who do not practise baptism or eucharist. Thus it is important to keep these unresolved issues in mind when reading the document. Likewise it is important to keep in mind recent liturgical and patristic scholarship on the articulation of the concept of sacrifice and its relationship to the evolving understanding of its application to the eucharist.

The summary of statements concerning baptism demonstrates the substantial growth in convergences among churches. This is no trivial matter. In a desire to advance the growth in understanding of baptism, the Catholic Church invites consideration of aspects such as the indispensable link between Christ and his Body the Church in relation to baptism. Baptism is likened to a door by which people enter the Church (cf. *LG* 14). Additionally, there are other aspects such as the permanent character imprinted at baptism, its unrepeatable nature,⁶⁶ and how churches define the validity of baptism.⁶⁷ Along with these aspects could be added the topic of chrismation or confirmation. Progress has been achieved on the issue of the recognition of baptism, and the place of confirmation may be understood as a part of "a life-long process of growth into Christ."⁶⁸ Understanding Christian

66. Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC)* 845, http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_la.html

67. cf. *CIC* 841.

68. See *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, Faith and Order Paper No. 210 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2011) §55.

initiation as a process oriented towards fulfilment in the eucharist⁶⁹ may aid in considering further elucidation of the question of the sacramentality of chrismation.

The summary of statements on the eucharist shows great progress in mutual understanding amongst churches; the statement, "Christians receive the body and blood of Christ" (§42) is particularly profound. This statement simply begs for more explanation! As stated in the introductory paragraph, this was purposely made brief with the hopes of further discussion. A starting point for delineating the Catholic position is a discussion on sacramental theology.⁷⁰ In addition, there are practical questions: Who may or may not be admitted to Holy Communion and for what reasons? And what constitutes the valid elements for Holy Communion – wine or grape juice, wheat bread or other grains?

"Just as the confession of faith and baptism are inseparable from a life of service and witness, so too the eucharist demands reconciliation and sharing by all those who are brothers and sisters in the one family of God" (*TCTCV* §43). The Catholic Church also confirms this in its teaching: "Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the

69. Benedict XVI, 2007 Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* 16–17, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html

70. An intriguing example of growing convergence on the topic of sacraments can be found in *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between The Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006–2010*, 2013, §§72–130, http://johnrhudson.me.uk/christian/Word_of_God.pdf

breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another” (LG 7). This states well the transformation of life and service called for by eucharistic participation and transformation effected by the action of the Holy Spirit.

In growing towards convergence, dialogues between churches who espouse an “ordinance” perspective with regard to baptism and the eucharist and churches who espouse a sacramental approach are significant. Catholic conversations with Mennonites and Baptists have provided a platform for mutually affirming both the “instrumental” and “expressive” dimensions in the sacrament/ordinance. An example of this convergence is expressed in dialogues between Catholics and Baptists as follows:

The Latin word *sacramentum* translates the Greek word *mysterion*, which refers to God’s acts in history for the salvation of the world, especially the incarnation, death, and resurrection of his Son (cf. Col. 2:2–3). *Sacramentum* was already used in Roman times with the secular meaning of a soldier’s pledge of allegiance. In their theological meaning, both terms (*mysterion* and *sacramentum*) have a complementary sense; they express at the same time the action of God (the “mystery” of God’s saving work) and the active and lively human response to that divine salvific act in personal commitment and freedom (the “pledge” of faith). The term “ordinance,” which most Baptists prefer to “sacrament,” stresses institution by the command of Christ.

However, this term *can* indicate both the action of God and the necessity of faith, as does “sacrament.”⁷¹

It is simply remarkable to witness the considerable agreement that has occurred with regard to the mutual understanding of sacrament and ordinance. However, this sense may be called into question by the addition of the italicized passage that seems to imply that some groups do not adhere with conviction to the profound doctrines just set forth on baptism and the eucharist.

Ministry within the Church

Ordained ministry

The third element of communion, ministry, begins with a reference to ordained ministers who “may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments.” Unlike previous documents which began with the ministry of all the baptized, this document begins with the ordained ministry.⁷² The Catholic perspective

71. *Word of God in the Life of the Church*, §78. See also §75: “As the Baptists in this conversation have talked together, they have thus come to think that there is not an absolute difference, but a kind of overlapping of meaning between ‘sacrament’ and ‘ordinance.’ In fact, while most Baptists today prefer to speak of these acts of worship as ‘ordinances’ some of the confessions and writings of the early Baptists employed the language of ‘sacrament’.”

72. See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 16-17; *Nature and Purpose of the Church*. Faith and Order Paper No. 181 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998), §§81–84; *Nature and Mission of the Church*. Faith and Order

would place more emphasis on the *interrelatedness* of the roles of the ordained and the laity in building up the whole Body of Christ: “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ” (LG 10).

The italicized paragraph following §45 notes there are serious issues that still remain concerning the priesthood of the ordained. What is properly needed is further discussion on the understanding of a theology of priesthood which is rooted in a theology of baptism as distinguished from a theology of *diakonia* or service that is related to the question of ministry.

The life of the church needs to be ordered, and historically it developed into a threefold pattern of *episkopos-presbyteros-diakonos*. The Catholic Church teaches that “the divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity (*ab antiquo*) have been called bishops, priests and deacons” (LG 28). We can, therefore, say that the ordained ministry is of divine origin, but its form evolved in order to safeguard the gospel project and its survival in the world in which the Christian faith was growing, thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We can likewise agree that the ministry is traced back directly to Jesus, the preacher, who then becomes Jesus the preached (either by

apostles, prophets and teachers, or by the local ministry of bishops, deacons, and presbyters, these being a later gift of the Spirit that gives shape to the Church).

While churches agree on the necessity and importance of some sort of formal structure of ministry, a number of churches do not agree on the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon. The Catholic Church does affirm the hierarchical order of the threefold ministry. The Church sees an ordered structure as a reality beginning with our Lord:

That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world, since the Gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. And for this reason the apostles, appointed as rulers in this society, took care to appoint successors. For they not only had helpers in their ministry, but also, in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their death, they passed on to their immediate co-operators, as it were, in the form of a testament, the duty of confirming and finishing the work begun by themselves, recommending to them that they attend to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit placed them to shepherd the Church of God. (LG 20)

Also, the Catholic Church can give an enthusiastic endorsement of the conclusion of §47 “that the threefold ministry ‘may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.’” Moreover, *TCTCV* takes

Paper No. 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), §§82–85.

a step with which Catholics and others would also agree. Paragraph 47 recalls that *BEM* (§22) only affirmed that the threefold ministry “may serve as an expression of the unity we seek.” The italicized text that follows §47 offers a welcome challenge to go further and to face the issue more directly: “*Given the signs of growing agreement about the place of ordained ministry in the Church, we are led to ask if the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills.*” *TCTCV* therefore keeps this issue before the churches in a forceful way.

The threefold ministry

The gift of authority in the ministry of the Church

Since all authority in the Church comes from Christ as Lord and head, the successors in the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*) exercise authority (*exousia* – power, delegated authority) in gospel proclamation, in celebration of the sacraments and in pastoral guidance. Pope John Paul II describes the Catholic perspective on the ministry of *episkopé* thus: “This service of unity, rooted in the action of divine mercy, is entrusted within the College of Bishops to one among those who have received from the Spirit the task, not of exercising power over the people – as the rulers of the Gentiles and their great men do (cf. Matt. 20:25; Mark 10:42) – but of leading them towards peaceful pastures” (*USS* 94).

The distinctive temperament of authority in the Church is fashioned in Christ who humbled himself for our redemption. The Catholic Church teaches that the exercise of authority by

the ordained ministry must be characterized by service (*diakonia*), love (*agape*) and communion (*koinonia*) as modelled in Christ himself (cf. John 13:1–7). In teaching, for which Christ promised the Spirit to guide into all truth (John 16:13), church authority presents truth and guidance for acceptance as and when circumstances call for this.

The multifaceted aspects of authority in the Church must be distinguished from mere power but instead understood as in a life of holiness in the Triune God. The Second Vatican Council in a similar way asserts:

Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use *only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness*, remembering that he who is greater should become as the lesser and he who is the chief become as the servant. (*LG* 27, emphasis added)

Catholics can concur with other sources of authority in the Church as including sacred scripture, Tradition, worship, the councils and synods, and the lives of the saints. However, an authority that is missing, but essential for Catholics, is the Magisterium of the Church (*DV* 10). The lives of Christian martyrs are another significant source of authority for all Christians, as Pope John Paul II notes: “The lives of Christian martyrs cut across all Christian Communities” (*UUS* 83). Pope Francis has referred to “this ecumenism which is giving us

strength, the ecumenism of blood. The martyrs belong to all Christians.⁷³

On the “certain kind of authority” which may be ascribed to agreed statements of ecumenical dialogue commissions (§50, final lines), the Catholic Church remains reserved, if only because of the massive production of such statements.⁷⁴ A sign of this reservation is the term “Study Document” in the subtitle of the Lutheran-Catholic text, *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2006), expressing the long-assumed qualification of such statements.⁷⁵ In contrast, the Lutheran-Catholic-Methodist *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999, 2006) clearly has authority for Catholics by reason of its official reception by the Catholic Church. The other dialogue statements remain for Catholics significant and stimulating works of theology crafted amid collaboration in the special circumstances of ecumenical service. They are not yet final words on their topics, but remain to be officially assessed by Catholic authorities for their coherence with Catholic faith and doctrine.

The Catholic Church encourages the process of reception of the results already achieved:

The whole process is followed and encouraged by the bishops and the Holy See. The

73. Pope Francis, Address to the Moderator and Representatives of the Church of Scotland, Monday, 16 February 2015.

74. Volumes 1–4 of *Growth in Agreement* (1984, 2000, 2007, 2015) offer 162 dialogue statements, of which one-half came from commissions with Catholic members.

75. *The Apostolicity of the Church*, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2019/documents/lwf_apostolicity_of_the_church_complete_book_english.pdf

Church’s teaching authority is responsible for expressing a definitive judgment. In all this, it will be of great help methodologically to keep carefully in mind the *distinction between the deposit of faith and the formulation* in which it is expressed, as Pope John XXIII recommended in his opening address at the Second Vatican Council.⁷⁶ (*UUS* 81, emphasis added)

The exercise of authority in the Church is shared by the entire people of God. The Catholic Church concurs with this based on the teaching that “the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues” (*LG* 12). Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* says, “The Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church” (*EG* 130).

Authority in the Church and its exercise

The ministry of oversight (episkopé)

The diversity of charisms in the Church needs co-ordination through the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*). The Catholic Church sees this exercised through the order of bishops. This is because “it is the duty of all bishops to promote and to safeguard the unity of faith and the discipline common to the whole Church” (*LG* 23). The bishops, as successors of the apostles and vicars of Christ, are to be committed pastors of their flocks in a manner of *diakonia* (cf. *LG* 24). They are to govern “by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power” (*LG* 27). The

76. Cf. *Gaudet mater ecclesia* 54 (1962), 792.

Catholic Church sees much advancement from the consensus statements of *BEM* but still needs to affirm the unique role of the head of the college of bishops in determining the truth of teaching and the “strengthening of his brothers” (Luke 22:32) in oversight concerning the whole church (cf. *DV* 7 and *LG* 18–22). While the oversight “needs to be exercised in personal, collegial, and communal ways,” as Faith and Order has declared especially in *BEM* (Ministry §26), Catholics have before them the example of Vatican II’s process of finalizing its Dogmatic Constitutions and other Decrees. Open discussion had its place, but the overriding aim was consensus over the truth of the teaching, along with the role of the head of the college. However, it needs to be underlined that it is not consensus that establishes the truth, but the truth that makes consensus possible. The Church is not simply a consensual community, but it lives out of the unity of truth. The truth of faith is not “produced” by discussion and consensus, but discussion and consensus are a service to the truth that God has revealed to the Church.

The quality of the ministry of oversight is manifested in synodality or conciliarity. This quality is attuned to the Catholic Church’s manner of addressing ecclesial, doctrinal and moral issues through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This practice involves the entire people of God (lay and ordained) at different levels. This is evident in the formation of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and other Synodal fruits like the African Synod, the Asian Synod, etc. According to Pope John Paul II, “Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path *towards human self-realization*, the

self-realization both of *each individual and of every human community*” (*UUS* 28, emphasis in original). The Catholic Church considers some doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irreformable expressions of the faith. Moreover, these normative teachings may be presented in a different way while preserving the substance of their truth.

The Catholic Church’s growing experience of synodality in practice at the local, regional and universal level of church life and pastoral action may be seen as an instance when the Church must teach together, celebrate together and decide together to maintain the unity of the faith.

Regarding the positions presented in the italicized passage after §53, the Catholic Church considers some doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irreformable expressions of the faith. At the same time, following Pope John XXIII’s distinction, “The substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another,”⁷⁷ it holds that normative teachings have a substance which can be presented in different ways.

The authority of ecumenical councils

In important decisions and councils, “there is need for someone to summon and preside over the gathering” (*TCTCV* §54), as seen throughout Church history. Particularly, in the Catholic Church, “The supreme power in the universal Church, which this college enjoys, is exercised in a solemn way in an ecumenical council. A council is

77. *Gaudet mater ecclesia*.

never ecumenical unless it is confirmed or at least accepted as such by the successor of Peter; and it is the prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to convoke these councils, to preside over them and to confirm them” (LG 22). Papal primacy or Petrine primacy or, at least, Petrine ministry is understood as the continuation of the role of Christ among the people of God. The link between the Bishop of Rome and the bishops is essential:

The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful. The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, which are fashioned after the model of the universal Church; in and from these churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason the individual bishops represent each his own church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity. (LG 23)

The Catholic Church would also note that the duty of a primate is to strengthen the colleagues in oversight (cf. Luke 22:32) while respecting local churches’ integrity. The inclusion of Canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons is especially helpful since the Canon looks to the observance of its rule as contributing to all giving glory to God.

In light of the fact that churches outside the Catholic Church do not share the same doctrinal view on primacy, Pope John Paul II made the bold invitation to theologians and leaders to “enter into

patient and fraternal dialogue” (UUS 96) with him on the topic of personal primatial ministry. With firm commitment to bilateral and multilateral dialogues, the Catholic Church must consider doctrinal statements such as this:

But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head. The pope’s power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact. In virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power. (LG 22)

Papal authority must be seen, as Pope John Paul II rightly states, as a ministry of *servus servorum Dei* (UUS 88). Therefore, the interpretation of the exercise and limit of authority of the Petrine ministry is obviously the point of divergence. An elucidation becomes an indispensable step towards a common understanding of the necessary ministry of Christian unity in the Universal Church, how it is to be carried out and by whom.

Much work still needs to be done in dialogue with this pertinent issue of the Petrine ministry. Catholics hold in tension a deep commitment to sacred doctrine handed down to us and, on the other hand, an openness to growing deeper in the faith. Thus, we state:

The Catholic Church, both in her praxis and in her solemn documents, holds that the

communion of the particular Churches with the Church of Rome, and of their Bishops with the Bishop of Rome, is – in God’s plan – an essential requisite of full and visible communion. (*UUS* 97)

The topic obviously calls for much further dialogue. Currently there is no agreement among Christians that a universal ministry of primacy is necessary or even desirable. At the same time, several bilateral dialogues have acknowledged the value of such a ministry. All would do well to take the approach of *TCTCV* in treating it as a consideration following upon the topics of *episkopé* and synodality/conciliarity. Perhaps recalling and/or observing the pastoral and ecumenical outreach seen in each of the Vatican II popes from John XXIII to Francis, and the current pontiffs, promotion of “a synodal church” might offer an illustration of the pastoral character of a universal ministry of unity.

We can also say, “Indeed, the Church is not a reality closed in on herself. Rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavour . . .” (*UUS* 5). Therefore, a commitment to the deposit of faith is not antithetical to frank and candid conversations with other churches in coming to understand the great depths of the faith given to all of us together.

CHAPTER 4:

The Church: In and For the World

The underlying tone of the whole of chapter 4 is characterized by a positive approach towards the world in which the Church finds itself and to

which it is called to proclaim the kingdom of God as the final end. This approach, in defining God’s plan for creation, echoes that which has characterized the Catholic Church at least since the pontificate of John XXIII. In particular, one can see this outlook mirrored in the opening address of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudet mater ecclesia*, in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* on “The Church in the Modern World,” and in the more recent apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis on “The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World.” All three of these documents, not coincidentally, already have in their titles an explicit reference to *gaudium*, a joy that, in tracing its origin to God himself, who “so loved the world” (John 3:16), is not overwhelmed by the “problems and tragedies” that mark our world and that “cry out for the compassionate engagement of Christians” (cf. *TCTCV* §64).

A. God’s plan for creation: the kingdom

If the affirmation of *TCTCV* that “the Church is called by Christ in the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the Father’s reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation” may seem to lead too readily to the consequence that “a constitutive aspect of evangelization is the promotion of justice and peace” (*TCTCV* §59), it should be borne in mind that the intention of the fourth chapter was not to restrict the mission of the Church to social activism. As is abundantly clear from the convergence text as a whole, the Church’s mission is holistic and multidimensional, including a necessary balance between the aspects of *diakonia* (service), *martyria* (witness), and *leitourgia* (worship or liturgy).

A Catholic comment on the first section of this chapter, which places Jesus' message about the kingdom as the framework for Christian social involvement, would emphasize that the reality of the Church is profoundly related to Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom: "The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in its very foundation. The Lord Jesus set it on its course by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God, which, for centuries, had been promised in the Scriptures: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand'" (LG 5). The Second Vatican Council adds that the Church, "equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom" (LG 5).

When *Lumen gentium* speaks of the Church as the "seed" and "beginning" of the Kingdom, it intends to express the subtle relation between the two, to express their simultaneous unity and difference. As the International Theological Commission of the Catholic Church has noted, given a sufficiently careful explanation of the terms "sacrament" and "kingdom," the Church may be called a "sacrament of the Kingdom": "The expression's aim is to relate, on the one hand, the Kingdom, understood in the plenary sense of its final realization, with, on the other hand, the Church in its 'wayfaring' aspect."⁷⁸

In delineating an "ecumenical response to religious pluralism," *TCTCV* §60 calls to mind the continuing and significant difference in positions among the churches, citing correctly the Catholic position in this regard as one among other options. That Catholic view is expressed in part in *Gaudium et spes* 22: "For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery." In consequence, Vatican II went on to state that "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (NA 2). Given that the duty of "the Church's preaching [is] to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's allembreing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows" (NA 4), we could therefore ask whether the variety of different approaches to the question of religious pluralism that characterizes our era might not, instead of reflecting mutually exclusive views and thus a cause of division among the churches, amount to a diversity that is not only legitimate but also evangelically fruitful.

However, the path towards a more positive approach to interreligious dialogue – undertaken

78. "Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican

Council," in *International Theological Commission, Vol 1: Texts and Documents, 1969–1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 303.

for some decades now by different ecumenical bodies – is recalled in *TCTCV* as an unavoidable issue for any Christian confession, “inviting others to the fullness of life in Christian expression of respectful love” (*TCTCV* §60). As stated by Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* 14, quoting Pope Benedict XVI: “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction.”

Nevertheless, we feel that, as Catholics, it remains very important to reaffirm clearly our faith in Christ as the unique Saviour of the world. During the Jubilee Year 2000, this was done by the declaration *Dominus Jesus*, which pointed out that because of the

‘unique and special relationship’ which the Church has with the kingdom of God among men – which in substance is the universal kingdom of Christ the Saviour – it is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God.⁷⁹

Such a rejection of interreligious relativism in no way contradicts the Catholic teaching that God “does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential

expression, even when they contain ‘gaps, insufficiencies and errors.’”⁸⁰

B. The moral challenge of the gospel

With regard to this section, it is significant that *TCTCV* places it within the perspective of the *sequela Christi* and that this discipleship is understood primarily as a call to Christians “to repent of their sins, to forgive others and to lead sacrificial lives of service” (§61).

If “the ethics of Christians as disciples are rooted in God, the creator and revealer” (*TCTCV* §62), they are also, and not least so, in Jesus Christ our redeemer and saviour. Therefore, both the teaching, attitude, and “lifestyle” of Jesus, along with his behaviour towards the men and women he encountered during his earthly ministry, must guide the ethical discernment of Christians. A more faithful *imitatio Christi* in its tangible manifestation of outreach to human sinners is called for, together with the due reaffirmation of unchanging moral principles and a pastoral approach of compassion and mercy even towards divisive and diverse moral options, in such a way as to be sensitive to the suffering of individuals and of local communities.

Undoubtedly, due to the very involvement of the Church in different societies and cultures, the sphere of ethical opinions is revealing itself to be potentially and often actually divisive among the churches. This is so not only with regard to principles, given that some opinions are held by some churches not to be “in harmony with the Gospel,” but also with regard even to agreeing

79. *DI* §21.

80. *Redemptoris missio* 55

whether “moral questions are . . . of their nature ‘churchdividing’” (*TCTCV* §63). Thanks to the extensive ecumenical journey that has already been undertaken, churches realize “that what one does affects the life of others” and consequently they are “accountable to each other with respect to their ethical reflections and decisions” (*TCTCV* §62). The mutual recognition of baptism should encourage the recognition of the demanding search for fidelity to the gospel that gives life to every Church.⁸¹

Regarding the question of the potential for moral teachings to be of such seriousness that they could justify division, it must be asserted that, according to Catholic teaching, faith possesses a serious moral imperative: “It gives rise to and calls for a consistent life commitment; it entails and brings to perfection the acceptance and observance of God’s commandments.”⁸² Jesus Christ,

81. In this sense, the path of reflection undertaken by ARCIC III could offer insight into practices aimed at a convergence in undertaking an ethical discernment in different spheres. In fact, after drafting a common text about the relation between the local, regional, and universal expressions of the Church, this bilateral dialogue has now undertaken the second stage of its mandate which concerns the precise question of “how in communion the local and universal Church come to discern right ethical teaching.” Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission III, “Communique from the Meeting of ARCIC III at Bose (May 17-27, 2011), https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/105248/ARCIC_III_Bose_2011.pdf. See also Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission III, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church – Local, Regional, Universal*, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/comunione-anglicana/dialogo/arcic-iii/arcic-iii---documents/2018-walking-together-on-the-way.html>

82. *Veritatis splendour* (*VS*) 89, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html

“the way, and the truth and the life” (John 14:6), provides the ultimate answer to the religious and moral questions of human beings. The gospel story about the young man who asked Jesus, “what must I do to have eternal life?” (Matt. 19:16) implies that moral behaviour is so important that it is decisive for arriving at the happiness that God intends to bestow upon human beings. Thus, for Catholic doctrine, unity in those moral teachings that are decisive for eternal life is an essential aspect of the unity of the Church. Of course, moral teaching can and even must develop over the course of time, according to new insights and new possibilities demanding moral decision-making. But there is also a certain continuity of the Christian moral imperative, which extends to all times and places, based upon the laws inherent in the way that God has created human beings and, especially, in light of revelation. As Pope John Paul II’s encyclical on the importance of the teachings of the Magisterium concerning moral questions has affirmed:

People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil. Christ is the Teacher, the Risen One who has life in himself and who is always present in his Church and in the world. It is he who opens up to the faithful the book of the Scriptures and, by fully revealing the Father’s will, teaches the truth about moral action (*VS* 8).

To serve the unity of the Church in the area of moral doctrine and practice, Christ chose the apostles and entrusted to them a special role in promoting and preserving all that He had taught them (cf. Matt. 28:19–20). We believe that this task continues in the ministry of their successors in the college of bishops (cf. *VS* 27). The encyclical letter on the “Gospel of Life” is an example of how official Catholic teaching exercises its task of moral guidance concerning contemporary questions such as abortion and euthanasia.⁸³ Clearly, according to Catholic doctrine, some differences in moral teaching are simply not able to be reconciled with the realization of full communion for which the ecumenical movement strives.

C. The Church in society

The churches’ presence and action in society and their passion “for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ” (*TCTCV* §64). This requires the responsibility and daily commitment of the churches to defend human life and dignity within the context of the proclamation of the “*diakonia* of Christ,” in his self-offering to death, even to death on a cross, an example left to his disciples to follow (cf. 1 Pet. 2:20). Christian *diakonia* is therefore not more or less reducible to philanthropy or to a praiseworthy standard of ethical humanism, but is an anticipation of the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13). This

83. *Evangelium vitae* (1995), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html

verse, along with others, constitutes an eschatological proclamation of that fullness of life awaited by all humanity and all creation (cf. Rev. 21:1; Rom. 8:19).

On the precise question of the relation of the Catholic Church to civil society, clearly that relation has taken various forms not only throughout the ages but also in different parts of the world in any given age, even today. We do not consider such variety as something to lament but rather as an expression of the important exercise of the Church’s vocation to engage in a positive way with culture, government, and social systems, to be salt of the earth and light of the world, within the variety of possibilities that history offers. The temptation for those in both political and religious power to dominate and determine the laws and customs of a particular society in an exaggerated, unilateral, and exclusive way has often led to regrettable consequences on one side or the other. In recent times, approximately from about the time of the social doctrine of Pope Leo XIII in the late 19th century (*Rerum novarum*) and continuing into the present, Catholics have been encouraged by their pastors to engage fully in political and social activities in order to promote the values of the kingdom and respect for the human person, protecting minorities both in countries where Christians are in the majority and in those where they are not. A new landmark in this process occurred in Vatican II’s declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis humanae* (*DH*), which affirms:

All nations are coming into even closer unity.
Men of different cultures and religions are

being brought together in closer relationships. There is a growing consciousness of the personal responsibility that every man has. All this is evident. Consequently, in order that relationships of peace and harmony be established and maintained within the whole of mankind, it is necessary that religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society.⁸⁴ (*DH* 15).

Unfortunately, this has not always been observed, as *TCTCV* §65 has affirmed, “The witness (*martyria*) of the Church will entail, for both individuals and for the community, the way of the cross, even to the point of martyrdom (cf. Matt. 10:16–33).”

The message of witness until the shedding of blood of so many sisters and brothers in faith, independently of the origin of their Christian confession, should also constitute a validating aspect of ethical discernment: the sufferings borne for Christ are themselves a powerful call to the radical demands of the gospel.

The encyclical *Ut unum sint* of Pope John Paul II affirms that all the churches

have martyrs for the Christian faith. Despite the tragedy of our divisions, these brothers and

sisters have preserved an attachment to Christ and to the Father so radical and absolute as to lead even to the shedding of blood. . . . In a theocentric vision, we Christians already have a common *martyrology*. This also includes the martyrs of our own century, more numerous than one might think, and it shows how, at a profound level, God preserves communion among the baptized in the supreme demand of faith, manifested in the sacrifice of life itself. . . . this communion is already perfect in what we all consider the highest point of the life of grace, *martyria* unto death, the truest communion possible with Christ who shed his Blood, and by that sacrifice brings near those who once were far off (cf. Eph. 2:13).⁸⁵

This “ecumenism of blood,” so often cited by Pope Francis, has been acknowledged in the last few decades also in meaningful moments within ecumenical liturgical celebrations. One need only mention the memory of the martyrs of the 20th century at the Colosseum during the Jubilee Year 2000, or the prayer in April 2017 for the Coptic martyrs in which Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other bishops and patriarchs of the Middle East joined Pope Tawadros II to pray in the church in front of the Cathedral of Saint Mark in Cairo.

Shared martyrdom is thus an appeal for the visible unity of Christians, a call that paradoxically reaches the churches from the very persecutors of the Christian faith (cf. Acts 8:1b–4). With the

84. *Dignitatis humanae* 15, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html

85. *UUS* 83–84

suffering inflicted on our sisters and brothers in faith, these persecutors demonstrate, despite their own intentions, that Christians are “already one” in shedding blood for their one Lord. Pope Francis never tires of insisting on this fact, as in his address to members of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships (31 October 2014): “For persecutors, we are not divided, we are not Lutherans, Orthodox, Evangelicals, Catholics. . . . No! We are one in their eyes! For persecutors we are Christians! They are not interested in anything else. This is the ecumenism of blood that we experience today.” Similarly, he stated to members of the Charismatic Renewal: “If the enemy unites us in death, who are we to be divided in life?” (3 July 2015). The underlying idea is the same: Martyrs of different traditions, who give their witness until the shedding of blood, are opposed and then killed simply for being Christians who seek to live according to the gospel.

Finally, chapter 4 is the place where *TCTCV* deals most explicitly with the Church’s response to the sufferings of human beings and the tragedies that affect them in so many ways throughout the world today. We appreciate very much the material about this topic in this chapter. It harmonizes well with the convictions and practice that has been an important part of Catholic life, both at the global level and regionally and locally. In 2016, as part of the reform of the Vatican curial structure, the Pope unified various offices that had previously been devoted to promoting the well-being and development of the human person in separation from

one another. The document establishing this new unified structure included the following rationale:

In all her being and actions, the Church is called to promote the integral development of the human person in the light of the Gospel. This development takes place by attending to the inestimable goods of justice, peace, and the care of creation. The Successor of the Apostle Peter, in his work of affirming these values, is continuously adapting the institutions which collaborate with him, so that they may better meet the needs of the men and women whom they are called to serve. . . . This Dicastery will be competent particularly in issues regarding migrants, those in need, the sick, the excluded and marginalized, the imprisoned and the unemployed, as well as victims of armed conflict, natural disasters, and all forms of slavery and torture.⁸⁶

The voluminous size (583 numbered paragraphs with 1232 footnotes) of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published in 2004, suggests that, for Catholic sensibilities, the main problem with this fourth chapter is not its content but rather that it is too brief.⁸⁷ Perhaps the chapter can also be criticized for the fact that it does not specifically relate Christian social

86. Pope Francis, *Humanam progressionem*, <http://www.humandevolution.va/en/il-dicastero/motu-proprio.html>

87. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

commitment to the liturgy, especially to the celebration of the eucharist, although that relation is treated in the beautiful paragraphs which make up the conclusion to *TCTCV* (§§67–69). The relation between the eucharist and concern for those who are suffering has been well expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum caritatis*:

The food of truth demands that we denounce inhumane situations in which people starve to death because of injustice and exploitation, and it gives us renewed strength and courage to work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love. From the beginning, Christians were concerned to share their goods (cf. Acts 4:32) and to help the poor (cf. Rom. 15:26). The alms collected in our liturgical assemblies are an eloquent reminder of this, and they are also necessary for meeting today's needs. The Church's charitable institutions, especially *Caritas*, carry out at various levels the important work of assisting the needy, especially the poorest. Inspired by the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity, they become a concrete expression of that charity; they are to be praised and encouraged for their commitment to solidarity in our world.⁸⁸

Another issue missing from *TCTCV*'s discussion of the responsibility to care for those who suffer is the frank admission that currently divided Christian communities do not always agree about the proper, morally acceptable way of responding to

88. *Sacramentum caritatis* 90.

social questions. For example, Catholic participation with the WCC in a program entitled Sodepax (standing for Society, Development, Peace) proved to be unsustainable because of disagreements on questions such as that of over-population and the moral means to address it, if and when it is verified as a genuine problem. What level of discernment needs to enter into the Church's promotion of the well-being of the human person? How is ecclesial social doctrine at the global level which proposes principles for the guidance of the whole Church to be applied in specific local situations? These are important issues that *TCTCV* did not take into consideration.

Chapter 4 begins and ends with forceful statements concerning the need for the Church to serve the dignity, well-being, and happiness of human beings. In this it should be applauded and praised. As such, it resonates well not only with the strong emphasis of recent Catholic theological anthropology but with an ever-recurring theme of Catholic magisterial teaching, perhaps most succinctly expressed by Pope John Paul II's *Redemptor hominis* when he taught that "Man is the way of the Church."⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

The Conclusion of the document (*TCTCV* §§67–69) offers a very positive and fitting synthesis of the essentials of the active and transforming presence of the Church in contemporary society. It

89. *Redemptor hominis*, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html

also gives a good pneumatological and eschatological perspective for taking ecumenism forward in the world we live in today. It emphasizes the fact that ecclesial *koinonia* finds its concretization in unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service to the world. It may be noted that the Fathers of the Church both in the East and the West insisted on the fact that these different dimensions of the Church's *koinonia* are inextricably intertwined. "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable."⁹⁰ The *martyria*, *leitourgia* and *diakonia* describe different aspects of the Church's presence in the world. As they celebrate the sacraments, Christians are personally and socially transformed through the effects of sacramental grace and are thus encouraged to strengthen the bonds of communion which unite them, to offer wholehearted service to their brethren and, in so doing, to bear witness in contemporary society.

The presentation of the Christian liturgy as a living experience which truly animates the daily life of those participating could have been developed further not only in the Conclusion but also throughout the text of the whole document. The Conclusion rightly highlights that we already share a deep degree of *koinonia* and invites the churches

90. *Deus caritas est* 25a, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html

to meet the challenge of finding more concrete ways to give expression to this real although still incomplete unity. It is hoped that readers and in particular church leaders on various levels of the Church's life will not dismiss this exhortation as "homiletical," but will find themselves inspired for action after giving these paragraphs serious and prayerful consideration. Uplifting aspirations are much needed in the demanding project of promoting the unity of Christians.

QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The Faith and Order Commission of the WCC presents *TCTCV* as a convergence text, and it is such in many aspects. Of course, there are still various theological statements in the text that Catholic teaching would find inadequate. Nonetheless, reflecting the decades in which Catholic theologians have engaged with other Christians in dialogue, *TCTCV* presents some convergences on the meaning of the Church which reflect, in very substantial ways, the ecclesiological understanding of the Catholic Church.

The following affirmations are consistent with some of the principal claims of Catholic doctrine concerning the Church; they are not exhaustive, but some of the most important:

- The Church is a communion (*koinonia*) of persons sharing in the life of the Holy Trinity and in God's mission (§1). It is "both a divine and a human reality"

(§23). It is the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Head of the Church.

- The insistence on faith, sacraments and ministry as essential elements of communion (§§37–57) reflects well the Catholic understanding of the Church.
- The whole people of God has a prophetic, priestly, and kingly vocation. It is through the sacraments of initiation that people become members of the body of Christ (§21). They renew their communion with Christ when they receive the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's supper (§42) and are refreshed and equipped for Christian living and mission by the Holy Spirit (§§19–21). Their discipleship requires moral commitment (§§61–62). Mary, the mother of God, is the model for the Church and for every Christian of several dimensions of responding to God's Word (§15).
- Jesus laid the foundations for community leadership by calling and sending the twelve apostles (§19) He "shared his authority with them" (§48). Faithful to his example, some believers are called to exercise "specific authority and responsibility," a special ministry of "word, sacrament and oversight" to equip the Church for its mission in the world (§§19–20). Their successors in the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*) exercise

authority in the same threefold ministry (§48). The Church has never been without such ministers (§20). They remind the community of its dependence on Jesus Christ (§19).

- The four marks or notes of the Church affirmed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed – unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity – are God's gifts that show that the Church has a divine mission (§22).
- The catholic unity of the Church allows for diversity, but there are "limits to legitimate diversity" (§30). "In crucial situations synods have come together to discern the apostolic faith in response to doctrinal or moral dangers of heresies" (§53). When the Church is called to make important decisions, "there is need for someone to summon and preside over the gathering for the sake of good order and to facilitate the process of promoting, discerning, and articulating consensus" (§54).
- One of the foremost tasks of the Church is evangelization. The promotion of justice and peace is one of its constitutive dimensions (§59). God reaches out to those who are not explicit members of the Church (§25), but this does not excuse Christians from their mission to invite them, by witness and word, to know and love Christ Jesus.

- In general, much progress has been made since the *BEM* document, but there is still some way to go to achieve greater convergence. At the same time, the opportunity to engage with *TCTCV* is for the Catholic Church also a good opportunity to reflect on some particular points of its own ecclesiology. In some aspects, for example in the teaching and exercise of primacy and synodality, some progress could be made to facilitate convergence with Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and also other churches.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

Catholics can identify some ways in which *TCTCV* offers a basis for growth in unity. Some consensus statements accept the contributions of Catholic theologians on previously disputed points; others advance the consensus by explicitly rejecting faulty views of the Church or calling attention to questions needing discussion.

- *It encourages recourse to the Tradition.* In setting out to discern God's will for the unity of the Church, *TCTCV* looks not only to scripture but to the witness of the "living Tradition" (§11). It cites several early witnesses to the Church's experience and teaching, e.g., Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, the *Apostolic Canons* and St. John Chrysostom (§§23, 39, 55, 67). It also notes the

function of synods (§53) and the significance of the Nicene Creed as an ecumenical symbol that serves the unity of the Church (§39).

- *It traces ordained ministry to the Lord's choice of the Twelve.* In its treatment of the ordained ministry, *TCTCV* distinguishes the Twelve/the Apostles from the rest of the disciples and acknowledges that Jesus shared his authority with them (cf. John 20:22) and sent them "to serve [the Church] as its foundation and to oversee its mission" (§22). It identifies the functions of the apostles as "proclaiming the Word, baptizing and celebrating the Lord's Supper" (§2), and it asserts that their "successors" in the ministry of *episkopé* exercise the same functions (§48). In this way, it promotes the view that certain aspects of the Church's order were willed and instituted by Christ himself.
- *It values the idea of apostolic succession.* "The Church is apostolic because the Father sent the Son to establish it, and the Son sent the apostles [and prophets] . . . to serve as its foundation and to oversee its mission." It cites Clement's Letter to the Corinthians in support of this and acknowledges that "apostolic succession in ministry, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church" (§22).

- *It expands and clarifies what the ministry of episkopé involves.* *TCTCV* confirms and extends the growing consensus with respect to the function of *episkopé* and its necessary service to the essential elements of *koinonia* – faith, sacraments, and ministry – by considering more fully the role of those who fulfil this office.
- *It promotes the value of synodality and primacy.* In promoting and illustrating the concept of synodality (or collegiality), *TCTCV* supports the view that the visible unity of the Church will be achieved by the collaboration of those who exercise *episkopé* (§53), and it introduces consideration of the Church’s historical experience of regional and universal primacy (§§54–55).
- *It adds elements to its previous definition of the Church.* *TCTCV*’s definition of the Church now includes “the apostolic faith confessed,” and “a ministry of *episkopé*” – along with “a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached,” and “the sacraments are celebrated” (§31). *TCTCV* identifies the “universal Church” as “the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world” (§31). It also acknowledges that the Church needs a ministry of *episkopé* at the local and universal levels for coordination and mission and in order to maintain

“continuity in the apostolic faith” and “unity of life” (§§52, 54; see also §29).

- *It notes the problem posed by conflicting moral norms.* *TCTCV* recognizes that the rethinking of moral norms poses new challenges and introduces new divisions, even within a particular church (§63). It asks when these differences become “church dividing.” Moral questions must be explicitly addressed if the ecumenical movement is to retain its credibility.

If the insights of *TCTCV* were received by the various churches and communions, their members might recognize some common understandings of the Church which their theologians have identified through dialogue. The faithful in all of the churches and Christian communities may not realize that these common understandings of the mystery of the Church have been acknowledged; such a realization can bring hope and encouragement for future dialogues. This situation raises the crucial question of reception of ecumenical dialogues within the churches, and it points to the urgency of ecumenical formation.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

As affirmed earlier in this response, the Catholic Church is highly appreciative of *TCTCV*. Furthermore, a truthful reading of the document has enabled us to reflect once again and, hand on

heart, to embrace – with a rediscovered vigour – certain crucial aspects indicated here below. The Catholic Church earnestly commits itself to the challenges posed in *TCTCV*.

- The Catholic Church commits itself to respond to the call to grow in holiness. *TCTCV* §35 refers to the reality of sin and division. The Church is holy because it is the body of Christ; but, at the same time it is touched by sin because of the actions committed by its members. The Church Fathers have indeed, at times, used the term *casta meretrix* to describe the Church. *TCTCV* rightly states that “although sin is in contradiction to the true identity of the Church, it is nonetheless real” (§35). Whatever the manner in which different churches and communities understand the reality of sin and division, all Christians are called to grow in holiness. The personal commitment of each Christian to grow in holiness will contribute to the holiness of the Church.⁹¹ Indeed, an authentic personal commitment to Christ is conducive to a deepening of one’s faith and to a more radical embrace of discipleship. The Catholic Church commits

itself – both on a universal level, as well as at a grassroots level – to remind the baptized faithful, through the new evangelization and through catechesis of the daily call addressed by Jesus to each of its members, to grow in holiness.

- The Catholic Church commits itself to an authentic spirit of renewal. In certain aspects of the life of the Catholic Church, the much needed *aggiornamento* initiated by the Second Vatican Council, unfortunately, did not always lead to a renewal in the life and mission of its members. The conciliar Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, refers to renewal in various spheres of the Church’s life, such as biblical studies, liturgy, the preaching of the word of God, catechetics, the apostolate of the laity, new forms of consecrated life and spirituality of marriage and the family, and the church’s social thought and involvement (cf. §6). It is indeed encouraging that similar initiatives are present in other churches. The churches are therefore encouraged to deepen their commitment to these areas of renewal and to collaborate together by doing together whatever can be done together. The Catholic Church, thus, reaffirms the perennial validity of the Lund Principle (1952). Furthermore, the Catholic Church commits itself to the words pronounced by Pope Francis in Geneva

91. Cf. Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, Study Document *Be Renewed in the Spirit: The Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism*, 2013, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/jwg-rcc-wcc/ninth-report-of-the-joint-working-group>

to the World Council of Churches: “Let us help one another to walk, pray and work together” (21 June 2018).

- The Catholic Church commits itself, once again, to being the Church of the poor and for the poor (cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 186–216). *TCTCV* affirms that solidarity with the poor is a challenge facing the contemporary Church. While the social encyclicals of the Catholic Church have shed an important light on its responsibility vis-a-vis the poor and the marginalized, much more needs to be done. It realizes that, in certain aspects regarding the care and support of these strata of society, it is duty-bound to move decisively from words to concrete actions. Good intentions must be followed by radical choices to put these intentions into action. The contribution of international church bodies, episcopal conferences and local churches on this prophetic option has had a global hearing. In the face of different kinds of poverty in today’s world, the challenge for Catholics to witness effectively to the gospel is closely linked to the mission of being a Church *of* the poor and *for* the poor. Reducing the gap between theology and life in this field will pave the way for a more integrated Catholic Church and, thus, a more convincing witness and holy dialogue partner to other churches.

- Reading *TCTCV* §53, the Catholic Church is challenged to continue to develop its current practice of synodality. Since the ecclesiological shift in the context of the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar period, synodality and collegiality have continued to flourish. In a landmark speech on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis underlined the centrality of synodality. He stated that “a synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing.’ It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.”⁹² He also acknowledged that the hope expressed by the Council to promote decentralization, collegiality and synodality on all levels of Church life “has not yet been fully realized,” and affirmed his will to promote and stimulate this process. Responding to this intention, the International Theological Commission recently published a study which offers guidelines for a renewed theology of synodality as well as useful pastoral orientations about what it implies for the Church’s life and mission in the third millennium.⁹³

92. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, 17 October 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

93. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018).

Some have rightly affirmed that an enhanced commitment to the synodal principle enables a fruitful and regular exchange of available material and lived experiences among local churches, an exchange facilitated by the guidance of the Bishop of Rome. This is indispensable in a world and Church that are progressively becoming more global and at the same time more pluralistic. Indeed, synodality – underlined so positively *TCTCV* §53 – and proposed for “all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional and universal” has been increasingly encouraged within the Catholic Church.

Synodality is not solely a style of exercising authority, service and collaboration in the formal structures of the Church but is also an ecclesial attitude which can be adopted by all Christians, whatever their responsibility, even at the grassroots. The Catholic Church commits itself to facilitate this two-way process within its own life. This takes place centripetally, from the local churches to the centre, as well as centrifugally from the centre to the peripheries. This ecclesial transformation marks a shift in behaviour and in the way of doing things, but, more profoundly, it signals a radical change in attitude. Regarding synodality at the grassroots level within the Catholic Church, it will seek to promote a more inclusive attitude in its structures wherever this is either absent or weak – as in diocesan and parish pastoral councils of consultation and collaboration.

The ecumenical significance of synodality is to be highlighted, as it brings the Catholic Church closer to churches which have practised it. Such convergence has assisted different churches in

approaching a common Christian understanding of the interrelationship between primacy and synodality, as well as the entering into collaboration with other Christians. Furthermore, each church is encouraged to refrain from the taking of important decisions which may have grave repercussions on relations with other churches, until it first takes into consideration their position. This can be carried out by adopting the same synodal attitude mentioned above, through consultation, thus avoiding the creation of avoidable divisive situations resulting from unilateral decisions.

In a more synodal and conciliar Church a new light can also be shed on the interrelationship between primacy and synodality. *The Catholic Church is challenged to look for new ways of exercising the ministry of primacy on all levels of the Church's life* which are correctly balanced with the practice of synodality and collegiality.

On the grassroots level, the pastor (*parochus*) is the one who presides over the parish community (cf. *CIC*, can.515). However, he is called to exercise his ministry in cooperation with other presbyters or deacons and lay members of the faithful (cf. *CIC*, can.519). While presiding over the community, he is to encourage the proper part which all members have in the mission of their parish and to promote the spirit of communion (*koinonia*).

On the local level, the diocesan bishop is the chief shepherd who has responsibility for the pastoral care of the faithful within his jurisdiction (cf. *CIC*, can.381, §1). He is the visible principle of unity in his diocese. As the figurehead of the particular church, he is responsible for teaching, governing and sanctifying the faithful. However,

he shares these duties with the priests, deacons and lay ministries. He is called to preside over the particular Church in the communion of all its members, and to ensure that their diverse gifts serve to build up the community in union with the universal Church.

The practice of primacy culminates in the service of the Bishop of Rome. He exercises his universal ministry of primacy as perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of the whole Church (cf. *LG* 23). In line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and calling to mind an ancient tradition, Pope Francis affirms, “The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time – as Successor of Peter – to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.”⁹⁴ This unique ministry of “presiding in charity over all the Churches” entails that synodality be exercised in communion with the Bishop of Rome as the visible sign of the Church’s unity and the head of the college of bishops.

The Catholic Church is aware that the ministry of primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not always recognized by non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities and continues to be a difficulty on the way to full visible communion. While the Catholic Church affirms that this ministry corresponds to the will of Christ and thus belongs to

the very nature of the Church, it also affirms that in the new situation of Christianity influenced by the ecumenical movement, its exercise needs a new evaluation and vision. This is why John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* urged the pastors and theologians of all churches to help him, while in no way renouncing what is essential to this mission, to find the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all Christians (cf. *UUS* 95).

- The Catholic Church accepts the challenge to strengthen the laity in their vocation as “missionary disciples.” The Second Vatican Council had emphasized the role of the lay faithful, empowering them to act in ways they had not experienced before. Inspired also by *TCTCV* §48, Catholics are urged by the Church to spread “the joy of the Gospel” to all those they meet.
- The Catholic Church commits itself to the new paths opened by receptive ecumenism. In addition to Pope John Paul II’s description of ecumenism as an exchange of gifts (*UUS* 28), receptive ecumenism emphasizes in a special way the importance of being open to learn from others.
- The Catholic Church accepts the challenge to instruct its leaders to shoulder responsibly for the promotion of the formation of ministers and laity, with particular attention to their ecumenical

94. Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015.

formation and commitment. Ordained ministers as well as lay pastoral agents and all those involved in formation are to be ecumenically minded. This necessitates a solid grounding in all the aspects of ecumenism, both from an academic point of view, as well as on a practical hands-on level.

- The Catholic Church renews its commitment to facilitate encounters with the leaders and representatives of the various churches. These personal encounters are precious not only in strengthening the bonds of friendship between church leaders, but also have a powerful and positive media impact on the individual members of the respective churches.
- Finally, the Catholic Church also renews its commitment to collaborating in joint projects within the social field with other churches on a local level.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

This question refers to the Church *ad intra* (the life of faith) and to the Church *ad extra* (its mission). The answer to this question will highlight examples of what we have been able to do – and what we can do – together as churches, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

It is very painful that we cannot celebrate the eucharist with members of other churches. This reality enables us to recall the wounds of division we have inflicted upon each other in past centuries. However, this does not impede us from inviting members of other churches to the liturgies we celebrate, just as nothing stops us from attending the liturgies of other churches when it is acceptable. The liturgy is an opportunity to learn about each other: as we pray, so we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*).

As explained earlier, in the answer to question three, we will renew our commitment to do together whatever we can do together, even in the context of the liturgy. These are some examples: the highly significant gesture of the washing of the feet, signifying service as well as intimacy, following Jesus' example; the imposition of ashes on the first day of the Lenten season; celebrating together the liturgy of the Word and other symbolic gestures during the vigils of solemnities such as Christmas, Epiphany, the Ascension, Pentecost and the Martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul; local religious festivities in significant shrines to which Christians from different churches journey as pilgrims.⁹⁵

The Catholic Church encourages its members to engage in common spiritual initiatives, as for example, shared bible study and *lectio divina*, common spiritual retreats (particularly in Advent and Lent), and reading together the texts penned by spiritual masters and mystics from all Christian

95. cf. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, §§116–119.

traditions. The Catholic Church gladly joins the Orthodox Church, as well as other churches, in the celebration of the World Day of Creation on 1 September (cf. *Directory*, §215).

The Catholic Church renews its commitment to put into practice the letter and the spirit of the abovementioned *Directory*, in particular Chapter 5 which treats Ecumenical Cooperation: Dialogue and Common Witness.

A number of markedly prophetic gestures, carried out jointly by church leaders, have had a positive impact on all Christians. As far back as 1966, during the encounter between Pope Paul VI and Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope recognized Ramsey as “a brother in Christ” by placing on the Anglican leader’s finger his own episcopal ring, a gesture which witnesses said moved the elderly Archbishop to tears. In a reciprocal gesture on 5 October 2016, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, gave Pope Francis a silver Cross of Nails, based on the Coventry symbol of reconciliation, as a sign of their renewed partnership in the urgent work of reconciliation today. The Pope put it around his neck before the two leaders gave a joint blessing, a gesture that would have been unthinkable half a century ago. On the same occasion, on the spot where Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine out on mission to evangelize the English at the end of the 6th century, Pope Francis and Archbishop Welby “sent out” on mission together pairs of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops, before signing a common declaration recommitting their churches to take the gospel “to the ends of the earth,” and, in particular, “to those on the margins

and the peripheries of our societies.” Other joint gestures by Pope Francis and leaders have taken place at Lesvos, during the poignant encounter with migrants (16 April 2016); Lund, during the beginning of the 5th centenary commemoration of the Reformation (31 October 2016); and Bari, at the ecumenical prayer for peace in the Middle East (7 July 2018). The Catholic Church highlights the important ecumenical significance of these and other gestures by church leaders at a local level, and encourages them.

The Catholic Church has nurtured closer relationships with other churches in the difficult and challenging contexts of persecution, war and natural calamities. The ecumenism of the martyrs has been reiterated, time and time again, by Pope John Paul II and by Pope Francis. In *Tertio millennio adveniente*, Pope John Paul II reminds us that “witness to Christ, borne even to the shedding of blood, has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants, as Pope Paul VI pointed out in his homily for the canonization of the Ugandan martyrs.”⁹⁶ Pope Francis has expressed himself, time and time again, on the ecumenism of blood. In his encounter with Ahuna Matthias I, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church, he affirmed: “The ecumenism of the martyrs is a summons to us, here and now, to advance on the path to ever greater unity” (29 February 2016). Addressing members of the Renewal in the Spirit Movement, Pope Francis stated:

96. *Tertio millennio adveniente* §37, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html

A few months ago, there were those 23 Egyptian Copts who were also beheaded on the shores of Libya. In that moment, they said the name of Jesus. ‘Oh, but they are not Catholic!’ But they are Christians! They are brothers! They are our martyrs! This is the ecumenism of blood!” He then went on to say: “And 50 years ago, Paul VI, at the canonization of the young martyrs of Uganda, made reference to this: that for the same reason, their Anglican catechist companions also shed their blood. They were Christians, they were martyrs. Forgive me, do not be scandalized, but they are our martyrs because they gave their lives for Christ! And this is the ecumenism of blood!”⁹⁷

The Catholic Church expresses its gratitude to God for the large number of bilateral and multi-lateral ecumenical consensus or convergence documents and will spare no effort in proceeding in this direction.

Closer relationships in life and mission are enhanced because there is a commonly felt need by Christians across the globe for *a call to conscience* by respected Christian leaders. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Patriarch Athenagoras, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Pope John Paul II, to mention a few examples, spoke loudly and clearly to the conscience of the human family on the common good. The Catholic Church reiterates its readiness to support the courageous stance taken by leaders of other churches in the

defence of human dignity and the rights of indigenous populations. On a local level, too, the Catholic Church will continue to offer its support to other churches and their leaders in presenting a common front against injustice and intolerance, and in the support of human rights, justice and peace.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

In its response to *TCTCV*, the Catholic Church has reflected on the extent to which this document can be used to address a variety of issues. Furthermore, the Catholic Church is convinced that what has been achieved in *TCTCV* could be a platform for future fruitful endeavours carried out by Faith and Order. The Catholic Church therefore suggests that the ongoing work of Faith and Order in the field of ecclesiology, in the coming years, include the following dimensions:

- Among the aspects of the life of the Church which could call for further discussion, priority ought to be given to a more extensive study of the relationship between *diversity* and *separation*, as well as the limitations of diversity. Further discussion can be carried out on the theological principles for discernment on legitimate diversities and on diversities which separate the churches. After so much progress achieved in the

97. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Renewal in the Holy Spirit Movement, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150703_movimento-rinnovamento-spirito.html

last decades, the quest for visible unity is a pressing challenge which ought to be continued further in the light of the ecumenical dialogues of the last fifty years and *TCTCV* itself.

- Faith and Order is encouraged to reconsider the question of a universal ministry of primacy at the service of Christian unity.⁹⁸
- The Catholic response points to those areas in *TCTCV* where differences require further work. The Catholic response to *BEM* in 1987 had mentioned three critical issues, all forming a part of ecclesiology, which should be part of Faith and Order's continuing work: "sacrament and sacramentality," "apostolic tradition," and "authority in the Church." One can state that *TCTCV* has made some progress in each of these areas, since *BEM*: regarding sacrament and sacramentality (cf. §§25–27, 40–46), regarding apostolic tradition (cf. §§22–24), and regarding authority in the Church and its exercise (cf. §§45–57). Although the progress achieved is still insufficient, nonetheless the Catholic Church is extremely grateful for what has been achieved so far. We are duty-bound to reiterate that

98. cf. UUS 89; 5th World Assembly of Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela, *Confessing the One Faith to God's Glory* (1993), 31, 2, https://archive.org/stream/wccfops2.160/wccfops2.160_djvu.txt

the convergence achieved by *TCTCV* is indeed useful for further study. What has been accomplished, so far, may truly serve as a springboard for further studies and reflection.

- In particular, the work of Faith and Order could profit from further discussion on sacramentality. Christians do not yet have a common understanding of the sacraments and sacramentality. A deeper study of the instrumental and the expressive perspectives is required. The Catholic Church affirms that Christ is the principal minister of the sacraments, and that they are both signs and instruments, or causes, of grace. The question of instrumental causality deserves more attention. For Catholics, this is not just a question of terminology, but represents a fundamental belief regarding how Christ is present and active in the Church, namely, by means of efficacious signs. The discussion on this may be advanced by considering unresolved questions on baptism and eucharist, and on why Catholics call holy orders a sacrament and how apostolic succession fits into this question.
- Another important area of study is that of Christian anthropology (especially the relationship between person and nature), as this is related to discipleship and ethical issues. Reflection on the relationship between Creator and creatures

and, consequently, on human freedom, sin and human weakness sheds light on the extent to which humanity can shape and discover a deeper meaning to its own existence. Indeed, the freedom with which Christ has set us free encourages Christians to become authentic servants of their sisters and brothers.

- We underline the importance of attending to cultural contexts, such as the shifting of the Church's centre of gravity from Europe and North America to the global South. As a result, a new evangelization and catechesis is required since some of the "new emerging churches" seem to give less importance to the sacraments, doctrine and ecclesiology. The importance of seeking to engage these churches is not meant to distract from the thrust of the new evangelization in the "older historic churches." Together we are to seek answers to the question of the ecclesiological challenges facing these "older churches" and their experience of declining numbers. The latter are called to share "traditional" values with the "new" churches.
- Faith and Order can deepen its study on charisms and the charismatic dimension of the Church. Although mentioned in *TCTCV* §§16, 18, 21 and 28, it is worth focusing, in faithfulness to scripture, upon their constitutive

dimension regarding the local and the universal Church. An awareness of the plurality of charisms is a decisive factor for a constant renewal of the churches. Many movements born of the Spirit, in contemporary times as in the past, have energized church life and evangelization.

- The role of the Church in the world can be studied further, especially in the context of religious pluralism and serious ethical questions. This reiterates the importance of Christian anthropology, as stated above, because the primacy of the person is fundamental. The place of the Church is, therefore, also within the "secular" dimension of economy, politics, human rights, ecology, etc., namely, the "new *areopagi*" of our times. The challenge, therefore, is to strengthen the relationship between ecclesiology and anthropology.
- Further study on ecumenical spirituality is also suggested. The Catholic Church – in union with other churches – is convinced that by focusing our life on Christ, crucified and risen, it will be possible, despite the obstacles and barriers that still exist, to grow in an authentic experience of *koinonia* that will be conducive to full visible unity. Deepening the implications of this ecumenical spirituality, possibly with a specific study project on "the spirituality of encounter," could be an important

avenue of research in the “ecumenical pilgrimage” towards full communion. Pope Francis’ frequent emphasis on the spirituality of encounter is a valuable tool towards a greater mutual understanding among Christian churches. This dimension thus merits further study.

FINAL REMARKS

The Catholic Church wishes to express deep gratitude to the World Council of Churches, and in particular to the Commission on Faith and Order, for *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. This response, drawing upon comments sent to the PCPCU from various episcopal conferences, theological faculties and individual experts from around the world, represents an important stage in the process of reception of the document. We hope that it will assist the Catholic Church at local, regional and universal levels to continue to engage with the text and to draw the pastoral consequences of the doctrinal convergence reached in the text on some crucial aspects of ecclesiology. We hope that the reception of the text in all churches will lead us to more genuine church fellowship and cooperation. We are very mindful of the fact that the unity that Christ prayed for will be realized through renewal in each of our churches so that we become more faithful to the gospel. The Church is always in need of renewal and reform under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We receive this document as an instrument of renewal within the Catholic communion. It offers a way for each of us to work with our ecumenical partners as we

listen to the voice of each other and together to the voice of the Spirit guiding the Church in our own time.

RESPONSES FROM CHURCH WORLD
COMMUNIONS, NATIONAL COUNCILS
OF CHURCHES AND REGIONAL
ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATIONS

SECTION 2

23. Finnish Ecumenical Council

Introduction

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV) (2013) is a convergence document on the theological understanding of the Church. The document is a fruit of 25 years of work, following in the footsteps of the previous convergence document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1983). The preparatory process itself signals the churches' joint desire to reach fuller communion. The two drafts preceding the final document were sent to the churches for comments and the final document was modified according to the feedback. The current, final text is the product of the joint efforts of various Christian churches and a reflection of the present depth of their communion. As we see it in Finland, the document is a great ecumenical achievement.

The Finnish Ecumenical Council's Faith and Order Section discussed the document during several meetings. Discussions were based both on the original text and the Finnish translation. As a consequence, the Council's Faith and Order Section has decided to renew a publication presenting the various Christian churches and communions in Finland. Our experience is that the document has already now, after two years of its publication, had an impact on the ecumenical discourse in Finland.

The national council's Faith and Order Section prepared this response for the Board of the Council, which finalized the text. Therefore,

the following observations reflect the common emphasis of the various Finnish churches and our particular ecumenical context. However, we are not explicitly referring to the theological responses given by our individual churches. Because of the council's ecumenical structure, this response is not fully in line with the questions posed by the Faith and Order Commission. We focus more on how ecumenically beneficial we see the formulations, rather than on their doctrinal compatibility.

The questions we discussed are the following:

1. How ecumenically useful do you find the ecclesiological solutions presented in the document?
2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?
3. How far are you able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?
4. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could you offer for the on-going work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

1. The ecumenical usefulness of the basic ecclesiological approach in *TCTCV*

The ecclesiological approach in *TCTCV* is based on God and the Trinity. The Church is understood

as an instrument and sign of God's plan of salvation. The Triune God, active in history, connects teaching on the nature of the Church and the mission of the Church. The Church is understood in the framework of God's salvific plan for the whole creation.

Even though the churches can state together that the Church serves the will and purposes of God, they interpret and manifest God's will in the world in numerous ways. Since all churches agree on Christ as the core of salvation, we find a more Christocentric approach advisable. This is beneficial also in the sense that some of the churches may feel an explicitly Trinitarian approach too abstract.

TCTCV approaches unity discourse from the concept of communion. In a general sense we find this a good choice. Our experience and our understanding of communion are so strong that we should not need to be afraid to discuss the limits of diversity.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

One of the central themes of *TCTCV* is the call to transform the world. The nature of this transformation remains rather abstract. What we find appealing is the emphasis on the witness (*martyria*) of life to the communion of the churches. At the same time we are concerned how this idea of witness resonates among the churches that concretely live under persecution and distress. On the one hand, the witness of the martyrs in history and today is a powerful source of encouragement and hope for many Christians. On the other hand, we should not underestimate the pain and sorrow of

Christians and other people who suffer. We should do everything in our power to help the victims and build peace and reconciliation.

We also discussed the relationship between ethics or morals and faith, and salvation and sin within transformation. We noted that, while churches as human communities are not perfect, at the same time the Church of Christ is holy. Many of our churches can easily relate to an idea of sanctification as a continuous growing into Christ. The struggle against evil on the individual level, however, receives very little attention in the text.

On a more general note it was pointed out that the theological approach of the document and the questions chosen for discussion most probably appeal more to the so-called traditional churches. For example, the description of episcopacy and the threefold structure of the ministry reflects a view that is normative for some, acceptable to others, but for some churches only relatively possible. Also, mutually recognized baptism is taken as a more universally accepted fact than it actually is. The document exemplifies a particular kind of ecumenical ecclesiology that is more recognizable to those more experienced in the ecumenical movement than for those who have joined in more recently (e.g., the Pentecostal movement, free churches etc.). One is compelled to ask to what degree the sacramentality of the church is generally accepted among the churches; and how does one uphold cooperation among those churches who do not speak in terms of sacramentality? Are churches that may, though not actively, choose to use this vocabulary, asked to change their discourse? *TCTCV* aims to bridge the gap between

various discourses by emphasizing God's active presence in the world by the creative activity of the Holy Spirit.

Every church is bound to find something easy to recognize in this document, but also something that is more difficult to take in. Many of our churches recognize expressions rising from their own tradition, but also those more characteristic to other churches. The portrait one is confronted with is a form of a mosaic or a kaleidoscope.

3. How far are you able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The document aims to address both the socio-political contexts of the whole global reality and the individual theological interpretations of WCC member churches. Because of this, the text remains rather general and may be interpreted in various ways. In our own context, the relevance of the document is particularly in its capacity to create discussion.

In Finland ecumenical dialogues have mainly been bilateral discussions between two churches, with one of the partners having been the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. One new possibility in our context would be to start an official multilateral dialogue at the national level. One goal for the discussion could be to create a wider understanding and practice of a mutual recognition of baptism. Clarity could also be gained in the various practices of ecumenical hospitality regarding the participation of clergy and laity in the services

and various ecclesial rites of other churches. The principal orientation should be to encourage the widest possible range of participation.

4. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could you offer for the on-going work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

TCTCV bridges successfully various theological discourses. A good example of this is the discussion on sacraments and ordinances. In addition to defining the limits of diversity, it is important to offer tools for the churches to express ecumenically legitimate diversity in theological terminology and method or spiritual life. Factual reception is easier when the churches can give expression to the basic truths of faith in a way that also clearly reflects their particular confessional heritage and everyday spiritual life. When facing increasing challenges in intercultural encounters, it is important to develop the hermeneutical capacity to distinguish between concepts and meanings. It is also important to create safe ecumenical spaces in which people representing various ecclesial and cultural traditions can meet in an atmosphere of freedom and respective tolerance, and also freely express their personal experiences and puzzling questions without fear or oppression.

For the future of ecumenical development, it is essential to look into the variety of concrete solutions for inter-church relationships. For ecumenical rapprochement to occur, it should be noted that not all aspects of ecclesial life are purely doctrinal or theological. Also socio-cultural and

canonical aspects are included, additionally affecting theological expressions. Many questions with significant effect on the possibility to live out communion are informed by particular contexts. Also, the importance of spiritual and receptive values should not be forgotten. Furthermore, even if basic theological consensus can be found, ordination and the more practical issues are hindering unity.

The value of the quite abstract and general approach is that as large a number of churches as possible may agree with it and by receiving the document testify to their ecumenical commitment. At the same time, it is notable that the general style of writing does not allow for a more detailed description of the contexts in which the churches live. For example, it is sadly noticeable that the question of women's full participation in the church and in the society does not surface at all. We do appreciate *TCTCV* as an achievement. Yet we want to emphasize that the Faith and Order commission ought to raise up more powerfully both the challenges and successes of contextual realities and the general issue of women's full participation.

Closing words

The Finnish Ecumenical Council has found *TCTCV* very helpful in creating discussion and in (re-)activating ecumenical activity. The document has already been used in various contexts and new openings have been made, for instance, towards non-denominational communities. The document is a valuable addition to the means by which the churches seek more visible communion.

Mari-Anna Pöntinen, General Secretary

24. Christian Council of Sweden

Introduction

The Christian Council of Sweden (CCS) was formed in 1992. At that time, the ecclesial geography of Sweden was facing a number of major changes. Through migration, the presence and variety of Orthodox churches was increasing. The Church of Sweden was about to separate from the state and become a free national church, and some of the Free Churches showed increased ecumenical interest, among them the Pentecostal Movement, which at that time was the largest of the Free Churches. CCS gathers representatives for major parts of the churches of the world and has become an ecumenical platform in Sweden, currently consisting of 26 member churches. The phrase “Churches Together in Faith and Action” defines the focus of its work. CCS consists of four major church families, i.e., the Lutheran, the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox and the Free Churches, that is, the Protestant Non-Lutheran Churches. The governing board is made up of the highest leaders of the member churches and a presiding committee, consisting of a representative from each of the four church families, who together with the General Secretary provide the outward face of CCS.

The development of democracy and the emergence of popular movements in Sweden have provided good growing conditions for collaboration

between Christians and for the strivings towards unity among Christians and their churches and denominations. Relationships between the churches in Sweden are respectful. Church leaders are positive to collaboration within CCS. Locally, circumstances vary a great deal, but responses from two different local ecumenical councils suggest a positive attitude toward ecumenical collaboration. Ecumenism in Sweden could be described as very well organized, even as on the threshold of institutionalism. We are happy and proud of what we achieve and continue to engage in, but we are aware of the risks involved in an increasingly representative well-functioning ecumenism that is becoming less and less of a popular movement, and decreasingly “a united people on the way.” There could be a risk that ecumenical work feels less urgent for church members in general as it has increasingly become only a matter for people with a specialist interest in ecumenism and for theologians.

Within the framework of CCS, conversations are held in constellations that would be impossible in many other places in the world. For quite a long period, the ideological foundation of CCS has been formulated as a sincere desire “to get to know one another in depth.” Fairly extensive ecclesiological work on the self-understanding of the churches and their relationships to other Christians has been undertaken and documented

in various ways, for example, in the series of publications issued by CCS. This experience has been significant for the formulation of a common response of the CCS member churches to the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

The expectations of this new convergence document from the Faith and Order Commission were great in Sweden, not least given the importance that the previous convergence document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), have had for Swedish ecumenism. CCS's predecessor, The Swedish Ecumenical Council, worked on that document, and Swedish denominations submitted their responses. That document was also significant with regard to the development of the liturgy in the Church of Sweden and formulation of the foundation of faith for the Uniting Church in Sweden. Hopefully, this new document might motivate the churches to reflect further and more deeply, from their own perspective, on the obstacles they can see, both with themselves and with other churches, along the path towards the full unity of the Church.

A key question seems to be how much reconciled diversity, or what kind of diversity, can be contained within the fullness of the unity and catholicity of the Church, within a shared definition of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The issue of continuity and renewal is intimately connected to these questions. The reflections in italics on pages 14–15 (“How continuity and change in the Church relate to God’s will”) and on page 17 (“Legitimate and divisive diversity”) are, we believe, of decisive significance for continued ecumenical conversations.

The Church of Sweden and the Uniting Church in Sweden are both members of the World Council of Churches and have submitted their own responses to this document. The Roman Catholic response has been submitted from the Vatican; and the Orthodox responses will be submitted in the usual way by each respective member church. However, the Christian Council of Sweden believes that ecumenical documents should also receive ecumenical responses, following conversations across denominational boundaries. That will widen the perspectives and the relevance of the document to include churches that are formally outside the World Council of Churches as well. It could also be said to mirror the fact that, as such, the Faith and Order Commission is broader, since both the Vatican and the Pentecostal Movement are full members.

The CCS Working Group for Faith and Order has spent three years working on *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. This Group is responsible for translation, dissemination and further work on this document through seminars, council meetings, conversations in groups and contributions to the Nordic-Baltic Faith and Order meetings. We have also invited some local ecumenical councils to respond to the document.

We note that the church families are attracted by the structure of this document to different degrees, and that some churches find it difficult to access. We appreciate that the document shows such a clearly missiological perspective, in which the Church is presented as part of God’s sending, of the *missio dei*, in the world. Thus this document becomes a mission document that should be read

in conjunction with the new mission affirmation, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelisation in Changing Landscapes*, which is just as much a document on ecclesiology. CCS has focused on this by working with both these documents in parallel at a number of seminars and similar events.

TCTCV begins and ends in the mission of God (and the Church), which we appreciate. We would, however, have wanted a clearer concretization in the final chapter. We are attracted by the reasoning text of the presentation, which takes what the churches are in principle agreed on as its starting-point, and then proceeds to describe issues on which consensus is not yet a reality. Every part concludes with a suggestion in italics for continued conversations. In the Swedish edition we have highlighted these issues as an encouragement to reflection and then placed them in “boxes” with an exhortation to “think within this box.” Here we find burning, challenging and necessary questions for continued conversations. In this context we can only regret that the reflection boxes for the final chapter have not managed to go deeper into the issues about how the Church’s being and doing relate to one another. “Ecumenical response to religious pluralism” and “Moral questions and the unity of the Church” are of course important themes, but other issues certainly ought to be illuminated under the heading of chapter 4, “The Church: In and for the World” (§§64–66) to include plenty of challenges that might have merited a reflection “box” of their own.

Of the five questions that Faith and Order want to have answers to, CCS has chosen three, which we consider relevant to a national Christian

council; and we have partly re-formulated them and added some questions as follows:

1. How would you describe relationships between the churches in Sweden?
 - To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth of greater unity among the churches?
2. What renewal does this document challenge the churches to work for?
 - What would you like to do that “the churches together” do not yet do?
 - What would be needed to make this happen?
3. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice would you give for the on-going work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?
 - Is there anything special in your situation that you would like to share with others?

Question 1: How would you describe relationships between churches in Sweden?

- **To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth of greater unity among the churches?**

The churches in Sweden have good relationships in many ways. Yearly conferences for church leaders strengthen relationships between the churches. There is a mutual interest and a will to get to know one another’s peculiar identity. There is support and help for one another across denominational boundaries, for example, by the loan of worship

localities when necessary. The churches also collaborate and take a common stand on certain contemporary issues at national as well as at regional and local levels.

CCS has become an important platform that enables theological conversations on various issues. Significant results have been for example the publications *Faith - Baptism - Membership from an Ecumenical Perspective* (No. 6 in CCS's Series of Publications), *Churches in Conversation - A Report on Bilateral Dialogues in Sweden* (No 8), *Faith - Life - Unity. On the Identity and Mission of the Church in Sweden* (No. 13) and *Meeting People in the Joy of Celebration and in Bereavement* (No. 19).¹ Here the various ecclesial traditions have had the opportunity to give their own views on significant ecclesiological perspectives.

The ecumenical movement has led to awareness that what unites the churches is more important than that which separates them; and much collaboration takes place, not least locally, across parochial and denominational boundaries. Even so, there may be underlying polarizing tensions that might reflect international tensions, and these might surface when churches in Sweden meet Christians who have recently arrived in Sweden.

This environment of openness and conversation has enabled CCS to deal with hard issues. We do not need to agree, but we can talk with one another with respect. Here council meetings and seminars on urgent matters with representative participation from the church families have played a significant role. We believe that the Stendhal

principle for inter-faith dialogue, namely not to compare the worst in others with the best in yourself, might be applicable in the work on ecumenism as well.

At the local level, it is important to let the peculiar identity of each church stand out clearly, not least for the sake of those who have recently arrived in Sweden and who seek contact with a local congregation. They often have an ecclesial membership, for example, of an oriental church. It is important that the established churches in Sweden show respect for their church membership. Congregations should show hospitality and welcome them but, through good contacts with other churches, they should also be able to refer them to their own ecclesial tradition.

We note that the text is hard to access for some, and might seem unfamiliar to some ecclesial traditions. Others can recognize themselves easily in the formulations, especially in chapter 2 on what the Church is. We consider this chapter as the best worked through text, where there is much that we can relate to together. The idea of *koinonia* is important, and most churches can identify with that. However, it is important to realize that a different meaning can be attached to the concept of *koinonia* and therefore it is important to be precise about what one means. The views of the Church as the People of God and as the Body of Christ are central to our perception of the Church.

Although Roman Catholics and Lutherans are attracted by the structure in the view of the Church, Pentecostals feel that there is too much form and structure. They want to emphasize the significance of life experience, and the Orthodox

1. Available at <https://www.skr.org/material/>

point to the liturgy. Regardless of the perspective, it is obvious that this text challenges us and stimulates us to further reflection on what the Church is.

The missiological perspective, which is the very starting-point for this document, and which is sketched in the introductory chapter and, to some extent although insufficiently, in chapter 4, is central. We are happy to read this document alongside the mission affirmation, *Together towards Life*, in which God's sending, the *missio dei*, and the ecclesiological perspective provide guidance.

In itself, this document is insufficient as a foundation for the emergence of greater unity, even though it could lead the churches to accept its convergence as a common foundation. Different ecclesial traditions find different aspects problematical. However, the aspects that the document highlights as expressions of convergence might challenge each church to ask itself to what extent these aspects are expressed in its own self-description and how this would affect the relationship to other churches that also work on these same aspects in their self-understanding.

Conversation is always a good way towards increased understanding, and thus an opportunity for greater unity. This document could provide the starting-point for continued and deeper conversations. The texts in the reflection boxes provide a challenge to joint work on issues that can be identified as remaining differences, on which no kind of convergence has hitherto been achieved.

However, given its relatively complicated form, this text risks becoming dependent on experts, and would therefore need complementing

in two ways. One way would be to make it more accessible in language and format, maybe by giving the reflections boxes greater space and by developing them as background for conversations. The other way would be to let the various churches write their own comments, both on the text itself and – this would perhaps be the most important aspect – on how they view one another as churches within the Church. These comments should focus on self-reflection on what it is within their own church that constitutes hurdles for unity, and how these hurdles might be dealt with.

Unity is a relational term that presupposes interplay between two or more parties. That means first of all that unity does not mean uniformity, but unity beyond the differences. If the Church is on the way towards a common vision that implies unity, the issues about differences must be taken seriously. Unity that means uniformity risks leading to a watering down, in which nobody would in the end recognize him- or herself. Secondly, this means that the parties that have accepted one another's differences would choose to collaborate and to live together. This is both a decision about interplay within and beyond the differences, and an acknowledgement that, in spite of the differences, there is a common foundation.

This text challenges the various churches to seek unity, not least by speaking of the Church as *koinonia*. Through increased understanding of the Church as sprung from a divine community, the different churches could recognize the divine life in one another. Community is built on a common faith in and belonging to God, the trinitarian community. It is also built on the recognition

by the various churches of their common identity within the divine community, which is likened to the body of Christ. *Koinonia* is not something we can take for granted; we think differently, and what we mean matters.

One of our local ecumenical councils noted in connection with the phrase “emerging churches” (§7) that now and then Christian communities emerge in the space between established congregations. Therefore, they do not speak of congregations but of “communities” in their internal documents; and this is something that ought to be highlighted in ecclesiological conversations. Is this a reason for further fragmentation, or is it a foundation for new thinking within ecumenism?

With reference to §64, the same local council also highlights common action as a way to show Christian unity, which has proved itself clearly in the churches’ efforts to meet the major stream of asylum-seekers in our country. “Even now, divided Christian communities can and do carry out such discernment together and have acted jointly to bring relief to suffering human beings and to help create a society that fosters human dignity.”

It is important that we dare to take hold of the hard questions, where convergence is unclear, and that we do not allow the division into church families to appear as something permanent and typical of Swedish Christianity. In order that developments in this area might be followed and acknowledged, it is important that the reports from the continuing conversation groups between churches are widely and continuously communicated.

2: What renewal does this document challenge the churches to work for?

- **What would you like to do as “Churches Together” that is not already done?**
- **What would you need to do in order to enable this?**

We begin by noting that Christian fragmentation must be considered a scandal; but we also note that the causes behind this fragmentation are often political and semantic rather than theological, even though there are of course theological reasons as well.

We find many issues in chapter 2 that are a great help in the continued ecumenical conversations towards Christian unity. The will to conversion plays a major role. Pope Francis’ talk about the Church as a field hospital is an interesting ecclesiological image that could develop the thoughts in chapter 4 further.

We also note that we are probably not as disunited as we think. Chapter 2 provides a good vision of the nature of the Church; and chapter 3 points to ways to realize this vision and also notes how much has already been achieved. It is important that the churches should dare to work self-critically and not only theoretically, one by one and together, on the issues that have been highlighted in this document. That could lead to renewal. We believe that it is important to look particularly at the balance between unity and a diversity that might enrich, at the issue of power and authority,

and at what a structure of joint decision-making might look like.

Ecumenism can be seen as something that is taken for granted in Sweden, but renewal does not necessarily follow from that. We believe that common and mutual learning from one another's ways not only of understanding, but also of living the life of the Church is important for renewal. It is important to identify what is good in other Christian traditions. For that, this document can be an inspiration beyond the limitations of the questions it raises. Ecclesiology could change from an entirely dominating doctrinal to a liturgical discourse with greater focus on how we manifest our faith liturgically. We are rarely equally inspired by reading one another's church documents and doctrines as by sharing one another's living experiences of worship.

A shared life is the first step that could lead to a common faith and gradually to a shared practice. What is the Church? The people who live the life of faith and who share its life in practice. If the common faith in Christ is the starting-point for ecumenism, the other issues will have another weight.

Question 3: What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice would you give for the on-going work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

• Is there anything special in your situation that you would like to share with others?

In its ecclesiological work, the Faith and Order Commission must start from the ecclesial authority that is shown forth in the cross of Christ, i.e., from the kenotic perspective that takes its starting-point in, for example, Phil. 2:6 or in Luke 22:26: "With you, things are different." The churches' work on ecclesiology and the question of the operating system of the churches (according to the former Director of Faith and Order, John Gibaut), are important parts of the churches' search for the visible unity, which it is the task of the Faith and Order Commission to call them to. In this work on the question of how things are different, leading through service can become an ecumenical attitude in which the churches with ecumenical hospitality can invite and call one another to seek the unity for which Christ prayed, and which his disciples were promised they would receive, in order that the world might believe that the Son was sent by the Father (John 17:21). We read §49 with joy; but we would like to see diaconal ministry given greater space, both here and in the document as a whole.

Since the World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, the ecumenical movement is on

a pilgrimage of justice and peace. When the churches understand themselves and their role in God's mission to hand out the liberation that only the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, can give, then the Church can perceive its nature and its vocation. The self-understanding of the Church becomes far too inward-looking if it is sought only within itself. However, if the Church understands its role as a witness to the world about how the living God acts in creation and salvation, the Church will find its role as a collaborator in God's kingdom, in God's great plan for the cosmos. An ecumenical ecclesiology must answer the question of how the churches can find that relationship of mutual service towards one another and towards the entire creation. This will help us to see how we become restored, liberated and healed in Jesus Christ.

The Church is unity in diversity, members of the same body, similar and different, complementary and mutually dependent, and in the end linked together in and through Christ. The theology within and about the Church belongs to and takes shape through her life and service. Ideas about the Church are an important foundation for life in the Church. It is, however, when the ideas about the unity of the Church become concretized in the life of the Church, in the meeting between her various parts and in the building of relationships between people within the various parts of the Church, that it becomes really interesting. Within the basic incarnational perspective, theology must always become embodied, in this case through real encounters. There is a continued need to develop ways to exchange experience and a shared life.

Yet another dimension of this is to allow the service of the Church in the world to be the starting-point for continued and deeper conversations about the life, identity and unity of the Church through local and specific meetings. The incarnation makes man, the micro-cosmos of creation, the subject of his own path towards perfection, as well as that of the entire creation. The resurrection of Christ puts man at the centre of the transformation of the whole of creation. Therefore the potential for holiness within human beings must also be highlighted (1 Pet. 1:16). Man is both the cause of death, destruction and fragmentation *and* the receiver and transmitter of life, eternity, healing and unity.

When the starting-point is taken in the Church as unity in diversity, issues of recognition, proselytism and internal persecution become important. These problems need to be worked on through deeper conversations about what the real foundation for unity is, and where the boundary for unity must be drawn. Some of the key concepts of ecumenical theology and other loaded concepts (for example ecumenism, unity, heresy, catholicity, orthodoxy) also need deeper and common illumination. What do they mean in our various traditions? Are we even speaking about the same thing?

Faith and Order could, for example, work on the following issues in the perspective of how the understanding of doctrinal issues, and in particular of ecclesiology, are affected by being worked on in relation to the task/mission of the Church:

- Power and authority
- Baptism, eucharist and ministry after everything that has happened after *BEM*
- Views of the concept of parish
- Different interpretations of legitimate and divisive diversity
- Christology and pneumatology
- Spirituality
- Creation and sustainable development in relation to the theology of creation and ecclesiology
- Increasing theological differences between the global North and South
- Challenges from the increasing importance of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements
- Interfaith dialogue

Here the theological perspectives from WCC's *Together towards Life* and the methods proposed in WCC's *Moral Discernment in the Churches* could be applied to doctrinal issues. All doctrinal issues must relate to the task/mission of the Church. Here we would like to underline how important it is that the perspectives from *Life and Work* and from *Faith and Order* enrich each other mutually. The being and doing of the Church cannot be separated from one another. More work is required here than what is provided in chapter 4. And it would be worth considering how the document would be affected if some of the content in chapter 4 had been put at the very beginning of the text,

and in that way would have made a link to the model of see-judge-act.

We believe that the Swedish situation, in which we grapple with both majority and minority complexes, is something that we could share with others, both with those in similar situations and where this is thought not to be relevant. It is, however, important not to limit the discussion to a matter of size, but to allow it to include attitudes and theological self-perception (great in ecclesiology but small in statistics).

Finally, we would wish for continued and deeper work on the themes of reconciled diversity and legitimate and divisive diversity. Not all diversity needs to be reconciled; some of the diversity should perhaps even be celebrated. Is it the diversity or the wounds inflicted that we reconcile?

25. Council of Churches in the Netherlands

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Recently, the Council of Churches in the Netherlands had an initial discussion on the Faith and Order report *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, focusing on the theme of the sacramentality of the church. We welcome the way this report takes stock of the major ecclesiological questions that we as churches face together. We have decided to continue a public discussion within our churches on these issues. Through this letter, we want to inform you about the discussion so far, and about the way we intend to continue dialogue.

In our meeting of December last year we dealt with a report of our own National Faith and Order Commission (a group of theologians from the participating churches within our council). This commission presented an analysis of the Faith and Order report in the context of our secularized environment, focusing on the issue of the sacramentality of the Church. It came to the conclusion that to a large extent there is common ground regarding the question raised in *The Church* that reads:

Those who use the expression “the Church as sacrament” do not deny the unique “sacramentality” of the sacraments nor do they deny the frailty of human ministers. Those

who reject the expression, on the other hand, do not deny the Church is an effective sign of God’s presence and action. Might this, therefore, be seen as a question where legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable? (§27)

Within the national council, we discussed this report and its conclusions. We concluded that it would be worthwhile to develop a longer discourse on this issue, which might help to bring the churches closer to each other and to find more words in explaining why we agree (or almost agree, or, in some cases, disagree) on this matter. We decided that during the next two years we will regularly discuss the main issues in *The Church* in our plenary meetings. At a later stage, we hope to give you an update about the results of the discussion over the years to come. We look forward to seeing how your Faith and Order Commission receives the input of churches all over the world, and particularly how the concept of the sacramentality of the Church will develop.

For now, we decided to send you this letter, in order to give you at least an idea of the discussions between the churches in our country as stimulated through the report. As a contribution to your discussion we also send you the report of our National Faith and Order Commission. It should not be regarded as an official

document of the National Council of Churches, but it worked quite well in initiating discussions among us.

With kind regards,
Dr. Klaas van der Kamp, General-secretary

Council of Churches in the Netherland National Faith and Order Commission

The Council of Churches in the Netherlands asked its National Faith and Order Commission to provide it with an advice with regard to the Faith and Order report *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*.

First of all, the Commission wants to express its appreciation of this document, as it is a result of long-lasting encounters between different Christian traditions that intend to foster and express growing unity between the churches. We hope that also within the churches there will be an increasing need and desire to seek the space that this ecclesiological approach provides, and to give expression to it. The vision as expressed in *TCTCV* is more than just another text: it shares the experience of the one Church of Christ with its readers.

However, the Commission also concludes that the *TCTCV* does not represent progress in ecumenical dialogue in a measure comparable with that of the 1982 Lima Report. It is disappointing to see that the decision of Santiago de Compostela World Conference (1993) to broaden the discussion to ecclesiology in general has not resulted in major theological advances so far. *TCTCV* can

be characterized as mainly a careful stocktaking of ecclesiological questions that we as churches should face together. This, however, is a significant exercise indeed.

Our response intends to show how *TCTCV* can be received in our Dutch context, which is shaped by two experiences the churches share. First, there has been ecumenical cooperation for more than half a century: Catholic and Protestant traditions have been equally present and active in it. Second, we share the context of a very secularized society which confronts the churches with major questions, compelling them to deal with classical theological issues anew.

“The Church as sacrament”

In this response, we intentionally focus on one theme that we regard as particularly relevant in our Dutch context. It regards the issue of the sacramentality of the church, a theme that also stands out in the present policy planning of the National Council of Churches. On the one hand, this issue has been characteristic of Protestant-Catholic relationships for a long time. On the other hand, it relates to fundamental and modern questions regarding the possibility of presenting the gospel in word and sign in our cultural context.

This issue is most explicitly touched upon in §27 of *TCTCV*. There we read:

While there is wide agreement that God established the Church as the privileged means for bringing about his universal design of salvation, some communities believe that this can be suitably expressed by speaking of

the “Church as sacrament,” while others do not normally use such language or reject it outright.

The italicized commentary added to this paragraph asks:

Those who use the expression “the Church as sacrament” do not deny the unique “sacramentality” of the sacraments nor do they deny the frailty of human ministers. Those who reject this expression, on the other hand, do not deny that the Church is an effective sign of God’s presence and action. Might this, therefore, be seen as a question where legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable?

The Commission is convinced that this question deserves an unequivocally positive response. We do, indeed, feel that the differences in formulation at stake, as shaped by different traditions, are legitimate, and can be understood in fruitful ecumenical dialogue as “compatible and mutually acceptable.”

We intend to substantiate this position by the elaboration of three themes: (1) The Church as mystery and sacrament, (2) The Church as instrument and sign, and (3) The Church and transformation.

1. The Church as mystery and sacrament

TCTCV §23 speaks about the Church as “both a divine and a human reality.” This is meant to express that the Church is not merely the sum

of individual believers among themselves, but that it is characterized by a holy dimension, an aspect that we also recognize where the report speaks about the two sacraments of baptism and eucharist.

In these sacraments, the believers partake of God’s presence. Paragraphs 41–44 rightly emphasize the importance of sanctification, and the mystery of God’s presence in the Church. It is the sacraments that in a way include and protect this sanctification and this mystery.

We are aware – as *TCTCV* also states – that not every ecclesial tradition recognizes these sacraments. Therefore, it might be even more striking that within our Commission there is a broad appreciation of the way the mystery of God’s commitment to humankind can be experienced in the sacraments. It is an appreciation that is not only expressed from a Catholic or an Orthodox background: Representatives of protestant churches, that in some cases hardly give any room, if at all, to the celebration of these sacraments in their own communities, could also agree.

This appreciation of the significance of the sacraments (and, for that matter, sacramental ecclesiology) has the following aspects:

a) It deepens ecclesiology through a trinitarian approach. Cf. §23: “The Church is fundamentally a communion with the triune God and, at the same time, a communion whose members partake together of the life and mission of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4), who, as Trinity, is the source and focus of all communion. Thus, the Church is both a divine and a human reality.”

b) It implies an antidote to what we see as a threat of “trivialization” of church worship within the Dutch context. Sometimes we see signs of this “trivialization” in sincere efforts of churches to be understood and to be relevant to our own context: a loss of depth, a loss of the dimension of mystery, and a lack of appreciation of tradition. As it has become difficult to communicate the significance of classical dogma, creative forms to shape “liturgy as a performance” are being sought – but at a cost. Sometimes, “eventology,” i.e., creating events, seems to be more important than focusing on theological depth and a re-appreciation of tradition. There might be an element of internal secularization in this. However, in their being directed towards the sanctification of the Church and its people, sacraments (as §§41–44 deal with them) foster the challenge to keep speaking about God’s presence. In a broader manner, this sacramentality can also be expressed in other aspects of the gatherings of the congregation, whenever wonder is somehow experienced. It is recognizable in the role of icons in the orthodox tradition, but not less in the significance of silence (as a way of becoming open to the Holy Spirit) in the worship of the Society of Friends. The main challenge is to further the transparency of such liturgical elements.

c) A conversation about sacramentality also has to deal with the question of how we understand these sacraments. We see this as a particularly helpful conversation between different church traditions within the ecumenical movement. The way *TCTCV* raises the issue of sacramentality can help Protestants to speak about the sacramentality of the Church, in order to maintain the position

that any manifestation of the Church can only be appropriate in its “referring” function, i.e., in its intention to refer to divine reality in human reality.

This conversation about the sacraments also raises questions:

a) If the sacraments “give space to” God’s mystery and if they help believers to understand the meaning of this mystery, is it possible that this mystery can become visible as well – within the context of *oikoumene* – in other significant forms, like particular forms of communion (*koinonia*), diaconate, or the gifts of the Spirit to the believer? Would it make sense to speak about “Sacraments” (uppercase – the classical sacraments), and “sacraments” (lowercase)? Sometimes, the term “mystery” provokes a negative reaction. This could be caused by the fact that people do not want to be involved in something that seems to be mysterious and that only gives access to those that are ready to participate: “Is the Church not there for everybody?” Can this reaction be included in ongoing dialogue on sacramentality?

b) The importance of a hospitable church may prevail. It is important that the church is recognized as hospitable and inviting. This is an aspect of the eucharist as well. The Church can, however, be hospitable even if not all those attending can or should participate in the sacraments. Particularly with a view to interreligious and intercultural conversation, we deem it important that the way we celebrate the sacraments does not impede hospitality.

c) Sometimes, there is indifference within churches regarding the sacraments. This is a sincere

concern to the churches. The response cannot be found in rigidity or in a congealed form of sacramentality that does not “speak” to the believers.

d) Parts of the Evangelical Movement, among others, focus on the eschatological aspects of sacramentality. It is not the act of people/ministers as such that realizes the mystery of God’s presence: Speaking about God’s presence and experiencing it is a wonder that only occurs in an open and anticipating way of watching for God’s kingdom.

2. The Church as instrument and sign

The two complementary aspects of the sacrament – as “a divine and a human reality” – should also be recognized in the issue of the Church as both an institution and the body of Christ. The Church that we experience is a sign and instrument of the Church that we believe in, and that we can only know in faith. This understanding provides space. For we people are never in control: In the Church it is all about “referring” instruments.

However, this instrumentality can be experienced as problematic. This can make people reticent in speaking about “The Church as Sacrament.”

We notice the following aspects.

a) It continues to be important to fully assent to instrumentality! Our cultural background helps us to understand the questions this raises, but we do feel that this aspect cannot be missed. The Church is determined by “God’s design for the world,” God’s kingdom (see above, on eschatology and ecclesiology).

b) But is “sacramentality” helpful in this respect? As a matter of fact, people in the Church are very much involved in this eschatological reality. In this sense, we can speak of “effective signs” that shape and change the community. In the Church, we may now live from the power of the vision: that experience is part of reality, here and now. Fundamentally, that is what is expressed in classical theological vocabulary such as “transubstantiation.”

c) There is a continuing quest for appropriate language that makes it possible for the believer to express the significance of the sacraments – and, so, of the sacramentality and the instrumentality of the Church – in a way that is recognizable to the world.

d) Not all traditions celebrate the sacraments. Whereas, for instance, sacraments are pivotal within the Orthodox tradition, other traditions (including part of the Evangelical Movement) show a quite spiritualistic character. But even where the immediate experience of the Holy Spirit is central, believers participate in acts and rites in which people can experience God’s presence. The question is to what extent sacramental ecclesiology can provide space to all manifestations of God’s presence. Could, for instance, foot-washing also be seen as a manifestation of “the Church as sacrament”?

3. The Church and transformation

A third issue regards the question to what extent the Church is able to gather people who want to follow the Lord according to the gospel, in a transformative process. From the perspective that the

Church is not there for its own sake, but that it always refers to God's world and His kingdom, the question rises as to what extent believers are really stimulated to make steps on that road. Can believers really feel involved in the signs of God's kingdom in the sacraments and in the sacramentality of the Church?

The Commission is aware of the transformation that is part and parcel of the sacraments. If, for instance, the eucharist helps us to understand hospitality, it can also be an instrument that furthers hospitality in a wider context. Celebrating the eucharist together is not a final goal, but it is a way forward in the *oikoumene* to which we are called.

This requires social ethics. The invitation as implied in the celebration of the sacraments is also the extent to which the significance of the sacrament as celebrated in the Church can be recognized by us and by other believers as determining our ways in the *oikoumene*, in the world we live in. This concerns believers with or without sacraments in their particular tradition that contribute to the significance of the sacraments in different ways. Sanctification is not just a matter of a worship service: it takes place in the *oikoumene* as well. This approach might bring us further on the way of transformation. Cf. §42: "The Lord's Supper is . . . an invocation of the Holy Spirit to transform both the elements of bread and wine and the participants themselves (*epiclesis*).” For it is important not to stick with the sacraments as such, but to take the road they show us, as a reality. The gospel is not something to cherish, but rather an incentive to go forward.

In summary

1. Sacramental ecclesiology can help us to realize that any manifestation of the Church is only significant in its referring function.
2. Sacramental ecclesiology can remind us that the Church includes effective signs that really shape and change the community.
3. Sacramental ecclesiology can contribute to a new experience of the transforming power of the gospel, from the perspective of the coming kingdom of God.

In short, the Commission is convinced that – whereas some prefer to speak about the sacramentality of the Church and others are not familiar with that terminology – such differences in formulation, as shaped by different traditions, are legitimate, and can be understood in fruitful ecumenical dialogue as “compatible and mutually acceptable.”

March, 2017

26. National Council of Churches in Denmark*

1. Summary: resonance, challenge, future questions and recommendations

This following official response continues the earlier practice concerning the Danish response to *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.¹ It aims to answer the five initial questions stated in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. The response recognizes areas of resonance (*missio dei*, pneumatology, Church as presence of Christ, ecclesiology and mission no longer separated, church as eschatological community); of challenge (priesthood of all believers, apostolicity, universal ministry of primacy); and it identifies future questions (Is visible unity the ecumenical goal? What does legitimate diversity mean? The differences in hermeneutics and anthropologies between the Global South and the Global North). Furthermore, the response identifies a number of areas

where the document challenges our Danish ecclesiologies. Finally, the response sums up findings in a number of recommendations from the Danish perspective: a Danish translation of the document, the development of a study guide for the ecumenical study of *TCTCV* in the Danish context, and furthering ecclesiological convergence with the global church present in Denmark in the form of increased interaction and relationship with various ethnic migrant churches.

2. Introduction: receiving an ecumenical document

Published in 2013 by the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order, *TCTCV* was a result of many years' work by representatives from various Protestant, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Pentecostal churches, lay people and ordained ministers alike.

According to the foreword, the nature of the document is an ecumenical "convergence" document. The text documents how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of ecclesiology. Furthermore, we take "convergence" to mean that the document invites readers and responders to uncover what a global,

1. See earlier responses to former version *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper No. 198) here: http://www.danskekirkeksraad.dk/fileadmin/filer/documenter/kirkens_v%c3%a6sen_og_opgave_final.pdf and here: http://www.danskekirkeksraad.dk/nyheder/nyhed/?tx_ttnews%5bbackpid%5d=29&tx_ttnews%5bpointer%5d=2&tx_ttnews%5bttn_news%5d=170&chash=e415742612813c99e599051314c8853a

* The following is the official response from a working group initiated by the Council on International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (Det Mellemkirkelige Råd) in collaboration with the National Council of Churches in Denmark (Danske Kirkeks Råd). The statement was produced in the period August 2016 to November 2016. The statement was submitted to the plenary of the National Council for comments in January 2017 and final approval at the annual general meeting in April 2017.

multilateral, and in this sense, ecumenical understanding of the nature, mission and purpose of the church might be in their own various contexts.

The document encourages churches to receive and use the text to “test and discern their own ecclesiological convergences with one another, and to serve their further pilgrimage” towards unity. Being mindful of our responsibility to test and discern our ecclesiological convergence, we have prepared the following response which describes results and insights from our reception and response to the text, as well as our ecclesiological convergence with the global Christian church. We understand and use the term “reception” as the process by which churches make their own the results of encounter with others. Thus, reception is an important methodological step in ecumenical reflection and the work towards unity. On a fundamental level, there is ecumenical agreement in Denmark that the document is timely and able to stimulate fruitful ecumenical cooperation.

In Denmark, the reception process was initiated by the Council on International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and the National Council of Churches in Denmark. After a general meeting at Aarhus University in August 2016, it was decided that a smaller working group under the auspices of the National Council of Churches in Denmark should draft and present a statement for approval by the National Council of Churches in Denmark, January 2017. Input and comments were offered from Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Pentecostal theologians – Birger Nygaard, Mogens Mogensen, Maria Munkholt, Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, Jakob Egeris

Thorsen, Tonny Jacobsen, Jette Pedersen and Jan Nilsson. The text was prepared by Jonas Adelin Jørgensen, and commented and revised by Jakob Engberg, Henning Thomsen, Bent Hylleberg and Jakob Egeris Thorsen.

3. Setting the scene: recent ecclesiological debate in the Danish context

In the Roman Catholic Church in Denmark, ecclesiological debate has in recent years circled around the relation between the universal Church and the local Danish context. Debates about ecclesiology have also surfaced in relation to the more pastoral question of marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics and possible participation in the Catholic eucharist.

In the larger community of free churches in Denmark – spanning from Methodist, Mission Covenant Church, and Baptists to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches – practical questions about cooperation between churches has been central. This has manifested itself for instance in joint summer conferences between Baptists and Mission Covenant Churches in Denmark, and in establishment of *Frikirkenet*, a network of Charismatic, Pentecostal and other free Churches and a number of Christian institutions and organizations.

Most Baptist churches and some charismatic churches have accepted “transferred membership” in the last decades. This is viewed as an ecumenical gesture which means that members in the Lutheran Church, for example, baptized in childhood, can become members of a Baptist church without being re-baptized. Alternatively, some Baptist churches have welcomed an “open

membership” model like that of Baptist churches both in Sweden and in Great Britain.

In the established Lutheran Church, debates have taken place concerning the acceptance of the Porvoo Declaration and the Leuenberg Concordia at the turn of the millennium. In recent years, discussions have focused mainly on the work of a politically appointed commission investigating the future structure of the established Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark and the relation between church and state.

In the so-called “*Betænkning 1544: Folkekirken styre*,” the report finalized by the commission in 2014, the main task of the church is described; and a rudimentary sketch of an ecclesiology is offered in the chapter “*Folkekirken opgave og idenitet – og syv pejlemærker*.” The mission of the church is that of “proclaiming Christ as savior of the whole world,” which is acknowledged as the basis for all activities in the church. The rudimentary ecclesiological sketch mentions “points of navigation,” including the relationship between people and church (over 75 percent of the Danish population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church), the national presence at the local level, inclusion and liberty, congregations and unity of the church, independence of pastors, democratic legitimacy, and state-church relations. The unfolding of the church’s mission in the Danish context is said to include church service, instruction, *diakonia*, and mission or evangelization.

(Question 1) To what extent does the document reflect ecclesiological understanding in our context?

Thus, the shared concerns between the ecclesiological debate in the Danish context and *TCTCV* relate to the missional nature of the church, legitimate diversity and unity in the church and between churches, and ministry and ordinances in the church. These three areas are those in which Danish churches might benefit most from interaction with *TCTCV*. The one area that plays an important role in ecclesiological debate across churches in the Danish context – the role of laity – is, however, not a prominent theme in the document. This goes a long way to answer the first question.

4. The text of *TCTCV*: resonance, challenges and questions

On an overall level, the document is received positively in that it sums up a long development, stretching from the Lima declaration over to former versions of the document, and now finally presented under the heading “Towards a Common Vision.” The document continues Faith and Order’s long-time commitment to formulating an ecumenical ecclesiology, and we find that the document resonates with our understanding in a number of ways. At the same time, we are challenged and feel that there are issues that need future attention.

Areas of resonance

We resonate ecumenically with the attempts to view trinitarian theology, ecclesiology and mission as closely interrelated, with the prominent use of pneumatology and with the invitation to move

beyond the limitations of confessional and geographical viewpoints.

- The Church is the presence of Christ. Therefore, the church is not a voluntary association of isolated saved individuals organized to promote individual interests. It is the fellowship of all those in Christ, rooted in the relational nature of Father, Son and Spirit, a consequence of God's economy of salvation, and equipped by the Spirit with gifts, qualities and orders. As Christ was the presence of God, the church is now the presence of Christ.
- *Missio dei* remains the theological framework within which both ecclesiology and mission are appreciated and related. The unity and universality of the church becomes part of God's economy of salvation, and the challenge to churches to "recognize that the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body" (*TCTCV*, 8) therefore remains a theologically important challenge.

† The church exists in its relation to Christ, and in its mission to the world.

† The invitation to move beyond a "confessionalistic" and geographically limited outlook is a much needed and appreciated quality of the document.

† Pneumatology is central and holds a more prominent place in ecclesiology than in prior documents.

† We see this in other recent documents from the WCC as well, for instance, *Together towards Life, Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (CWME, 2013).

- Mission is no longer a separate area of ecclesiology, but the church is "missionary by its very nature" as a consequence of God's economy of salvation. That is, the document sets the church's mission as point of departure to understand the nature and tasks of the church.

† In contrast to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM, Faith and Order Paper No. 111), which does not mention the mission of the church in relation to baptism, eucharist and ministry, *TCTCV* fully acknowledges these practices to be understood in relation to the mission of the church.

- The recognition of eucharistic fellowship as one of the founding practices of church resonates ecumenically in the Danish context.
- The importance of scripture for theology, as reflected in our ecumenically acknowledged emphasis on a scriptural theology.
- The church is an eschatological community, living in hope for things to

come. As a (paradoxical) fellowship of the cross (the place of ultimate isolation and death), its mission is to give witness to the restored communion which God intends for all humanity and all creation in the kingdom. Ecclesiology and eschatology remain closely connected.

On an overall level, we therefore welcome the document and view developments as positive and relevant in our context and for our ecclesiological reflections.

Areas of challenge

We are challenged by the document in relation to our own ecclesiastical context in Denmark in several ways:

- The document acknowledges the priesthood of all believers or universal priesthood, an insight ecumenically valued and treasured in Danish context. However, *TCTCV*'s discussion about *episkopé* and a ministry of primacy seems to be lacking connection with this important theological category, and we feel that the universal priesthood of all believers remains unrelated to the discussion about ministry and ordinances. We feel that there is more to explore in the relationship between the universal and the special ministry of believers.
- The document points to apostolic succession. Apostolic succession is a real

challenge in the sense that ecumenically divergent understandings of apostolicity remain between churches in the Danish context. However, we find the term apostolicity could be explored further in search for an ecumenical ecclesiology.

† From a Lutheran perspective, we believe that the Porvoo Declaration might offer valuable inspiration on what apostolicity might mean from an Anglican and Lutheran point of view in terms of gospel, church and episcopate. In the Porvoo Declaration, apostolicity is interpreted as a common tradition of spirituality, liturgy and sacramental life (32, e), and it is said that a ministry of pastoral oversight (*episkopé*), exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways, is necessary as “witness to and safeguard of the unity and apostolicity of the Church” (32, k). We find these formulations helpful in fleshing out what apostolicity might mean.

- Pointing out a universal ministry of primacy is challenging to those of us who identify with various protestant traditions. Again, the challenge remains.

† From a Roman Catholic point of view, we see a number of other ways and means of relating fruitfully to churches other than a universal ministry of primacy, for

instance, the differentiation (in itself Roman Catholic) between churches, ecclesial fellowships and Christian groups (cf. *Lumen Gentium* as well as *Dominus Iesus*). In our contemporary situation, where numerous new and dynamic ecclesial fellowships emerge especially in the Global South – often rich in experience and healings, centered around charismatic and prophetic figures – we suggest that our task is to explore how our sacramental and episcopal churches might relate and interact fruitfully with fellowships and groups. Rather than formalizing episcopal structures, we suggest an attempt to spell out in concrete ways what it means to be responsible in relation to each other as churches.

† From our various protestant perspectives, we question ourselves whether anyone in full honesty believes that Orthodox and Protestant churches would come to a full recognition of a universal ministry of primacy? Rather, we see a more realistic and interesting option in exploring how fellowship and *episkopé* might supplement each other.

† From the perspective of the free churches in Denmark, we would argue for a mutual recognition

in love between various ecclesial bodies rather than attempts to hierarchically organize churches according to criteria not ecumenically recognized.

(Question 5) What aspects of the life of the churches could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

We see future questions in the italicized paragraphs of the document, which forces us to continue working with the difficult areas in ecumenical relations, areas where we sense that future challenges are located:

- Visible unity: Is visible unity still the ecumenical vision; or should it be supplemented or maybe even replaced by common witness and service – engagement in social, economic and ecological crises – in acceptance of the impossibility of reaching agreement on sacramental life, ministry and baptism?

† Again, we must point out the diversity between ecclesial bodies in our Danish context when discussing whether visible unity is a priority; or whether, for instance, mutual recognition in love is a more productive goal.

- Legitimate diversity: If diversity is not only acknowledged but distinction is to

be made between a legitimate, valuable, and stimulating diversity and an illegitimate and destructive diversity, we need further reflection and guiding structures in making this distinction.² Diversity is a complex area, in that it might be identified in a number of areas: in theology, in pastoral practice, or in ethics and moral instruction.

- Hermeneutics and anthropology: In the Danish Lutheran church, dividing factors inside and in relation to other Lutheran churches is how scripture is used and how moral issues are looked upon. Areas such as marriage and sexuality divide churches into a liberal Global North and a conservative Global South in Lutheran churches, but also internally in the Danish Lutheran Church. In this situation, not only ecclesiology is in focus but also the reflection on scripture and what a “scriptural theology” might mean in relation to anthropology and sexuality.

From our perspective, a continuing difficulty is located in the nexus between these terms and ideals: How do we reconcile visible unity with legitimate diversity when faced with different scriptural hermeneutics and theological anthropologies? Is it

2. This is not a new question in Church history, but a well-known challenge, for example, in the Moravian Church as mirrored in their famous dictum: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love” seen in relation to the foundational document “The Ground of Unity.”

really the best strategy to call for acceptance of certain abstract and ideal concepts of unity in order to define the boundaries for a legitimate diversity, but at the same time pay relatively little attention to the contemporary reality in which churches find themselves?

Faith and Order has in a number of documents and processes worked with communion in unity and diversity. In *TCTCV*, the insights summed up in pp. 16–18 remain superficial compared to the much more serious integration needed of Protestant perspectives on the necessity of mutual understanding and appreciation independent of recognition of ministry and ordinances (cf. the comments on priesthood of all believers, apostolicity, and a universal ministry of primacy above).

Again, comparing *TCTCV* to the older *BEM*, it has been claimed the latter had success in addressing some of the pressing ecumenical issues – apostolicity, *episkopé*, etc. – by removing the cultural and historical context of the terms. Although ecumenical documents might be viewed as successful by doing so, it leads to an active ignorance of the contemporary reality of the churches and their mission.

In contrast, we suggest it would be more fruitful to think the other way around, starting with our common contemporary reality and the challenges we are facing globally and alike, calling for an ecumenical response to these challenges.

Among the constructive comments for future ecumenical work on ecclesiology and unity, we collected in the process of the Danish reception the following insights:

- Hope: *TCTCV* is concerned with pneumatology and with the eschatological character of the church. However, as a theological category, “hope” is entirely missing from the document. We believe that Christian witness in proclamation and *diakonia* must be related to our Christian hope.
- Hospitality: Rather than calling for a laissez-faire theology and practice in relation to the eucharist, we would like to explore how a “eucharistic hospitality” between churches might be practiced. That is, what are the practical possibilities for opening up eucharistic celebrations to other Christians?
- Fellowship: As mentioned above, in a situation where numerous new and dynamic ecclesial fellowships emerge, especially in the Global South but also in our own context, we need to explore how sacramental and episcopal churches might form fruitful fellowship with these groups.

5. Methodological notes and comments on *TCTCV*

Among our methodological notes, most importantly we want to point to the question about vocabulary, representation in ecumenical dialogue, and the style of the document:

- Vocabulary: On the background of the considerations presented above, we find

that a key future achievement would be to develop a common language among churches, a vocabulary of appreciation and unity, rather than continue using the terms well known to divide churches (for example, “sacramentality,” “ordinances,” the “primacy” of St Peter’s ministry, the idea of a universal ministry, etc.). The vocabulary should be as concrete as possible, describing not abstract ideas but actions needed to demonstrate a visible unity. New vocabulary gives rise to new epistemic structures!

- Representation and reception: WCC and its constituency represent roughly 20 percent of the world’s Christians, and the core of WCC is made up by historical European and North American churches as well as various Orthodox churches. Many of these churches experience diminishing membership for reasons well explained in the document (secular culture, questions about relevance of church in modern life). We know that more than 60 percent of Christians today live in the Global South, and that a large part of them are Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians. The kind of ecumenism these brothers and sisters endorse is probably quite different from the one proposed in the document. This means that there is a vast majority of Christians outside of the intended readership of the

document, and that there remains a challenge in stretching out the ecumenical dialogue to all Christians. As reception is an increasingly important topic in ecumenical theology, more consideration into the process of reaching the majority of Christians is needed.

- Style: The style of the chapters varies throughout the document. Whereas the first chapters seem to be authoritative, the latter chapters are more tentative. Thus, the intention and status of the document seems to change through the text. Does a “convergence text” mean an authoritative or a tentative text? The document is said to be comparable in status to *BEM*, but the style, structure and textual clarity is quite different.

6. Ecclesiological convergence with the global church: a Danish reflection on the guiding questions

As a way of summing up and rephrasing what is said above, this section will answer the guiding questions provided in *TCTCV* (3). The first and fifth guiding questions are tentatively answered above and therefore focus is on the remaining three questions.

(Question 2) To what extent does the document offer a basis for growth in unity among churches in our context?

We agree that the document is valuable in its offering of an ecumenical language for discussing and identifying what unites and what divides us as Christians in Denmark. The very conversation itself fosters growth in unity among churches in Denmark.

- In the Lutheran Church, ecclesiological discussion focuses mainly on confessional and national unity, and only to a lesser degree on unity across confessional or geographical borders. Historically, inclusion in the established church system and liberty within the same system are the historically proved instruments of unity, not confession. Historically and constitutionally, this is reflected where the Danish constitution is the founding document of the established church, not the (Augsburg, Lutheran) confession. Therefore, from a Lutheran perspective we feel sad to report that the key goal of the ecumenical movement – the full and visible unity between churches – is not within the horizon, nor even within the established national church itself from a Danish Evangelical Lutheran perspective.
- On the other hand, we feel challenged where *TCTCV* warns about limits to legitimate diversity (p. 17). The document does not unfold how agreement on limits might be reached. But it lists

criteria for full communion in a visible united church (p. 22), and points to shared moral values and social ethics (p. 35). The criteria for full visible unity – common and full apostolic faith, sacramental life, one and mutually recognized ministry, structures of conciliar relations and decision making – can hardly be said to characterize the current state of affairs in the established Lutheran Church of Denmark.

- Consequently, in our Danish context, historically speaking, the experience is that rights of freedom and religious liberty unites. The legitimate diversity in relation to doctrine and life within and across Christian churches in Denmark is as large as across the global churches. We find this confirmed by the document where it says that “Legitimate diversity in life of the communion is a gift from the Lord” (p. 16). From the perspective of free churches, we therefore encourage a focus on unity as mutual recognition in love between ecclesial bodies.

(Question 3) What adaptations or renewal in the life of our church does this statement challenge our churches to work for?

We view the document as valuable in that it might stimulate discussion and reflection within the various churches on an ecumenical ecclesiology.

- From a Lutheran point of view, *koinonia* might be identified as a fellowship

in local congregations; but above the local level, no overall leadership or common voice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church exists. We see this in contrast to the document which insists on *koinonia* as the most fundamental theological statement about the church, because we believe that such a fundamental statement must manifest itself.

As pointed out above, we see the ecumenically challenging nexus between visible unity, legitimate diversity and hermeneutics and anthropology as aspects calling for further discussion: How do we reconcile visible unity with legitimate diversity when faced with different scriptural hermeneutics and theological anthropologies?

(Question 4) How far are we from forming closer relationship in life and mission with churches, which acknowledge in a positive way the ecclesiology of the document?

In recent years, a number of ecumenical activities have been continued or started, all of which have proven to be valuable in forming closer relationships in the life and mission of the churches. We would like to point to the following: the ecumenical triannual *Danske Kirkedage* (Danish *Kirchentag*); the activities surrounding “*Grøn Kirke*” (Green Church working group) focusing on the involvement of local congregations in ecological advocacy and sustainable practice; on ecumenical participation in the annual national political festival *Folkemødet*; and on the annual

ecumenical prayer week initiated by the Evangelical Alliance in collaboration with National Council of Churches in Denmark.

- From a Lutheran perspective, and in contrast to *TCTCV*, there is a more static understanding of the established Evangelical Lutheran Church's mission in the Danish context. In the case of the established church, the church's mission manifests itself in worship, instruction, diaconal work and evangelism or proclamation. That is, when the church's mission translates into activities, focus remains on ritual service, confirmation classes, material service to homeless and economically marginalized individuals and various cultural activities at the local level.

We see this contrasted by the dynamic understanding of the church's mission (p. 6), and especially as it is unfolded in the last part of the document (chapter 4: "The Church: In and for the World"). Here the activities of the church are said to include the promotion "of the values of the kingdom of God," and the opposition of policies and initiatives which contradict them. Special mention is made of justice issues, freedom of religion and belief, religious pluralism, social order, and economy. To a large degree, these areas are addressed in relative separation from the local congregations by various faith-based organizations and their professional staff.

To sum up, the statement challenges us to form closer relationships by discovering the more dynamic dimensions of the churches' mission together as expressed in ecumenical activities and various faith-based organizations.

7. Recommendations from the Danish perspective

Looking ahead, we recommend discovering the more dynamic dimensions of our churches together in our common contemporary reality. We believe that an ecumenical response to social, economic and ecological challenges in the Danish context is timely and needed. Understanding the nature and mission of the churches is a challenging issue facing contemporary ecumenism. The working group believes that *TCTCV* has a potentially important role to play in discerning stepping-stones in the continued work towards a common understanding of ecclesiology, and in turn towards a more visible unity between churches in Denmark. To facilitate further discussion, we recommend (a) a Danish translation of the document as well as (b) the development of a study guide for the ecumenical study of *TCTCV* in the Danish context, together with (c) a strategic dialogue with migrant churches in Denmark. We see possible ecclesiological convergence with the churches in Denmark towards a deeper ecumenical understanding of the nature and mission of our churches together.

27. North Carolina Council of Churches*

As the committee examined *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, we began by looking at the overarching themes which seemed to guide the Faith and Order Commission as it worked through the challenging task of developing a convergence document which might lead the Church toward a common ecclesiology. To this end, the committee sought to explore the *scopus* which shaped the overall contours of *TCTCV*. At the same time it sought to be mindful of the *ductus* or specific path which the commission sought to follow as it compiled this document. As the committee used this methodology in our examination, such study assisted us not only in discussing and evaluating the directions which the commission took in articulating its convergences in *TCTCV*, but also in connecting attempts at convergence in *TCTCV* with our own everyday ecumenical efforts.

As we considered the *scopus*, we gave thanks that in the last part of the 20th century, amid the exciting ecumenical work by the Commission reflected in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*,

there was an increase in interest in the whole topic of ecclesiology. Following work on *BEM*, participants in that document process recognized that work needed to proceed which would help bring convergence on a common ecclesiology. A huge step was taken in this direction in *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*.¹ Based on biblical insights, the commission suggested that four approaches to the nature and mission of the Church were required to honor these Biblical perspectives: “People of God,’ ‘Body of Christ,’ ‘Temple of the Holy Spirit’ and *koinonia*.”²

Proceeding from this initial stage, the commission in its work on *TCTCV* expanded upon the understanding of the Church as a part of the mission of God which had been reflected in *The*

1. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 2. (Hereafter NMC)

2. *NMC*, 6.

*At a quarterly meeting of the North Carolina Council of Churches’ Christian Unity Committee (NCCC CUC) on 6 November 2015, time was set aside on the agenda to discuss the work of the World Council of Churches’ Commission on Faith and Order as articulated in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Following the committee’s discussion, Rev. Dr C. Pierson Shaw, Jr., a Pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Co-Chair of the committee along with the Rev. Rollin O. Russell, formerly the Conference Minister of the Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ and the committee’s former Chair, each provided some specific reflections on *TCTCV*. The compilations of all of these reflections were then disseminated to the members of the committee to ensure that as a whole it had confidence that this response fairly reflected the committee’s critique and discussion process.

Nature and Mission of the Church. In the perceptible *ductus* discernable in *TCTCV*, the commission sought to root a common vision of ecclesiology in the doctrine of the Trinity. As the persons of the Holy Trinity are one and undivided, the Church is to be understood as being in the design of God. The commission briefly traced the ecclesial mission through the whole history of the Church, recognizing that the *missio ecclesiae* is properly anchored in both the economic and ontological Trinity. This *ductus* directs the Church toward the necessity of unity. By participating in the *koinonia* within the ontological or immanent Trinity, the Church receives the gift of unity, as the triune God draws not just the whole Church, but all of humanity into the *koinonia* of the economic Trinity. This starting point is very important, as it enables the commission to expound not just upon Biblical images of the Church from its earlier statement in 2005, but also to utilize images found within the Church's overall tradition and history. The commission has thus effectively been able to speak definitively of the Church as "sign and servant of God's design for the world."³

We are very pleased that, because *TCTCV* begins with the unity of the Holy Trinity, the commission is able to affirm that human beings were created for unity, as the document states that "man and woman were created in God's image, so bearing an inherent capacity for communion with God and with one another." Christian unity offers visible signs of healing and an imperative

to repair the breaches and divisions which are the result of human sin over the centuries, both in the Church and in the world. Mending the breaches that divide along with healing are at the core of the Church's mission (§1). Working out of a solid theology of the trinitarian economy, we affirm the principal focus on initiation into discipleship (§2) and the strong overarching pneumatology of *TCTCV*, as the statement affirms that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples at Pentecost for the purpose of the *missio dei*. This pneumatological focus in the *scopus* in turn is well balanced by a sound Christological focus, both of which are reflected as the Church together confesses in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. This confession enables the commission to assert boldly that "the Church is rooted in the plan of the Triune God for humankind's salvation" (§3). Working out of this christological and pneumatological understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, the statement affirms that the Church may see the *missio ecclesiae* as that which stems from her nature. It is inherent to that nature of the Church that she shares in the ministry of Christ who remains the mediator between God and creation in this vision of total unity (§4). We as a committee also find it commendable that there are two major challenges to the Church's mission articulated in *TCTCV*, namely, (1) on the part of the Church a growing awareness and appreciation for other faiths, and (2) the Church's immersion in a secular, materialist culture (§7).

We are deeply appreciative of the emphasis taken in the *scopus* of *TCTCV* on the mutual recognition of each church of the classical marks

3. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 1–17.

in each of the other churches as the basis of the possibility of unity. This means that we can find in each other the evidence that other communions are part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church (§9). As the line of argument in the text of *TCTCV* begins to shift the discussion of unity toward naming the ways in which different Christian communities perceive themselves in relationship toward other Christian communities, it might have been helpful to have begun with a statement acknowledging the “scandal” of division. Acknowledging the sin of division at this juncture would enable the direction of the *scopus* to help reestablish the reality of brokenness. This would offer a chance for the text of the document to offer a challenge without prejudice. Further, it would have permitted the Church to acknowledge the sin of division for which the Church is called to repent. At the same time, had the sin of division been acknowledged, a call to repentance could have been mutually shared by all, regardless of a Christian community’s perceptions concerning ecclesial differentiation and oneness. As the statement is worded, the onus for repentance would seem to rest mainly upon those who “identify the Church of Christ exclusively with their own community” (§10). We must acknowledge the reality that our division and disunity, and all that perpetuates separation among brothers and sisters, is sin. The reality of this acknowledgement could enable such an assertion to be seen as a challenge to the whole Church, that she may be a collective agent of reconciliation and may be “called the repairer of the breach” (Is. 58:12). We do find the challenge as stated in the following italic paragraph

helpful, as it offers future topics for real focused ecumenical discussion, whether at local, national or international levels, as the Church seeks to dialogue about, redefine, and clarify the meaning and scope of its visible Christian unity. This challenge comes to a Church existing in a fragmented post-modern world which questions all authority. Yet the challenge to envision Christian unity is issued to a Church which we confess to be “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” (§9).

TCTCV might have offered some important points which could provide some clarity leading to fruitful dialogue in particular between those denominations of the Protestant reform and Roman Catholicism. Protestants have often made statements such as, “It is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere.”⁴ The term *adiaphora*, a Greek word borrowed from Stoic philosophy, was used by the Protestant Reformers to speak of those matters which did not need to be practiced or confessed universally by all in the Christian faith.⁵ Yet, in modern parlance the term *adiaphora* has been often used in a reductionist sense in some circles. This is to say that the term *adiaphora* has been often used to refer to anything which does not meet one person’s or one community’s view of that

4. R. Kolb, T. I. Wengert, and C. P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 43.

5. *Ibid.* 230.

which is essential to the nature of the Church, and therefore is something which may be eliminated, in the interests of focusing on that which is essential to the nature of the Church. The two questions become, (1) based on this criterion, what are the essentials and what is *adiaphora*; and (2) by what authority are these categories determined? Some Protestants, reflecting changes in social views, increasingly make decisions which reflect the desire by many in these denominations to shift away from more historically traditional views to newer understandings based on matters ranging from dogma, social statements, and the specific qualifications for clergy. In the process, many might be led to perceive that, amid the differing views held among sisters and brothers of good conscience within a denomination, such differing views on a matter make the matter itself *adiaphora*. Since it could be argued that such differences on dogma, canons, confessional statements, social statements, and views on qualifications for who may be admitted to clergy orders should not be ultimately Church dividing, are these matters to be counted among the essentials or not? Even within various ecclesial communities, and among the members of a denomination, ecclesial disunity is often manifested in differences over what matters are essential. Amid both internal differences and interdenominational differences, the term *adiaphora* has been employed in a reductionist sense as a way of arguing in favor of what has often been called a reconciled diversity.

At the same time, the Roman Catholic Church speaks of a “hierarchy of truths.” The phrase first appeared in the Second Vatican Council’s “Decree

on Ecumenism.” The Council used the phrase when speaking on the methodology of ecumenical dialogue. “When comparing doctrines with one another, they [theologians] should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists a ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith.”⁶ This methodology of engaging in dialogue has permitted Roman Catholic ecumenists to engage with dialogue partners on matters which are essential, since these doctrines form the basis for other doctrines. This permits ecumenists the ability to move on to the thornier yet far fewer issues that divide Roman Catholics from their separated brothers and sisters. For many Roman Catholic as well as Protestant laity, the terms “hierarchy of truths” and *adiaphora* may well have been misappropriated to the extent that both terms may have often been used in a reductionist sense.

Many Protestant denominations have been led to ordain both women and men, as well as both women and men whose self-understanding is gay, bisexual, lesbian, queer, or those who are led to live as transgendered persons. Many denominations now offer same-sex marriage rites just as the Church has offered the rite of marriage to persons of the opposite sex for centuries. Some denominations in the United States have taken moves to support contraception and abortion through insurance plans and through advocacy contained in social positions. In such cases, there would be those who would advocate that such positions should not divide sisters and brothers who hold

6. *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 11.

opposing positions on any or all of these matters. Many of the members of NCCC CUC have noted that *TCTCV* in its overall *scopus* contains a glaring omission in light of the conversations in many Church bodies. Many members of our committee are concerned that the Faith and Order Commission has failed to name many of the very same matters that divide the Church both inter-denominationally and intra-denominationally.

Yet, for those who support their denominations in what could arguably be divisive issues, there is a painful reality which *TCTCV* never acknowledges. The Roman Catholic Church continues to maintain that many of the directions which denominations have been led to take now reflect impediments to unity with the Roman Catholic Church. The Code of Canon Law within the Roman Catholic Church will not permit the Church to deviate from the Church's historical social teachings on marriage or abortion, nor enter into full communion with those who hold or perpetuate views on these matters that are contrary to the Canons. Those within the Roman Catholic Church who perpetuate such views themselves live in a state of impaired Communion within their own church, since they are espousing views that are contrary to the Canons and the teachings of the church. Causing a faithful member of the congregation of the laity to engage in agreements which would lead to a state of impaired communion can never be viewed by the Roman Catholic Church as *adiaphora*, but instead remains an impediment to full communion between the separated brothers and sisters and the Roman Catholic Church. The commission would have done well in

its work in drafting *TCTCV* to acknowledge with frankness this painful yet very present reality, as many denominations are being led to make decisions which are at present creating new barriers to obtaining the unity which we seek.

The lack of any discussion on this lingering area of division led Rollin O. Russell to note that, in *TCTCV*, it is recognized that there is inherent diversity among the books of the canonical scriptures. The commission was led to make the following conclusion: "Legitimate diversity is not accidental to the life of the Christian community but is rather an aspect of its catholicity" (§12). Yet, Russell is compelled to ask, what diversities are "legitimate?" Then as a follow-up question Russell asks, "How are ecumenical partners to agree on the criteria for legitimate diversity?"

Despite the lack of guidance on the matters of legitimate diversity by the commission, the Biblical perspectives which speak of brothers and sisters in the body of Christ in solidarity do offer an important shared model for ecclesial unity. *TCTCV* speaks of other scriptural images that envision the Church as a *communio* (§13). The document shows convergence even amid diverging ecclesiological affirmations. Yet these diverging affirmations need not be mutually exclusive. As a case in point, *TCTCV* appeals to several scriptural images of the Church's members. The Church's members are those who "have born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). The Church's members are strengthened "through the preaching of the Gospel" (Rom. 10:14-18); and the Church remains "under the power of the

Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Which Biblical images are most important has historically led to divergences between the Roman Catholic Church and the heirs of not only the Wittenberg Reformation, but the Hussite Reform, the Geneva, Dutch and Scottish Reform and the English Reform movements. Yet, each of the contrasting ecclesiological statements articulated in *TCTCV* which had historically been identified with the Protestant Reformers or with the Roman Catholic Church no longer needs be identified as exclusively Reformed or Protestant. Through ecumenical dialogue over the second half of the 20th century, many Protestants and Roman Catholics alike have come to be able to affirm that, based in scriptural ecclesiological images, through the gospel and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, “human beings come to saving faith and, by sacramental means, are incorporated into the body of Christ.” Many today could affirm that the Church is *creatura evangelii* (creature of the Gospel), *creatura verbi* (creature of the Word), and even the “sacrament of Grace” (§14).

Among many of the scriptural images which certainly offer convergence between numerous Protestants and Roman Catholic dialogue partners, there is that of the Marian *fiat* as articulated in Luke 1:38. Since the image is anchored in scripture, a broader convergence among dialogue partners is possible (§15). The commission also offered images of the Church which should enjoy broad convergence when it pointed to the images of the Church as prophetic, priestly, and royal. The idea that the people of God are chosen may certainly be found in Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel

37:27, 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Hebrews 8:10. Yet this document tempers the identity of the Church being chosen as the people of God in the Church by lifting up Romans 11:11-36. This sense of the people of God in the Church comes with the stern caution that the Church has not supplanted God’s people Israel, the people who first received the promise. *TCTCV* affirms that God offers gifts to the Church for her work’s sake and that such gifts come with an obligation and responsibility to which the brothers and sisters are mutually accountable (§§17–18). All on our committee were in agreement that the commission was wise to base the entire discussion of ecclesiology on “the whole people of God,” which leads then to the discussion on the ordered ministry. Thus the document maintains that the ministry of the ordained derives from the ministry of the laity (§19). Yet our own committee encounters divergence over the specificity of how the ordained should be fully accountable and answerable to the laity.

In the *scopus* of *TCTCV* there is a strong use of the image of the people of God who, through their participation and sharing in the eucharist, become the body of Christ. Such a strongly sacramental understanding of holy communion enables the commission to challenge the whole Church to recall why the people of God are gathered and equipped as Christ’s body in the world. The commission speaks of the importance of the Church’s being shaped and empowered by Christ for ministry, so that the whole Church may proclaim the gospel. As the document turns to speak of the fourfold confession that the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, Russell notes that he

would wish to see some further defining of how the Church is understood to be holy. Since one characterization of Christ's holiness is to be found in his humility and servanthood, so too should the Church see that she is holy to the extent that she is empowered to carry out her ministry and adopts the posture of servanthood (§§22f.).

The commission was wise to establish in the *ductus* of this document that the Church herself is not the sum of her parts, or merely the sum of her members. She is a community in communion with one another and in communion with the triune God who is in mission. This affirmation, which various traditions should be able to hold in common, permits the document to offer various ways in which communions understand how much or how little ecclesial structures are perceived as being divinely inspired. As Rollin Russell notes, in the italicized paragraph reflecting where differences remain on this matter,⁷ he would affirm that the bonds of mutual affection within the one body of Christ necessitate that we honor the various traditions of all who identify themselves as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. For some it may be that in our present age, among those in the global North, we no longer live in the paradigm of Christendom. For some ecclesial communities this may indeed be the time for a new approach to church orders so that the Church herself is not bound by what some might see as outworn traditions. Whether some church bodies seek new ecclesial structures, or some seek to find ways of making traditional models work, brothers

and sisters are members of the body of Christ and are thus compelled to strive humbly for the building up of the body, seeking neither to bear false witness, nor to see themselves and their own denomination as better than another.

The commission offers what is an essential image of the Church for many Roman Catholics while it remains problematic for some denominations. In some quarters, the teaching that the Church is properly understood as a sacrament, with Christ as primary sacrament, presents an ecclesial image which may increasingly offer new areas for continued conversation between those in the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. There is a major reason why the notion of Church as sacrament with Christ as primary sacrament is so important as a truth within the Roman Catholic tradition. In Roman Catholic theology the understanding that the Church is a sacrament with Christ as primary sacrament⁸ provides a vital presupposition upon which a post-Second Vatican Council sacramental economy and sacramentology is based. The notion that the Church is a sacrament with Christ as primary sacrament enables the Roman Catholic Church to speak of the True Church as subsisting in the Roman Catholic Church as the Church confesses that Christ's divinity subsists within his humanity. The statement that the Roman Church subsists within the true Church often seems to many ecumenical partners a pompous claim. Yet, it is important to note that the Roman Catholic Church's understanding is not that the Church is

7. Following §24.

8. *Lumen gentium*, Chapter 1.1.

the Roman Catholic Church or that the Church is contained in the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, since the Church which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic subsists in the Roman Catholic Church, the claim is not exclusive but is actually inclusive. The claim does not suggest that other ecclesial communities may not also subsist in the one true Church. Rather, since the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has sought to be in dialogue with other ecclesial communities, in order that the Roman Catholic Church might discern with them the degree to which other Christians in other ecclesial bodies might also be a part of the Church in her true sense. Since this is such an important image for dialogue between Roman Catholics and other Christians, its omission from *TCTCV* seems a glaring one.

There has often been the assumption that Lutherans as a whole would reject the notion that the Church is a sacrament with Christ as the primary sacrament. Yet Lutherans are not of one mind on the matter of refusing this Second Vatican Council affirmation. It is often argued by some Lutherans that declaring the Church as sacrament with Christ as primary sacrament may blur the distinction between the holiness of Christ and the Church comprised of sinners. Of some help here is Luther's often-quoted dictum that the baptized believer remains *simul iustus et peccator*. When this dictum is coupled with some advances in Luther studies presented by what has often been called the Finnish school, along with the perspectives of those who are often called "Evangelical Catholics," together these might offer new perspectives to future dialogues. The newer perspectives

among Lutherans might well move the conversation beyond what has often been perceived as an impasse in this area. Clearing the roadblock might have enormous implications for Lutherans and Roman Catholics moving forward, and not only on ecclesiology and sacramentology. It may prove a way forward on other historical points of contention which have caused division.⁹

In the very paragraph in which we see both areas of convergence as well as divergent views on the notion of the Church as sacrament, we see that the commission calls for the Church to reach out to those who are not explicitly members of the Church. Such reaching out may be seen in ways not always visible to others, yet which nonetheless compel the Church to see beyond the narrower definition of who one's neighbor is. To be a neighbor calls the Church to faithfully respect "the elements of truth and goodness that can be found in other religions" (§25). Rollin Russel believes the commission's exhortation is insufficient; simply "respecting" falls short of what the Church is called to be. Russell goes on to say that "we need to honor other religious groups as we honor each other. We should further begin to discuss whether it is desirable, possible or necessary to separate the truth of the gospel of God's Reign from the person of Jesus, and make the truth of the gospel the basis for inter-faith dialogue and encounters." Russell believes that the Church "would find ready affirmation of the Gospel vision of unity, justice, love and peace if the image of Christ, so long perceived as exclusive by persons of other faiths, were

9. *TCTCV*, italicized paragraph following §27.

de-emphasized and Christ's message made the center."

Pierson Shaw would take his departure from Rollin Russell, not so much over the nature of the concern which Russell raises, but rather the point in the *scopus* at which the commission has chosen to take up the topic of those of other religions. *TCTCV* takes up the topic of the overarching *missio dei* in §3. This would have been the appropriate place to bring up the "truth found in other religions." As God had promised Abraham that through his offspring Abraham would be the father of nations, so too God's mission is active among all peoples and all nations (Gen.12-17). God, we are told by the prophet, will gather all nations to his holy mountain on the last day where there will be a feast, and death will be swallowed up forever (Is. 25:8). Because God is at work in mission for the sake of the whole world, we as God's people should respect our fellow human beings who are also children of the same God. We share a common humanity and, as the Church, we are adopted heirs of Abraham, grafted into the promise. Therefore, we are compelled to acknowledge that "there are truths to be found in all religions." By anchoring the inter-religious dialogue in the *missio dei*, we avoid the confusion of the proclamation of the gospel and of the kingdom with proselytizing. We also distinguish the differing goals and purposes of inter-religious and ecumenical dialogues. Interreligious dialogue is conformed to the ongoing mission of God in the lives of all people. Interreligious dialogue therefore aims at fostering mutual respect, understanding and an appreciation that we are all God's children

and that we together are called to seek a just and equitable society in the world in which we live.

Ecumenical dialogue, on the other hand, seeks to remove the impediments which prevent the unity for which our Lord prayed, so that the world might believe that the Father had indeed sent the Son into the world. Since the Church lacks visible unity, the proclamation of the Christian gospel is distorted and, in turn, the world's view of the truth that God is love is distorted. Further, when the Church is seen as a divided body of quarrelling members, the Church's *missio* as agents of reconciliation and healing comes to be seen as antithetical to her unity for which Jesus prayed on the night of his betrayal. Even in the Church's vocation to be humble servants, amid division, humility and servanthood come as occasions too often seen as periods for competition, especially by a postmodern culture which is already skeptical, and which sees competition as self-serving. At the same time, so long as the Church is divided, her evangelical invitation to the world comes to be seen by the world as congregations or separate traditions attempting to outdo each other. This is exacerbated when congregations and denominations compete for who can offer more and better programs through which people can be persuaded to attend. When Christian communities attempt to persuade those who attend one Christian community to leave and join in fellowship with another, the world sees the crassest manifestation of the Church's division.

The commission makes an important affirmation in *TCTCV* when it acknowledges the importance of the variety of complementary gifts. It offers an important dimension to the nature of

the Church by acknowledging the importance of each community's cultural expression of the gospel, adaptations which offer a necessary legitimate diversity within the Church. The commission thus resists the temptation of saying that cultural diversity constitutes disunity. Further, we would affirm that each local church, by living out and faithfully proclaiming the gospel, embodies the marks of the church which "is in communion with the local churches of all places and all times." Indeed, we would concur with *TCTCV* that a "pastoral ministry for the service of unity" assists the Church in maintaining accountability at some level of local unity which balances catholicity and diversity. The commission is also quite right in positing that a local pastoral ministry has the responsibility to do what the Church has done since the Apostolic Church, namely to prayerfully discern the distinction between diversity and essentials. Likewise, the commission is wise in pointing to the work of the first seven ecumenical councils as well as the more contemporary example of much of the Church's condemnation of apartheid as further examples of the Church being guided by the Holy Spirit in discerning the essentials of living out and declaring her doctrine. At the same time, some parts of our committee felt strongly that *TCTCV* should be strengthened by stating that the need for the Church to maintain a sense of catholicity must not be compromised or thwarted by some parts of the Church seeking to impose particular models of ecclesiastical structures (§§28–30).

The commission offers an important historical model of how the local churches have maintained a dynamic relation with other local congregations

in the apostolic period. *TCTCV* points to the collections and "exchanges of letters, visits, eucharistic hospitality and tangible expressions of solidarity." The images from the historical model are furthered by moving beyond the confines of the canon of scripture by pointing, as *TCTCV* does, to the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem. But the commission might have also looked to the example of the writing of Egeria. The witness of Egeria is recounted in *Peregrinatio* (pilgrimage) or *Itinerarium Egeriae* as Egeria was admitted to the eucharist in the places to which she traveled on pilgrimage by local bishops in other lands. We are appreciative of the challenge made by the commission, as stated in the italic paragraph, that our Christian Unity Committee should seek a "more precise mutual understanding and agreement" in the "expression 'local church'".¹⁰

The strongest part of the whole document, in our view, was chapter 3, since ministry is based first in the ministry of the baptized who live in the eschatological reality of "now, but not yet." Taking up ministry in this point of the *ductus* may be what makes this chapter so strong. We found it very helpful that the focus on the journey towards God's gift of communion requires agreement on the fundamental aspects of the life of the Church. The commission goes on to define the "attributes . . . necessary as a framework for maintaining unity in legitimate diversity" (§37). These are well stated and should certainly be the heart of our ecumenical vocation. Another major strength in this whole document is to be found

10. Italicized paragraph following §32.

in chapter 3, which is anchored in the shape of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* by beginning with the mutual recognition of baptism and leading to the mutual recognition and reconciliation of the orders of ministry (§41).

We are certainly appreciative of the fact that *TCTCV* moves beyond internal ecclesiology, and devotes an entire chapter pointing to the *missio ecclesiae*. The commission reminds us that the Church's *missio* is grounded in the overarching and ongoing *missio dei*. The conclusion offers an opportunity for the commission to reflect upon the vital work of the history and work of Faith and Order even before the inception of the World Council of Churches. This chapter makes the very important assertion, which should not be missed in our present age, that the emphasis on the questions of ecclesiology has accompanied "the history of the modern ecumenical movement."¹¹

Overall, we acknowledge that, since the commission was drafting a conciliar statement, it was seeking broad convergence. Achieving such convergence among so many ecclesial communities is a daunting task. Our committee saw different limitations in the document. As noted above, there was no attempt to name the concerns that continue to challenge the Church and continue to divide. Two of these issues remain the role of women in ministry as well as the inclusion, or even the level of inclusion, of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer persons.

A major concern from our committee remains that the list of images which describe

the Church's mission, while extensive, omits an extremely important image, namely that of "bride/bridegroom." This scriptural imagery which describes the relation between Christ and his Church would seem to be a glaring omission. This failure to adequately articulate and explicate the significance of the dual "bride/bridegroom" images left *TCTCV*, in the end, sorely lacking in a major respect. The *ductus* of the document lacked a way of maintaining a thoroughgoing Christology, which would, in turn, prevent a reliance upon an overly institutionally and anthropologically mediated ecclesiology. In short, when an ecclesiology lacks a robust Christology, the danger inevitably becomes – and here you will pardon the bluntness – so much "church chat." This also means that the list of Biblical and historical images, which are very important to a significant part of the Church, was left truncated. Unfortunately, the document's good intentions of offering an extensive list of possible images of the Church is weakened in its ability to hold a clear vision before the whole Church. There becomes what may unfortunately be seen as a list of options from which to choose, with which a given denomination might identify with some approaches to mission, more so than others. As such, the document offers various perspectives on the Church in hopes of achieving agreement without clear specificity.

A lack of convergence with specificity points to the challenge faced by the commission, or any such body, of developing a coherent ecclesiology through conciliar and convergence documents. Our Christian Unity Committee certainly recognizes the challenge faced by the commission

11. *TCTCV*, "Historical Note," p. 41.

in drafting a document such as *TCTCV*, since we reflect a diverse group of Christian traditions and certainly are not of one mind on various points of this review. Yet we also recognize that, for an ecclesiology drafted by the commission to truly meet its intent (to offer an articulated ecclesiology towards a vision which the Church might hold in common), such a document should assist us in raising the points which assist the Church in reaching convergence. The goal should not be to push aside differences in the interests of reaching convergence in a document. Rather the document should raise important points of difference so that Christians in local conversation might engage the points of difference with the hope of reaching a level of convergence.

Grace and Peace,

On behalf of the whole committee,

The Rev. Dr C. Pierson Shaw, Jr.
Compiler of the NCCC Christian Unity Committee's response
Co-Chair of the Christian Unity Committee

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28. Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

(Translated from the German)

1. Preliminary note

The convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, prepared by the WCC's Faith and Order Commission, was published in 2013. Responses are requested until the end of 2015 from the member churches of the WCC as well as "from ecclesial bodies, such as national and regional councils of churches and the Christian World Communions" (Preface). On the basis of this request, which the director of the Faith and Order Commission also addressed directly to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), the CPCE is pleased to present this response.¹

This response is not intended to replace or devalue those drawn up by individual member churches. However, the CPCE sees itself as a guardian of its numerous smaller member churches, which do not have the capacity to prepare their own responses. Moreover, it is particularly challenged by the topic since it also views its own model of church fellowship – based on the Leuenberg Agreement (LA) – as a "contribution" to the "ecumenical fellowship of all Christian

churches" (LA 46–47). The response will therefore address questions and take food for thought from *TCTCV*, and examine this document from the perspective of the church fellowship realized among the churches of the CPCE.

The response first says something about the CPCE, and then provides some general comments on *TCTCV* before finally addressing the questions for consideration in the churches' responses which were proposed at the end of the Introduction to *TCTCV*.

2. About the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

2.1. Origins and composition of the CPCE

The CPCE includes most of the Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist churches in Europe, as well as several Latin American churches. It dates back to the Leuenberg Agreement (LA) adopted in 1973, which has been signed by 100 churches since then. The seven Methodist churches in Europe did not sign the LA but rather a declaration on church fellowship with the churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, as the CPCE was called until 2003. Since a number of churches have merged in the meantime, the CPCE currently (2015) comprises 94 member churches.

In accordance with the Statutes adopted in 2006, the CPCE provides the framework for actualizing the church fellowship declared in the LA.

1. Response adopted by the Council of the CPCE in December 2015 on the basis of preparatory work by the Expert Group on Ecumenism.

It is headed by a Council, maintains an office in Vienna, and holds a General Assembly every six years.

2.2. The ecclesiology of the CPCE

Incorporating the criteria mentioned in the *Confessio Augustana* VII, LA 2 declares that “agreement in the right teaching of the Gospel and in the right administration of the sacraments is the necessary and sufficient prerequisite for the true unity of the Church.” After determining that the Protestant churches share a common understanding of the gospel (Part II), and that the mutual doctrinal condemnations of the Reformation period no longer apply to the current teachings of the respective other denominations (Part III), Part IV of the LA was able to declare church fellowship, which is realized in “fellowship in word and sacrament” (or “table and pulpit fellowship” according to LA 33) and in the striving towards the “fullest possible co-operation in witness and service to the world” (LA 29).

The LA itself contains hardly any explicit statements on ecclesiology. It defines “the message of justification as the message of God’s free grace” as the “measure of all the Church’s preaching” (LA 12). Whoever is justified by faith in the gospel “lives within the fellowship in praise of God and service to others” (LA 10). In addition to *leiturgia* and *diakonia*, *martyria* is also one of the missions of the Church: “It is the task of the Church to spread this Gospel by the spoken word in preaching, by individual counselling, and by Baptism and the Lord’s Supper” (LA 13). Fundamental to the declaration of church fellowship is the

conviction “that they [the agreeing churches] have part together in the one Church of Jesus Christ” (LA 34).

The study *The Church of Jesus Christ (CJC)*,² adopted by the General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in Vienna in 1994, explained the ecclesiological principles of the LA and presented the foundations of the Protestant understanding of the Church. The study distinguishes between the foundation, shape and mission of the Church. This elevated the fundamental distinction between the action of God and the action of people, which is constitutive for Reformation theology, to the rank of a key ecclesiological principle. The foundation of the Church is God’s justifying, liberating action, which precedes all human action. It is testified to in the preaching of the gospel and celebrated in the sacraments. As a witness to the gospel in the world, the Church is called to be “an instrument of God for the actualization of God’s universal will to salvation” (*CJCI*. 3.2). The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church exists in individual churches which, due to historical reasons, have taken on different shapes. These shapes are not arbitrary but must accord with the foundation, essence and mission of the Church.³

2. Leuenberg Documents 1 (1995), 4th edition: 2012. This and other noted documents are available at <https://www.leuenberg.eu/documents/>

3. See particularly the results of the doctrinal conversation *Gestalt und Gestaltung protestantischer Kirchen in Europa*, chap. 1.1–1.4, in *Gemeinschaft gestalten - Evangelisches Profil in Europa. Texte der 6. Vollversammlung der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa - Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft - in Budapest, 12. bis 18. September 2006*, ed. Wilhelm Hüffmeier, Martin Friedrich (Frankfurt a.M., 2007), 47–51.

The diversity of liturgical and ecclesial shapes, however, does not stand in the way of unity if this diversity is aligned with the shared understanding of the gospel.

In further doctrinal conversations, which deepened the consensus achieved in the LA, other ecclesiological questions were addressed such as the doctrine on and practice of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (1987), the relationship between the *Church and Israel* (2001), the shaping of *Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé* (2012, hereinafter MOE), and the relationship between *Scripture, Confession, Church* (2012). Work is in progress to clarify the understanding and realization of church fellowship; the aim of this is to emphasize how the Leuenberg approach can serve as a model. Since this model has been critically evaluated by other denominational families, the CPCE is endeavoring to resolve issues and further develop its model in discussions with them.

2.3. The actualization of church fellowship in the CPCE

Fellowship among the CPCE churches is realized in different forms. Fundamental to this is fellowship in word and sacraments, which is actualized in practice through joint worship, inter-celebration at the Lord's supper and exchanges of pastors. In addition to its traditional emphasis on doctrinal conversations, promoting common worship has increasingly become the focus of the CPCE's work in recent years. Since the General Assembly in Belfast (2001), the churches have also come to view the CPCE as an instrument for making "the voice of the Protestant churches in Europe

more audible," and have increasingly taken up social ethical issues. This reflects how the "struggle for justice and peace in the world increasingly demands of the churches the acceptance of a common responsibility" (LA 36).

"Unity in reconciled diversity" has become popular shorthand for church fellowship based on the LA. All elements of this concept are significant. In the 40 years of its existence, the CPCE has brought its participating churches closer to each other in many areas. As a consequence, some churches in the Netherlands, France, and parts of Germany have also undergone organizational unification; others have established bilateral and multilateral cooperation. However, there is still no intention to standardize the "lively plurality in styles of preaching, ways of worship, church order, and in diaconal and social action," which was already rejected in LA 45. The particular challenges, which are also being addressed in the ongoing doctrinal discussion on "Church fellowship," therefore include questions about the binding nature of living fellowship, the possibility and forms of reception of jointly adopted texts and resolutions and, thus, the capacity of the Protestant churches for catholicity.

3. General comments on the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*

In *TCTCV*, the Faith and Order Commission attempts to arrive at convergent ecclesiological statements for different Christian churches and denominations. In this respect, it is similar to the CPCE's doctrinal conversation texts, in which churches from different contexts and with

partially different confessional commitments also elaborate common positions. However, the ecclesiological diversity which *TCTCV* seeks to unite is much broader than that in the CPCE, where church fellowship already exists. In accordance with the CPCE's fundamental belief that it is the shared understanding of the gospel and not doctrine that should be the basis of church fellowship, these attempts do not strive to achieve unification through compromise or unilateral waivers but rather, as a more recent CPCE study formulated, to discover "functional equivalents and parallels . . . in differing structures and terminologies. The primary aim of hermeneutic efforts is not to unify structures . . . for their own sake, but to come to a deeper ecumenical understanding of the spiritual realities which are held in common (including the legitimacy and the limits of diversity), and to encourage structures that can be mutually recognized."⁴ From the CPCE's perspective, *TCTCV* should be examined for the extent to which it accords with this approach, and for the extent to which the ecclesiological views represented in it are compatible with the ecclesiology of the CPCE or are functionally equivalent to it.

TCTCV was developed in a process which took almost twenty years. Precursor documents containing interim results were published twice (1998 and 2005). This enabled a broad discussion whose results were incorporated into the later versions. Formally, this corresponds to the CPCE's approach, except that the latter's time frames are

generally shorter. *TCTCV*'s long processing time also certainly reflects the diversity of ecclesiologies of the churches represented in the Faith and Order Commission. This raises the fundamental question of whether it is possible at all to reconcile the plurality of ecclesiologies in a common ecclesiological position. *TCTCV* is characterized by an emphasis on the unity of the Church, without sufficiently clarifying what it understands as unity (see below 4.1.6.).

Unlike in the case of *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, no responses to *TCTCV*'s precursor texts have been published. It is desirable that the responses to *TCTCV* be published, in order to make the discussion even more transparent.

4. On the questions for consideration

4.1. (Question 1) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

If we take the understanding of the Church which was jointly formulated in *CJC* as the ecclesiological understanding of the CPCE (see 2.2 above), several points of correspondence with, and difference from, *TCTCV* can be noted. This will be explained in one pass by looking at several of the main themes of *TCTCV*.

4.1.1. The starting point

In line with the Reformation approach, in the CPCE the message of justification – as noted in LA 6–12 and *CJC* I.1 – serves as the starting and reference point for the development of the understanding of the Church. This message manifests the “new experience of the power of the gospel to

4. Ministry - Ordination - Episkopé, §20 (Leuenberg Documents 13, 28).

liberate and assure,” against whose “original and pure testimony” “the Church’s life and doctrine” are to be gauged (LA 4). By contrast, *TCTCV* is rooted in the notion of the kingdom of God or the “vision of God’s great design (or ‘economy’) for all creation,” using it to explain the capacity for *koinonia* and then for the “restoration of *koinonia*” after the fall (*TCTCV* §1).

TCTCV’s approach, which is based on the theology of creation, is commendable since it opens up new perspectives for discussion, while not necessarily conflicting with the Reformation approach. *CJC* clearly states that the “all-encompassing action of God,” in which “the Church has its origin and lasting foundation,” also includes the reconciliation of “the alienated and rebellious human race.” It also affirms that the Church – as “God’s people chosen in Christ” – is “on its way through time towards its consummation in the Kingdom of God” (*CJCI* 1.1.1). As a witness to the gospel in the world, the mission of the Church “to be an instrument of God for the actualization of God’s universal will to salvation” (*CJC* 1.3.2) is also crucial to the Protestant understanding of the Church. This draws close parallels not only with *TCTCV* §25 but also with *TCTCV* §14, where the gospel is recognized as the center and foundation of the Church, defined as a *creatura evangelii*. The latter is indeed not included in *TCTCV* as a general ecclesiological insight, but is mentioned only as an expression used by several “communities.”

In more recent CPCE documents such as *Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé* (32–34), the universal perspective and social dimension of

justification are emphasized more strongly than in earlier CPCE documents.

However, Protestant ecclesiology also underscores the categorial distinction between the kingdom of God and the Church, which will itself be subject to judgment when the kingdom comes (*CJCI* 1.4). In *TCTCV* the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Church is reduced to a functional, instrumental connection. However, if the “Church” is understood – as in the *Confessio Augustana* – as the “gathering of all believers” and thus primarily as a community of worship, then the Church is intended for its own sake by the triune God. The communion of the triune God with the faithful, which occurs and is celebrated at every Christian service, has its purpose in itself and thus serves the transformation of the world.⁵

According to the Protestant view, the Church is both an end in itself and God’s instrument. That God calls people together and edifies them through his word for communion as the body of Christ and the people of God has its purpose in itself. At the same time, however, the Church also has an instrumental significance insofar as it is sent to all people, asking them to let themselves be reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:20) and witnessing to the gospel of the benevolent God in word and deed. But the Church, understood as an end in itself and as a community of believers, also has a significance which goes beyond itself, insofar as

5. Cf. *CJCI* 1.1.1: “In this way the church is God’s people chosen in Christ, gathered and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, on its way through time towards its consummation in the Kingdom of God. The church has its origin and lasting foundation in the reality of this all-encompassing action of God.”

it demonstrates to all communities, in an exemplary and temporary manner, the possibility of a reconciled life of independent individuals in communion.

The CPCE is very pleased that chapter 4 of *TCTCV* is explicitly devoted to the relationship of the Church with the world and the role of the Church in and for the world. The Protestant churches united in the CPCE understand the ministry for the transformation of the world as a task which they have to fulfill in their societies, in association with other, non-church actors (see LA 11; *CJC* II). In *TCTCV*, however, the comments concerning the Church's mission in and for the world lack a constructive reference to other social actors (or social systems), for example, the sciences or politics. In recent centuries, many effective and concrete contributions to the transformation of the world have come from these other social systems – also with a view to increasing humanity and solidarity. The section on the Church in society (§§64–66) notes, for example, that Christians “will seek to promote the values of the kingdom of God by working together with adherents of other religions and even with those of no religious belief” (§64). In the European context, it is totally incomprehensible why cooperation between Christians and non-religious people should “even” be possible. Regarding the cooperation of Christians in society, what is even more incomprehensible is why the religious affiliation of partners should be a factor which must be taken into account (cf. *CJC* II.3.3). In view of the concrete problems mentioned in this section (HIV, economic injustice, unjust social conditions), it

is incomprehensible why medicine, economics or political science – or those actors in the corresponding areas of social activity – are not considered here.

The relationship between Church and state is discussed in §65, but primarily from a critical standpoint. Although it states that it is appropriate for believers to play a positive role in social life, the document then, “however,” issues a warning against the interaction of Christians with secular authorities in sinful and unjust activities, and refers to the example of the socially, politically and economically critical Old Testament prophets. In view of the social situation of the vast majority of CPCE member churches, this description is of little use. It does not take into account the fact that at least in Europe (with the exception of a few countries), democratic and participatory conditions prevail. Of course, all power originates from the people only if all citizens see themselves as autonomous subjects and take ownership of their respective countries. It also does not take into account the fact that societies such as those in Europe consist of diverse social spheres and actors with which the churches should cooperate and not compete – not least because these actors are often also members of churches. In their vague and undifferentiated generality, the statements in *TCTCV* about the Church in society not only have little substance, but are downright counterproductive. One can assume that the focus was primarily on social conditions which differ from those in Europe today. If this was the case, it would have been better not to make generalizing and global statements about the relationship of the Church to

society in an ecclesiological text. Such statements should be contextually differentiated. If indeed *TCTCV* intended to make general statements about the relationship between Church and society, the comments in *TCTCV* are misguided since they are based on a contradiction between Church and society, instead of encouraging Christians to actively and constructively participate in developing and deepening participatory social conditions based on the rule of law, and to assume social and political responsibility – with a Church at their side in solidarity.

4.1.2. The trinitarian origin of the Church

TCTCV emphasizes that “the very life of the Holy Trinity” is the source of communion, and that the “saving activity of the Holy Trinity is essential to an adequate understanding of the Church” (*TCTCV* §§1, 3). In this way, the Church is defined as “a communion in the Triune God” (*TCTCV* §23). Traditionally, Protestant ecclesiology tends to emphasize the Christological embeddedness of the Church (see LA 2 and 9 and the programmatic title The Church of Jesus Christ, in contrast to the chapter title “The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*” in *TCTCV*, chapter 2.B) and the word of God as the creative origin of the Church. Nevertheless, according to the Protestant view, it is the word of the triune God on which the Church is founded, and it is the justifying action of the triune God to which the Church owes its existence and to which it must bear witness (*CJC* I.1.1; I.2.2). According to the Protestant view, the origin of the Church in the triune God is precisely conveyed through the living word of God, which is

testified to in holy scripture. By contrast, *TCTCV* ultimately leaves the question of the exact relationship between the Holy Trinity and the Church unanswered.

4.1.3 The Church as *koinonia*

The importance of the concept of *koinonia* is closely linked to the trinitarian approach in *TCTCV*. Following numerous bilateral dialogues since the 1980s, *TCTCV* defines the “Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*” and thus as “communion with the Holy Trinity” (*TCTCV* §67). For *TCTCV* the Church is “not merely the sum of individual believers among themselves” but “a communion in the Triune God and, at the same time, a communion whose members partake together in the life and mission of God” (*TCTCV* §23). When the LA was formulated in 1973, *koinonial communion* was not yet a central concept in ecumenical theology. In 1994, *CJC* also did not take up the now more prominent concept in connection with its discussions of the foundation and shape of the Church, but treated *koinonia* as a dimension of its mission, alongside *martyria*, *leiturgia* and *diakonia* (*CJC* I.3.3.4).

The reason for a certain Protestant reluctance towards certain forms of *koinonia* theology is that it wishes to avoid divinizing the Church and to strengthen the individual believers’ sense of responsibility for the Church. If the Church is seen primarily as a reflection of inner-trinitarian communion, its divine nature is placed in the forefront (see 4.2.5 below). It should therefore be noted that *TCTCV*, unlike its predecessor document of 1998,

no longer makes the concept of *koinonia* the sole key concept for all of ecclesiology.

Nevertheless, since the LA speaks not only of church fellowship but also of the membership of Christians in the body of Christ (LA 15 and 19), and since *CJC* views the Church as a “community of members whose unity among themselves is based on their unity with Christ” (*CJC* I.2.1), at the same time underscoring the work of the Holy Spirit (*CJC* I.1.3), there are points of contact which suggest that the differences between the ecclesiologies of the CPCE and *TCTCV* in their understanding of communion or *koinonia* should be investigated and evaluated further.

4.1.4 The Church as the people of God

The biblical notion of the people of God allows *TCTCV* to highlight certain aspects which are also central to Reformation ecclesiology. This includes, first and foremost, the solidarity of the Church with the people of the first covenant (*TCTCV* §17; see Church and Israel) and the calling of all believers to actualize the royal priesthood (*TCTCV* §18; see MOE 38–39). Regarding the lasting election of Israel and the solidarity of the Church – as the community of those chosen from Jews and gentiles – with the chosen people Israel, a solidarity which is expressed in the term “the people of God,” from the Protestant standpoint what could have been emphasized more is that the Church is linked to the election of Israel and is subject to eschatological reservation. “The title ‘people of God’ is a healthy relativisation by setting the Church in a broader overall framework which points to how God’s saving will concerns

humankind. In addition to the reasons connected with election and covenant theology, the eschatological perspective is the main characteristic of a theologically correct understanding of the ‘people of God’” (*Church and Israel*, II.2.5.9, 144). The Church sees in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of the priesthood of the people of God, in which all believers have a part. The churches of the CPCE also share the conviction (MOE 41–43) that the “royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) and a special ordained ministry” must not be played off against each other, but are interdependent (*TCTCV* §20).

4.1.5 The divine and human reality of the Church

In *TCTCV* §23, the idea that “the Church is both a divine and a human reality” results from an adoption of the New Testament image of the Church as the body of Christ and from an examination of the four Nicene attributes of the Church. These are “God’s gifts to the Church which believers, in all their human frailty, are constantly called to actualize” (*TCTCV* §22). In *CJC* I.2.3 as well, unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are primarily gifts which are given to the Church “by virtue of its origin.” Just as the churches of the CPCE are certain that they too share these essential properties of the true Church and must bear witness to them in their shape and work, they also reject the equation of an individual historical church (or a community thereof) with the Church as a divine reality. The reason for this lies not in an (often ambiguously formulated) opposition between the visible and invisible

Church, but in the distinction between the foundation and shape of the Church which is fundamental for Protestant ecclesiology (see 2.2). From the Protestant standpoint, we cannot agree with the explanations of the four Nicene characteristics of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity provided in §22. According to the Protestant view, the Church is not one because there is only one God, but because Christ is one with the Father (John 17:11) and is the only Lord of the world and head of the Church (Eph. 1:20-22). If Jesus Christ as the head of the Church is the unity of the Church in the many shapes of its actualization, then current “divisions” of the Church do not contradict this unity, as *TCTCV* maintains in §22. The challenge therefore lies in identifying, believing and actualizing unity in diversity. It is regrettable that in discussing different attempts to identify the unity of Christ’s Church in the diversity of churches in §10, the CPCE’s model of church fellowship was obviously not taken into account. Although it mentions that there are “various types of covenant relationships, which sometimes include the sharing of worship,” the footnote here only refers to Anglican-Lutheran covenants and not to the CPCE.

In *TCTCV*, the holiness of the Church is grounded in the holiness of God and not in the holiness of Jesus Christ, with the result that the forgiveness of sins that occurs in Jesus Christ does not play any role in defining the holiness of the Church. According to the Protestant view, the Church is holy precisely because it forgives sin and guilt in God’s name. In *TCTCV*, the catholicity of the Church is grounded in God’s

boundless goodness, from which the international mission of the Church to all people follows. This global understanding of catholicity is then supplemented by the statement of Ignatius of Antioch that the Church is catholic where the whole mystery of Christ is present, as in the celebration of the eucharist. Wholly in line with Ignatius, the conclusion is drawn that the Church’s essential catholicity comes into question if one allows cultural and other differences to develop into divisions. Protestant theology has traditionally harbored sympathies for the ancient Church’s understanding of catholicity, insofar as “catholic” means that which is held in common in a variety of manifestations. Based on the Protestant definition of the Church in the multiplicity of churches, this is the presence of the triune God and particularly Jesus Christ as the head of the Church, in word and sacrament at every Christian service celebrated in the name of the triune God. In *TCTCV*, the apostolicity of the Church is defined above all by fidelity to the apostolic origins of the Church, and to the apostolic mission and ministry. It should be noted that from a Protestant standpoint, fidelity to the apostolic origins of the Church is primarily fidelity to holy scripture, which should be understood above all as a successor to the apostles. However, scripture is not even mentioned in *TCTCV*’s comments on apostolicity. Instead it mentions the apostolic succession of ministry, which serves the apostolicity of the Church.

4.1.6. The relationship between unity and diversity

The affirmation of “legitimate diversity in the life of communion” (*TCTCV* §28) particularly accords with the LA’s understanding of unity (cf. *CJC* III.1.3–4). In more recent documents, however, the CPCE also recognizes – like *TCTCV* §30 – that the “diversity of structures and ministries of the church and their specific shaping is not without limit” (MOE 19). The distinction between “legitimate” and “illegitimate diversity” addressed in *TCTCV* is also a question which concerns the CPCE. However, *TCTCV* does not go any further than stating that precisely this distinction is treated differently in the individual churches, and that it would therefore be desirable if the churches developed common criteria for this distinction and created common structures for applying this distinction. As in other passages in *TCTCV*, the comments end in questions which have been asked and worked on for decades. The following section of *TCTCV*, on the communion of local churches and their relationship to the universal Church (§§31–32), similarly ends in an unsatisfactory manner. It makes a statement which is obvious and basically trivial, namely that there is no agreement between the churches on how the local, regional and universal levels of church order relate to one another (§32). In the subsequent summary of this section, the issue of unity is invoked again and the churches are asked to reach agreement on the question, “what is the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those

relations?” Regarding the key issue of shaping the visible unity of the churches, the document ultimately keeps to the well-known open questions, on which *TCTCV* offers no progress. From the Protestant standpoint, this is also due to the fact that the legitimate diversity of churches acknowledged in the quoted question is part of the goal of a “fully united Church.”

Indeed, a monistic notion of unity subtly dominates, especially with regard to institutions, as well as a polemic against the current plurality of churches. Already the document’s Preface speaks of the “abnormal situation of ecclesial division,” although it remains unclear why, firstly, this is abnormal, given that this situation has existed practically since the beginning of church history; and why, secondly, the document speaks evaluatively of divisions, and not simply of a diversity of churches. Certain notions of unity are largely foreign to *TCTCV*, for example, the idea that the unity of the churches could be the unity of a movement developing in diverse ways.

4.1.7. The growth of the Church

The title of chapter 3 uses the growth metaphor, but only in the sense of a deepening of communion. By contrast, in the Epistle to the Colossians, the growth of the Church always has two directions: growth in intensity and growth in extent. The idea of the extent of the Church, and thus of a growth in members, is practically absent in *TCTCV*. However, the willingness to accept new members into the Church is essential for the openness of the churches to sharing their liturgical life with others and strangers. Here the CPCE would

like to refer to its document “Evangelising – Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe” from 2012 (esp. §§1.1, 2.1–2.3 and 2.12).⁶

4.1.8. Authority in the Church

The gift of authority in the ministry of the Church is discussed in detail in *TCTCV* §§48–51. In §51, part of one sentence also recognizes the contribution to the Church from the insights of those who specially devote themselves to biblical and theological studies. For Protestant churches, this relates not only to the ordained ministry but goes beyond it. But since the Church is a creation of the word, the authority of the ministers charged with the “ministry of word and sacraments” (see MOE 41ff.) is linked to competence, particularly theological competence acquired through education. Ordination is the confirmation of the divine calling and the commission for this ministry (see MOE, 62); it does not, however, “give ordained ministers a humanly based authority over the congregation. Their authority for this is derived from God’s word” (MOE, 46). Responsibilities and decision-making powers that go beyond this are given to the ministries on the basis of church constitutions.

4.1.9 *Episkopé* - synods - laity

The comments on *episkopé* in §52 pay too little attention to the fact that in the Protestant churches, the synods and presbyteries or parish councils – in which laypersons comprise the majority – are the

bearers of church authority. Moreover, over the past few decades almost all European Protestant churches have consistently modified their church constitutions to accord with the model of the separation of powers: What seems to be appropriate in the area of politics (especially within the context of democratic societies) also enjoys a high degree of credibility for the self-organization of churches. This also holds true for the question of the participation of the laity in synods.

4.1.10 Ministry of church primacy

Paragraph 55 deals with the question of “primacy” in the sense of a “personal ministry of oversight” which serves the unity of the entire Church. It underscores that the ecumenical movement has improved the climate for discussing this issue. From a Protestant perspective, it is difficult to associate the ministry of unity so closely with the question of primacy. Regarding the ministry for the unity of Christendom, it would be desirable if the WCC itself could once again take on this global ministry for church unity more robustly, a ministry which would then find its full visible expression in the WCC Assembly. This desire holds true regardless of the ecclesiological quality of the WCC and the various understandings of the Church that encounter one another in it. The question of primacy, by contrast, is of a different kind. The CPCE welcomes the placing of the question of primacy within the context of *episkopé*, so that not only its personal but also its communal and collegial dimensions can be noticed. From the CPCE’s standpoint, *TCTCV*’s recommendation to strictly distinguish between the essence of

6. [Translator’s note: the document seems to date from 2006 and was published as a booklet one year later: https://mission-respekt.de/fix/files/GEKE-evangelisch_evangelisieren.pdf]

such a ministry of primacy and the possible ways in which this ministry was or could be exercised is not convincing, since it belongs to the essence of a ministry that it is exercised; and therefore the exercise of a ministry cannot be separated from its essence.

4.2. (Question 2) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

From the CPCE's perspective, *TCTCV* is characterized by a vague understanding of unity. The CPCE has developed a consistent conception of ecclesiological unity, which presupposes the mutual recognition of the churches in their diversity. Of course, this is easier within the CPCE than at the global level, where theological and ecclesiological differences are much more marked. Nevertheless, the CPCE believes it would be more appropriate if the unity of the churches were associated with the legitimate variety of their shapes, instead of discrediting the latter with judgmental images. Thus, an increase of churches per se does not have to be negatively judged as a division of something that belongs together, but can also be interpreted as a fruitful, productive process under certain circumstances. In *TCTCV*, an understanding of church unity can be repeatedly discerned which is very much shaped by the idea of organizational unity as it exists in individual churches. Other notions of unity are not appropriately acknowledged, critically evaluated or considered at all. Because of this, the CPCE feels that *TCTCV* does not really help deepen unity between the churches.

4.3. (Question 3) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The CPCE is well on its way to expanding and deepening its model of unity in reconciled diversity. The CPCE is open and ready to walk this road with all Christian churches. The CPCE expresses its support for *TCTCV*'s observations that reconciliation, including that between churches, is experienced above all in the eucharist or in the Lord's supper, although it associates this experience with every church service. The churches of the CPCE have table fellowship among themselves, which they would like to extend to other churches and their members from other Christian traditions, provided that there is a shared understanding of the gospel, and the practice of eucharistic hospitality where table fellowship does not yet exist. As regards the theme "The Church: In and for the World," the CPCE gladly and constructively takes up the *TCTCV*'s call to work on ethical issues with other churches. From the CPCE's point of view, however, *TCTCV* does not seem to adequately recognize the cooperative role of the churches within their democratic societies any more than it does the modern, functionally differentiated society. The CPCE will also continue to deepen its understanding of the concept of *koinonia*.

4.4. (Question 4) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

Despite existing differences in doctrine, practice and church constitution (church order), the CPCE is pleased to cooperate with individual Christian churches and other communities or associations. This includes cooperation in the areas of witness and ministry, particularly in exercising the public responsibility of the churches, further theological dialogue and joint worship.

4.5. (Question 5) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

It would be meaningful if the WCC would position and recommend itself once again as a central forum for global efforts for church unity. For this, the WCC would have to make a coherent ecclesiological proposal which would go beyond *TCTCV* and suggest how the unity of the diverse Christian churches could be reflected in it. The discussion of the visible unity of the churches currently suffers from this essential failure of the WCC to act as a motor for the actualization of church unity.

29. Baptist World Alliance*

In response to the invitation of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order to the churches to submit official responses to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity is pleased to make the following contribution to the process of reception of this important convergence text, in the hope that our churches and all churches might live into its vision of an ecclesial communion that receives from the communion of the Triune God “both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (*TCTCV* §1).

1. The Baptist World Alliance and the Status of This Response

1.1. Founded in 1905, the Baptist World Alliance (hereinafter BWA) is a fellowship of 240 Baptist conventions and unions located in 125 countries and territories, including 168,491 local

congregations and 47,500,324 members.¹ According to its Constitution, “The Baptist World Alliance, extending over every part of the world, exists as an expression of the essential oneness of Baptist people in the Lord Jesus Christ, to impart inspiration to the fellowship, and to provide channels for sharing concerns and skills in witness and ministry. This Alliance recognizes the traditional autonomy and interdependence of Baptist churches and member bodies.” One of the objectives of the BWA articulated in its Constitution is “to promote understanding and cooperation among

1. These statistics for the total number of local congregations and individual church members affiliated with the BWA were current as of December 31, 2017. The number of 240 member unions reflects the reception of one additional member union by the BWA during its 2019 General Council meeting (Baptist World Alliance, “Statistics,” <https://www.bwanet.org/about-us2/stats>). Since Baptist churches do not include in their membership statistics children whose families participate in the life of the congregation but who have not yet been baptized, the actual number of persons affiliated with churches included in the global fellowship of the BWA is significantly larger than 47,500,324 members.

* Drafted by Steven R. Harmon (Associate Professor Historical Theology, Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity, Boiling Springs, North Carolina, USA); revised in light of input from the membership of the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity meeting in Nassau, The Bahamas, 8-12 July 2019.

Baptist bodies and with other Christian groups, in keeping with our unity in Christ.”²

1.2. One of the Commissions of the BWA is the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity, which is charged with the following work:

The Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity identifies, reflects on, and clarifies issues of doctrine that are important to Baptists. It analyzes the causes of disunity among Baptists and promotes ways to overcome this disunity. It shares in theological conversations between the BWA and other Christian communities, in furtherance of Jesus’ prayer for the unity of the church. It also participates in programs to improve inter-church understanding and cooperation. The Commission makes its findings available to the wide Baptist family.³

As an instrument by which the BWA relates to other Christian traditions, the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity supplies the members of Baptist delegations to the joint

2. Baptist World Alliance, “Constitution of the BWA,” <https://www.bwanet.org/about-us2/constitution>, “Preamble” and “II. Objectives.” While the largest national union of Baptists in the world, the Southern Baptist Convention—which was instrumental in the founding of the BWA in 1905—ceased to be a member union of the BWA in 2004, Southern Baptists nevertheless continue to participate individually in the commissions and gatherings of the BWA.

3. Baptist World Alliance, “Commissions of Mission and Evangelism,” <https://www.bwanet.org/images/MissionEvangelism.pdf>

commissions of international bilateral ecumenical dialogues, receives updates on these dialogues, and offers responses to multilateral proposals for ecumenical convergence such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* and *TCTCV*.

1.3. While the BWA itself is not a member body of the World Council of Churches (WCC), eight Baptist unions were founding members of the WCC in 1948: the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Northern Baptist Convention (now American Baptist Churches, USA), the National Baptist Convention (USA), the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference (USA), the Baptist Union of New Zealand, the Union of Baptist Congregations in the Netherlands, the Burma Baptist Missionary Convention and the China Baptist Council.⁴ Today twenty-seven Baptist unions are WCC members.⁵ Representatives of these Baptist WCC member unions, as well as representatives of the BWA itself, have served on commissions of the WCC, including the WCC Commission on Faith and Order and its working groups that have been responsible for drafting and offering input into the Faith and Order study documents and convergence texts.

1.4. While the WCC Commission on Faith and Order has commended to the churches for study numerous study documents among the more than two hundred Faith and Order Papers issued by that commission since 1948, and has invited

4. Ernest A. Payne, “Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement,” *Baptist Quarterly* 8: 263 (258-67).

5. “Church Families: Baptist Churches,” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/church-families/baptist-churches>.

the churches to offer responses to them, only two have been designated as “convergence texts”: *BEM* (1982) and *TCTCV* (2013). The Introduction to *TCTCV* explains the status of a convergence text in this manner:

Our aim is to offer a convergence text, that is, a text which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues considered, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study. Rather, the following pages express how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the Church, showing the progress that has been made and indicating work that still needs to be done.⁶

The Preface to *TCTCV* invites both “ecclesial responses” from “the churches that are members of the Commission [on Faith and Order] and the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches” and “responses from ecclesial bodies, such as national and regional councils of churches and the Christian World Communions, whose official dialogues among themselves have contributed so much to the convergence reflected in *The Church*.”⁷ When a similar call accompanied the publication of *BEM*, nine Baptist unions issued official ecclesial responses.⁸ In the category of

responses from ecclesial bodies such as Christian World Communions, the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation (now the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity) received an initial response to *BEM* drafted by George Beasley Murray, Morris West, and Robert Thompson that was subsequently expanded by William R. Estep.⁹ This response detailed Baptist affirmation of aspects of *BEM* along with Baptist concerns about other elements of that convergence text: for example, appreciation for *BEM*'s recognition, informed by ecumenical biblical and historical scholarship, of

They include the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (1:70-77), All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR (3:227-29), Baptist Union of Scotland (3:230-45), Baptist Union of Denmark (3:246-53), Covenanted Baptist Churches in Wales (3:254-56), American Baptist Churches, USA (3:257-63), Burma Baptist Convention (4:184-90), Union of the Evangelical Free Churches in the GDR (Baptists) (4:191-99), and Baptist Union of Sweden (4:200-13).

9. R. J. Kerstan and R. J. Burke, eds., *Out of Darkness into the Light of Christ: Official Report of the Fifteenth Baptist World Congress, Los Angeles, California, USA July 2-7, 1985* (McLean VA: Baptist World Alliance, 1985), 146-55; William R. Estep, “A Response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No. 111,” in *Faith, Life and Witness: The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist World Alliance 1986-1990*, ed. William H. Brackney and R. J. Burke (Birmingham, AL: Samford University Press, 1990), 2-16. The earlier version prepared by George Beasley Murray, Morris West, and Robert Thompson is noted by Ken Manley, “A Survey of Baptist World Alliance Conversations with Other Churches and Some Implications for Baptist Identity,” a paper presented to the joint meeting of the BWA Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission and Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation Commission, Seville, Spain, July 11, 2002, <http://bwa-baptist-heritage.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Survey-of-Conversations-with-Other-Churches.pdf>

6. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 1. Hereafter *TCTCV*.

7. *TCTCV*, viii-ix.

8. These Baptist ecclesial responses are published in *Churches Respond to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 6 vols., ed. Max Thurian (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986-88).

the biblical, historical, and theological priority of believers' baptism, but also concern about what seemed to be an *ex opere operato* (i.e., automatically conferred) connection between baptism and salvation; an appreciation for the biblically rich development of the meaning of the Eucharist, but again reservations about a stronger connection between the Eucharist and the experience of salvation than Baptists would typically make; and appreciation for the attention to the ministry of the whole people of God in the section on Ministry, but disappointment that *BEM* seemed to make reconciliation with the historic episcopate (i.e., apostolic succession) a condition for visible unity.¹⁰

1.5. While the present document is presented as a response to *TCTCV* by the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity, it is not the first effort of this commission to participate in the process of reception of *TCTCV*. At the meeting of the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, July 1-6, 2013, three responses to different sections of *TCTCV* (in one case, to a section of its 2005 predecessor *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*¹¹) were presented to and discussed by the Commission.

10. While Estep's expanded response was presented to the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation and published in the collected papers of the Study and Research Division for 1986-1990, it was not published in the six volumes of *Churches Respond to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

11. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*. Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005). Hereafter *NMC*.

These responses were subsequently published in the collected papers of the BWA Division of Mission, Evangelism, and Theological Reflection for the quinquennium 2010-2015.¹² In addition, other individual Baptist theologians have published independent responses to *TCTCV*.¹³ The

12. Curtis W. Freeman, "'The Church of the Triune God': A Baptist Response to *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* (Faith and Order Paper 198)," in *Baptist Faith & Witness, Book 5: Papers of the Commission on Mission, Evangelism and Theological Reflection of the Baptist World Alliance 2010-2015*, ed. Eron Henry (Falls Church, VA: Baptist World Alliance, 2015), 7-24; Elizabeth Newman, "'The Church: Growing in Communion': Response to Chapter III of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper 214)," in *Baptist Faith & Witness, Book 5*, 25-36; Paul S. Fiddes, "'Koinonia: The Church in and for the World': Comment on the Final Part of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper 214)," in *Baptist Faith & Witness, Book 5*, 37-47 (included in *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, v. 2). Note: while the subtitle of the volume in which these responses appear refers to a "Commission" on Mission, Evangelism and Theological Reflection, its proper designation during this period was the "Division of Mission, Evangelism, and Theological Reflection," a division which included multiple study commissions of the BWA, among them the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity.

13. Derek C. Hatch, "Koinonia as Ecumenical Opening for Baptists," *The Ecumenical Review* 71, nos. 1-2 (January-April 2019): 175-88; Joshua T. Searle, "Moving towards an Ecumenism of Koinonia: A Critical Response to 'The Church: Towards a Common Vision' from a Baptist Perspective," *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 15, no. 2 (January 2015): 17-27; Alexander Abramov, Alexander Geichenko, and Mary Raber, "The Importance, Relevance, and Challenge of 'The Church: Towards a Common Vision,'" *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 15, no. 2 (January 2015): 28-33; Octavian D. Baban, "Four Views and a Response on WCC Church Vision," *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 15, no. 2 (January 2015): 34-45; Teun van der Leer, "The Church: Towards a Common Vision: A Believers Church Response," *Journal of*

present response draws in part on these previous instances of Baptist participation in the reception of *TCTCV* as well as on the input of the current membership of the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity.

1.6. This response, then, is in the category of “responses from ecclesial bodies, such as national and regional councils of churches and the Christian World Communions”¹⁴ solicited by the WCC; but its status as a response from the BWA needs some qualification. It is the product of the work of the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity as an expression of its charge to share “in theological conversations between the BWA and other Christian communities, in furtherance of Jesus’ prayer for the unity of the church” and to make “its findings available to the wide Baptist family.”¹⁵ As such, it has a status similar to that of the reports written by the joint commissions to the international bilateral ecumenical dialogues with BWA participation. The note on “The Status of This Report” appended to the Preface of the report from Phase II of the dialogue between the

European Baptist Studies 15, no. 3 (May 2015): 21-31; and Steven R. Harmon, “How Might We Envision the Unity We Have? Engaging *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Part 1,” <http://www.lainterchurch.org/documents/Speaker-Harmon-SessionOne-3-3-15.pdf>; and idem, “What Can We Do About the Unity We Envision? Engaging *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Part 2,” <http://www.lainterchurch.org/documents/Speaker-Harmon-SessionTwo-3-3-15.pdf>. The last two are addresses presented to the annual assembly of the Louisiana Interchurch Conference, The Wesley Center, Woodworth, Louisiana, March 2-3, 2015.

14. *TCTCV*, viii-ix.

15. “Commissions of Mission and Evangelism.”

BWA and the Catholic Church (2006-2010) also applies to the status of this response in relation to the BWA and its member unions:

The Report published here is the work of the International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance. It is a study document produced by participants in the Conversations. The authorities who appointed the participants have allowed the Report to be published so that it may be widely discussed. It is not an authoritative declaration of either the Catholic Church or of the Baptist World Alliance, who will both also evaluate the document.¹⁶

2. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision in Baptist Ecclesiological Perspective*

2.1. The Introduction to *TCTCV* invites the churches to respond to this convergence text in light of five questions, the first of which is, “To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?”¹⁷ While the Baptist ecclesiological principle of congregational freedom to follow the leadership of the Spirit in

16. *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006-2010* (2013), published in *American Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 28-122; *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity Information Service* 142 (2013): 20-65; also <https://www.bwanet.org/images/pdf/baptist-catholic-dialogue.pdf> and http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/Bapstist%20alliance/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20101213_report-2006-2010_en.html.

17. *TCTCV*, p. 3.

discerning the mind of Christ about what it will mean for the congregation to be the body of Christ in its particular context makes it difficult to generalize about Baptists' ecclesiological self-understanding, there are multiple dimensions of the Baptist ecclesial vision that may be recognized in the vision of church articulated by *TCTCV*.

2.2. Apart from the ecclesial vision expressed in the text of *TCTCV*, Baptists may recognize themselves also in the process that led to it. The previous paragraph mentioned the Baptist ecclesiological principle of congregational freedom to follow the leadership of the Spirit in discerning the mind of Christ about what it will mean for the congregation to be the body of Christ in its particular context. One way in which Baptists have sought to exercise this freedom is the practice of ecclesial discernment. Ideally this practice entails deep listening not only to all voices within the congregation—including (perhaps especially including) minority or marginalized voices—but also to various voices from other contexts beyond the local church.¹⁸ A parallel to this Baptist practice

18. Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes has explained the embodied “Baptist experience” that informs Baptist efforts to bring their faith and practice under the rule of Christ in this way: “The liberty of local churches to make decisions about their own life and ministry is not based in a human view of autonomy or independence, or in selfish individualism, but in a sense of being under the direct rule of Christ who relativizes other rules. This liberating rule of Christ is what makes for the distinctive ‘feel’ of Baptist congregational life, which allows for spiritual oversight (*episkopē*) both by the *whole* congregation gathered together in church meeting, and by the minister(s) called to lead the congregation... Since the same rule of Christ can be experienced in assemblies of churches together, there is also the basis here for Baptist associational

of ecclesial discernment through listening deeply

life, and indeed for participating in ecumenical clusters.” Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*. Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 13. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 6. Elsewhere Fiddes elaborates what it means for the whole congregation to seek together the mind of Christ in what British Baptists call “church meeting”: “Upon the whole people in covenant there lies the responsibility of finding a common mind, of coming to an agreement about the way of Christ for them in life, worship and mission. But they cannot do so unless they use the resources that God has given them, and among those resources are the pastor, the deacons and (if they have them) the elders. The church meeting is not ‘people power’ in the sense of simply counting votes and canvassing a majority... The aim is to search for consent about the mind of Christ, and so people should be sensitive to the voices behind the votes, listening to them according to the weight of their experience and insight. As B[arrington] White puts it, ‘One vote is not as good as another in church meeting,’ even though it has the same strictly numerical value.” Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 86. Cf. Mikael Broadway, Curtis W. Freeman, Barry Harvey, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Elizabeth Newman, and Philip E. Thompson, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America,” §1: “*We affirm Bible Study in reading communities* rather than relying on private interpretation or supposed ‘scientific’ objectivity... We thus affirm an open and orderly process whereby faithful communities deliberate together over the Scriptures with sisters and brothers of the faith, excluding no light from any source. When all exercise their gifts and callings, when every voice is heard and weighed, when no one is silenced or privileged, the Spirit leads communities to read wisely and to practice faithfully the direction of the gospel.” *Baptists Today* (June 1997), 8-10; *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 303-10; <http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/faculty-freeman/reenvisioning-baptist-identity.pdf>. For an exploration of the theological practice by local churches of discernment through inter-contextual listening to a wide range of voices beyond the local church, see Amy L. Chilton and Steven R. Harmon, eds., *Sources of Light: Resources for Baptist Churches Practicing Theology. Perspectives on Baptist Identities*, no. 3. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2020).

to the input of multiple voices is the process by which the WCC Commission on Faith and Order solicited and received responses from a wide range of ecclesial voices to the successive drafts of the convergence text that became *TCTCV: The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998),¹⁹ *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005), and three successive additional drafts that made continued improvements in light of ongoing input on the way to the reception by the WCC Central Committee in September 2012 of the new convergence text *TCTCV*, published in 2013.

2.3. Baptists may especially see themselves in the way *TCTCV* attended to the voices of those who have been marginalized in their contexts. Baptists began as a persecuted religious minority, and this formative experience has led them historically to be advocates for religious liberty, not only for themselves but for other marginalized minorities, and to work for the just treatment of all persons. We confess that there have been notable Baptist failures to embody these convictions regarding freedom and justice. But at their best, Baptists have sought to live in light of the insistence of Baptist minister and theologian Martin Luther King, Jr., that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”²⁰ The ongoing commitment of the global Baptist community to seeking liberty and justice for the oppressed and marginalized is reflected

in the existence of BWA Commissions devoted to Religious Freedom; Racial, Gender, and Economic Justice; and Human Rights, Peacebuilding, and Reconciliation. In addition, the BWA awards an annual Human Rights Award that reflects this commitment.²¹ When members of the 2009 Plenary Commission on Faith and Order, with Baptist representatives among them, offered their perspectives on the draft statement *The Nature and Mission of the Church* and suggestions for revising it, one speaker critiqued the way that draft text treated biblical images of the church in purely doctrinal terms without sufficient attention to their sociological dimensions and implications for the liberation of the dispossessed and the disempowered.²² Baptists who pray and work for liberty

21. During years in which the quinquennial Baptist World Congress is held, the award is designated as the BWA Congress Quinquennial Human Rights Award; in non-Baptist World Congress years, the prize is awarded as the Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award, named after a former General Secretary of the BWA and his wife.

22. Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Coorilos of India called the dispossessed and disempowered “the actual church amongst communities of people in their struggle for the fullness of life,” going on to say, “In India, for the [“untouchable” members of the Dalit caste] who form the majority of the Indian church, the body of Christ is a Dalit body, a ‘broken body’ (the word Dalit literally means ‘broken’ and ‘torn asunder’). Jesus Christ became a Dalit because he was torn-asunder and mutilated on the cross. The Church as ‘body of Christ,’ in the Indian context, therefore, has profound theological and sociological implications for a Dalit ecclesiology....[*The Nature and Mission of the Church*], however, fails to strike chords and resonate with such contextual theological challenges...In other words, the text fails to encounter the real *ecclesia* among communities of people in pain and suffering.” Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, “The Nature and Mission of the Church: An Indian Perspective,” in *Called to Be*

19. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* (Faith and Order Paper No. 181; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998). Hereafter NPC.

20. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (April 16, 1963), p. 2, http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf

and justice for the dispossessed and disempowered will rejoice that this critical voice was heard by the drafting committee. It is reflected in the insistence of *TCTCV* that “the Church needs to help those without power in society to be heard,” “must become a voice for those who are voiceless,” and is impelled “to work for a just social order, in which the goods of this earth may be shared equitably, the suffering of the poor eased and absolute destitution one day be eliminated” (§64), as well as in its assertion that “after the example of Jesus, the Church is called and empowered in a special way to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalized” (§66).

2.4. Baptists welcome one feature of *TCTCV* that seems most obviously an advance beyond *BEM*: its reengagement of the roots of the modern ecumenical movement in the modern missions movement. The 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference that led to the founding of the ongoing International Missionary Conference in 1921 was in some sense anticipated a century earlier by pioneering Baptist missionary to India William Carey (1761-1834), who in 1806 suggested that “a general association of all denominations of Christians from the four quarters of the earth”

the One Church: Faith and Order at Crete, ed. John Gibaut. Faith and Order Paper No. 212. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 188-92. Also at the meeting of the Plenary Commission on Faith and Order in Crete, members of the Plenary Commission recommended that those responsible for drafting “shorten the text and...make it more contextual, more reflective of the lives of the churches throughout the world, and more accessible to a wider readership” (*TCTCV*, 45).

meet each decade at the Cape of Good Hope.²³ In *TCTCV*, the quest for Christian unity is framed as a participation in God’s mission in the world in its opening chapter, “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church.” The opening paragraph ends with these two sentences:

The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit *to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world*. Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing (*TCTCV* §1, emphasis added).

This first chapter sees the *missio dei* as carried out in the sending of the Son, defined by the earthly ministry of Jesus, extended in the church as the body of Christ that continues his mission, and empowered by the Holy Spirit sent upon the church and into the world. In the next chapter on “The Church of the Triune God,” the church “is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom” (§13). Whereas the title of the earlier text, “The Nature *and Mission* of

23. E. Glenn Hinson, “William Carey and Ecumenical Pragmatism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 76-77.

the Church” suggested that one could somehow differentiate the church’s nature and the church’s mission, *TCTCV* now conceives of mission as essential to the nature of the church—a strengthening of a long-developing trajectory in ecclesiology and ecumenical theology that appropriates the missiological concept of the *missio dei* in which the church participates and becomes more fully the church whenever it does so. Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800-84), the German “Father of Continental Baptists” who adopted as his motto “Every Baptist a Missionary,” would have been pleased by this aspect of *TCTCV*.²⁴

2.5. A second notable advance beyond *BEM* is the way *TCTCV* roots the unity of the church in the unity of the Triune God: “Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (§1). The text advances this Trinitarian rationale and framework for conceiving of the church and its unity not only in its second chapter, “The Church of the Triune God,” but throughout the document. It does so especially in terms of the biblical concept of *koinonia*, which the subsequent Christian theological tradition has developed both as Trinitarian concept and as an ecclesiological concept; and it is influenced in particular by recent constructive retrievals of these developments.²⁵ *TCTCV* reaps the harvest of this

Trinitarian ecclesiological ferment as a deepening of a theme long present in ecumenical theology;²⁶ but it is also a theme that had already featured prominently in international bilateral ecumenical dialogues with Baptist participation, in particular, Phase II of the dialogue between the BWA and the Catholic Church (2006-2010). A “common language” of an ecclesiology rooted in Trinitarian *koinonia* enabled Baptists and Catholics together to make affirmations such as the following in the report of this dialogue, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*:²⁷

Jesus Christ is thus God’s self-revelation who draws us into the communion of God’s own triune life and into communion (*koinonia*) with each other” (§7).

The church is thus to be understood as a *koinonia*...which is grounded in the *koinonia* of the triune God. Believers are joined in *koinonia* through participation in the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit...[and] are in *koinonia* through their participation

Ecumenical Ecclesiology: From Foundations through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008).

26. *Unitatis Redintegratio* §2, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II* (London: Sheed & Ward; and Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 908-20.

27. *The Word of God in the Life of the Church* §8: “In recent years this [the *koinonia* of the Triune God as the foundation for the communion of the church] has become our common language, whether Catholic or Protestant, or specifically Baptist.”

24. Hans Luckey, *Johann Gerhard Oncken und die Anfänge des deutschen Baptismus*, 3rd ed. (Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 1958).

25. E.g., Lorelei Fuchs, *Koinonia and the Quest for an*

in the community of believers gathered by Christ in his church (§11).

The principle of *koinonia* applies both to the church gathered in a local congregation and to congregations gathered together... We agree that the local fellowship does not derive from the universal church, nor is the universal a mere sum of various local forms, but that there is mutual existence and coinherence between the local and universal church of Christ (§12).

The Baptists recognized in such an ecclesiology of *koinonia* a convergence with the concept of “covenant” emphasized in Baptist ecclesiology, in which the church is constituted by participatory divine-human and human-human relationships that extend beyond the local church to include trans-local ecclesial relationships (§§16-19). While *TCTCV* does not make this connection between *koinonia* and covenant, it is in particular the communion ecclesiology of *TCTCV* that makes it possible for Baptists to see *TCTCV* as a basis for growth in unity, a matter addressed in the next major section of this response.

2.6. Baptists are also able to appreciate a third strand in this ecumenical vision that *TCTCV* brings into sharper focus: its development more strongly than *BEM* of the church’s ecumenical imperative in eschatological terms, which *TCTCV* sees as inseparable from the mission of the Triune God, who is the source of ecclesial unity. The three strands come together in the opening paragraph of *TCTCV*, which concludes with the insistence that “Communion, whose source is the very life

of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity *in hope of reconciliation and healing*” (§1, emphasis added). *TCTCV* portrays the church that has this eschatological hope as “an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom, but not yet its full realization.” Therefore, it is also “a pilgrim community” on a “journey towards the full realization of God’s gift of communion” (§§33, 35, 37).²⁸

28. This thoroughly eschatological pilgrim church motif had already been expressed in the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism, which said that the church “makes its pilgrim way in hope toward the goal of the fatherland above,” with that goal defined in the next sentence as “the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church” (*Unitatis Redintegratio* §2). This pilgrim church conception of ecclesial identity, however, belongs broadly to the modern ecumenical movement and all churches that participate in it. The concept was clearly expressed in reports and documents issued in connection with assemblies of the WCC that preceded and followed the Second Vatican Council: Evanston in 1954 and New Delhi in 1961, as well as Uppsala in 1968. The New Delhi assembly issued a Report on Witness that urged “a reappraisal of the patterns of church organization and institutions inherited by the younger churches” so that “outdated forms... may be replaced by strong and relevant ways of evangelism.” It offered this as an example of “How the Church may become the Pilgrim Church, which goes forth boldly as Abraham did into the unknown future, not afraid to leave behind the securities of its conventional structure, glad to dwell in the tent of perpetual adaptation, looking to the city whose builder and maker is God.” The New Delhi assembly also proposed a vision of the ecumenical future toward which the pilgrim church journeys in its definition of the unity sought by the modern ecumenical movement: “We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and [God’s] gift to [God’s] Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully-committed fellowship,

This vision of a pilgrim church articulated by *TCTCV* may be the feature of this convergence text that most fully reflects the ecclesiological self-understanding of Baptists. The Baptist ecclesial ideal is the church that is fully under the rule of Christ, which Baptists locate somewhere ahead of them in a not-yet-arrived-at future rather than in any past or present instantiation of the church.²⁹ Baptists are relentlessly dissatisfied with the present state of the church in their pilgrim journey toward the community that will be fully under the reign of Christ; and *TCTCV* gives expression to the same sort of holy dissatisfaction with the ecclesial status quo. The acknowledgement that the whole church both shares in past and present ecclesial failures to realize God's gift of communion, and shares in a pilgrim journey toward a visible manifestation of communion, that has yet to be fully realized makes it possible for Baptists to see the vision of *TCTCV* as a basis for mutual growth toward a more fully visible unity.

holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages, in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls [God's] people." "Report of the Section on Unity," in *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961* (New York: Association Press, 1962), 116.

29. Cf. Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), "The Theology of a Pilgrim Church," 213-42.

3. The Church: Towards a Common Vision as Basis for Growth in Unity

3.1 *TCTCV* also invites response to the question, "To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?" In Baptist perspective, the communion ecclesiology developed within the framework of Trinitarian *koinonia* noted in the previous section makes it possible to envision a movement toward visible unity that has a place not only for Baptists and their own ecclesiological convictions but also for all the other churches with which Baptists do not currently have full communion, without any of the traditions being required to surrender the distinctive ecclesial gifts that have been uniquely preserved in each of the divided traditions. Without the exchange of these gifts, none of the divided churches can become fully catholic (in the sense not only of quantitative catholicity, which describes the totality of the one church to which all who belong to Christ belong; but also of qualitative catholicity, which describes the fullness of certain qualities of faith and faithfulness that mark the one church fully under the rule of Christ).³⁰

3.2. *TCTCV* insists that "each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church" (§31). This emphasis of *TCTCV* on the presence in the local church of the catholic fullness of what it means to be church (in both

30. On the distinction between "quantitative" and "qualitative" catholicity, see Yves Congar, *Chrétiens désunis: principes d'un "œcuménisme" catholique*. Unum Sanctam, no. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1937), 115-17; ET, *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, trans. M. A. Bousfield (London: Geoffrey Bles/Centenary Press, 1939), 93-94.

senses of catholicity noted in the preceding paragraph of this response), without prioritizing the universal church over the local church, invites a growth toward unity that happens at the grassroots. This develops further the locality of growth toward visible unity envisioned by the 1962 New Delhi assembly of the WCC in its definition of “The Unity We Seek”: “We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and [God’s] gift to [God’s] Church is being made visible as *all in each place* who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully-committed fellowship...”³¹ This emphasis on the local church makes space for the contributions of difference and diversity to the growth toward unity, and it helps ensure that growth toward unity is not merely a matter of negotiating mergers between trans-local unions of churches, which themselves play an important role in the traditioning of healthy diversity within the body of Christ.

3.3. The affirmation of *TCTCV* that “each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church,” quoted in the preceding paragraph of this response, continues, “It [the local church] is wholly Church, but not the whole Church. Thus, the local church should not be seen in isolation from but in dynamic relation with other local churches” (§31).³² This application

of the *koinonia* ecclesiology of *TCTCV* helps the churches to imagine the possibility of a form of future visible unity that is neither ecclesial merger nor a movement “home to Rome” (or Constantinople), but rather a communion of communions in which each communion is able to conserve and offer to the whole church its diversity of distinctive ecclesial gifts while having full communion with the other communions. Such “full communion” would entail the conditions envisioned by

Ecclesiology in Elstal, Germany, March 21-24, 2007, that addressed the question “Are Baptist Churches Autonomous?” Among the five affirmations agreed upon by the sixty-plus conference participants were these two: “That for Baptists, the local church is wholly church but not the whole church,” and “That our local churches and Conventions/Unions are participants in the one church that God has called into being as we anticipate the full revelation of the children of God.” This language derives from Jean-Jacques von Allmen, “L’Église locale parmi les autres Eglises locales,” *Irenikon* 43 (1970): 512, who as a Reformed ecumenist insisted that the local church is “wholly the church, but not the whole church,” language closely echoed in the Elstal affirmation. The statement from the Elstal symposium and the press release reporting on its proceedings are no longer available online at the BWA web site, but the affirmation referenced here is quoted and engaged by Elizabeth Newman, “Are Local Baptist Churches Wholly Autonomous?” *Baptist News Global* (June 12, 2007) <http://baptistnews.com/archives/item/2582-opinion-are-local-baptist-churches-wholly-autonomous>. This statement by the BWA, along with the papers from this symposium, are published in a thematic issue on “Congregational Independence—Associational Interdependence” in *American Baptist Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2019); see “Statement from the Baptist World Alliance Symposium on Baptist Identity and Ecclesiology (Are Baptist Churches Autonomous?),” the editorial introduction by Curtis W. Freeman “Wholly Church but not the Whole Church,” and the articles “Words Are Inadequate to Express Our Convictions: The Problem of the Autonomy of the Local Church” by William H. Brackney and “Are Baptist Churches Autonomous?” by Nigel G. Wright.

31. “Report of the Section on Unity,” 116 (emphasis added).

32. The BWA has previously embraced this conception of the interdependency of the local church and expressions of church beyond the local church. In conjunction with the German Union of Free Evangelical (Baptist) Churches, the BWA sponsored a Symposium on Baptist Identity and

the New Delhi statement referenced above: a full communion of the churches with each other in which all baptized Christians fully belong to one another in a covenanted community that is both local and worldwide, marked by common confession of the broad contours of the historic faith of the church, common celebration of the eucharist in which table fellowship is fully extended to all members of all churches, joint engagement in mission and service, mutual recognition of the baptisms and ordinations performed by one another's churches and a unified prophetic voice. The communion ecclesiology of *TCTCV* offers a theological framework within which such full communion may more easily be envisioned, and in a manner that may seem much more inviting to the churches that have a history of reticence about Faith and Order ecumenical proposals.

3.4. The *koinonia* ecclesiology of *TCTCV* also makes ecclesial space for the practice of "receptive ecumenism" as a paradigm for ecumenical convergence. It invites the churches "not only to work untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences in liturgy, custom and law and to foster legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological method and formulation in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole" (§30). While the language of receptive ecumenism is recent in ecumenical theology,³³ it

33. Receptive ecumenism is a more recent approach to ecumenical dialogue according to which the communions in conversation with one another seek to identify the distinctive gifts that each tradition has to offer the other and which each could receive from the other with integrity, but in which "the

has long been practiced in the recognition that there are gifts of liturgy, spirituality, theology, and other ecclesial practices present in other traditions that may be received into one's own tradition to help it become more fully catholic, more fully under the rule of Christ, without relinquishing the good gifts that have been distinctively stewarded in one's own tradition. The reception of *TCTCV* by the churches can help the practice of receptive ecumenism become more intentional. When practiced over time by the churches, it may lead to the future realization that our churches have so remarkably converged toward one another through the exchange of these gifts that full communion is now possible in ways not previously envisioned, as the gift of the Spirit at work in the churches rather than a blueprint for convergence engineered by ecumenists.

4. Challenges to Baptists

4.1. The next question which *TCTCV* poses to the churches is, "What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?" Receptive ecumenism is

primary emphasis is on learning rather than teaching...each tradition takes responsibility for its own potential learning from others and is, in turn, willing to facilitate the learning of others as requested but without dictating terms and without making others' learning a precondition to attending to one's own." Briefing document distributed to participants in an international conference on receptive ecumenism held at Durham University (UK), 2006; quoted in Walter Cardinal Kasper's "Foreword" to Paul D. Murray, ed., *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii.

not merely the addition of gifts received from other churches to the store of gifts already possessed by one's own church. Sometimes the recognition of the desirability of these gifts carries with it the realization of deficiencies in one's own church that must be rectified by altering aspects of faith and practice in light of a current shortcoming that another tradition's gift reveals. At other times, a gift recognized in another tradition leads to the re-reception of a gift that has previously marked the life of one's own communion but that has been neglected or forgotten and therefore must be renewed.

4.2 After noting the interdependence that marked the first-century Christian communities described in the New Testament, *TCTCV* rightly insists:

This communion of local churches is thus not an optional extra. The universal Church is the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world. It is not merely the sum, federation or juxtaposition of local churches, but all of them together are the same Church present and acting in this world. Catholicity...refers not simply to geographic extension but also to the manifold variety of local churches and their participation in the fullness of faith and life that unites them in the one *koinonia* (§31).

While Baptists are able to recognize their emphasis on the primacy of the local church in the refusal of *TCTCV* to prioritize the universal church over the local church, serious consideration of the *koinonia* ecclesiology of *TCTCV* will

remind Baptists that while "the local church is wholly church, it is not the whole church" and that there is therefore something intrinsically deficient about the local church when it is not living into the fullest possible extension of its interdependence with the whole church.

4.3. Baptists have often seen themselves as ecumenical in the sense that they value their spiritual connection that they already have with other followers of Jesus Christ in other churches from which Baptists are visibly divided. They recognize that with these other Christians they share "one body and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God" (Eph. 4:4-6 NRSV) in what has been termed a "spiritual ecumenism." While this is an important recognition as a starting point for ecumenical engagement, Baptists have too often been content with affirming spiritual ecumenism and neglecting or even disavowing the visible unity of the followers of Jesus, which is the clear implication of Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21 NRSV). The insistence of *TCTCV* that visible unity is the goal of ecumenical convergence challenges Baptists beyond being content with the spiritual ecumenism they already affirm.

5. Opportunities for *Koinonia* in Life and Mission

5.1. The Introduction to *TCTCV* asks, "How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?" While Baptist ecclesial diversity precludes generalizing about

Baptists' perspectives on particular ecclesiological proposals, in general Baptists will be able both to affirm the vision of the church articulated by *TCTCV* and to recognize churches that can join them in affirming this vision as churches with which "closer relationships in life and mission" can be formed.

5.2. The Lund Principle proposed at the Third World Conference on Faith and Order in Lund, Sweden, in 1952, according to which churches should "act together in all matters except those in which deep difference of conviction compel them to act separately," serves as a useful means of self-examination regarding the extent to which Baptist churches have developed missional partnerships with other churches in living into the vision of *TCTCV* for a more visible unity.³⁴

5.3. In the context of international bilateral dialogue, delegated representatives of the BWA have already affirmed the Lund Principle as a guideline for entering into missional partnerships with other churches. The first of eleven recommendations at the conclusion of the report from the dialogue between the BWA and the World Methodist Council is this:

Around the world Baptists and Methodists share joint work through theological education, social ministry, youth programs, evangelistic meetings, joint communion services, and they often participate in each other's

churches when there is no congregation of their own denomination in the area. Because such widespread shared life already exists, we recommend that at every geographical level from the global to the local congregation, Baptists and Methodists always seek to follow the Lund principle that "to manifest the oneness of the people of God [they should] act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."³⁵

Therefore, inasmuch as there are other churches beyond Baptist churches and Methodist churches that embrace the ecclesial vision of *TCTCV* in which Baptists can recognize themselves and which Baptists can affirm, this application of the Lund Principle to Baptist-Methodist relationships can be applied to Baptist relationships with these other Christian churches as well.

6. Baptist Questions and Suggestions for the Commission on Faith and Order

6.1. Finally, *TCTCV* invites response to the question, "What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?" While there is much that Baptists could propose

34. *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order, Lund 1952*, ed. Oliver S. Tomkins (London: SCM Press, 1953), 15-16.

35. Baptist World Alliance and World Methodist Council, *Faith Working through Love: Report of the International Dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council* (2018), <https://www.bwanet.org/images/MEJ/Final-Report-of-the-International-Dialogue-between-BWA-and-WMC.pdf>

for work by the Commission on Faith and Order, in this response we focus on some ways in which from our perspective the *koinonia* ecclesiology of *TCTCV* could be fruitfully applied to matters not sufficiently developed in this convergence text.

6.2. Although *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition* (2011) represented a fuller development of *BEM*'s recognition of the historical and theological priority of believers' baptism that Baptists were able to appreciate,³⁶ this did not receive as thorough an exploration as might have been desired in *TCTCV*. This convergence text also did not apply the insights of its emphasis on *koinonia* to the ongoing divisions between churches that baptize only believers and those that also baptize the infant children of believing parents. Proposals that focus on the "mutual recognition of baptism," which is the language employed also by *TCTCV* (§41), remain problematic from a Baptist perspective. However, the international bilateral dialogues which the BWA has held with the Anglican Communion, the Catholic Church, and the World Methodist Council have explored the possibilities for a mutual recognition of journeys of initiation in which the emphasis is shifted from chronological orderings of faith, baptism, and formation in faith to a focus on the whole journey of Christian initiation in the company of the church.³⁷ As one response to *TCTCV*

by an individual Baptist theologian has suggested, a theology of *koinonia* makes it possible to appreciate the manner in which different orderings of events in whole journeys of initiation nonetheless draw those who are baptized into participation in the communion of the Triune God in the communion of the church.³⁸ We believe that a fully ecumenical exploration of these possibilities for a mutual recognition of journeys of initiation in light of the *koinonia* ecclesiology expressed in *TCTCV* would be a fruitful endeavor for future work by the WCC Commission on Faith and Order.

6.3. In light of the convergence between an ecclesiology rooted in Trinitarian *koinonia* and a Baptist covenantal ecclesiology explored in bilateral dialogues with BWA participation noted earlier in this response (2.5), we suggest that further study of the parallels between covenantal ecclesiologies and communion ecclesiology would invite a wider embrace of the vision of *TCTCV* not only by Baptists but also by other churches in the broader Free Church tradition.

6.4. The WCC Commission on Faith and Order recently has been giving attention to the matter of ecclesial moral discernment, which is becoming a concern for Faith and Order ecumenism because disagreements over ethical issues are increasingly a cause of ecclesial division.³⁹ It

36. Steven R. Harmon, "'One Baptism': A Study Text for Baptists," *Baptist World: A Magazine of the Baptist World Alliance* 58, no. 1 (January/March 2011): 9-10.

37. *Conversations Around the World 2000-2005: The Report of the International Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005), §§40-52; Baptist World Alliance

and Catholic Church, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, §§101-06; Baptist World Alliance and World Methodist Council, *Faith Working through Love*, §§70-80.

38. Fiddes, "Koinonia," 43-44.

39. *Moral Discernment in the Churches: A Study Document*. Faith and Order Paper No. 215. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013).

has been noted that the section of *TCTCV* on “The Moral Challenge of the Gospel” (§§61-63) lacks any connection with the overarching theme of *koinonia*. The application of the framework of Trinitarian *koinonia* to moral discernment in the churches might supply this ecclesial practice with a theological framework that “can point all people towards the possibility of a life in which relations are the most important thing, where all persons and even the natural environment are interconnected, and where human beings can actively and intentionally participate more deeply in movements of love and justice in which they are already immersed by living in the world.”⁴⁰

7. Recommendations for Baptist Reception of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*

Toward the end of facilitating reception of *TCTCV* among Baptists, the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity makes the following recommendations:

7.1.1. The text of *TCTCV* and this response to it need to be disseminated widely in the global Baptist community if there is to be a Baptist reception of what is proposed by this convergence text. Links to the electronic version of *TCTCV* on the web site of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order and to this response from the BWA Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity should be posted on the web sites of the BWA and its regional fellowships.

7.1.2. The Baptist reception of the ecumenical ecclesiology articulated by *TCTCV* will be aided

by once again posting the statement from the 2007 Elstal Symposium on Baptist Identity and Ecclesiology on the BWA web site (see 3.3 above).

7.2. In the absence of ecumenical officers and other structures tasked with promoting ecumenical engagement, in the Baptist tradition it is institutions of theological education that have the greatest opportunity for facilitating Baptist reception of *TCTCV*. We recommend that the BWA encourage Baptist theological educators to make use of *TCTCV* and this response to it as texts in courses that include attention to ecclesiology, and that institutions of theological education provide continuing education opportunities for ministers that introduce them to *TCTCV*.

7.3. At the local level, we encourage Baptist ministers to study *TCTCV* themselves and to form local study groups with ministers of neighboring churches from other traditions to read and discuss *TCTCV* and to contemplate the possibilities for living into its vision locally in the relationships between their churches.

7.4. We appeal to local Baptist churches, to Baptist associations and unions, and to the BWA itself to give serious, prayerful consideration to the Lund Principle, according to which churches should “act together in all matters except those in which deep difference of conviction compel them to act separately,” as a call to seek a fuller, more visible participation in the Trinitarian *koinonia* imagined by *TCTCV* wherever manifestations of this *koinonia* are recognized.

40. Fiddes, “*Koinonia*,” 46.

RESPONSES FROM ECUMENICAL
ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

SECTION 3

30. Response by Rev. Prof. Paul S. Fiddes

1. *Koinonia* and covenant in ecclesiology

“A picture shows me at a glance what it takes dozens of pages of a book to expound.” So wrote the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev, and the church of Christ has exemplified this truth by offering a series of images to express the complexities (even the mystery) of its own nature. The Faith and Order paper of the World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, notes early on that an adequate approach to the mystery of the church requires a wide range of images – primarily “people of God,” “body of Christ,” and “temple of the Holy Spirit,” together with other images such as vine, flock, bride, household, soldiers and friends (§12).¹ However, it subordinates all these to the idea of *koinonia*. “The biblical notion of *koinonia*,” it declares, “has become central in the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the Church” (§13).

The Greek noun *koinonia*, *TCTCV* explains, may be understood as “communion, participation, fellowship or sharing.” *Koinonia*, of course, is also an image, especially when applied to the

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC publications, 2013). All paragraph numbers refer to this edition.

life of God which can only be approached through metaphors or verbal images. Indeed, the usefulness of the term “communion” is both its capacity for expressing a diversity of human relationships, and its rooting in a vision of God as Trinity. This is surely why *koinonia* has become the term of choice in ecclesiology of recent years, especially on the ecumenical scene. It has, over last the thirty years or so, supplanted the previously preferred terms “body of Christ” and “people of God.”² The language of “communion” has soaked into the documents that mark bilateral conversations between Anglicans, Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, Lutherans, Reformed, Methodists and Baptists.³ Ecclesially, it can describe the relation of an individual believer to a local congregation, the relating of churches together on various levels of human society, the relation between churches and their leaders (pastors and bishops) and leaders with each

2. For this shift in thought, see Edward P. Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005), 3–30.

3. See Loreli F. Fuchs, SA, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 251–368; Walter Kasper, *Harvesting The Fruits. Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: Continuum, 2009), 72–77.

other, the communal life created by sharing in the eucharist, the relation of the local to the universal church, and the participation of all these relations (including the partnership of woman and man in creation) in the loving fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In short, it makes clear that the church is a manifestation in time and space of the eternal relational life of God.

The importance of *koinonia* for *TCTCV* is stressed throughout its pages. The third edition we have before us, issued in 2012, is claimed to be no longer “a stage on the way” to a common statement, but the common statement itself, a convergence document which can be sent to the churches as “a common point of reference in order to test out or discern their own ecclesiological convergences.” The new title with the words “a Common Vision” echoes the idea of *koinonia*, and the section previously called in Faith and Order Paper No. 198 “The Church of the Triune God” is now headed “The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*,” so *beginning* with the concept of *koinonia* rather than working up to it through other images as the previous Paper had done (§13).⁴ Throughout the revised document, references to the church as communion or *koinonia* have been liberally increased.

I believe that the image of *koinonia* is indeed foundational to our proper vision of the church, and that *TCTCV* which embodies it is the most effective convergence document on the church

that Christian churches have as yet produced. But despite the welcome stress on *koinonia* in the final version of *TCTCV*, I want to make two observations that might give us pause for thought. First, there is no attempt to place alongside *koinonia* another ecclesial concept which has become increasingly significant in recent years. I mean the concept of “covenant.” Putting “*koinonia*” and “covenant” together has, for example, been a definite achievement of the recent conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance. These align the ecumenical convergence on *communio* with the idea of covenant which is traditional within Reformed churches such as Baptists. The agreed statement affirms:

The *koinonia* of the church may also be understood as a “covenant community” although this language is less familiar to Catholics than to Baptists. “Covenant” expresses at once both the initiative and prior activity of God in making relationship with his people through Christ, and the willing commitment of people to each other and to God The fellowship or *koinonia* of the church itself is [thus] both a gift and calling . . .⁵

From their earliest beginnings in the English Reformation period, Baptists – along with Congregationalists and many Presbyterians – have

4. Cf. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*. Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 17(d).

5. *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between The Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006–2010*, in *American Baptist Quarterly*, 31 no 1 Spr 2012, p 28-122, at §16.

thought of the church as gathered by a covenant or agreement which has two dimensions. There is, first, a vertical agreement which relates believers to God, members of the church gratefully receiving the eternal covenant of grace which God makes with all humankind in Christ, and promising for their part to be faithful to God. Second, there is a horizontal dimension in which believers are united to each other in a promise which usually took the form of pledging to “walk together and watch over each other.”⁶ Often this horizontal promise has taken the form of a written document to which all members of a local church have put their names, while in other places the covenant is understood to be enacted in baptism. The covenant in these two dimensions, eternal and temporal, is certainly *sealed* in baptism and renewed in the Lord’s supper or eucharist. The early Baptist John Smyth clearly sets out these two vectors of covenant (1607):

A visible communion of Saints is of two, three or more Saints joyned together by covenant with God & themselves⁷ The outward

6. E.g., William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. W.C. Ford (2 volumes; Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1912), vol. 1, 20–22; *The Faith and Practise of Thirty Congregations, Gathered According to the Primitive Pattern* (London: Will Larnar, 1651), 52, in W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 183; *A Confession of the Faith of Several Churches of Christ (The “Somerset Confession”)* (London: Henry Hills, 1656), XXIV, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 209. For exposition, see Paul S. Fiddes, “Walking Together. The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today,” in *Tracks and Traces. Baptist Identity in Church and Doctrine* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 21–47.

7. John Smyth, *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible*

part of the true forme of the true visible church is a vowe, promise, oath, or covenant betwixt God and the Saints This covenant hath 2 parts. 1. Respecting God and the faithful. 2. Respecting the faithful mutually.⁸

The two dimensions of covenant are, we can readily see, parallel to the two dimensions of *koinonia* – communion *within* the people of God and *between* that people and the triune God. Now, while the word “covenant” occasionally appears in *TCTCV*,⁹ it is never applied to the nature of the church. Although the Historical Note shows us (p. 45) that the drafting committee included theologians from the Reformed tradition (as well as from the Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Orthodox traditions – but no Baptist), my argument will be that it would have made a difference if features of “covenant” had made their way into the discussion of *koinonia* as they have done in the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) - Roman Catholic conversations.

My second general observation is that, despite multiple references to *koinonia*, there is some evidence that a theology of *koinonia*, and particularly a participation in the *koinonia* of the triune God, has not sunk sufficiently deeply into the discussions of chapters 3 and 4. A very good start

Church (1607); printed in W.T. Whitley (ed.), *The Works of John Smyth* (2 volumes; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), I, p. 252.

8. Smyth, *Principles and Inferences*, in *Works*, I, p. 254.

9. §§10 (local ecumenical covenant), 17–18, 45 (Old and New covenants).

is made in chapter 2 by drawing upon *koinonia* for illumination of the relation between unity and diversity, and especially of the relation between the local church and the great church universal. But my impression is that there is less theological depth to the references to communion and *koinonia* in chapter 3 (“The Church, Growing in Communion”) with its discussion of faith, sacraments and ministry; and that the depth grows even more shallow in the chapter on which I want to concentrate here, chapter 4 on “The Church: In and for the World.” I am going to make one reference to chapter 3 in due course, but now we turn to the last chapter and its vision of the relation between church and world.

At several points here this “convergence” document is constrained to notice “serious disagreements” that remain within and between the churches on the issues handled (§§60, 63, 65). *TCTCV* does an excellent job on setting out both convergence and remaining divergences, with both clarity and charity. My argument is that we might be able to move some way towards resolution of these disagreements (without admittedly finally solving them) if first we were to draw more on the theological resources of *koinonia*, and second if we were to draw on the insights that “covenant ecclesiology” can bring to *koinonia* ecclesiology.

2. God’s purpose for creation: the kingdom

Chapter 4 begins with a splendid vision of the love of God for the world, which means “for every child, woman and man who has ever become part of human history and, indeed, for the whole of creation.” The final destiny of the universe is thus

affirmed to be the Kingdom of God. Of course, this is gloriously true, but oddly there is no reference in the section (§§58–60) to *koinonia*, or the Kingdom *as koinonia*, though similar affirmations are made elsewhere in *TCTCV*. Does this matter? It does, I suggest, when the language of a divine “plan” appears both in the heading to the section and in the declaration that God intends the church to “serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world.” The language of “plan” has a static quality to it, while the notion of “purpose” is more dynamic.

I mean that God can have “purposes” that are open in the way they are to be fulfilled, leaving plenty of room for the freedom of God and the freedom that God gives to created beings. God can fulfill God’s promises in unexpected ways, as Israel of old learned continually; and surprises might come both from the creative imagination of God and from the results of cooperation between God and the world God creates. By God’s own desire there is an uncreated Creator and created creators, working in co-creativity. God’s purpose to overcome evil and finally bring about a new creation is certain because of the power of God’s love; but the form that the new creation takes will be shaped by the responses that creatures have made to the possibilities held before them. This idea of open-ended purposes rather than fixed plans fits well into the vision of *koinonia*, a fellowship in which each partner is open to the other and humbly affected by the other. It is underlined by the idea of covenant in which the covenant-partners each play their part, while nothing can happen in the first place without the initiation of the covenant-maker. So,

according to Genesis 9, God makes a covenant for the preservation and flourishing of life not only with human beings, but with “every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth” (Gen 9:12, 16).

This perspective of a God who has open purposes for love, justice and peace rather than fixed plans about the future is an essential context for the discussion that follows on evangelization and religious pluralism. *TCTCV* rightly affirms that the church must be obedient in evangelizing, understood as bearing witness to reconciliation in Christ and “the promotion of justice and peace.” It must also “always be respectful of those who hold other beliefs.” In a fine phrase it affirms that “Sharing the joyful news of the truth revealed in the New Testament and inviting others to the fullness of life in Christ is an expression of respectful love,” adding in a footnote that “inducing anyone to convert through moral pressure or material incentive” is not. Leaving people free to follow their conscience before God is a historic principle among Nonconformist churches in the UK; and so is what the footnote calls “not *hindering* anyone from entering into conversion of his or her own free will.” *TCTCV* lays stress here on respecting human dignity; historic thinking within my own Baptist tradition underlines this, but also *adds* – from the perspective of covenant – that we must respect the freedom of people to stand before God with their own responsibility. My tradition, for instance, has grounded freedom of religious belief in human rights, or what used to be called “the Rights of Man” from the 18th century onwards. The Baptist minister Robert Hall, for instance wrote in 1793:

That there are natural rights, or, in other words, a certain liberty which men may exercise, independent of permission from society, can scarcely be doubted by those who comprehend the meaning of the terms. Every man must . . . have a right to worship God after the mode he thinks acceptable; or, in other words, he ought not to be compelled to consult any thing but his own conscience.¹⁰

But the context for this belief in rights is an earlier conviction, dating from the 17th century, that freedom of conscience is grounded in the sole lordship of God; because human beings must alone make account to God, with whom they make covenant, conformity in religious matters cannot be imposed by human beings. So here is the Baptist Thomas Helwys as early as 1611:

For men’s religion to God, is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge between God and man. Let them be hereticks, Turks [i.e., Muslims], Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.¹¹

My point is that those evangelizing are more likely to be “respectful” of others in this way if

10. Robert Hall, *An Apology for the Freedom of the Press and for General Liberty* (1793), repr. in Olinthus Gregory (ed), *The Works of Robert Hall*, Vol. III (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832), 121–38.

11. See Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (n.p., 1612), 69. Spelling modernized.

they are not made anxious by fixed ideas about plans that have to be carried out, whether human strategies or what is thought to be a divine game-plan for the world. Respect will also be fostered by recognizing the responsibility of each person or group to enter into covenant with God. *TCTCV* may have undermined its commendation of respectful dialogue by the context of “God’s plan for creation” and its failure to explore the theology of *koinonia* and covenant.

This becomes even more apparent when the section treats “serious disagreements within and between churches” on the issue of whether there is any salvation for those who do not explicitly believe in Christ, or “explicitly share Christian faith.” Here *TCTCV* discerns a tension between New Testament teaching that God wills the salvation of all people, and the affirmation that Jesus is the one and only saviour of the world. It does not consider the possibility of meeting Jesus Christ himself through the experience of other faiths, drawing attention as it does only to “the positive truths and values” contained by other faiths, and the need to appreciate “elements of truth and goodness” that are present in other religions” (§60). A perspective of the *koinonia* of all people in the life of the triune God allows us to think that Christ is present (often in a hidden way) with and in truths and values in all faiths and none, always bringing a challenge to human life and calling for response as the Lord of the universe, even where he is not explicitly recognized within the bounds of this earthly life. It also allows us to think that a response might be made faithfully *either* by remaining within a particular religion, *or* by

changing from one faith-community to another, just as the sovereign Spirit of God leads.

This brings us to the reference to chapter 3 that I promised to make earlier. In considering the resistance of some to the idea that there can be any salvation outside the church, *TCTCV* records their conviction that scripture requires “the necessity of faith and baptism for salvation.” How, they ask, can there be salvation without baptism and faith? *TCTCV* enquires how the churches might arrive at a greater convergence about these issues, but in the previous section it has failed to set “faith and baptism” in the context of *koinonia* and covenant in a way that might well help.

I mean that baptism, whether infant baptism or believers’ baptism, is regarded *on its own* in *TCTCV* as being “the introduction to new life in Christ,” and “the water of re-birth” “incorporating” the person baptized into the body of Christ (§41). Baptists gladly affirm this of the baptism of a believing disciple, but generally find it difficult to apply to the case of a very young infant whose faith has to be vicariously represented by others, and so generally decline the invitation to make a “mutual recognition of baptism.” Baptists have in fact been urging in a whole series of bilateral ecumenical conversations that initiation, or beginning a new life in Christ, should be understood not as one point but as a process of salvation, a journey on which baptism is one stage.¹² In the case of

12. See *Conversations Around the World. Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance*, 44–51. Similarly, see *Dialogue between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) on the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism*.

the baptism of an infant, Baptists have urged, the journey into Christ needs to be completed in an act of personal faith and commissioning by God's Spirit to share in God's mission in the world. Then a mutual recognition of initiation (rather than baptism) might well be possible. This leans on a theology of *koinonia*, in which people are being drawn more deeply over a process of time into the communion of God's life, and a theology of covenant, where covenant-promises need at some point to be made. Whether coming into the *koinonia* of the church as a young infant or as a mature believer for the first time, their salvation is not a single point (baptism or a "decision" of faith) but a process of "being saved," of being transformed into the image of Christ. Here the representatives in the conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance found common ground in the idea of a journey of initiation, an image that is used in the Catechism of the Catholic Church¹³ and which was drawn upon in the Report of the Conversations. There we find an agreed statement:

Initiation into Christ and his church is a process wider than the act of baptism itself. We can work towards a mutual recognition of the

Leuenberg Documents 9 (Frankfurt: Verlag Lembeck, 2005), 19–22; *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity. Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation* (London: Church House Publishing 2005), 31–57; *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, §§101–4.

13. Note that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states (1229), "becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages."

different forms that *initiation* takes among us, as an entire "journey" of faith and grace.¹⁴

Unfortunately, there is no trace of this understanding of the journey of initiation in *TCTCV*, the lack of which betrays – I suggest – a lack of theological exploration of *koinonia*. The relevance for the question of religious pluralism in chapter 4 is that *TCTCV* has no vision of such a process or journey *outside* the church either. Those who find difficulty in the idea of a saving encounter with Christ outside the church might consider that faith and baptism have their place within a whole process of being saved. Within the counsels of the God who holds us in *koinonia*, we do not know what further steps or stages might be needed in any particular person, to complete a salvation which has begun within the mystery of God's dealing with a human life; we do know from scripture that our salvation will come to its fullness only in the new creation, at the Day of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ We might dare to apply this vision of a journey to those outside the visible church who have not, or not yet, been baptized.

3. The moral challenge of the gospel

The term *koinonia* does appear in the next section of this last chapter about the church in the world. We read: "*koinonia* includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based on

14. *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, §§101–4.

15. E.g., Phil. 1:6, Eph. 4:30, Rom. 5:9–10, 8:24, 13:11, 2 Tim. 2:10, 1 Pet. 1:9.

the inspiration and insights of the gospel.” The point being made is that churches which share together in *koinonia* need to be accountable to each other for the decisions and attitudes they take on ethical issues. The paper obviously has in mind that fellowship between churches, and ecumenical advances between them, have been broken by taking up positions on certain matters – the question of human sexuality hovers in the air here but is not named. The section speaks of “challenges to divergence represented by contemporary moral issues,” but no examples are given.

It seems that these challenges belong to what the section calls “individual moral values.” Discipleship, it affirms, demands moral commitment on both the individual and social level, but *TCTCV* seems happier to specify social values such as “justice, peace and protection of the environment” than contentious individual values.

It seems odd that no individual moral values are named in *TCTCV*. Perhaps what the authors are trying to avoid are not values at all but codes or rules of behaviour that bind the individual, constructed from values. If we are bound by covenant, we will want to name these values, to which a covenantal life commits us, but not necessarily to construct a tight moral code. Within the Reformed-Dissenting tradition, a church covenant is not a set of rules, and not even a binding confession, but an agreement to “walk together” in love, trust and mutual responsibilities. If we are to begin identifying the covenantal values, there are few places better to begin than with the cardinal virtues named by Thomas Aquinas, largely following Aristotle, which combine to make the

good life that serves the common good of all. First among these is prudence, the capacity to make judgements in a particular situation where rules are missing or do not seem to apply. This may also be called practical wisdom, which is both “knowing what to want and what not to want” and deciding to act to satisfy the want.¹⁶ Prudence accompanies and guides all the other virtues, of which the cardinal ones are justice, moral courage and temperance (or moderation).¹⁷ It hardly needs to be underlined that those responsible for the recent meltdown that has befallen the international world of business and finance have sadly lacked the virtues of prudence, justice, courage and moderation.

Thomas then identifies three “theological” virtues of faith, hope and love, three values belonging to a relationship with God.¹⁸ These are also going to be built into covenantal relations, and here I want to suggest that the combination of faith and love issues in trust, which in Baptist experience is absolutely essential for the covenant to work – trust between members and pastor, between individual congregations and associations or conventions of churches. Unfortunately, for Aquinas there is a quantum leap between the “moral virtues” which are given as a basis for all human life through a “natural law,” and the theological virtues which are given only to a select group – mainly the Christian church – through being revealed by

16. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae.57.4–5; cf. 2a2ae.47.1

17. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae.47.14; 1a2ae.58.1–4.

18. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae.8.1–2; 2a2ae.17.1–3; 2a2ae.18.2; 2a2ae.23.1–2

God. *Christian* disciples will certainly aim all the time for the cardinal, moral virtues to be transformed by faith, hope and love. Love of God and neighbour will show us how moral virtues are to be worked out in daily life. But we ought not to expect too great a gap between what is considered moral in the church and what is felt to be moral in society. Paragraph 63 of *TCTCV* perhaps sounds too great a note of despair about the conflict between moral norms in “the world of today” and the life of the church.

This is where the theological idea of *koinonia* becomes important. The belief that all things are held together in *koinonia*, and this fellowship is grounded in God’s own *koinonia*, means that disciples of Christ can point all people towards the possibility of a life in which relations are the most important thing, where all persons and even the natural environment are interconnected, and where human beings can actively and intentionally participate more deeply in movements of love and justice in which they are already immersed by living in the world. In their own way, all people can find the moral virtues transformed by faith, hope and love. This transformation will happen in a particular, intense way in the church which is bound by covenant, stands under the word of God and nourishes its life with the sacraments. But these theological values can still appear in surprising ways and unusual forms in the world if we look for them with the discernment of the Spirit. There have been several studies, for example, of the exercise of virtues in business and the market-place, which have identified forms of

faith, hope and love even in supposedly secular life.¹⁹

This section of *TCTCV* suggests that a primary theological issue in thinking about the moral challenge is the relation between faith, grace and works in the life of a believer, and here it points to the recent consensus achieved between the Roman Catholic Church and churches of the Reformation over the meaning of justification, a church-dividing issue at the time of the Reformation. In the conversations between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (1967-present), a notable advance in unity has been the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), to which the World Methodist Council has also now consented.

Unfortunately, *TCTCV* gives no idea as to the content of that consensus. The point is that in the past it has often seemed as if Catholic thought and Lutheran thought have been polarized between a stress on “justification by faith” of the believer, and “justification by grace” infused into the believer by the Holy Spirit. Lutherans have stressed that justification is a “declaring” or “imputing” of Christ’s own righteousness to believers in faith. Believers are not righteous, but they are *declared* to be righteous by God because God sees them clothed in Christ. Catholic theologians have understood justification as an actual *making* of the believer righteous by the infusing of the Holy Spirit, so that they can perform righteous works. The two

19. E.g., Theodore Roosevelt Malloch, *Doing Virtuous Business. The Remarkable Success of Spiritual Enterprise* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), chapter 3 “Faith, Hope and Charity.”

communions now confess that forgiveness by God cannot be separated from inner renewal. Divine forgiveness is not simply an announcement that God regards us as being in the right, but is transformative of human life.²⁰ Justification is received by faith as “God’s gift through the Holy Spirit who . . . leads believers into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternal life.”²¹

We should surely agree that God’s declaration of us as being in the right must be accompanied by renewal, and that this is the work of the Spirit. Once again, *TCTCV* seems to miss an opportunity by not referring to *koinonia* here. *Koinonia* only appears when the paper is considering the way that differences over moral values (which it does not name) affect unity. But it is surely the theological foundation for moral renewal. If we participate in the fellowship of the Trinity, then we will be changed and transformed by any change of our attitude and relation to God. We will share in the faith, hope and love that characterize the relations between the Father, Son and Spirit. It is not a question, as has often been conceived in the past, of having grace like a celestial fluid “infused” into us, injected into our system. Rather, we dwell in the midst of the interweaving relations of a triune God, and God dwells in us to make us new. All persons in the world know something of that reality, but those who are made daughters and sons through Christ know it with a fullness that anticipates the new creation.

20. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church* (1999), §17.

21. *Joint Declaration*, §16.

4. Church and society

The term “communion” (though not the Greek *koinonia*) appears just once in this section, at the beginning where the compassionate engagement of Christians in the world and their passion for its transformation are said to be grounded in “communion with God in Jesus Christ” (§64). Their compassion is to be directed towards the poor, the powerless, the marginalized, victims of natural disasters and war, those suffering from threats to health and from economic inequalities and those discriminated against in every way (§§64–65). Disciples of Christ have a responsibility, *TCTCV* insists, to defend human life and dignity and to care for the environment. In these various ways the church is to promote the “values of the Kingdom of God.” What might be added to this by a deeper reflection on *koinonia* or communion than appears here?

Two issues are treated that I suggest would benefit from a theology of *koinonia*. First, this section affirms a number of times that members of the church should work in cooperation with those outside the church: it names “adherents of other religions,” “even those of no religious belief” (§64), “civil authorities” (§65) and “all people of goodwill” (§66). This is obviously a recommendation that the authors of *TCTCV* feel strongly about, and yet no theological basis is given for it. It is the vision of *koinonia* and covenant that will provide this, and perhaps overcome the tendency of churches to be inward-looking and self-sufficient even in their works of love to others. It becomes compelling for Christians to work with others when we believe that we are all held in the

communion that God gives to all humankind (§67) and in which the triune God dwells, and also that God has made covenant with all living things. There are, as I have mentioned already, different ways of living in communion and covenant, and different forms for manifesting the values and virtues of Kingdom. The church certainly has its own distinctive way which should not be confused with the world beyond the walls of the church. Nevertheless, the church must learn to discern the way that those outside the church are joined in communion and covenant with the Creator, and learn to detect what motivations have integrity within that framework, even though they may not be the same motivations as the church that lives by the word and the sacraments. It is only through developing this discernment that the church will know when to resist cooperation with others as well as to offer it gladly. We are to be conformed to the movement of God's triune life, not simply conformed to others, and this may sometimes mean resistance.

The notion of resistance brings us to a second issue requiring a theology of *koinonia* and covenant: the variety of models of relation between church and state to which *TCTCV* draws attention. It obviously has in mind various models of establishment, synergy between church and institutions of the state, and "free-church"; and it rightly gives weight to "contextual circumstances" that may legitimate one model or another. It also notes the danger of the church thereby abetting "sinful and unjust activities." What *TCTCV* does not do is offer any criteria by which models may be assessed. A theology of *koinonia* prompts the

question as to whether a particular model promotes the enriching and flourishing of human relations. A theology of covenant prompts us to ask whether a particular model respects the rule of Christ in his church as its covenant-maker. It was this latter aspect that fired the passion of ancestors in my own tradition of Free or Nonconformist Churches in England and Wales. They objected to the rule of the state in the church – determining its ministry through state-appointed bishops and determining its worship through a state-approved prayer book – and they also objected to the church's being given privileges over other citizens. These acts of resistance did not stem from a concept of "autonomous" freedom in which local congregations awarded themselves the right to choose the ministers and worship they wanted. Rather, they acted from a conviction that the rule of Christ was being infringed.²² The liberty they claimed in areas of belief and practice was based in the conviction that they stood under the rule of Christ in covenant, which meant that nobody else had the right to claim that authority.

Protestant Free Churches (Baptists among them) have tended to stress the element of a "prophetic voice" (and even martyrdom) to which *TCTCV* refers (§65), and perhaps to under-stress the element of cooperation with others outside the church that is found in more Catholic traditions in the west and the east. We might say that we have allowed covenant to swamp *koinonia*, and we often need to recover a balance between them.

22. Helwys, *Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, "The principal matters handled in the Booke," recto; and 49.

Unfortunately this section attempts to discuss issues of cooperation and prophetic witness without exploring either of them.

5. Conclusion

While *TCTCV* does represent a certain convergence between the churches on the role of the church in the world, the reader is bound to find that only five pages on this huge theme is somewhat skimpy. My own comments have far exceeded the length of this chapter 4, but I do believe that the text cries out for a development of its very brief references to *koinonia*/communion. Despite taking the professed perspective of the church as communion, the words *koinonia* and communion appear only once each in this section, both in passing. Further, I suggest that the theology of *koinonia* would be enhanced by placing it in parallel to the Reformed concept of covenant, as urged, for example, by the recent BWA - Roman Catholic conversations. However, let us finally praise this Faith and Order Paper for tackling the theme of the church in service to the world. At least it sees clearly that no ecclesiology can be constructed if the church is simply left in isolation. However perfect the church might be in abstraction, this is not the kind of perfection that our God requires.

31. Theological Committee of the Church of Greece

The Theological Committee was formed by his Beatitude the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece on behalf of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. Specialized Professors of the theological schools of the universities of Athens and Thessaloniki were nominated as members of the theological committee in order to study and comment on *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (*TCTCV*) and to submit their opinion in a report to the Holy Synod, underlining comments, corrections, and improvements the text needs from an Orthodox viewpoint.

The Theological Committee came together in the Inter-Orthodox Center of the Church of Greece at sessions held on 16–18 November and studied thoroughly the text from an Orthodox viewpoint. It concluded as following:

General remarks

As a convergence text, and not as a text of full agreement, *TCTCV* is greatly influenced by the Orthodox ecclesiological point of view. Still, it has many deficiencies and gaps that need further elaboration and improvement, especially from an Orthodox standpoint.

In regard to the main question (Introduction, p. 3), if and to what extent the text *TCTCV* expresses the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church, the Theological Committee mentions the following: As a convergence text, *TCTCV* does

not reflect fully the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church because—as mentioned in the Preface, p. viii—it is not identical to any ecclesiology of the member churches of the WCC. It just includes only those points on which the common understanding of the member churches was expressed in regard to ecclesiology, based on previous texts: *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (BEM, 1982) and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005), as well as on the reactions of member churches towards these texts.

Taking into consideration the second question (Introduction, p. 3), we, the members of the Theological Committee, submit our comments and answers from an Orthodox viewpoint, aiming to the growth of rapprochement among member churches on the issue of ecclesiology.

In general, the terminology used to describe the Church is seen as successful. Nevertheless, there are several terms used having an ambiguous meaning. Thus, it is necessary that they be clarified or replaced by others. We mention as an example the use of the term “mission,” which can be understood not only as a mission (*apostole*, ἀποστολή) and a task of the Church, but as a missionary work that might be misinterpreted as proselytism. Instead, we would suggest the terms “presence” (παρουσία), “*diakonia*” and “witness.” Changing terms happened in the case of the term “*koinonia*” that replaced or clarified the term “fellowship.”

Special remarks

The Theological Committee examined thoroughly each paragraph of the text, and noted problems and suggested improvements or replacements:

According to Orthodox ecclesiology, the unity of the Church is not only a desire—as is suggested in the Introduction (point 3, p. 2–3)—but it is a historical reality as well. Thus, citing only Eph. 4:12-16 is insufficient, and we consider that Eph. 2:20, where the unity of the Church is presented as a definite historical event, should be added.

Chapter 1, §§9–10: the Theological Committee of the Church of Greece insists on the Orthodox position that the visible unity among the local churches depends on the unity of the faith and the *koinonia* in the sacraments, in order that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is manifested, according the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Committee considers as extremely positive the reference to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and its acceptance by member churches of the WCC. This certain fact allows the Orthodox Church to recognize elements of ecclesiality beyond her limits, such as:

- holy scripture
- faith in Christ and in Triune God
- emphasis on the action of the Holy Spirit in history and in the creation
- baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity
- full acceptance and projection of the person of *Theotokos*
- recognition of the Church Fathers as a

genuine expression of the truth and the life of the Church

- the life of grace
- eschatological anticipation
- recognition of the threefold ministry
- respect and love in Christ for the neighbor
- responsibility for the salvation of the world and the whole creation
- the effort for the establishment of peace and justice.

The most significant contribution to this issue is the text of the 3rd Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference (Chambésy 1986) under the title “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world,” which was updated by the 5th Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference (Chambésy 2015). The latter unanimously stated that:

The Orthodox Church, being the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, in her profound ecclesiastical consciousness firmly believes that she occupies a central place in matters relating to the promotion of unity of the Christian world. The Orthodox Church acknowledges the existence in history of other Christian Churches and confessions, and at the same time believes that her relationships with them should be based on a speedy and more accurate elucidation by them of all ecclesiological topics, especially the teaching

on Sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession as a whole.¹

Chapter 2: the Theological Committee evaluates as especially positive the fact that many of the remarks of the inter-Orthodox conference in Agia Napa (2–9 March 2011) are accepted and embodied in *TCTCV*.

According to Orthodox teaching, the Church is not only a creation of the Holy Scripture (*creatura evangelii*), as indicated in §14, but Holy Scripture is also a creation of the Church (*creatura ecclesiae*), as she was the one who defined the canon of Holy Scripture. This fact brings into sight the principal and undisputable authority of the Church.

Paragraph 16: The Theological Committee suggests that the phrase “individual believers” should be replaced by “upon each member of the church.”

Paragraph 20, with regard to the issue of who is in charge for making the final decisions inside the church: According to the Orthodox ecclesiology, it is the synod of the bishops who represent the *pleroma* (clergy and laity) of all the local Orthodox churches.

With regard to the question of what criteria we should adopt concerning continuation and change (see the questions written in italics, below

1. See this important text/decision of the 3rd Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy in Damaskinos Papandreou (Metropolitan of Switzerland), *Λόγος Διαλόγου*. Η Ορθοδοξία ενώπιον της τρίτης χιλιετίας, ed. Kastaniotis (Athens 1997), 187–197 (187–188). Cf. the text/decision of the 5th Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in (Chambésy, Geneva, 10–17 October 2015) “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world,” §6.

§24): we, the members of the Theological Committee, notice that the basic criterion is determined by the challenges of the times. The Church should answer and express her faith in accordance with the apostolic tradition. The life of the Church is characterized by tradition and renewal. Renewal does not apply to the essentials of the faith; and it does not contradict the fundamental elements of the Church tradition.

Paragraph 27: The Theological Committee repeats the constant request of the Orthodox for the use of the term “means” instead of “instrument.”

The Theological Committee considers that the discussion of legitimate diversity in §28 must not refer to any diversity in dogmatic issues. Thus, this particular paragraph should be evaluated taking into consideration §30. Moreover, citing 1 Cor. 12:14-26, one should have in mind that this passage does not refer to the diversity of the disciples, as §28 of *TCTCV* implies, but refers to the functional unity of the members of the Church as the body of Christ.

With regard to the question of common criteria (below §30), the Theological Committee notices that the common criteria for the distinction between unity and legitimate diversity ought to be identical to those of the united Church of the first ten centuries, according to the formulation of St Vincent of Lerins “what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all” (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*).

The Theological Committee notices that in §31, despite all the correct things said about the relationship between local and catholic Church,

one should mention the absence of emphasis on the eucharistic manifestation of the catholic Church in the frame of the local Church, which is an essential element of the early Church. For this reason, we would suggest to rephrase as follows: “Each local church contains within her the wholeness of the catholic Church, which is manifested during the celebration of the mystery of the divine eucharist into the frame of the local church, as noted in §22 (cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrneans*, 6).

The reply of the Orthodox Church to the question posed in the section following §32 is that she brings forward synodality as the normative principle for the relationship among the different levels of life (local, regional, universal) of the Church. Synodality is an expression of the exercise of authority inside the Church. Primacy—as is very well noted in the text based on the 34th canon of the Holy Apostles—is closely related to synodality (see §55).

The Theological Committee noted that, despite its appreciation for all the positive things mentioned in §§42–43 concerning the relation between the eucharist and the Church, the following should be clearly stated and added to *TCTCV*: “Therefore the eucharist constitutes the very being of the Church.”

To the question below §44 concerning the number of sacraments, the Theological Committee responds that this has not been an issue for the Orthodox Church, nor has it ever been the case in her long history, because the Church herself is the mystery itself (see Eph. 5:32). Later on, several efforts to frame and limit the sacraments to

a certain number are considered to be the result of an influence by scholastic theology. Regarding the issue of the liturgical rite, the Theological Committee estimates that several differentiations at a local level do not influence the validity of the sacraments.

The Theological Committee greatly appreciates the reference to authority in the Church, which is understood as a service of love (*diakonia*) for the growth of the church in *koinonia* in faith, love and witness (*martyria*).

Similarly, the reference of *TCTCV* to the recognition of the sources of authority (Holy Scripture, Tradition, worship, ecumenical and local synods), as well as the reference to the lives of saints and the witness of monasticism during the historical course of the Church (§50) are greatly appreciated.

In contradiction to all references in *TCTCV* regarding the possibility of recognizing any authority to ecumenical dialogues and common statements as their fruit, the Theological Committee emphasizes that it is not possible from an Orthodox viewpoint to recognize any authority to them. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no respect for the fruit of the ecumenical dialogue.

Also, in this same §50, the formulation “missionary endeavor” could be replaced by the term “witness” (*martyria*), in order to avoid in this way the risky misinterpretation of the term “missionary” in English.

Regarding the question below §53, the Theological Committee considers that in the frame of the ecumenical dialogue through which the

member churches of the WCC are walking together in seeking a common understanding/evaluation of the normativity of the ecumenical synods of the first centuries, based on the work already done by the assemblies of the WCC (New Delhi, Nairobi, Canberra, Porto Alegre, Busan. Cf. §37).

Concerning the question below §57, the answer is that the unity of the Church at a universal level is served and safeguarded by the synodical system.

Chapter 4: concerning this chapter about the relation of the Church with the world and the contemporary problems of the human being, the Theological Committee noted that the whole approach to this issue is very limited and its theological background is insufficient.

While in several points the text emphasizes ecclesiology, taking greatly into consideration many elements of eucharistic ecclesiology in order to underline the balance of the relation between the local and the universal Church, unity and catholicity, it does not take into consideration the “eucharistic vision” developed in the Lima text (1982)² and the Vancouver Assembly (1983). Based on this vision, unity and *martyria*, Church and world, spiritual and missionary-social dimension, history and eschatology, liturgy and *diakonia* are interrelated. It is only in the conclusion (§67) that there is a wise reference to St John Chrysostom who spoke about two altars, meaning

the “liturgy after the liturgy”—a phrase not used at all in *TCTCV*.

This is the reason that the Theological Committee suggests the inclusion of all or part of the significant §20 of the Lima document concerning the eucharist. It might be added at the end of §58 of *TCTCV* (below the helpful reference that “service [*diakonia*] belongs to the very being of the Church” and the helpful citation of the Faith and Order document *Church and World*), or at §66, as follows:

The eucharist embraces all aspects of life. It is a representative act of thanksgiving and offering on behalf of the whole world. The eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the eucharist the all-renewing grace of God penetrates and restores human personality and dignity. The eucharist involves the believer in the central event of the world’s history. As participants in the eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world’s situation and the human condition. The eucharist shows us that our behaviour is inconsistent in face of the reconciling presence of God in human history: we are placed under continual judgment

2. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). (*BEM*)

by the persistence of unjust relationships of all kinds in our society, the manifold divisions on account of human pride, and, above all, the obstinacy of unjustifiable confessional oppositions within the body of Christ.³

In chapter 4, under “The Moral Challenge of the Gospel” (§§61–63), we have to note that—and because of the absence of what was already mentioned above—moral values are mainly seen as simple recommendations of the Gospel rather than its essentials. Also, there is no emphasis on *synergia* and love.

Reference to the respect of human dignity and the need for dialogue with peoples of other religions, as well as the positive evaluation of the “elements of truth and goodness [that] are present in other religions,” should not be seen only as general principles and moral commandments, as is the case in §60 of *TCTCV*. Instead, it should be clear that they are based on a theological background, which is accepted especially by the ecumenical consciousness of the early Church. A theology for other religions such as the one of Justin the philosopher and martyr regarding the “spermatic word” (σπερματικός λόγος), which—having a biblical background (John 1:9)—defined the position of the early Church towards Judaism and Hellenism, is absolutely appropriate for this purpose.

Paragraph 62: While the remark that the Church “does not stand in isolation from the moral struggles of humankind as a whole” is right,

nevertheless it is not linked to the beginning of the exodus (ἐξοδος) of the Church in the world that is the holy eucharist. Also, in this same paragraph, the reference that “*koινωνia* includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based upon the inspiration and insights of the Gospel” is not related to the rest of the text.

Paragraph 64, line 3: It is mentioned simply that “The source of their passion for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ.” At this point, once again it could be possible to mention the eucharistic experience of the eschatological anticipation of new heavens and new earth, where justice will prevail.

That is why the position of the Church towards social problems should be founded on an indisputable theological background and the living experience of the Church, as it is the case in the text of the 3rd Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference in Geneva (1986).

At this very moment of the history of the ecumenical movement, a primary issue is that of the integrity of creation, emphasized by the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church (*Laudato si'* [On Care for our Common home]). It is worthwhile to note that it is the fruit of the participation of the Orthodox churches in the discussions and the activities of the ecumenical movement. Evidently, that reference is considered to be poor, very weak and insufficient, in just one sentence in the last paragraph (§66).

That is why it is important at this point to emphasize the consequences of the eucharist for all creation, as well as for the cultural activity of the

3. *BEM*, Eucharist §20. Cf. the text of the 3rd Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference, 1986.

human being. It is about a eucharistic viewpoint, that cannot be possible in the absence of an ascetical attitude towards the world and life.

With regard to the Conclusion, the Theological Committee considers very important the reference of §68, that “growth in communion unfolds within that wider fellowship of believers that extends back into the past and forward into the future to include the entire communion of saints,” a fact that justifies the catholic faith of Christians that “the final destiny of the Church is to be caught up in the *koinonial*/communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The Theological Committee also thinks that the reference to St John Chrysostom about the two altars, although it fully expresses the Orthodox position concerning the social dimension of the eucharistic experience and life of the Church, would be better—as it has been already suggested—placed in chapter 4 that deals with the whole issue.

The Theological Committee suggested the translation of *TCTCV* into Greek in order to be submitted with this report to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece.

In conclusion, the Theological Committee noted that a lot has been achieved with regard to the issue of ecclesiology in the work of the WCC. It expresses the hope that its effort would be a contribution to reducing the distance towards the goal which is always—according to Christ’s will—“that they all may be one.”

The members of the Theological Committee

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The WLS faculty welcomes the opportunity to provide a contribution to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) as it prepares to respond to the Faith and Order Commission's *The Church: Toward a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. We appreciate the deliberative process that integrates the previous work on ecclesiology of the WCC's Commission that rose from the many dialogues the WCC has hosted. This multilayered ecumenical text by the Commission provides a useful convergence statement on ecclesiology. We are thankful for the 20 years of dedicated work by representatives of the Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic traditions.

The *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* agreement in Lima, Peru in 1982 led in large measure to the mutual recognition of baptism across the Christian traditions. We understand that *TCTCV* was written with the purpose of assisting churches in reaching a common response to the questions of identifying the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" and God's intention for the unity of this Church. As far as this multilayered ecumenical text is concerned, the objectives and questions that need to be addressed in this convergence process and the ensuing hope of reception by churches are two:

1. Renewal: While acknowledging that church cannot identify with any one ecclesiological tradition, the document calls for living fully the ecclesial life. How can this be made a reality?

2. Theological agreement or consensus on an understanding of "the Church": Is such a consensus necessary for the unity of the church?

"'Thy will be done' are words that countless Christians pray every day." The visible unity of Christians is an important expression of and a means to witness to the Gospel that lies at the heart of the faith in general and this ecumenical convergence statement on ecclesiology in particular. We welcome *TCTCV* in that it offers an opportunity for enhancing the visible unity of the church in our time.

Theological affirmations of ecclesiological understandings of "church"

To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

Lutherans read *TCTCV* with a particular understanding of "the church." Regarding the church, Lutherans confess that

[T]he church is not only an association of external ties and rites like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons. It nevertheless has external marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ.¹

The Lutheran reformers affirmed that the “*Una Sancta*,” one holy church, was the “*communio sanctorum*” or the “community of saints” of all who believed, and not just of those who were formal members of temporal ecclesiastical organizations. Insofar as this community of saints is *corpus Christi*, united by faith in Jesus Christ alone through grace, there exists a unity that transcends and precedes that of the ecclesiastical “earthen vessels” of denominational churches. Manifesting the visible proximate unity of this invisible divinely ordained unity is an important and always imperative undertaking. Such ecumenical initiatives as *TCTCV*, particularly for Lutherans, must be viewed through this wider theological lens and with moderate expectations given the power of human sinfulness.

As Lutherans, we would certainly affirm the view of the church expressed in *TCTCV* as a “community of witnesses,” a “community of worship,” and a “community of discipleship.” We support

the “understanding of the Church and its mission as rooted in the vision of God’s great design (or ‘economy’) for all creation; the ‘kingdom’ which was both promised by and manifested in Jesus Christ.”² “Bearing an inherent capacity for communion (*koinonia*) with God and with one another,” we would affirm a missional imperative of the “one holy, catholic and apostolic Church” expressed in *TCTCV*.

We appreciated that *TCTCV* recalls and helps the churches remember some of the important dimensions of what it means to be a church in God’s world. In chapters 2 “The Church and the Triune God” and 3 “The Church Growing in Communion,” we are reminded of important common historical and central theological understandings of church and ensuing expressions of ministry. At the same time *TCTCV* is sensitive to the nuances of the “ecumenical body politic” and the differences that are theologically distinctive and help particular churches maintain their authenticity. In large measure the document provides an important summary of some of the key issues that have historically divided churches; and by implication confirms the importance of the ecumenical work of the Faith and Order Commission, one outcome being *TCTCV* itself. More might be said here to affirm various aspects of the statement. As with any convergence text, there are elements that do not apply to a Lutheran view; but more positively, we do see in *TCTCV* a “Lutheran” understanding of the church. We would add that *TCTCV* does

1. *Articles VII and VIII, The Church, The Augsburg Confession* in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 174.

2. *The Church: Towards A Common Vision* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), §1.

capture *what has been* the ecumenical theological geography of a broad understanding of the nature of “the Church.”

We turn now to raising the areas where we feel the statement needs more attention to “offer a basis for unity,” to lead to “renewal” in churches, and to enable “closer relationships in the life and mission” with other churches.

Contextualizing the shared areas of growth in unity

To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among churches?

TCTCV presents a quandary. It does offer a useful historical perspective that is vitally important to healing the breaches of the past. However, it is not as helpful in developing an understanding of the church in its various contexts to provide churches and ecumenical/multifaith organizations a future-oriented missional imperative in the Canadian context. *TCTCV* offers a way of believing ourselves into a new way of being “church,” when what is needed in the Canadian context and possibly elsewhere is a new way of acting in the world into a new modality as “church.” Canadian sociologist David Seljak reminds us that “religions are always connected to societies”; “religious thought, values, attitudes and practices are always open to influence by surrounding culture”; and religion also acts on the surrounding culture and helps shape it.³ Engaging the context is import-

3. David Seljak, “Now that Religion has Refused to Die,” Public Lecture for Third Age Learning, 15 January 2015, Waterloo, Ontario.

ant in understanding the nature of ecclesiastical institutions and the nature of what it means to be “church,” particularly in the Canadian experience.

The Canadian context is changing. The lingering effects of colonization, the embrace of globalization, reliance on increased militarization, growing awareness of diversity and pluralism with the rising specter of polarization, as well as growing numbers of “spiritual but not religious” people have all reinforced the “disestablishment” of the Canadian churches. This has led to what sociologists Paul Bramadat and David Seljak have described as a “discourse of loss” within many Canadian churches.⁴ At Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, we have been considering the current Canadian context as we engage in planning for our institutional future in post-secondary education. The following are just some highlights of some of the important changes that we have identified:

- “After some 500 years of a relationship that has swung from partnership to domination, from mutual respect and cooperation to paternalism and attempted assimilation, Canada must now work out fair and lasting terms of coexistence with aboriginal people.”⁵ Settlers and First Nations need to work out a fair and just relationship

4. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, editors, *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 15.

5. See *People to People, Nation to Nation*, - The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996.

in a future Canada. There are similar situations elsewhere in the world.

- The world has moved from *internationalization* in the post war years to northern-led *economic globalization* beginning in the 1980s. This has been followed by *second and third stage globalization*.
- While overall participation in Canadian churches has declined, “religiosity” remains a significant factor in Canadian life. Statistics Canada reports, “40% of Canadians have a low degree of religiosity, 31% are moderately religious and 29% are highly religious.”⁶ Globally, faith is important and it is arriving in Canada. 47.5% of the immigrants arriving in Canada are Christian and 33% are Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist.⁷
- There has been a redistribution of power with the exponential *growth of civil society* (NGOs) and a sharing of power with states and markets. “Non-state actors represent citizen engagement on a global – and growing – scale.”⁸ Civil society is playing an increasingly important role in offering new ideas and approaches to address the crisis of misery facing many

6. Warren Clark and Grant Schellenberg, “Who is Religious?” (Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2006001/9181-eng.htm>)

7. Benjamin Shingler, “Influx of immigrants changing religious makeup” (Canadian Press, The Record, 11 May 2013).

8. Joe Clark, *How We Lead, Canada in A Century of Change* (Toronto, ON: Random House Canada, 2013), 72.

people and communities in both rich and poor parts of the world.

- Reginald Bibby argues that *polarization*, not secularization, is the major challenge today.⁹ Engaging diverse publics, at times in the midst of conflict, in a meaningful pursuit of the common good is a significant challenge.
- Revolutionary new communication technologies and greater connectivity have made massive amounts of data and information instantly available. As these collide and recombine, they reveal new knowledge and challenge our conceptions of knowledge itself while confronting us with profound ethical choices. In such a dynamic information environment where knowledge is rapidly emerging on many new fronts, human comprehension and understanding can reach its limits.
- According to the OECD Better Life Index, Canada is ranked the third “best place to live.” An old Jewish proverb warns, “Where there is too much, something is missing.” A Community Index of Well Being report on Ontario points out that, over the 17-year period, GDP has grown almost four times more than our overall well-being. Some have

9. Reginald Bibby, public lecture at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in November 2012. See also Reginald Bibby, *A New Day: The Resilience and Restructuring of Religion in Canada* (Lethbridge, AB: A Project Book, 2012), p. 12.

suggested that amidst our prosperity looms a potential *crisis of loneliness*.¹⁰

No doubt there are other currents of change in Canada impacting what it means to be “church.” These are but a few of the significant ones. Understanding the “signs of the times” is important but not new to the churches or to the ecumenical project. When the World Council of Churches came into being in 1948, religious, political and economic leaders all committed to ensuring that “never again” would the horrors of World War II and the Shoah (Holocaust) be repeated. Many international institutions (e.g., the United Nations, World Bank, IMF, GATT, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, etc.) were established to help create a viable alternative future marked by peace and security. Churches were also at the forefront of thinking about the geopolitical realities and political causes that had led to the war.

The World Council of Churches found considerable organizational energy from student and lay movements such as the International Missionary Council, the World Council of Christian Education and the Student Christian Movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. As we ponder the nature of the church in this time, we might well consider how current youth and church movements might play a role in defining and connecting with a renewed understanding of the church in the world. *Costly Unity*, *Costly Commitment*, and *Costly Obedience*, produced from the joint study programme on Ecclesiology and Ethics jointly

organized by the Faith and Order Commission and the WCC’s Justice, Peace and Creation team, provide a very helpful process for determining and understanding the meaning and role of the church and its mission in these times.¹¹ Together both groups played a constructive role in developing an understanding of the church that might appeal to these movements. This can provide a basis for acting together as churches in the world, thereby giving visible expression to the unity we enjoy in Christ. We concur with the authors of *TCTCV* when they write, “Faith has to be lived out in active response to the challenges of every age and place.”¹² This is a critical task in our dangerous and turbulent world.

Increasingly in Canada, the question is not only ecclesiological but sociological as well. As theologians, we have increasingly come to speak our vocation to be a “public church.” In 1981 Martin Marty described the idea of the “public church” in this way:

The Public Church is a family of apostolic churches with Jesus Christ at the center, churches which are sensitive to the *res publica*, the public order that surrounds and includes

11. *Costly Unity*, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/vi-church-and-world/ecclesiology-and-ethics/costly-unity>; *Costly Commitment*, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/vi-church-and-world/ecclesiology-and-ethics/costly-commitment>; *Costly Obedience*, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/vi-church-and-world/ecclesiology-and-ethics/costly-obedience>.

12. *TCTCV*, §38.

10. *The Globe and Mail*, 23 November 2013.

people of faith. The public church is a communion of communions, each of which lives its life partly in response to a separate tradition and partly to calls for a common Christian vocation.¹³

Such an understanding needs inclusion in our respective self-understanding of our own tradition(s). Likewise it needs ecumenical affirmation and further public ecumenical articulation.

Areas for renewal - developing a public theology for a public church

What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for? How far is your church able to form closer relationships in the life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

A Canadian Lutheran approach to acting as a public church embodies “faith active in love” in God’s world. We agree with WCC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit that we “need to see more dimensions of the call to unity and remind ourselves that we are always embraced by and called to love (1 Cor. 13).”¹⁴ A public church needs a public theology that operates on the commandment of “love your neighbour as yourself.” My “neighbour” today includes all of creation and humanity with

all their divine complexity, diversity, mystery and beauty.

Living in a religiously pluralistic world, it is all the more pertinent that we give credence to John 14:2. “In my father’s house there are many rooms” is not a placatory statement. It is an affirmation of the universality of the reign of God. The church too has universal and particular expression, global and local institutions. While the church is and always has been particular, it is equally true that the church will be and always has been universal.¹⁵ Developing a global/local horizon is important today to any articulation of what it means to be church.

Lutheran public theology is focused on “neighbour-love.” Universality and particularity are undergirded by mutual love. Mutual love is a measure by which humanity will be judged. Christians will not be surprised by this expectation. A Christian will not ask “when did I see you and feed you,” because he/she already knows.¹⁶ As for the rest of humanity, through Christ God “gave every human being the possibility of loving others.”¹⁷ How can the church concretely embody this local/global vision?

What do we mean by “public theology”? Theologian Jürgen Moltmann has defined “public theology”:

Its subject alone makes Christian Theology a *theologia publica*, a public theology. It gets

13. Martin Marty, *The Public Church*, (Crossroads Publishing, 1981), 3.

14. *TCTCV*, v.

15. Juan Luis Segundo, *The Community Called the Church* (New York: Orbis), 1973, 4–8.

16. Segundo, 11.

17. Segundo, 11.

involved in the public affairs of society. It thinks about what is of general concern in the light of hope in Christ for the Kingdom of God. It becomes political in the name of the poor and marginalized in a given society. Remembrance of the Crucified Christ makes it critical toward political religions and idolatries. It thinks critically about the religious and moral values of societies in which it exists, and presents its reflections as a reasoned position.¹⁸

What is required may not be so much a reappraisal or consensus on the nature of the “church,” but rather a public theology that enlists, motivates and equips the churches and the broader ecumenical family to sustain an engagement with a missional imperative of “the healing of the world” (*tikkun olam*).

Jesus the Christ, upon whom the church has its foundation, was not a “church builder” but more of a “community organizer”; and that involved the three spheres of public life, domestic and community life and the sacred social spaces of leisure and church life (*koinonia*). If we are involved in a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level, the way to exercise such a ministry is in the praxis of public life, or family and community, and in our social relationships. Such a church is provocatively passionate and promotes even a certain kind of assertiveness, one that that seeks *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, to become a more just,

18. Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, (London: SCM Press, 1999), 1.

peaceful and sustainable social order that indicts and convicts the world’s unjust and presumptuous systems and structures.

Canadian churches have been effective in acting together to build a different national and international community. They have not been as clear in articulating the theological basis for their understanding of “church” that engages in this ministry. *TCTCV* appears to invite churches to articulate a new public theology for their engagement with the world. Chapter 3 of *TCTCV* asserts “The church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world. Thus, service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the church.”¹⁹ A public theological ecumenical consensus on “The Church in and for the World” might gather more humbly and modestly around historic WCC themes such as “justice, peace and the integrity of creation.”

Sacraments are central to a Lutheran understanding of the church. The Augsburg Confession Articles XIII and XIV make it clear that the church is where there is public teaching, preaching and the administration of the sacraments.²⁰ A sacrament is a tangible, physical expression of God’s grace.²¹ Such an understanding may also provide a

19. *TCTCV*, §58.

20. *The Book of Concord The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, Augsburg Confession, Articles XIII *Concerning the Use of the Sacraments* and Article XIV *Concerning Church Government* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 46–47.

21. Julie K. Aageson, John Borelli, John Klassen, *One Hope: Re-Membering the Body of Christ*, Fortress Press. Kindle Edition locs. 324–325.

useful way of understanding the nature and public ministry of the church. Is there a public theological perspective on the “church as sacrament in human history” whereby the church becomes, for a wider public, a sign of God’s solidarity with humanity and creation as well as a symbol of hope for the future? *TCTCV* alludes to this theological sentiment in stating “It is on the basis of faith and grace that moral engagement and common action are possible and should be affirmed as intrinsic to the life and being of the Church.”²² Can such a public sacramental theology allow for different perspectives on the nature of the *communio sanctorum* as sacrament in society? In fact, the church is called to be a community where worship is “a public demonstration of a new order of social relationships, characterized not by friendliness but by respect and a certain expectation of difference.”²³ Such a view offers an important and dynamic challenge to Lutherans and to other sacramental churches.

Such a public theological perspective might recognize a constructive role for the “other” and for “difference” in contributing a healthier view of “unity in diversity.” “I need you to be authentically who you are to help me be fully and authentically who I am, and vice versa.” Such a public theological perspective might secure a commitment to bridge the borders of division between communities with effective ways for ecumenical and

multifaith engagement and collaboration. Such a public theological perspective might replace the fallacy of Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” with Gregory Baum’s “dialogue of worldviews.” Such a public theological perspective might deepen, enrich and energize our common efforts at justice making, peace building and safeguarding creation.

A “public church” needs a commitment to do “public theology” in order to engage the public affairs of the community. The church, when it takes place, is not a private affair but something that happens in the public square. It is public in nature when it challenges and enlists not only its own members but also people outside its walls with respect shown to what they say and with heeding of their voice. To be public is to be political, but in a much larger way than is often more narrowly expressed. Given the contexts in which we are living and engaged, Canadian churches need a public theology approach that engages and builds relationships with other faiths and enhances multifaith understanding between faith traditions.²⁴ *TCTCV* opens the door to this possibility of an ecumenical public theology, but unfortunately does not adequately reflect this important commitment for the vision in both the ecclesiastical institution and an understanding of church. This is an area that would benefit from much more discussion among churches and other political, economic, and civil society institutions, particularly at a time when many believe that religion is at the source of many violent conflicts.

22. *TCTCV*, §61.

23. Susan L. Bond, “Preaching and Public Theology: reclaiming the church’s ministry,” in *Encounter* 71 No. 1 (Winter 2010), 63–80.

24. David Pfrimmer, “Business Plan for Martin Luther University,” 2015.

Building and renewing churches and ecumenical relationships – a “pontoon approach”

What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

We concur with the need for renewal in the churches and to re-energize the ecumenical movement, particularly among churches in Canada. While we would love to believe that in Canada there is an appetite for theological discourse, sadly we do not believe this to be the case. Noted Canadian author Peter Newman has described the “Canadian Revolution” which has seen many Canadians less deferential and more defiant of all authority. Newman observes:

During the decade under review (1985–1995), Canadians individually and collectively lost common cause with their institutions. Divorced from their sense of God, King and Country – thus separated from their sense of religion, monarchy and land – Canadians carried their own Cross, wore their own Crown, and held their own Orb.²⁵

Both among church members and in the wider public, the public discourse is moving away from traditional “theological discourse.” As the

National Post reported, two-thirds of Canadians say they are “spiritual,” while just half say they are religious.²⁶ While there remains a deep interest in the important life questions of meaning and purpose, Canadians in particular do not see faith-based institutions providing a way to address them. As a result, Christians in Canada need a different approach to theological dialogue.

Historically, the ship has been a symbol for the Church. Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee as the disciples trembled in fear (Matt. 8:23-27). The ship with the mast in the shape of the cross and the sails filled with the wind of the Holy Spirit crewed by the *communio sanctorum* has been an important metaphor for the Church. The image implies that we are all one, in one vessel, on the seas of life. Today in Canada we may need an additional metaphor. As the world seems increasingly messy, chaotic, violent and treacherous, our ship may be more of a pontoon boat, nimble, somewhat agile, able to bear heavy loads, providing stability in the midst of stormy waves, rescuing the vulnerable, making room for everyone and ultimately taking the faithful to places they might not normally go. A pontoon boat invites us to an adventurous journey.

In the context of widespread public skepticism about the integrity of churches and the ability of theology to address the significant life questions for the faithful and the increasingly “spiritual but not religious” public, and when many people and

25. Peter C. Newman, *The Canadian Revolution, From Defiance to Defiance* (Toronto, Canada: Viking Books, 1995), 103.

26. “Organized religion on the decline? Growing number of Canadians ‘spiritual but not religious,’” *The National Post*, 12 December 2012.

communities are fearful of the existential threat posed to our planetary home by globalization, militarization and climate change, Charles West may be right when he said, “the church owes the powers of the world a ministry of social imagination.”²⁷ Can we imagine that another world is possible, the world God intended? It is not about doing something for the sake of being different, but doing something that is liberating and life enhancing for all of creation and humanity.

It is our view that the future contribution of Faith and Order needs to take these dynamics of engagement and multilateral dialogue much more seriously, if the WCC wishes to contribute to the renewal of Canadian churches, the witness of the ecumenical movement as well as emerging multi-faith movements. This will require new models for understanding the world and discerning the churches’ public mission and ministry. These will need commitment to engage the local, regional, national and global. Such models, if they are to be broadly inclusive, may require a new theological language and grammar. Cross-disciplinary dialogues and conversations with other institutions may be an important witness. Such models already exist in many places. We mentioned earlier the joint study programme on Ecclesiology and Ethics jointly organized by the Faith and Order Commission and the WCC’s Justice, Peace and Creation team as one important example. The work of the churches in the United Nations system is another.

27. James V. Bronson, Barry A. Harvey, Inagrace T. Dietterich, and Charles C. West, *Storm Front: The Good News of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 101.

In Geneva, scientists from CERN led a fascinating worship service at the international congregation in Geneva, bringing together their vocation as scientists exploring the “God particle” with their Christian faith. At Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, we have undertaken bi-annually “A Day of Dialogue on Aboriginal Spirituality” and meeting of the “Abrahamic Faith Forum” to foster dialogue. This is the kind of concrete “imagination” that West suggests is needed.

We believe that a public church requires a public theology to engage in a public witness that offers an understanding of why, where and how God is at work in the world, and the alternate future God offers. It must be a public theology that enlists faithful skeptics and spiritual seekers with an authority that summons them to their vocation in God’s world. Such a public theology emerges when the public dialogue about the realities of the world is engaged creatively with the life-enhancing message of the gospel.²⁸ A church that dialogues and works with the world is a church that knows that she is part of humanity and Creation.²⁹ She is a church that knows that she is, by definition, a public church, in the service of people, communities and Creation itself. Such a tangible institutional expression of the *Una Sancta* cannot but be involved in the struggle to meet the basic needs of all the people, to safeguard the dignity of all, to protect the environment and to be an embodiment of God’s life-enhancing Spirit that builds peace with justice. It is faith made active in living

28. Segundo, 131.

29. Segundo, 131.

service to the world and is the proper response to the call to love our neighbours.

In a public church, public theology becomes “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the word,” deepening our faith to create a counterintuitive worldview and motivate discipleship.³⁰ The practice of justice coupled with the pursuit of justice has to be the church’s mission and ministry.³¹

[L]ove of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely recognition of the dignity and rights of one’s neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every person is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a sibling of Christ, the Christian finds in every person God himself and God’s absolute demand for justice and love.³²

Looking forward, we believe that there is a pressing need for public theology to inform the Christian witness in Canada. This takes a Christological expression in our daily living as people of faith, in what we would suggest is what it means to be truly “global citizens.” This is a very Lutheran understanding of the vocation of the Christian (*Beruf*). Such a vocation means that we

do need to implicate ourselves in the messy complexities and realities of the world. Luther was no stranger to such messy involvements or entanglements. Luther’s Seal includes a black cross on a heart overlaid on a white rose that symbolized his theology; but it also alluded to his “earthiness.” Luther is also reported to have said, “If I knew that tomorrow was the end of the world, I would plant an apple tree today.” There is an “earthy hope” embodied in Luther that could serve us well as we seek to be “community” (*koinonia*) of companions to accompany brothers and sisters in our common life’s pilgrimage.

30. José Míguez Bonino, “Praxis,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd Edition, ed. Nicholas Lossky et. al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 923.

31. Julie K. Aageson, John Borelli, John Klassen, *One Hope*, Kindle locs. 756-757.

32. World Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World (De Justitia in Mundo)*, 1971.

33. Response by Rev. Presbyter Irakli Jinjolava

Preface

I have chosen to respond from the perspective of Orthodox theology to the ecclesiological study *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.¹ During my research fellowship at the Secretariat of Faith and Order, I studied in depth with respect, but at the same time with critical and academic spirit, as far as I could determine it, the above study document.

The views presented in this response are neither thorough nor special. They do not, and cannot, also claim to be *the* (i.e., official) Orthodox ecclesiological understanding, but *a* scholarly academic or more individual one. However, since in Orthodox tradition the idea of *an* eschatological and trinitarian Church, is far more emphasized as continuous and unchangeable than in *TCTCV*, nevertheless I think that some of the emphases presented in this response might need to be reflected more in detail.

The presented response to *TCTCV* is composed of four parts: short summary, critical elements, positive elements, conclusion.

Short summary

The Church: Towards a Common Vision is the result of many years' work by theologians from different

churches asking what can be said in common about the Church; it expresses "how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the Church, showing the progress that has been made and indicating work that still needs to be done."² The present convergence text consists of four chapters with conclusion and historical note.

The first chapter – "God's Mission and the Unity of the Church" – underlines the quest for the unity of the Church and its mission, which includes "the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen" (§4). The unity of the Church and its mission express God's will in Jesus' prayer: "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). This unity in the New Testament is described as *koinonia*, "whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity" (§1). This chapter concludes by identifying a basic requirement for "visible unity" (cf. §10): "that churches be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople (381) calls 'the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church'" (§9). Finally, under the title of "Fundamental issues on the way to unity," three significant ecclesiological questions or challenges are summarized, which are still relevant: "How can we identify the Church which the creed calls one, holy, catholic

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013).

2. Introduction, p. 1.

and apostolic? What is God's will for the unity of this Church? What do we need to do to put God's will into practice?"

In chapter 2, "The Church of the Triune God," "Scripture is normative" for acquiring greater agreement (§11); and it affirms the concept of "legitimate diversity" (§12). The "biblical notion of *koinonia*" is regarded as "central in the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the Church" (§13). The text calls attention to "the gospel, the proclamation of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Son of the Father" in which "the Church is centred and grounded" (§14). Members of the Church are described as "a royal priesthood" and "a prophetic people" (§§18, 19). The "royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the church, and are not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives" (§20). The definitions of the Church as the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" are given by using the Church Fathers, like Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome (cf. §22). A further vision or understanding about communion is given, namely, that "each local church is in communion with the local churches of all places and all times" (§29). Thus, this chapter concludes with a reflection and invitation: "in our common quest for closer unity, we invite the churches to seek more precise mutual understanding and agreement in this area: What is the appropriate relation between the various levels of life in a fully united Church and what specific ministries

of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations?"³

Chapter 3, "The Church: Growing in Communion," reminds us of the concept of the Church as mystery: "The Church is an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom, but not yet its full realization" (§33). Our thought and idea of ecclesiology is more than a cerebral or intellectual exercise. For Christians as "the communion of believers," some

visible and tangible signs which express that this new life of communion has been effectively realized [are]: receiving and sharing the faith of the apostles, baptising, breaking and sharing the eucharistic bread, praying with and for one another and for the needs of the world, serving one another in love, participating in each other's joys and sorrows, giving material aid, proclaiming and witnessing to the good news in mission and working together for justice and peace (§34).

Here the "Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacrament, Ministry" are presented, which are identified as some of "the most significant unresolved issues" (§§37–45), and to which may be added, as one of the important forms of ministry, "the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon" (§46). Authority in the Church is "a gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the service (*diakonia*) of the Church in love" (§51). Here

3. *TCTCV*, "The relationship between local and universal Church," pp. 18ff.

comes the question for reflection: has “ecumenical dialogue made possible a common assessment of the normativity of the teaching of the early Ecumenical Councils?” At the end of the conclusion of chapter 3 the question about “A universal ministry of unity” is raised: “If according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry serving to foster and promote the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?”⁴

Chapter 4 – “The Church: In and for the World” – concentrates further on the plan of God for creation, where we continue to proclaim “that Jesus is Lord,” which seeming contradiction calls for an “ecumenical response to religious pluralism” (cf. §§58–60). Here we might need to face the question: “How may the churches arrive at greater convergence about these issues and cooperate more effectively in witnessing to the gospel in word and deed?” On the other hand, the chapter is focused on the gospel’s moral challenge (cf. §§61–63), and we are reminded that St Paul preaches that “human beings are justified not through works of the law but by grace through faith (cf. Rom. 3:21–26; Gal. 2:19–21).” At the end of this chapter the issue of the role of the Church in society is raised, where the world’s “problems and tragedies . . . cry out for the compassionate engagement of Christians. The source of their passion for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ” (cf. §§64–66).

In its Conclusion, the convergence text *TCTCV* outlines an important relation between “the unity

of the body of Christ” and “the gift of *koinonia* or communion that God graciously bestows upon us human beings.” *Koinonia* is characterized as “communion with the Holy Trinity.” This communion “is manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service [. . .] including ministry and mission.” In addition, the people of God “proclaim the Good News, confess their faith, pray, teach and learn, offer praise and thanksgiving, receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, and are sent out in mission.” The final paragraphs contain eschatological elements and remind us that the mission of Christ is “bringing light and healing to human beings until he comes again in glory” (cf. §§67–69).

Critical elements

According to *TCTCV*, the threefold ministry eventually “became the generally accepted pattern and is still considered normative by many churches today” (§46). But “some churches, since the time of the Reformation, had adopted different patterns of ministry.” In this sense, those churches who do not use the threefold ministry have to reflect about it – and especially those without bishop since “the bishop is in the church and the church is in the bishop” (Cyprian, *Epist.* 66,8).

It is mentioned that “the authority of ecumenical councils” is an example of one historic approach to a ministry of *episkopé*. But some churches regard conciliar doctrinal decisions to be “open to revision,” while others consider them as “normative and therefore irreformable.” In this, from the perspective of the Orthodox, ecclesiology is expressed by the conciliar nature of the

4. *TCTCV*, “A universal ministry of unity,” p. 32.

Orthodox Church which, in the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “recognizes only one authority: the Council of her canonical hierarchs. Beyond a conciliar decision, the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy is not possible. The Church’s dogmas and holy canons bear the seal of conciliarity. Orthodoxy is the conciliar Church.”⁵

Positive elements

The fact that the convergence text is based on the biblical vision and underlines the biblical image of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” is already having a positive effect, as the document proclaims that “the present text seeks to draw upon the richness of the biblical witness, along with insights from the tradition” (§12).

The present document comprises the following positive elements concerning:

- the description of “The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” (§22) uses the early church fathers, which gives a continuous understanding of ecclesiology with a strong emphasis on spiritual matters;
- the document (§§13–16) underlines the trinitarian foundation of the Church and dimensions of *koinonia*;
- the eschatological dimension of the Church is stressed;

5. “Statement of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, on his trip to Constantinople,” <http://oca.org/holy-synod/statements/his-beatitude-metropolitan-tikhon/statement-of-his-beatitude-metropolitan-tikhon-on-his-trip-to-constantinopl>.

- generally, the convergence document states mainly from the point of view of traditional theology in respect to ecclesiology;
- the text is not only multilateral; it also draws on the results of fruitful bilateral dialogues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I value the convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* in its present form, which is, as one knows, the most profound result of a long-term ecumenical cooperation.

If we take the present convergence text as the most common minimal basis response *necessary* or *obligatory* for every member church of the WCC, a synthesis of it might help us at the multilateral level of the ecumenical dialogue on ecclesiological issues. It will also be a big and positive step towards the rediscovery of unity, in the way the document proclaims itself *Towards a Common Vision*.

TCTCV underlines some significant aspects for the unity of the churches (i.e., the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, §9), which, in my point of view, should be reflected and recognized by all churches, and probably can be used in their worship to confess on it, not only to look into its historical context.

Nevertheless, while the document contains elements in accordance with the theological teachings of the Orthodox Church, but it does not express the *full* doctrinal view. Moreover, the text is not a final *theological consensus* of all member churches of the WCC, but a *theological convergence*.

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Abstract

The author has prepared an evangelical response to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* based on classroom discussions at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium, and with the kind cooperation of colleagues. The respondents have no authority to speak *for* an ecclesial family. In fact, they do not even share a denominational allegiance. They can, however, offer a multilayered appreciation from within the diverse evangelical movement, which is characterized by a shared spirituality. After general remarks, Faith and Order's second convergence document is discussed from conversionist, restorationist and revivalist perspectives. While opinions on the document diverge, there is a general appreciation for the work of Faith and Order. It is explained how the document challenges the evangelical movement to critical self-reflection. Particular theological emphases of the evangelical movement that can contribute to the developing ecumenical ecclesiology are suggested as well.

Who is responding

In the introduction of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, the Commission on Faith and Order warmly invites “churches” and

“ecclesial bodies” connected to the World Council of Churches (WCC) to study this important convergence document and to prepare for the Commission an “official response.”¹ As straightforward as this request may seem to many churches and ecclesial families, it is a request difficult to meet for ecclesial/spiritual movements, such as the evangelical movement. The ecclesial reality of “evangelicalism” is an undefined conglomerate of churches, organizations, institutions, and individuals with an enormous theological and ecclesiological diversity and lacking both institutional unity and authoritative organs—even if organizations such as the World Evangelical Alliance earnestly seek to interconnect and represent the movement as well as possible. Despite their lack of unifying structure, evangelicals often feel connected in a shared identity. In a classic definition, evangelicalism is characterized by (a) a focus on the need of a personal appropriation of the message of Jesus Christ and a consequent change of thinking and of life; (b) being grounded in the Bible as the word of God which is normative and sufficient for growth in faith and Christian life; (c) having a centre in theology and spirituality in the atoning death of

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, ix.

Jesus Christ and his resurrection for the salvation of all believers; and (d) a desire to bring the gospel message to the world by word and deed.² The evangelical movement is represented in the WCC by different supra-denominational bodies, denominations and/or ecclesial families. As it is a conglomerate rather than a unified church, however, none of these can and will claim to speak *for* this movement. Strictly speaking, “the” official response to this important document cannot be provided by “the” evangelical movement.

But even if nobody can speak *for* the evangelical movement, one can certainly speak *from* the movement and in numerous ways. This response is one attempt to do so. It was prepared by staff and students of the Evangelical Theological Faculty (ETF) in Leuven, Belgium, in the course of the academic years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. At ETF, students and staff come from Reformed, Baptist, Anglican, Pentecostal, Lutheran, and other traditions. Most are Dutch or Belgian, but other European countries such as Germany and Switzerland are also well represented at our academic institution. There is a substantial North American presence in the faculty as well, and a presence of students from the other continents. All feel in one way or another part of the evangelical identity that was characterized earlier. This response is thus informed by a certain breadth of the evangelical movement, but has a clear limitation in the connectedness to the ETF, an academic institution

2. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (new edition, London: Routledge, 1988). He summarized them in four terms: “conversionism,” “biblicism,” “crucicentrism,” and “activism.”

located in Europe with a predominantly Northern/Western and white middle class profile.

This response is the result of a three-step writing process. First, the text has been read and discussed by three groups of students under the guidance of the Jelle Creemers, who then wrote the text.³ The students who followed the Bachelor course “Ecclesiological Models” in the academic year 2013-2014 or 2014-2015 were required to read the text carefully (in English or in the Dutch translation)⁴ and to send their comments to the instructor. The text was then discussed together in class and notes were taken. The students who followed the Master course “Ecclesiology and Ecumenism” in 2013-2014 prepared and discussed the text in a similar way. The Master class discussion was facilitated by the participation of Eddy Van der Borgh (Reformed), professor of Systematic Theology at VU Amsterdam (Free University Amsterdam). As a second step, a draft of this response was prepared by the author on the basis

3. The students who have participated in this effort are Arjan Blaauwendraad, Tobias Becker, Michael Borowski, Nick Brink, Jeroen Cocquyt, Peter Gunst, Eline Hoolsema, Margriet Jaspers Focks, Jesmar Joncker, Willem Koudijs, Christine Krijnsen, Anne Lorein, Arttu Mäkipää, Dick Molenaar, Kaj Ockels, Siegrit Oranje, Willem Jan Palsgraaf, Anonymous, Femke Rienstra, Tom Schepers, Daniël Sloots, Nils Sperlich, Bouke Stomphorst, Rachel Troch, Janno van den Ende, Banie van der Walt, Pim Vrijmoeth, and Laurien Walraven.

4. The Dutch translation was prepared by Dr. Ton van Eijk on behalf of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. It is freely accessible online at the website of the (Dutch) Catholic Association for Ecumenism: www.oecumene.nl/files/documenten/de_kerk_-vertaling.pdf.

of the given input.⁵ This draft was sent to selected colleagues with a request for their comments and suggestions.⁶ Third, these comments from faculty members were integrated into a final edition of the text, which is the response presented here.

We are aware that the Commission on Faith and Order has expressly directed its request for responses to this document to *churches* rather than academic institutions. We realize that we are not a church, but we have purposefully sought to respond to the text as a family of faith rather than as an academic community. Obviously, this was particularly difficult for the faculty members, who were expressly requested to economize their tendencies to contextualization, methodological criticism, historical analyses, and systematic theological elaboration. Also obvious is the fact that the opinions in class and among colleagues diverged. This end result is not a report of all the opinions, but it reflects what the author saw as the general tendency. He has taken it upon himself to make final decisions on the writing process, and thus to decide on what to incorporate and what to leave out. Lack of clarity, simplifications, and weaknesses therefore do not reflect the academic qualities of the participants; they are the responsibility of the author.

5. Responses were collected, linked to the document, encoded and analyzed using Atlas.ti software.

6. I am very thankful for the critical comments and suggestions for improvement offered by my colleagues Pieter Boersema, Jan Hoek, Ron Michener, and Steven van den Heuvel.

Evangelicals responding to *TCTCV*?

Throughout most of the 20th century, Western theologians made use of a simple divide between “evangelical Christians” and “ecumenical Christians” when discussing matters of Christian unity and Christian witness in the world. Sharply contrasting the two is unhelpful, as evangelicals can be characterized as ecumenical in their own way—and vice versa. But it is common knowledge that “evangelicals” and “ecumenicals” have chosen different paths in the aftermath of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. Each group has long been critical or even outrightly dismissive of the other’s emphases in spirituality, theology, and missional and ecclesial practices. While the general sentiments towards one another have been changing in the last decades, their paths still often head in different directions. This was sadly exemplified in the double celebration of the centennial of the aforementioned World Missionary Conference in 2010, one “ecumenical” in Edinburgh and one “evangelical” in Cape Town. A positive sign was that at each celebration representatives of the other group were present.

This historical background explains why *TCTCV* feels strange and distant to us in a number of ways. It is obvious that it is not an “evangelical” document, even if evangelicals have had a voice in the long process of preparation. A quick look at the list of documents and dialogues on the basis of which this document has been built evidences that influences from evangelicalism were rather limited. Its presuppositions, questions, and emphases are therefore often unfamiliar to

evangelical ways of thinking.⁷ This is visible, for example, in terminological preferences. Some students at our faculty expressed discomfort with the prefix “St” (as in “St Paul”) and the clear preference of “eucharist” over other terms indicating the Christian memorial meal. In contrast, the usage of Greek terms such as *koinonia*, more familiar in our circles, was generally appreciated. Another indication of the limited evangelical voice in the creation of this document is the understanding of majorities and minorities. What does it mean, for example, when the document states that “according to the understanding of *most traditions*, it is also through the rites or sacraments of initiation that human beings become members of Christ” (§21)?⁸ The wide variety of traditions with an evangelical or pentecostal signature would largely disagree with this statement, as would many other (mostly Protestant) traditions (see below). In what way are these traditions to be understood as a minority? And why is it even important to speak of majorities in this regard? The presence of such terminological and perspectival markers and some other indicators that might recall the

7. Cf. Jelle Creemers, “Dance to the Beat of Your Own Drum: Classical Pentecostals in Ecumenical Dialogue,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 35, no. 1 (2015), 58–68.

8. Italics added. For another example, see §55: “According to canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons, which is expressive of the Church’s self-understanding in the early centuries and is still held in honour by *many, though not all*, Christians today, the first among the bishops in each nation would only make a decision in agreement with the other bishops and the latter would make no important decision without the agreement of the first” (italics mine).

classic evangelical/ecumenical divide does not, however, imply that the text is completely foreign, unrecognizable, or unappreciated—far from it! As will become evident throughout, reading *TCTCV* has been a great learning experience for us. This response primarily aims to return the favour to the Faith and Order community which has offered it to us.

***TCTCV* from an evangelical perspective**

The evangelical movement is characterized by a common spirituality rather than a common ecclesiology or ecclesial reality. Therefore, we cannot simply answer the guiding questions that are listed in the introduction of *TCTCV*, as all of them presuppose that the respondent speaks from a specific ecclesiology or ecclesial reality. In our response, we can only start from what we have in common. In what follows, appreciations of *TCTCV* from our shared evangelical perspective are presented in four categories, based on an ecumenical typology of the evangelical movement. After opening with general remarks, three characteristics of evangelical spirituality which deeply influence our ecclesiological and ecumenical perspectives and attitudes will be used as starting points for our interaction with *TCTCV*: (a) conversionism, (b) revivalism, and (c) restorationism.⁹ In these categories, related topical comments are enriched with specific examples from the text.

9. For an explanation of how these three characteristics are fundamental to Evangelical/ Pentecostal ecclesiology, see Jelle Creemers, *Theological Dialogue with Classical Pentecostals: Challenges and Opportunities*, Ecclesiological Investigations (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 7–36.

It is our hope that our response, albeit slightly unusual, will contribute to the ongoing dialogue aiming at visible unity among Christians, in service of God's mission in this world.

General remarks

Evangelicals share a close attachment to scripture as the primary source for all matters of faith and life, even if evangelical perspectives on scripture range from soft "Bible focused" to hard "strict inerrantist" views. An evangelical assessment of *TCTCV* thus necessarily starts with some remarks on its use of scripture. In this regard, there is much appreciation for the fact that the document opens with an elaborate description of New Testament perspectives on the church under the title "The Church in the Design of God" (§1; cf. §11f.). The fundamental importance of the New Testament people of God as exemplary and directive for the church today is emphasized, while diversity within the early church is also acknowledged. It was, however, noted that the attention paid to the people of God before the coming of the Messiah is rather limited. The questions regarding the continuity and discontinuity of God's people are mentioned, but answers are absent (§17). Further, while the usage or interpretation of some verses can be questioned,¹⁰ it is much appreciated that this convergence document consciously seeks to argue from and with scripture, making use of a canon that all Christians consider as authoritative. For example,

10. E.g., it is rather disputable if Acts 17:22–34 offers a good example of early gospel proclamation, as §6 suggests; and 1 Pet. 2:9 in no way connects insertion in the church to baptism, as §41 suggests.

one student noted with pleasure that the section on the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church not only referred to the second ecumenical council (381), but also contained numerous scripture passages to argue for the importance of the four *notae ecclesiae*.

A second introductory comment that should be made from our evangelical perspective is our great appreciation of the effort made by the World Council of Churches in promoting visible unity of the church. As evangelicals, we tend to focus on the mission of the church for the world without much consideration of the potential force of structural ecclesial unity in view of this mission. Many students indicated that *TCTCV* really challenged them to reflect seriously upon the quest for visible unity and the necessity and challenges of ecumenical dialogue—often for the first time. The frequent references to earlier ecumenical dialogue texts demonstrate that such dialogue is important and fruitful, even if the process is often slow and the results are not always as groundbreaking as we would like them to be. While disappointment and frustration in reading the text were present as well, the dominant emotions were appreciation, surprise, and enthusiasm. The openness to and fair description of different expressions of the church, the emphasis on mutual accountability and the kind invitation to respond all contributed to a good atmosphere in our discussions, as we felt appreciated as fellow-Christians, whose voices deserve to be heard.

***TCTCV* from a *conversionist* perspective**

As its main characteristic, evangelical Christianity has a strong focus on personal conversion.¹¹ Conversion is understood as the moment at which a person is confronted with the good news of salvation in such a way as to be urged by the Spirit to put life in the hands of the Father and trust Jesus Christ for salvation. Conversion is usually understood in strongly experiential terms and typically considered the moment at which an individual enters into the church. The baptismal rite expresses this conversion and entrance in the church, but is usually not considered to effect it. From this conversionist perspective, four overarching remarks can be made regarding *TCTCV*.

First, it is much appreciated that *faith* is given particular consideration in *TCTCV*. This marked attention for faith is present in numerous other ecumenical texts, as the footnote to §37 explains. *TCTCV* explicitly considers faith as an “essential element of communion,” together with sacraments and ministry (§§37-39). This contrasts with Faith and Order’s other important convergence text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), which focuses on the other two as key elements essential for communion, while integrating faith as an underlying factor. We note that faith is discussed in *TCTCV* as *fides qua* rather than *fides quae*: the focus is on the faith “once delivered to the saints” (§38–39). The personal disposition of the believer, his or her “believing,” is given but

limited attention. This we regret, as we consider the personal commitment of faith in Jesus as Lord crucial to Christian identity. A clear example of how the mindset of *TCTCV* differs from ours can be found in §39. Here, the focus is laid on *churches* professing the creed in their liturgy and “recognizing fidelity to [the one] faith in themselves and in others.” Evangelicals would rather focus on the *believers’* personal confessions, obviously in an ecclesial context. While ritualized confession in a liturgical context has much value, one should always be careful that rituals do not become vain in absence of believing hearts. That being said, the focus in *TCTCV* on the *fides qua* also implied for many of us an eye-opener as to the large consensus among churches on central aspects of Christian doctrine. It is truly encouraging to read that on these matters “ecumenical dialogue has shown that . . . there is a great deal that already unites believers” (§39).

In a second instance and in direct relation to the former, our attention was drawn to doctrinal matters of *soteriology* that are present in *TCTCV*. Unsurprisingly from an evangelical perspective, many of our ETF students reacted to the document’s perspectives on salvation. One student stated his amazement over not finding “clear statements about the wrath of God and human beings as sinners,” making him wonder “what the [document] means with ‘Gospel.’” Others expressed a general unease with the many positive affirmations of other religions in absence of clear appeals to conversion (e.g., §§25, 60). While the document emphasizes God’s plan of salvation (§§3, 17), mentions the salvific value of Christ’s death (§8)

11. See, e.g., Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*; Sébastien Fath, *Du ghetto au réseau: Le protestantisme évangélique en France 1800–2005* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2005).

and calls the church to proclaim the good news of salvation in the world (§59), it limits any potential negative consequences of disobedience and sin to this: worldly suffering caused to oneself or others. Eschatological perspectives are not absent, but are limited to affirmations of blessing, thus ignoring admittedly uncomfortable scriptural projections of curse (cf. §69).

Consequent to the conversionist starting point in soteriology, evangelicals tend to define the Church primarily as a “*gathering of believers*” or “communion of saints.” This implies that we tend to build our ecclesiology “from below” and in local terms, rather than “from above” and in universal terms. Reading *TCTCV* carefully, we estimate that it has a preference for the reverse, defining the local church from the perspective of the universal. The structure of *TCTCV* indicates this, as it discusses the Church first extensively as a corporate entity and only then gives attention to her being a “communion of local churches” (§§31-32). In addition, these paragraphs consciously put the local churches in a subordinate relation to the universal Church by stressing that the universal Church is “not merely the sum . . . of local churches” and by positing the necessity of the ministry of *episkopé* in service of the community. Of course all Christians would agree that the Church has both local expressions and a universal expression. While the different ecclesiological starting points thus must be put in perspective, they are not without meaning. Defining the Church from above has a tendency to emphasize questions of structure and authority, to start from the ideal (and to idealize the Church), and to prefer unity over plurality.

Defining the Church from below has a tendency to focus on the individual believer and his/her place in the church, to start from the phenomenological (and to banalize the church) and to prefer diversity over uniformity. We learn from the text to question our evangelical tendency to virtually define the believer in individual isolation. We feel uncomfortable with the text, however, when it seems to start from an essentialist understanding of the Church and to underestimate the diversity and sinfulness of her historical reality.

Fourth, we noticed a rather strong *sacramental(ist)* focus in *TCTCV*. Due to our own focus on personal conversion and our starting point in the church as gathering of believers, as evangelicals we fear any “confusion” of Christ and Church in a way that would obfuscate the unmediated presence of Christ in each believer by his Spirit. We feel challenged by the text to fully take into account the biblical texts that speak of the church as a “mystery,” implying that she is more than “the sum of individual believers among themselves” (§23). However, the consequential understanding of the church as an effective sign of God’s presence and action or as a sacrament (§27), the emphasis on sacraments as effective means of grace (§§41-44), with baptism effectuating one’s incorporation in the body of Christ (§14), and the central role attributed to ordained ministry (see below) run counter to our understanding of *sola fide* and *solus Christus*. That being said, we also learnt that as evangelicals we tend to underestimate in how many ways grace is mediated to us and how crucial the Church and our fellow believers are in that regard. Looking more closely at the sections

in *TCTCV* on the sacraments, there was a general appreciation of the paragraphs on baptism. In our estimation, they are written in unison and quite straightforwardly and they are biblically informed. Without much ado, they explain and give room to diverse traditions of baptism, which is easily recognizable within the evangelical movement as well. The sections on the eucharist offered much food for thought. The weight given to sacramental communion and the centrality of the eucharist (§16) in the liturgy are for many of us unusual, as many evangelical services focus more on preaching and/or singing praise. A striking contrast was found between this high esteem for eucharistic unity and the lack of eucharistic hospitality in many churches which share that focus. More than one student opined that “evangelical” churches show more eucharistic hospitality than many “ecumenical” churches, even while evangelicals would consider spiritual unity more essential than sharing in the Lord’s supper. The paragraphs also triggered some of us to introspection. The “dynamic and profound relation between baptism and eucharist” described in §42 was a cause for some to critically question why their own church allowed people to participate in the Lord’s supper without having been baptized. One student was struck by the fact that the eucharist is primarily described as an event of joy and celebration. He noted with regret that in his church the prevailing emotions connected to the Lord’s supper are not freedom and joy, but sin and sadness. Finally, some were uncomfortable with formulations in *TCTCV* emphasizing the transformation of the elements, but at the same time moved by the statement that in the eucharist

“Christ gives himself,” and by the communal and missional implications thereof (§43).

***TCTCV* from a restorationist perspective**

Second, evangelicals usually share what has been termed a “restorationist” perspective on the church. Looking back on church history, we discern sad episodes in which impurities have entered the church and her teaching and by which she has lost some of her original calling. We consider in many ways the New Testament church as an example for the church of today and find in the biblical teachings on the church resources to restore her unity and her intended impact on the world. It seems to us that *TCTCV* generally looks at the historical church with much appreciation, which has triggered our thinking in different ways.

We came to realize that our restorationist perspective often has implied (and still does imply at times) a depreciation of *Tradition* and a general neglect of the valuable elements which the history of the church has brought to theology and church life. This we consider a loss, and we want to stress our intention to help our evangelical communities to appreciate more deeply the work of the Spirit in the church of all ages. Still, our restorationist perspective implies at least a clear priority given to scripture over tradition in describing and projecting the mission of the church. This flows logically from our understanding that the church has been formed on the basis of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that she received her unique position in the history of salvation through the arrival of the Spirit as described in the book of Acts, and that in history not all developments in the life and theology of

the church have been to the benefit of the kingdom of God. We believe that the church, including our evangelical beliefs and daily practices, has a constant need of restoration and return to the foundation of the gospel.

Our dissatisfaction regarding *TCTCV*'s dealing with Tradition essentially boils down to two criticisms. First, we regret the instances in which Tradition does not imply an unequivocal enriching and temporary actualization of the New Testament teaching, but a fixation of a historical development in view of eternal immutability. When we read the book of Acts and the New Testament letters, we find an early church with a great variety of structures, emphases, and cultural adaptations which we deem essential principles for the church today. While *TCTCV* in principle agrees with this (§46, cf. §38), we cannot fail to note, for example, a preference for the *threefold ministry* of bishop, presbyter and deacon. When it is said that "some churches, since the time of the Reformation, have adopted different patterns of ministry," this seems to suggest a break in continuity by these churches, while one could also have noted their express desire to restore ecclesial ministry on the basis of New Testament principles. The citation from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* suggesting that the threefold ministry "may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it" is significant in this regard as well. Some of us endorse this statement wholeheartedly and see much ecumenical potential in a shared theology and praxis of ministry. Others, however, consider the appeal for a general acceptance of the threefold ministry as "part of God's will for the

Church" (§47) as inappropriate because it goes beyond scripture and limits rather than creates space.

Second, we regret instances where care is given to respect and protect the historical church and/or her Tradition when this actually implies a denial of *evil* done by her. As was said earlier, the limited attention to sin in *TCTCV* was noted by our students, and this was frequently linked to the church (history) and her mission. Many of us were astonished that §6 lists in only one sentence some "tragic events" in the history of the church and blames individuals ("those engaging in evangelization") for it rather than stating that the church has at times compromised her mission (cf. §§22, 27, 65). The firm statement that "all authority in the church comes from her Lord and head, Jesus Christ" (§48) and the subsequent discussion of authority do not even mention the possibility of power abuse, let alone confess its reality. We were glad that the document acknowledges in §35 that a different approach is possible, in which the church is conscious of being *simul iusta ac peccatrix*. Even while we understand the underlying theological differences, we feel that a more elaborate discussion of critical episodes in Christian church history would have been in place. A heartfelt *mea culpa* would help us to admit that the consequences of our past mistakes are still present in the church today and allow us also to learn from them for the future.

A final remark based on our typical restorationist perspective of the church has to do not with the past of the church, but with her future. Evangelicals generally share a strong expectation

of a future recovery of full *koinonia* with the triune God and with one another. This *eschatological hope* constantly drives us forward. We found it, however, to be almost absent in the text and we are inclined to relate that as well to what we perceive as an overtone of this-worldly ecclesiological triumphalism. To be sure, we realize that triumphalism is painfully present in the evangelical movement as well. Moreover, we are aware that a strong eschatological focus can lead to irresponsible behavior as well, in particular to a withdrawal from earthly affairs. Therefore, we have read with appreciation the paragraphs that explain the tension of already/not yet in which the church constantly stands (§33-36). We missed, however, some of the implications thereof for the church's self-understanding and mission. We believe that a well-developed eschatology can help the church *in via* to be at the same time truly hopeful and truly humble. It can instigate the church to action and guard her against both hubris and inferiority complexes. We believe, therefore, that our strongly expectant eschatology is something evangelical Christianity has to offer to the developing ecumenical ecclesiology, of which *TCTCV* is an important witness.

***TCTCV* from a revivalist perspective**

In addition to conversionism and restorationism, evangelical perspectives on the church are also typically marked by a *revivalist* mindset. In short, it means that we want to be ever expectant of movements of the Spirit to revive our personal faith and the life of the church in new ways. In personal life, this implies a focus on continuing sanctification and a frequently rekindled enthusiasm, which we

love to share with others—fellow-Christians and people outside of the church. A revivalist ecclesiology, then, acknowledges that a church can at times and for a variety of reasons lose some of her fervour. Therefore, she must always be open for fresh gusts of the Spirit, in unexpected places and new ways. An important place where these fresh movements should be followed is in the mission field. If the Spirit has prepared fields white for harvest, it is the church's duty to go where the Spirit leads, into the world in service of the gospel.

In our reading exercise, we have come to discover that our revivalist reflex implies certain emphases that actually find pendants in the perspectives offered in *TCTCV*. We believe that it would be a gain both for ourselves and for other Christian traditions if we could learn better to appreciate these counterparts and to express our foci more clearly in ecumenical encounter. First, our evangelical emphasis on seizing the moment and seeking out opportunities is frequently at odds with the value of continuity that is strongly present in *TCTCV* and expressed most concisely in the term "Tradition." The document invites us to critical self-reflection, as we often lack consciousness of being in and maintaining continuity with the church of the past. We should learn better to recognize the work of the Spirit in both *continuity and change* and to stand more consciously in this tension, to which the document frequently refers (for example, §§24, 30). In this regard, however, we also noted a particular weakness in the document. While it clearly stresses the continuity of the church throughout her history from the time of the apostles to today, it is notably silent on the

relationship between Israel and the church. The continuity of the people of God in both covenants and the implications thereof for the church are touched upon briefly (§17-18), but not elaborated. As we consider this relation as well as the question of “Israel’s unbelief” (Rom. 9) important for the self-understanding and mission of the church today, we call for a stronger elaboration of these critical topics.

Second, our revivalist reflex gives us much openness to new developments in the church, leading to the accentuation of diversity on the axis of *unity and diversity*. We agree fully, however, when *TCTCV* notes that there are limits to legitimate diversity. Together with the writers of this document, we have been pondering these limits and on how to agree on them as Christians. We do not come with the solution, but we agree that this question is difficult and fundamental to the ecumenical quest. And we are willing to put our perspective on the scale. In its own way, we note, the evangelical movement is inherently ecumenical. It tends, however, to focus on *spiritual rather than structural* unity. Of the so-called “essential elements of communion” (faith, sacraments and ministry), we tend to focus on the first (see above). The latter two so-called essential elements, on which the ecumenical movement typically focuses, often seem to us to cause disunity rather than to serve and create unity. We do not deny, however, the importance of the sacraments and the enormous potential of true sacramental and ministerial unity. We therefore applaud Faith and Order’s long-standing work towards that aim.

Third, our revivalist focus implies, as do our conversionist and restorationist starting points, a particular interest in *evangelization and mission*. It is clear in this document and in its predecessor, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, that Faith and Order considers the unity and the mission of the church as fundamental and interrelated. We wholeheartedly agree and were particularly pleased to read the frequent elaborations on the mission of the church in and for the world. Some students noted with surprise and appreciation that *TCTCV* not only considers “planning for mission and evangelism” but also “eucharistic worship” as instrumental in the evangelistic vocation of the churches (§4). The explicit attention for the evangelistic task of all believers (§19: “The whole people of God is called to be a prophetic people, bearing witness to God’s word”) was also forcefully underlined. There was, however, almost unanimous disappointment over the final chapter of *TCTCV*, which was considered quite weak for a variety of reasons. First, it seems to lack a hands-on mentality. Not denying the truth and beauty of the statement, what does it mean in practice if the church is “to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world”? Second, many were surprised that the chapter gives little attention to the message of the church for the world concerning the crucified and resurrected Christ, but rather focuses on other religions. Some felt that the current phrasing (especially §60) at times seems to encourage syncretism. Others, on the other hand, felt that the lack of respect that the church has often demonstrated for other cultures and religions could have been stated more strongly. Third, it was regretted that the tensions within the

church regarding ethical issues were only mentioned (§63) and not explained. The final paragraphs on “The Church in Society” (§64–66) were, however, generally appreciated. They forcefully challenge the church and the individual believer towards “compassionate engagement” (§65) “in the tradition of the prophets” (§66). As we consider activism an important Christian value, these closing paragraphs really strike a chord with us as evangelicals. Still, we dare to challenge the Faith and Order Commission to broaden its team when the time is ripe to reconsider the final chapter. We believe that an ecumenical examination of the role of the church in society would profit enormously if not only theologians and clergy, but also Christian economists, sociologists, and entrepreneurs were actively involved in the discussions and the writing process.

In conclusion

Constructing a bridge is a difficult undertaking. It requires careful planning by architects and engineers, financial engagement of dedicated sponsors and protracted pains of an army of manual laborers. Destroying the bridge takes no more than one enormous blow or a few targeted acts of sabotage. To criticize and deconstruct a text is so much easier than the careful process of writing it together. It is not the intention of this response simply to heap our critical comments on *TCTCV*. We have sought to communicate both our deep appreciation for the text and the questions that it evoked.

One important lesson we learnt from the document and from the third chapter in particular is that in ecumenical dialogue results can be achieved

when the necessary time is taken. The process leading to *TCTCV*, as explained in the introduction and the historical note, has been long and has taken much effort. Yet the document demonstrates that, slowly but surely, ecumenical dialogue can achieve great things. We have come to realize that *patience* is a virtue essential to ecumenism and that not many evangelicals have grown it. We have also come to realize that our movement will probably need quite some time before it will achieve full consciousness of the need of ecumenical dialogue in view of visible Christian unity. We accept that this is a slow process, but at the same time we want to express our desire to function as catalysts in our own environments.

Looking back, we dare say that our comments have probably all been foreseen by the Faith and Order members, for they touch on virtually all elements presented in the paragraphs in italics, indicating specific issues where divisions still remain. While they will most probably not be solved in the years to come, even in our lifetimes, the fact that churches together have come to a shared understanding of the dividing issues and that they can be spelled out so clearly is very important. It urges us to take up our own responsibility and engage with fellow-followers of Jesus Christ, within or outside of our familiar circles, in view of building bridges to one another and toward the world. We thank the Faith and Order Commission for preparing this text for us. The classroom discussions on which this response is based have certainly had more impact on us than this response will ever have on its readers. The text and the discussions gave us the opportunity not only to discover and

appreciate commonalities with other believers, but also to come to a deeper understanding of who we as evangelical Christians are—and are to become. May God's Spirit guide the Church towards its full realization, to the honor of the Father, in the image of the Son and in the service of creation.

35. Response by V. Rev. Presbyter Nemanja S. Mrdjenovic

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the largest body of the ecumenical movement that brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships representing over 500 million Christians in 350 member churches. WCC describes itself as a “community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ.”¹ The Commission on Faith and Order is an integral part of the WCC and, in the context of theology, its most vital organ as it concentrates on organizing “study programs dealing with theological questions that divide the churches.”² Faith and Order Paper No. 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* has been called “an ecumenical highlight of 2013.”³ This is a second convergence text of Faith and Order that came

about as a result of a two-decade long effort of the commission on ecclesiology.⁴

The aim of this commentary is to present a reflection on *TCTCV* from an Orthodox Christian perspective, pointing out its particularly positive aspects and offering a constructive criticism of others. Taking into account the limited space provided, more attention will be directed to a critique of those segments that might use some improving than to those which could be admired and wholeheartedly accepted. That is why it is important to stress here that even though this reflection might seem critical, even harsh at times, there are by far more encouraging parts than conflicting ones in this text which proves to be a true “platform for disunited Christians on which they can meet each other, discuss the problems which interest them, and decide on joint action.”⁵

The text is of extraordinary value for the whole Christian world for several reasons that can be summed up in two basic ones. First, it is an

1. “What is the World Council of Churches?,” World Council of Churches, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>.

2. “Commission on Faith and Order,” World Council of Churches, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/faith-and-order>.

3. “Ecumenical Review seeks ‘a common vision of the church’,” World Council of Churches, http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/ecumenical_review_seeks-a-common-vision.

4. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003), viii. The first Convergence text was *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982).

5. Nicolas Zernov, *The Reintegration of the Church* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1952), 76.

accurate and concise summary of the ecumenical ecclesiological dialog. Matters that usually take up volumes of work are broken down into essential elements and presented in a coherent manner while preserving the spirit of inclusiveness as well as the basic theological genuineness. Second, the text represents the convergence point for ecclesiology of different Christian traditions participating in the ecumenical movement, which brings the study of ecclesiology in the forefront of the ecumenical movement where it belongs and moreover calls for self-reflecting reactions.⁶

Further development and perhaps influence of *TCTCV* on the everyday life of various churches should be expected to emerge after churches send their reactions back to WCC by the end of 2015. The anticipated interaction will be the only real measure of any success and also an indicator of the direction in which this discourse might develop further. The authors of *TCTCV* did point out in the Preface that “there are at least two distinct but deeply interrelated objectives in sending [the text] to the churches for a study and official response.” The first would be renewal, and the second theological agreement.⁷

One might start by saying that one of the most positive aspects of *TCTCV* from the Orthodox perspective could be the fact that there are no parts of the text that should not be there. Many Orthodox prerequisite expectations in the field

6. World Council of Churches. “The Orthodox Churches and the World Council of Churches” in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 189.

7. *TCTCV*, viii.

of ecclesiology are fulfilled, such as stressing the importance of *koinonia*, both as a goal and a gift,⁸ the trinitarian perspective of the life of the Church in relation to God⁹ to be embedded in both scriptures and Tradition,¹⁰ and so on. On the other hand, some aspects might not be as developed as they possibly should have been; in some instances the text lacks clarity; and it might resonate differently in different traditions, etc.

The document is divided in four chapters. The first chapter, “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church,” deals with the origins and the mission of Church in history. The second one, “The Church of the Triune God,” continues the thread of exploring the understanding of the Church as “both a divine and human reality.”¹¹ The third chapter, “Growing in Communion,” explores the existing traditions among churches and the possibility of their respective contacts. The final chapter, “The Church: In and for the World,” pays more attention to social aspects of the mission of the Church. Overall, the whole document is trying to “express how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the Church.”¹²

8. Philip Kariatlis, *Church as Communion, The Gift and Goal of Koinonia* (Sydney: St Andrews’s Orthodox Press, 2011), 236.

9. Grigorios Larentzakis, “Reconciliation in its Theological Dimension: Orthodox Aspects,” in *Ecumenical Dialogue on Reconciliation* (Geneva: Conference of European Churches, 1996), 7.

10. Kariatlis, 99.

11. *TCTCV*, §23.

12. *TCTCV*, Introduction.

The first chapter begins with a section on the Church as God's design expressed in a way that is brief but totally acceptable to the Orthodox Church. It continues with the Mission of the Church in History that rightly stresses the need for a contextual theologizing, and does not avoid the embarrassing moments in history, such as the case of evangelizing in concordance with imperialistic colonization, or proselytizing in already Christian communities.¹³

Keeping in mind that one of the praised qualities of *TCTCV* is its concise exposition, this reflection will also attempt to apply as a general rule only commenting on those parts that are not clear enough or might be seen as problematic, while the rest might be seen as completely acceptable. Additionally, some fragments that call for a deeper self-reflection should at least be acknowledged if not dwelled upon, as many of them are lurking under the surface of superficiality that dominates the everyday religious life of the majority of our faithful.

One such instance is the description of the advance of secularism in contemporary society, which faces many churches with the "challenge of a radical decline in membership," with people perceiving the Church as irrelevant, and the related emergence of voices calling for re-evangelization.¹⁴ From the perspective of Orthodox experience, it is necessary here to pay some attention to the challenge of transforming the Church into a "public (or state) spiritual service." In societies

that are historically Orthodox,¹⁵ the Church is often expected to provide services of needs (baptism, wedding, funeral, spiritual comforting, etc.) "on demand" and afterward to stay out of people's lives.

Another amazing aspect of *TCTCV* is its style that presents an idea – often not quite a clear statement – as, for example, §12 that explores the issue of "legitimate diversity" and then follows with an explanation that connects all the pieces of the puzzle. In the example mentioned, the text does not offer enough clarity to understand clearly what "legitimate diversity" is and the extent to which it stretches. However, §13 clearly states that "communion is not simply the union of existing churches in their current form." What remains unclear and casts a shadow onto subsequent accounts is the notion of *koinonia*, which in the Orthodox Church has the eucharist and the bishop¹⁶ as a foundational point of reference,¹⁷ but in a given context of *TCTCV* one cannot make that distinction.¹⁸

Overall the language of the document is quite close to the Orthodox, even to the extent

13. *TCTCV*, §7

14. *TCTCV*, §7

15. Such as Greece, Serbia, Russia, Romania, etc., including their communities in the diaspora.

16. John Zizioulas, Јединство цркве у светој евхаристији и у епископу у прва три века (Eucharist Bishop Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries) (Novi Sad: Beseda, 1997), 235.

17. Kariatlis, *Church as Communion*, 18.

18. World Council of Churches, *Ecumenical Conversations: Reports, Affirmations and Challenges from the 10th Assembly* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014), 11.

that there were some complaints from certain Protestant communities, both from the global North and the global South.¹⁹ Moreover, in §19 the tone of the text becomes so much Orthodox that it even invokes some of the challenges that Orthodoxy still fights on its home ground, such as extreme clericalism that presents almost an ontological gap between the ordained and lay members of the community, something totally alien to Orthodox theology.²⁰ When this threat is addressed in §20, the point of divergence surfaces in reference to the fact that “churches differ about who is competent to make final decisions for the community,” whether exclusively ordained or lay members as well. Without a clear distinction as to what kind of decisions we are expecting (liturgical, social, etc.), it is impossible to give any decisive answer. The divergence continues in §21, quite in favour of the Orthodox ecclesiology, unmistakably challenging papism and reaffirming Christ as the “abiding head of his body the Church.” The divergence culminates in §24, where no convergence can be perceived, as even the very foundations of ministerial service in the Church are completely different one from another.

19. World Council of Churches, *Summary of Responses on Sheets Prepared for Pair-Share*, unpublished document distributed to participants of Ecumenical Conversations 2 (*The Church: Towards a Common Vision*) at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea, 31 October 2013.

20. Stylianos Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church in the Orthodox Theology* (Sydney: St. Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2008), 63.

The key for Christian ecclesiology is given in §25: “the mission of the Church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come to know and love Christ Jesus.” Subsequent to such a striking definition, it is difficult to understand how it can be followed by §27, with its confusing and unacceptable idea that calling the Church a sacrament could somehow “obscure the distinction between the Church as a whole and the individual sacraments and that it may lead one to overlook the sinfulness still present among members of the community.” For the Orthodox there are no sacraments outside of the Church,²¹ and the Church itself is not an abstract concept. The Church is above all an event,²² the eucharistic event of *koinonia* – not an abstract statement, but a concrete experience.²³

Of course, one would not be completely honest if this was not seen as another call for the Orthodox to reflect upon ourselves once again. The Orthodox Church has to answer how can it be that the eucharist is our reference point of *koinonia* if our faithful receive communion only three to four times a year. How can the Orthodox Church lecture non-Orthodox that the Church is the eucharistic gathering, an event that gives context to other sacraments, when almost all sacraments have been removed from the liturgy and eucharist? Furthermore, how can we even talk about the

21. Harkianakis, 71.

22. John Zizioulas, *Екклисиолошке теме* (Lectures in Ecclesiology, my translation) (Novi Sad: Beseda, 2010), 37.

23. Kariatlis, 3–14.

exhaustive list of sacraments in the first place, if we claim the Church to be sacrament (*mysterion*)?

The sinfulness of men and women who are members of the Church does not have anything to do with the holiness of the Church. In the Church as the eucharistic event the sacraments are distributed as “*Τά ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις*” (the holy gifts for the holy ones) not because all members of the congregation are in good moral standing, but because “*Εἷς Ἅγιος, εἷς Κύριος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός*” (One is Holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ) and the community is communing with Him, thus becoming His “spiritual body.”²⁴

The additional paragraph in italics, which is the usual method throughout *TCTCV* of pointing out the remaining differences in different churches insinuates that the issue might be an example of “legitimate differences” of formulations that might actually be compatible and mutually acceptable.²⁵ But if that is the extent of divergence understood as the “legitimate differences,” then the whole idea of *TCTCV* as a convergence text is in jeopardy, as this is clearly an idea (though one of the very few) that is ultimately unacceptable.

The problem of the sinlessness of the Church continues through the text; and later on, two quite contradictory views are presented as co-existent (S35), suggesting that the authors possibly could not reach the consensus and they simply moved on. Perhaps if a paragraph or two were dedicated to a definition of sin, which might be an easier topic for a consensus, there would be more clarity overall

in this aspect which continues to cause uneasiness when it is presented as a part of the convergence text.

The document revisits the issue of sacraments, fleshing it out a little for better understanding; but some critical matters are still missing. For example, the sacrament of baptism as it is described in S41 would mean that a person baptized as a baby in the Church stays forever a member of the Church, regardless of his or her response to the Lord’s calling. This paragraph is in a direct contradiction to S15 that stresses the response of *Theotokos* to the Lord’s call delivered by Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation. The absence of the culmination of initiation in the Church, holy communion, reminds us of the notion of the Church as an abstract, theoretical institution and not a living body, a gift and a goal, a concrete gathering together around the whole and complete Christ.²⁶ The following paragraph (S42) could be on the right track of repairing this gaffe, only if two words of the second sentence were adjusted to say “full” instead of “fuller” and “affirms” instead of “reaffirms.”²⁷

The last chapter, “The Church: In and for the world,” mainly reiterates what was said earlier, contextualizing the mission of the Church in the real world, the secularized world in which churches live today. The whole chapter might undoubtedly be accepted by the Orthodox Church for the sake of convergence, without any objections. However,

24. Kariatlis. 80.

25. *TCTCV*, p. 16.

26. St Justin Popovich, *Notes on Ecumenism* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press, 2013), II.

27. *TCTCV*, 24.

it could also be summarized in one paragraph and none of its theological value would be lost.

Even though there is undoubtedly room for improvement of the text from the Orthodox perspective, one has to be aware that other traditions have even more concerns;²⁸ this is as far as mutual *oikonomias* of churches can be stretched. Thus, this is truly a *convergence text*, enabling the churches to respond to the questions raised and to direct the ecclesiological dialog towards a common vision of the one Church.²⁹

28. World Council of Churches, *Ecumenical Conversations: Reports, Affirmations and Challenges from the 10th Assembly*, 13.

29. Popovich, *Notes on Ecumenism*, 15.

36. Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity*

Preface

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV) is the title of one of the most important documents that have appeared in recent years. After being accepted by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in 2012, it was sent to the churches with the request that they react to it. With this document, the Faith and Order Commission has taken a further step on the way opened by the publication of that other document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper No. 111, 1982), which has influenced theological thought so extensively in recent decades. *TCTCV*, therefore, is not just any text. Its explicit purpose is to set out guidelines for the future of ecumenism. It is called a “convergence text” because it brings together theological insights from widely-varied sections of Christianity around the world and makes a serious attempt to integrate these into one common vision of the Church.

A great need was felt for this reflection on the nature and essence of the Church. Many are convinced that ecclesiology is the key discipline in pursuing the unity of Christians. We, too, as the Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity, share that conviction. Moreover, we believe that we have

a good case for the argument that unity will be strengthened by promoting the catholicity of the Church. This is what we intended to clarify in the *Catholic Appeal* (2011) as well.¹ After the publication of this appeal, the group was organized as a study group of theologians from a great variety of church traditions. The Forum’s aim is to provide an inspiring space where these theologians can reflect together on promoting the Church’s catholicity, which is viewed as its ability to accomplish unity and solidarity.

With this background in mind, it is clear why the Forum wanted to study this important document, and why it wants to offer the results of its reflections to other Christians. If the Forum, with this brochure, were to be instrumental in getting even more attention for *TCTCV* in the churches, and at the same time encouraging more in-depth study, it will have achieved its purpose. The Forum regards its contribution as complementary to the reaction which the Catholic Association for

1. The *Catholic Appeal* is the declaration of principles for the establishment of the Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity. It is also an appeal for support of the effort towards the catholicity of the Church.

* This reflection is the result of a number of discussions in the study group of the Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity. It is offered to churches to assist them in their discussion about catholicity as a characteristic of being the Church of Christ. It is also offered to the World Council of Churches as a reaction to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

Ecumenism² has already published and to the reflection taking place in the Faith and Church Community Consultation Group of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands.

On the feast day of St Augustine
28 August 2017

+ Dr. Joris Vercammen,
Old Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht, Chairman, Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity

Catholicity as the point of departure for the reflection on *TCTCV*

The Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity (OFK)³ is focused on the catholicity of the Church as a qualitative concept of being church, belonging to the *notae ecclesiae* which are part of the church's confession of faith. Catholicity is primarily a theological quality of the local church as the smallest unity in which the fullness of the church is present. This is based on a trinitarian-soteriological self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In principle, this also implies the solidarity of local churches or, as the case may be, faith communities, and their fundamental unity. A church is catholic when it exists in unity and solidarity with other churches. It is this openness that determines the quantitative aspect of the catholicity of a church. Even though the Church as such is

2. In the topical issue on *TCTCV* in *Perspectief*, 2015: 29, 56–62. It can also be found on <http://forumkatholiceit.nl/2015/12>.

3. For more information about the OFK, see the website <https://forumkatholiceit.nl>.

focused on a transcendent reality, and points to it, it is present only as the concrete form of the Church in its diversity, brokenness, and yearning for unity. At the same time, the Church is the conferred reality of the one body of Christ, a reality extending beyond our definitions. It is this conferred reality that constitutes its sacramentality, in its essence and ministry, as the efficacious sign of God's mission for the world.

The formal aspect of catholicity consists in the arrangement of services and functions such as oversight, ordained ministry, jurisdiction and authority to teach, and in the arrangement of relations between the churches. It is obvious that these ordained ministries, functions, and ministrations are arranged differently in the various churches. The local church does not have the same connotation everywhere either. In Catholic ecclesiology, a diocese is meant. In the congregations of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, the classis is considered the local church. The Church as a whole consists in the communion of local churches. Full catholicity consists in the unity of the churches.

Catholicity and apostolicity

God reveals himself to the Church by means of the proclamation of the Word and the ministry of the sacraments, or, in other words, in *martyria*, *leitourgia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*. They are made concrete in a community committed through baptism, a community bound by certain conditions and within which specific persons bear responsibility. Responsibility for mission on behalf of Christ takes form in ordained ministry within the

church. Ordained ministry may therefore be called sacramental. In the early church, these ordained ministries guaranteed its authenticity, and the apostolicity of the church was linked to its catholicity in this way. Catholicity and apostolicity have historically been anchored in specific institutionalized forms by which the service of Word, sacrament and oversight are organized, although there are differences in the way they are positioned in the various churches. These arrangements for the benefit of the church's mission are effected through the work of the Spirit. The aspects of catholicity and apostolicity are inextricably linked together.

Catholicity and communion

The text of *TCTCV* reflects this view of the catholicity of the church to a great extent. Using the communion conferred through baptism as point of departure – a community in which there is a place for those who are attracted by the love of God – and assuming the unity of all Christians to be the logical consequence of it, the text provides a strong foundation for all who, by faith, want to perceive more in the church than an association of people with similar religious beliefs and philosophy of life. Actually, what distinguishes Christians from other believers is the fundamental unity of all disciples of Jesus Christ across the world. The fact that they form “the Church of Christ” together – and the fact that a person belongs to the worldwide church from the moment of baptism – is the very heart of Christian faith. Without the Church, in the sense of a community including all those who are baptized and therefore “catholic,” being a Christian becomes an individual conviction like

so many others. In its original qualitative as well as quantitative meaning, catholicity points to the bringing together of all gifts that are present in the local churches as an efficacious sign of salvation for creation and humankind. It is the communion of the Church which makes it a portent of the kingdom of God, the all-embracing unity-in-diversity to which all humankind and all of creation is called. In other words, the Church, in its communion, clearly shows the design that is evident in creation as its soul and intention.

The church as a community of believers and as the body of Christ is focused on the fulfillment of creation

It is precisely the aspect of communion, which the document identifies and puts into words, that points directly to the divine-human reality of the Church. This does not mean that the church is sacrosanct, by nature inclined toward suppressing every criticism or disarming it beforehand. The intention of the Commission on Faith and Order is overcoming brokenness; it is geared towards a reconciliation that can eventually reconcile the consequences of the fall of humankind. This reconciliation does not come about through human effort; it is the work of the Spirit. Criticism challenging the church's sinfulness should therefore be accepted in faith as a prophetic protest and as an appeal likewise inspired by the Spirit. That is why *TCTCV* is right to point out that the church's task is to preach “conversion” and to encourage repentance, renewal and reform, not only on the part of individuals but also of institutions and structures (for example, §22). It is right that the document

presents the Church in the context of salvation history and eschatology. What is presented here is therefore a dynamic view of the Church. That is, the specific form of the Church is constantly involved in a positive tension with the eschaton. The Church is genuinely the body of Christ; but, at the same time, it is a reality that is constantly being fulfilled in it. The Church is not the owner of this reality, but it is bestowed on her, and she points to it.

The document does not present the Church as an unchangeable, solid block. Rather, it speaks of the Church in terms of possibilities for growth, or a pilgrimage undertaken through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, the document does not bring the eschaton enough to the fore as a permanent invitation to rise above our all too human reality and as a consolation for all the times that people do not achieve this. The eschaton can exert such an attraction on believers that they are stimulated to grow, without being frustrated by constant reference to their powerlessness or ignorance. In this way, the eschaton provides a healthy critical perspective that creates the space needed. This is no diachronic historical model for church development, but a constant orientation towards a reality that is celebrated and actualized in the Lord's supper and referred to in preaching.

The relationship between an ecclesiology of communion and God's mission

The ecclesiology of communion is an approach to the Church which does justice to the eschatological orientation of the Church, a commission which originates in God's own mission. Such an

ecclesiology sets norms for the Church within the context of the gospel. The *missio Dei* comes directly from the essence of God himself, which is a community of Father, Son and Spirit (see *TCTCV* §1).⁴ The sacramentality of the Church is based on this as well.

Approaching the Church as a sacrament means that we confess that God, in his grace, can enter the incomplete, unredeemed form of the church as it is now. Commitment to God's mission means precisely the openness to receiving this grace.

This certainly does not mean that the specific historical form of the Church as an institution or sociological form would become sacral. However, the Church *confesses* that it has a sacramental value and that God applies this human reality in such a way that his mission is thereby fulfilled through the work of the Spirit. This is the essence of incarnation. It is also good to realize that the incarnation is the work of the Spirit as well. However, the Church is not simply the continuation of the incarnation as it took form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is Jesus Christ who is present in the Church through the Holy Spirit; this Church is his body in the world and, at the same time, the temple of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Ultimately, it is Christ who regulates and relativizes the church.

4. "Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing." *TCTCV*, §1.

5. Walter Kardinal Kasper, *Wege der Einheit. Perspektive für die Ökumene* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 2004), 244–246.

All this also means that the communion of the Church has boundaries. It is impossible to call an entity a church which is determined by something other than evangelical motives. A theological boundary is drawn there.

It is part of the commission of believers to reflect together what an evangelical life should consist of, and then to point out where this life takes form in a particular age and where it clearly does not. This is where theological and moral boundaries are drawn.

The Church is a hermeneutical and therefore a historical community which accepts God's initiative in the Spirit and interprets it in a legitimate way. In this process, the authentic commitment of all to the *missio Dei* is regarded as a guarantee for the space offered to the Spirit of God. This commitment is an expression of the willingness to leave the initiative of reality to God and not take it upon ourselves.

The eucharist as a church-founding event

It is in this context that the eucharist, the unity of Word and sacrament, must and can now be described as a pivotal fact and a holy church-founding event. Since the *missio Dei* is fulfilled in the eucharist, it cannot be otherwise than that the eucharist, as the communion of Christ with his congregation, is also the heart of the Church. This view liberates the eucharist from an approach whereby its sacramental character is reduced to a memorial rite to which Christians together give form. In the eucharist, heaven and earth come together. Here, bonding and reconciliation occur. The congregation united in the name of Christ confesses that

this communion is a gift of God. The presider is a sign of it, and the communion of the congregation as a whole its fruit. Here it becomes evident that ordained ministry can and should be a sign of unity, for this "catholic unity" is just what God's mission is about. It is important to emphasize that faith, church, sacrament, and ordained ministry form a unity, being a sign and instrument of the eschatological community we experience with God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. Christ is present in this community, the Church, as its Head and Body. Both aspects should be thought of together constantly. It is a positive thing that *TCTCV* follows this logic of faith and describes it.

Ordained ministry

In its role as a representative pointing to Christ, ordained ministry is a sign of unity and connects with both the Church of all ages and the present worldwide Church, and also with the triumphal Church in heaven. The sacramentality of ordained ministry concerns this representation and not, of course, the person of the minister. This person is a baptized member like any other, although called to a particular, special service. This sacramental ministry, which cannot exist without a specific community of baptized persons, plays an important role in the catholicity of the Church, which is regarded as the form of the *missio Dei* in the world. Ordained ministry joins communities, forms a connection with the faith of previous generations, and represents the Lord. These aspects do not enter into a purely functional approach to ordained ministry. The crisis in the church which results from this is

ultimately rooted in the crisis of belief in God. In a culture where God has disappeared, it is difficult to be the “People of God.” Being the people of God emphatically includes ordained ministry, sacraments, and ministrations.

Ordained ministry and community cannot be separated. When they are detached from each other, both lose course. In that case, ordained ministry can become an entity withdrawing from the dialogue of the communion and resting only on formal authority. The community can become merely a religious society from which inner coherence has disappeared and everyone looks for their own interpretation. When ordained ministry and community are detached from each other, the catholicity of the Church is under great pressure. On this point, it is in *TCTCV*'s favour that it forms a bridge to *BEM*, although it unfortunately has less attention for personal oversight than *BEM*.⁶

Word and Spirit, Scripture and Tradition

Faith is evoked by the Word through the activity of the Holy Spirit. We find this activity of the Spirit in scripture and see it in action in Church

6. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), §37: “In churches which practise the succession through the episcopate, it is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved in churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate. This recognition finds additional support in the fact that the reality and function of the episcopal ministry have been preserved in many of these churches, with or without the title ‘bishop.’ Ordination, for example, is always done in them by persons in whom the Church recognizes the authority to transmit the ministerial commission.”

Tradition.⁷ It is interesting to see that these four realities (God’s Word, Spirit, Scripture, Tradition) are linked together and presented in a certain relationship to each other. Is it possible that the classic, and assumed, antithesis between “Scripture and Tradition” has undergone a shift in relationship? This concerns a shift between “Scripture and Tradition” on the one hand and the ongoing hermeneutical process in which both scripture and Tradition are dependent on the context in the way they function. After all, the Church is the hermeneutical community in which both are understood in a new way again and again.

The issue, therefore, is no longer whether emphasis is placed conclusively on Scripture or on Tradition; rather, the question is the position taken on how to treat them hermeneutically in a responsible way.

Service to the world as the criterion for the Church’s authenticity in the world

In regard to the human community, unity and universality are basic biblical categories which challenge a secular pluralism that undermines solidarity and community because of the maximum allowance given to individual freedom. The reason for this is that there is no longer any universal truth as an absolute reference in a post-modern secular view; but many “truths” exist side by side. As a result, commonly-held values are under pressure. Because of the emphasis on individual

7. *TCTCV*, §38: “Faith is evoked by the Word of God, inspired by the grace of the Holy Spirit, attested in Scripture and transmitted through the living tradition of the Church.”

opportunities and responsibilities, vulnerable people are under threat of becoming victims of the consequences of this way of thinking.

Human beings are created for each other for the purpose of support and care. In the Christian way of life, Christian truth is linked with authenticity and solidarity. Orthodoxy is connected with orthopraxis. That is why church service, as a service of love for the world, is the ultimate criterion for the Church's authenticity and being in the world in truth.

It remains to be seen to what extent the Church is successful in achieving unity and reconciliation, not only among its own members, but also for humanity as a whole. In this existential sense, truth is essentially a practical matter, which is not dogmatic in this case, but has everything to do with a self-sacrificing attitude of service; such service can bring about solidarity and community.⁸ Ecclesiology and morals are closely bound together. The Church is also a moral community, and its discernment is important for the future of humankind and creation (see the elaboration by Schreiter⁹ and his conception of "new Catholicism"). Radical solidarity with the world and its need for redemption is one of the fundamental aspects of catholicity, which speaks of God's unconditional solidarity with all humankind and the whole of creation.

8. See Kasper.

9. Robert J. Schreiter, *Die neue Katholizität. Globalisierung und die Theologie*. Theologie Interkulturell 9 (Frankfurt-London; IKO [Verlag für interkulturelle Kommunikation], 1997), 203–225.

In view of the above, the discussion concerning "the ecumenism of blood"¹⁰ takes on a special meaning. Churches find common ground in the truth of martyrdom as an image of radical witness. In this, they find, or receive, the unity that was evidently already given before any theological dialogue took place (*successio martyrum*). This unity cannot but serve as an incitement to, and inspiration for, engaging seriously in dialogues relating to the ecumenism of witness and church service as a radical service of love for the world. For this reason, it is regrettable that chapter 4 of *TCTCV* is so short.

The one Covenant

The unity of God's promise concerns Israel as well as the believers who came to call themselves Christians. In God's faithfulness and grace, there is no question of one covenant with Israel and a separate covenant with the Gentiles. God is one in his love and faithfulness. For this reason, the covenant is also the concept linking the Church with Israel. The Church's understanding of itself and the recognition of Jesus as Christ are intrinsically linked together and cannot do without the witness of the whole scripture. The Church is indebted to Israel and its tradition of faith. In the confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the identity-creating narratives of Israel have acquired a meaning of their own for the Gentiles, drawing them into God's promise through Christ.

10. See the address by Pope Francis on 12 October 2016 at a meeting of representatives of world Christian communities and the address on 28 April 2017 at the meeting with Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Church.

This means that a state of exile can be, or become, a reality for the Church. It also means that we can identify God's dynamic of covenant in the Trinity; God makes his life-producing word operative in his people. Therefore the Church can be identified as the messianic people of God. After all, scripture makes it clear to us that the Gentiles, too, are children of the One God, not replacing Israel, God's people, with its own place in the Covenant, but as participants in the grace of God.

It is doubtful that *TCTCV* adequately acknowledges the so-called Old Testament and the relationship with Israel, God's people. It is necessary to observe that both Israel and the Church live by and within God's universal promise of salvation for the world and the Gentiles.

Amersfoort, 2017

37. Conference of European Churches— Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

The Church: Towards a Common Vision: A response based on the Consultation on Migration and Ecclesiology – Being Church in Europe Today

Introduction

One of the major challenges for European churches today is the multi-faceted reality of migration. Migration challenges the theological reflection of what it means to be Church at the local level and in the global context. Not only are people coming to Europe in order to seek refuge from violence, conflict and persecution, along with others seeking to escape poverty, starvation and pollution or other environmental degradation; there is a new quality of mobility within and beyond Europe that intensifies the experience of growing religious plurality.

Migration is not a new phenomenon. Scripture is rich with images of migration: In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve leave the Garden of Eden; Abraham and Sarah are called to leave their home and travel to a new land; Joseph is trafficked into Egypt and then reacquainted with his father and brothers when famine forces them to move; Moses leads the people of Israel to the Promised Land; and later the Jews find themselves in exile in

a far off land, yearning for their home. In the New Testament, the gospel itself becomes a migrating message on the day of Pentecost as it is spread in all corners of the world. And so it is not an exaggeration to say that Christianity would not be what it is without migration; migration has always changed the way we lived and shaped the theological understandings of what it means to be the Church.

However, in the current European context, migration forces the churches to ask ecclesiological questions differently. While churches in the past reflected on the question of the nature and purpose of the church as well as the interrelationship of church and culture, and acknowledged that tradition is more than what is expressed in confessional documents, while they noted the dangers of nationalism, racism and religious hatred, migration urgently highlights the need to rethink these matters, while at the same time receiving and contextualizing theological insights from outside Europe.

Today there is an increasing sense that people have multiple identities: cultural, national and religious. Once it might have been assumed that to belong to one nationality meant to have an equivalent or similar cultural and religious outlook.

With increasing migration this is less often the case. The interconnectedness between these facets of individual and corporate identity and how they relate to the Christian faith is an area of theology that requires further exploration. To belong to a church essentially means to belong to a particular community in a particular place – a local congregation. Those participating in regular worship and fellowship experienced their roots as Christians in a uniquely specific time, place and culture. And yet to be Christian is to confess the belief in the triune God which transcends time, place and culture.

For the churches, migration and global mobility mean more than just a diaconal duty to help refugees and those in need, whether Christian or not. This duty is an integral part of the life and being of the Church. There is no question about the importance of receiving Christ and witnessing Him through the love for the ones in need and our neighbours (Matt. 25). The Church as the body of Christ cannot but pass on the love of the Trinity to all of humanity as a real way of being.

In the current situation, churches have to come to terms with the impact of migration on the life of the church in local contexts. Established churches, or churches that have historical longevity and churches which are new or relatively recent share the same geographical space and are challenged to relate to one another, especially in cases when they hold different views with regard to worship, theology and ethical issues. At the same time, churches that have existed for decades in Europe are sometimes labelled as “migrant” simply because the origins of many of their members are traced back to other countries or continents, while

historic churches are called to include the recently arrived Christians, re-examining their flexibility and barriers to integration built into their respective contextual ecclesiologies. Many churches are affected by the emigration of church members and their continuous need for spiritual care. Many churches realize and attempt to respond to the growing diversity within them. There are new neighbours who worship in communities of similar ethnic or linguistic background or worship style, establishing new church movements.

Churches are also challenged with regard to interreligious dialogue, as a considerable number of new migrants are faithful adherents of other religions. They are challenged to review and redefine their self-understanding and theologies vis-à-vis their neighbours, and overcome sentiments of fear, racism and intolerance in society and the church.

The consultation on migration and ecclesiology

In light of these challenges, the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark organized a consultation held in Copenhagen, Denmark, 8–10 December 2016.¹ The meeting aimed to provide a current European response to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*²

1. <http://www.ceceurope.org/being-church-in-europe-today-migration-through-a-theological-lens>

2. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013).

in the context of an urgent reality of churches and societies in Europe related to the impact of migration on ecclesiology, as well as the spiritual and theological challenges it implies. The consultation brought together around 30 participants from a diversity of church backgrounds. What was striking was the number of participants who were either migrants themselves, or descendants of refugees and migrants. The migration origins of many participants, but also of their churches (e.g., the Waldensians in Italy) together with the reality that traditions also migrate (e.g., Lutheran churches in different continents) underlines how Christians are called to go beyond borders for the sake of the gospel and for the reign of God.

The Consultation found that *TCTCV* recognizes the role of migration, migrant churches and intercultural co-operation in several ways. In “The Mission of the Church in History,” there are references towards the migrant churches in Europe (§§6, 7) that are serving with a mission in reverse approach; as well as the still existing need to develop new ways of being the Church (§7), which includes intercultural ministries and co-operation with migrants and migrant churches. In addition, the document emphasizes the need for *koinonia*: communion with God as well as within the Body of Christ – communion within the different churches and among the churches.

In this regard it seems problematic not to specify racism as one of the sins which distorts the relationship of humans with God and with one another. This violation of God’s design (§1) poses one of the great challenges with regard to the reality and vision of the Church. Participants in the

consultation felt the need to emphasize this aspect as they came to realize the manifold impacts racism has on the life of the Church. As the Church and its ministry are open to all people in all times and places, as is salvation in Christ,³ the fact that ethnic and racial discrimination exist in the churches and coming to the forefront more with the current discourse on migration poses a threat to the very being of the Church. Thus, to only name racism just as a question for the churches’ advocacy in society (§64) is utterly insufficient.

Gospel and culture

1. Churches in Europe are increasingly recognizing that their own structure and practice are influenced by the culture of the society in which they are located; the migration of Christians brings different approaches that become obvious on a local level. Contemporary challenges of racism and the rising political tension around ethnic and national identity pose the question to the churches of how to speak of the unity of the worldwide Church.

2. The consultation heard how the rise of nationalism, Islamism and other forms of religious fundamentalism have tended to undermine democracy and therefore social pluralism, as they lean towards defensiveness of identity. This is becoming a growing phenomenon in Western societies. The

3. See “Communiqué of Consultation about the question on ecclesiology,” in Michael Beintker et al. (eds.), *Consultations between the Conference of European Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe*, Leuvenberg Documents Vol. 11 (Wittenberg/Phanar: Verlag Otto Lembeck Frankfurt am Main, 2007), 16.

problem of phyletism was highlighted – i.e., distinctions based purely on differences of language and ethnic origin – and condemned by the Synod of Constantinople in 1872,⁴ which has resulted in a situation that prevails in many European cities of several national or ethnic jurisdictions within the church, something that is viewed as entirely normal. Thus the so-called diaspora has become an issue also between Orthodox autocephalous churches rather than “the providential place” where the Church can demonstrate its unity and catholicity.

3. For Lutheran churches, where liturgy and ecclesiology have been influenced strongly by European history and culture, an encounter between a newly established congregation for migrant Christians with those church denominations that have a historic longevity can be difficult. The consultation heard anecdotes of members of a historical Lutheran congregation considering a newly established parish of African migrants as a sect; the African Christians thought the Lutheran Church to

4. The Synod convened in Constantinople in 1872 by Patriarch Anthimos VI of Constantinople was attended by the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and other Orthodox hierarchs to consider the situation of the Bulgarian Exarchate established with the help of the Ottoman authorities in 1870. The Exarchate was an independent ecclesiastical entity under Exarch Anthimos of Bulgaria. The local Synod excommunicated the Bulgarians and condemned them for the heresy of phyletism, the false principle that ecclesiastical jurisdictions should correspond to ethnic divisions. Phyletism comes from the Greek words *phyle* which means clan, tribe, race.

be lifeless and lacking the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

4. A third example is the experience of Roma congregations: not migrants, but often suffering from racism and social exclusion. How can a need be met to worship according to their own culture without being subsumed into other denominations? How can legitimate diversity find expression in the life of communion as a gift of God? (§28)⁵ But also, how can all churches “recognize in one another the authentic presence of ... ‘the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church’” (§9)?

5. Many European countries have a history of having a national or state Church. This history, however, developed rather out of a pastoral – and at times political – necessity than out of a theological need. While it is important to allow people to pray and worship in their language and cultural pattern, there is no theological imperative to associate a church to a state or people. It is rather the practice of the church as described in the gospel to form “intercultural” communities *ad locum*, such as a church of a specific city. The letters of the Apostle Paul give a clear indication on the intercultural debates and conflicts in the communities of gentiles (who came from many different countries) and Jews. So, in regard to the origins of the church and its present challenges, it seems only appropriate to describe such churches as being territorial,

5. TCTCV, 16, cf. *Charta Oecumenica, A Text, a Process, and a Dream of the Churches in Europe*, ed. Viorel Ionita and Sarah Numico (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2003), 8, hereafter cited as *Charta Oecumenica*.

in that they have a calling to serve the people and land in a particular geographical area, rather than being of a nation. Keeping the territorial nature of the local church in mind, the question of the so-called “diaspora” becomes a unique challenge. While there are pastoral needs for many migrants to be able to pray and worship in their traditional way, theologically speaking this should not lead to different ecclesial jurisdictions of foreign churches in the long run. Rather, migrants and local people are called to find ways in which to develop a local and inclusive church. While churches might still be divided along denominational or traditional lines, there should be no division along cultural or language lines, as Christ transcends those categories (without negating them). So where pastoral necessity calls for diversity, this may not divide the people of God on the local level. This may also facilitate churches’ changing practices while appreciating cultural diversity, but also giving up some elements of culture in order to fulfil their mission. In the context of migration, migrants give up a great deal in order to survive and are changed by the process of migration itself. Historic European churches, many of whom cherish cultural traditions, are called to reflect on being part of a pilgrim Church, and to be prepared to change in order to live out the gospel in culturally relevant ways.

6. *TCTCV* §31 notes “Culture, language and shared history all enter into the very fabric of the local church.” Although this is true for the majority of places, the consultation participants heard numerous stories where local churches can be places of diverse cultures and languages, even

without a previously shared history. As stressed earlier in §28, “Legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones, to be imposed upon Christians of other cultures.” There is a need to find a balance between the pastoral need of expressing one’s faith in an accustomed way and the theological/ ecclesiological need to live together as an inclusive and respectful community as the body of Christ.

7. Racism is still prevalent and the Church should not rest until racist attitudes and behaviours have been eradicated. *TCTCV* mentions racism in §64 as one of the causes of war, but this does not cover this great evil with sufficient detail. Racism is a key factor in preventing the embracing of cultural diversity. Too often, particularly in the current refugee context, the issue of religious diversity is used as a proxy for racism and as a reason for not offering humanitarian protection to people in need.

Practice of being Church - identities and the Church

8. While the incarnation of Christ calls for the inculturation of the body of Christ the Church, national and ethnic issues become obstacles to the catholicity and unity of the Church. While the gospel needs to be expressed in the specific cultural form of the place where it is preached – thereby the churches are shaped by this specific culture – at the same time, the Church needs to transcend culture and place in order to express the unity and catholicity of the body of Christ. Ecumenical bilateral and multilateral dialogues have shown that visible

unity requires the overcoming of national and ethnic problems that divide the people of God as much as the healing of divisions on aspects of faith. The role of socio-cultural identities needs to be studied with regard to understanding churches and denominations, especially how these identities influence the realization of the notion of the catholicity and unity of the church. Projects such as the Faith and Order 1997 consultation *Ethnic Identity, National Identity and the Unity of the Church* that resulted in the document *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation: a Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict*⁶ need to be promoted and to influence the work on ecclesiology. As churches in Europe continue to struggle with divisions because of national and ethnic identities, further reflection is needed on the matter and on the interplay between national and ethnic identities and ecclesiology.

9. One place to begin consideration is a matter of nomenclature. Churches labelled “migrant” can often be established for several decades, and include members who are citizens of the society they are located in, and who are fully involved in the ecumenical movement, including participation in formal structures. Churches called “main-line” may imply that there is something ordinary, proper and regular about them, and therefore that other churches are deficient or regarded even as some kind of sect. “National” in a European

6. *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation. A Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict*, Faith and Order Paper No. 201 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2005).

context has connections with state churches (*cuius regio eius religio*) and an uncritical closeness between the institutions of the church and the government of a nation state. The Church can be, when called to be, deeply counter-cultural. All churches have a history of migration, persecution and movement. There is a real danger when trying to describe different models and practices of churches in a way which immediately divides groups into “them” and “us.” Similarly, there are dangers in describing the relationship between different churches as “host” and “guest”: a host has control and the guest is dependent. We need to recognize that both together are the Church, which indicates a relationship of mutual accountability and interdependence.

10. Once we have overcome the internalized barriers of our own outlook, we can turn to some of the real problems facing the practice of churches today. One common issue raised during the consultation was a situation in which one congregation rents rooms from another (in the European context, often a new congregation of migrants using the building of a long-established congregation). When one Christian congregation acts as a landlord to another, urgent questions rise concerning how they together constitute the Church and the implications for their relationship.

11. A second area of church practice which is increasingly a live issue is the question of how membership in the church is established and of the recognition of baptism, as a practical and ecclesiological matter. When a migrant Christian is able

to “prove” his or her baptism, or the ceremony of baptism may have conformed to a sense of “order” by another denomination, the recognition of a valid baptism in a refugee’s claim for protection on the grounds of religious persecution can have a bearing on the decision of immigration officials.⁷

12. Related to the recognition of baptism is the recognition of ministry inherent in the unresolved question between Protestants and Orthodox of the relationship between the apostolic succession of ministry and the apostolic continuity of the Church as a whole. In addition, some of the Protestant churches which have historic longevity in Europe have rigorous processes for the selection of candidates for ordained ministry, involving a series of assessments to identify if the church is satisfied with the nature of the individual’s calling in addition to their suitability for the role. However, in Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, now larger in Europe, a person who feels God’s spirit moving them can play a role in preaching, pastoral care and other ministry. The feeling in the consultation was that the attitudes of both the long-established and the recently-established churches have to be prepared to be flexible. At a practical level, if recognition of ministry depends on formal agreements between larger church bodies, this is of little use for a particular congregation in a local context, seeking to be “Church” with churches that do not belong to larger bodies.

7. See CCME resources and support on this topic: <http://www.ccme.be/areas-of-work/refugee-protection>.

Unity in reconciled diversity

13. Some migrant Christians in Europe join churches that have historical longevity. Some join existing churches but also join fellowship meetings for people of their own nationality, culture or language group. Some set up or join separate churches which meet the needs of other migrant Christians. Some of these newly formed churches belong to ecumenical bodies and networks; others do not. How are these increasingly diverse expressions of being the Church to be united in reconciled diversity? How is ecumenical prayer possible amidst cultural diversity?

14. There are those who regard greater diversity as a blessing⁸ and those who see it as toxic. There are risks in trying to force congregations of different cultures together into a structural model which meets the needs of neither group. Treating every person equally does not necessarily lead to equity; there are challenges to develop prophetic practices which work towards equity where the environment is unequal. The only way to work through such matters is to create a shared religious habitus, strengthen intercultural education, and talk through issues not only where there is agreement or disagreement, but on the relevance of particular issues. also.

8. “We consider the diversity of our regional, national, cultural and religious traditions to be enriching for Europe. In view of numerous conflicts, the churches are called upon to serve together the cause of reconciliation among peoples and cultures.” *Charta Oecumenica*, 13.

15. There is a challenge always to remember that unity as reconciled diversity is an essential component of ecumenical – and therefore Christian – spirituality. There is not always – or even often – a practical reason for unity; and so it is regarded as less of a priority by some. *TCTCV* is helpful in this regard, particularly §28, §33–36 and §62–63. The consultation also heard that there can be serious lack of unity within the same tradition, from Orthodox concerns about ethno-phyletism to radically different expressions of Reformed worship. So, as a first step, we need to develop an ecclesiological thinking which is able to appreciate pluralism and a variety of expressions within the individual churches, in order to be able to deal with pluralism in given societies. Because the different churches in Europe today are denominational as well as post- or pre-creedal churches, theological dialogue becomes more demanding than previously assumed. New ways of engaging are required that do not require high-level committees, but which involve the participation of many more Christians living in many different contexts. Furthermore, a new emphasis should be given to the *lex orandi, lex credendi* way of expressing the churches' teaching, so that a dialogue based on the actual expressions of faith in worship, prayer, preaching and everyday life of the churches can be developed. This would allow churches of different traditions in one place to recognize their similarities as well as to allow non-creedal churches to enter theological dialogue on a grassroots level and on a European one.

16. *TCTCV* §37 outlines the imperative to seek agreement on matters of faith, sacraments and ministry to achieve visible unity. While this goal remains a central one, in order to live and work together as churches in one place and to serve the needs of the different groups in our societies, we need a way to express the recognition of being siblings in Christ. In addition to theological dialogue, we need to explore practical expressions of unity which go beyond the physical unity of sitting in the same worship service, in order to recognize unity where there is no common language. The work of bilateral dialogues may be helpful here, such as the Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland which produced a shared/common liturgy for renewal of baptismal vows.⁹

The present paper is the response based on the consultation organized by CEC and CCME on the document *TCTCV* of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. In summary, the consultation made the following observations:

- There are vastly different experiences of migration in different parts of Europe; and the experience of migration in Europe has changed substantially from the period leading up to the publication of *TCTCV*.

9. http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3116/baptism_liturgy.pdf

- The terms “migrant,” “mainline” and “national” church are distinctly unhelpful when used too generally.
- Migration tests historical church structures and models, providing new challenges for churches seeking to promote unity in reconciled diversity.
- When new neighbours worship in communities that share a common language, worship style, nationality or ethnic background, they encounter new opportunities and avenues for relating to other churches and Christians.

The consultation also identified the following points that require immediate action:

- Traditional ecumenical organizations and those churches with historical engagement with ecumenism need to be better equipped to respond to an increasingly diverse range of church expressions and visions.
- Attitudes and behaviours within and between churches need to be shaped to be receptive and respectful of difference.
- Churches in Europe must respond to the refugee emergency which presents the continent with crises that are spiritual, moral and humanitarian.
- In places where integration in the church community is slow or difficult, churches can support it through their

ministry, through diversity expressed in their worship and life, and through making good use of the gifts of all members irrespective of cultural background. It is important to underline the meaning of integration as:

a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation where all parties give and receive. In this sense integration means respect for different cultural identities. This involves a shift in the majority communities’ ways of thinking. It is necessary to understand and accept that cultures and identities – including our own – are not static but changing. Integration is also a process of reducing socio-economic barriers between people or groups of people, creating equal opportunities and enabling people to participate actively in the public, economic, social, and political as well as church or religious spheres. It is a common effort towards a peaceful and equitable society.¹⁰

Suggestions for further work

Some of the ideas and suggestions for further reflection and work from the consultation included:

10. From the CSC/CCME response to the Council of Europe White Paper consultation on Intercultural Dialogue, p.3, available at http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/70_downloads/95_archive/2007/2007-06-14_csc-ccme_response_to_the_coe_white_paper_consultation_on_intercultural_dialogue.pdf

- In refugee-receiving communities, support should be given to Imams to reach out to new refugees to prevent interference from religious extremists.
- Establish an ecumenical committee in each country which can take up issues of migration with the state.
- Hold a consultation on national identity and being Church to address ethno-phyletism and publish a clear statement on it.
- Within the work of Faith and Order, prioritize questions of churches that struggle with division because of national and ethnic identities.
- The international ecumenical movement should have better defined and more realistic goals, such as seeking to end the concept of “migrant” and “mainstream” churches.
- Among churches maintaining communion, explore dual or multiple church membership as a practice to be commended to those for whom it is appropriate, as a sign of unity and understanding that migrants especially may wish to worship both with their new neighbours as well as in their own language or cultural style.
- Churches with different histories and cultures should invite Christians from different traditions to participate in

social action work as well as in governing bodies.

- Establish more flexible approaches around the recognition of individuals’ ministry, for example by allowing the responsibility to determine status to a local office holder or appropriate body.

In 2004 the CEC-CPCE consultation on the question of ecclesiology affirmed that “Ecclesiology can only be dealt with properly within the context of the doctrine of the trinity, the context of Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, and theological anthropology.”¹¹ Today, as migration changes the ecclesial landscape in Europe, ecclesiological questions need to be revisited in the conviction that:

- The universal Church is not compiled of incomplete part-churches, but exists as a community of equally valid local churches, without any overriding importance or subordination of any of these churches. The local church is supplied with all the marks of the nature of the Church, which enable the salvation of human beings. The idea of love, which binds together the persons of the Trinity and in which they interpenetrate each other (*perichoresis*) has come to be an important impulse for

11. Consultation about the question on ecclesiology, 18.

the understanding of the unity of the Church.¹²

- The biblical vision of the reconciled people of God does not mean “the end of cultural diversity but the end of division between people of different cultures as the church became incarnate in each culture.

One of the great issues in European culture is the tension that exists between different cultural groups and yet also the positive situations in which once oppressed cultures have found new freedoms. We believe the Church has a calling in this situation to be the Body of Christ in which the different parts are all honoured for what they are and the gifts they bring.”¹³

12. Ibid.

13. “Towards a Common Mission in Europe,” formerly available at <http://cid.ceceurope.org/working-priorities/mission-research>.

38. Joint Commission on Doctrine, Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church

Introduction

The Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland - Roman Catholic Church wishes to express its deep gratitude to the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches for presenting this text to the churches as a means of assisting them in their reflections on difficult questions concerning the nature and mission of the Church, in the hope that they might move towards a more common vision of the gift and mystery of the Church. Early on in a new century and a new millennium, it is a timely document, setting a marker on the distance the churches have travelled in the past century and anticipating further movement from those churches that are sincerely engaged in the ecumenical goal of Christian unity, in response to the Lord's own prayer that we be one.

The Joint Commission on Doctrine (The Joint Commission) was set up in 1977 to look at doctrinal issues that had a bearing on inter-church marriage. In the course of its work over the years, the Joint Commission studied the doctrine of the Church, taking into account

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM). After a short break in the latter part of the 1990s, the Joint Commission was reconstituted in 2002 around the focus of baptism. A joint study document, *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed* was published in 2007, to be followed by a *Joint Liturgy for the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows* which has been widely commended for use on ecumenical occasions. Other issues have been discussed without leading to reports: The Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith, which led to an extended discussion on sanctification and grace; healing of memories; the Church of Scotland's 2009 report *Being Single in Church and Society*; ecumenical training of clergy; and the ecumenical significance of the new English translation of the Missal. Since 2009 the Joint Commission has run a series of conferences: The Calvin Quincentenary (2009), The Reformation in Scotland (2010), The Year of Faith/50th Anniversary of Vatican II and the 30th anniversary of *BEM* (2013). A further conference is now planned for December 2015 around *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

The Joint Commission studied the text of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* closely. Both churches felt there was much to welcome in the text that was good, helpful and challenging. Clearly, as a joint response, the questions cannot be used as set, but we have used them as guidelines in the shaping of our response. This we have done under five broad headings:

- The ecclesiological understanding of the Church
- A basis for growth in unity
- Challenge to the Joint Commission for further work
- Ability to form closer relationships in life and mission
- Aspects requiring further discussion

The document as a whole was valued as a synthesis of study and reflection. We felt we were being asked to consider the mystery of the Church at a much deeper ecumenical level. The words that introduce the document, “Thy will be done,” suggested to us that a journey needed to be made into the will of God, something none of us finds easy to do. In receiving the text we are invited to journey into the mystery of the Church. Throughout the document there is repeated use of the word “challenge,” which pushes us back again and again to reflect upon this mystery. While the nature of a document which is a synthesis of years of sincere theological reflection is a considerable strength, it does not cover all aspects. For example, in §1 the

mystery of evil is dealt with in one sentence and in the past tense: “God’s purpose . . . was thwarted . . .” In a time when the mystery of evil and wickedness is such an obstacle to belief for so many people, this may be regarded as a weakness. We make similar points in relation to imperialistic colonization (§6) and the “grievous impact” of sin (§36) in sections 5.6 and 5.1 below respectively.

1. The ecclesiological understanding of the Church

1.1. “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church” (§§1–10)

The opening section of the document introduces immediately the dynamic of eternity breaking into time and the concept of gift which brings with it a responsibility to seek reconciliation. The significance of “the very life of the Holy Trinity” (§1) was warmly welcomed, developing our ecclesiological understanding beyond the Christological emphasis of previous times, and thus providing theological space for a new shared ecumenical reflection on the nature and mission of the Church.

The theology of the Spirit, which pervades this section, gives a dynamic understanding of the Church, emphasizing its giftedness and the fact that it is the collective experience that is important. It is on the disciples that the Spirit came, and from there the “indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the *reality* of the Church” (§3). This opening section reflects well our common understanding of the Church.

It also raises some hopeful questions: Could it be that contemplation of the trinitarian mystery of God will make possible a new common vision of the Church? Can this shared contemplation lead us to pray more fervently together to this God “for whom nothing is impossible,” even the healing of a broken Church?

1.2 The unity of the Church

The reference in §8 to reliving the experience of the first council of Jerusalem resonated in our Scottish context where efforts are being made to hold together two positions that appear to be mutually exclusive. This tension is experienced denominationally and ecumenically. Already the relationship built up between our two churches in the Joint Commission has allowed us to listen carefully, respectfully and sensitively to one another. Neither of our churches identifies the Church of Christ exclusively with our own communities, yet each of our churches will have within it those who would hold to that view (§10).

1.3 Fundamental issues on the way to unity

The Joint Commission welcomed this italicized section. It sets the agenda for further discussion.

1.4 “The Church of the Triune God: Discerning God’s Will for the Church” (§§11–12)

That the New Testament does not provide a systematic ecclesiology was noted as being of great importance (§11). The Church is so profound a mystery of God’s love that many images and metaphors had to be used. The Joint Commission felt

that this opens windows to the wealth of insights that are provided from our history and enables us to perceive and understand our history in a different way. This raised the questions: What insights does our age bring? And how are they assessed? In answering these questions it was felt that in our age it is ecumenical insights that are offered. Ecumenical commitment is now part of the tradition of the Church. It should, correspondingly, shape the life and authoritative documents of the churches, as it does, for example, in *Ut Unum Sint* and the *Charta Oecumenica*. We felt there was an openness to feel something different about what we say about the Church today and also about what we choose to emphasize.

The Joint Commission welcomed the link made several times in the document between the unity of the Church as a sign that unity is possible for humanity, and creation. It was also positive about the recognition of legitimate diversity (§12), which extends the understanding of catholicity, with further implications for church unity, holiness and apostolicity (§12).

1.5 “The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*: The Initiative of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (§§13–16)

Once again the effect of rooting the Church and the sense of community and communion in the mystery of the Triune God’s divine dialogue of love with the whole of creation and with humanity in particular was welcomed as giving a dynamic understanding of the Christian faith (§13). In the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the eternal

Father initiates a personal and dynamic dialogue which seeks to restore a broken *koinonia*, caused by human sin and disobedience (Gen. 3-4; Rom. 1:18-3:20). If God's restoring *koinonia* finds its irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, then the Church as the Body of Christ acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God's work of healing a broken world.

Koinonia, of which the source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.

From this perspective, while the concept of *koinonia* in scripture and the Fathers should be seen as one among several helpful for understanding something of the mystery of the Church, we considered that the concept could be helpful in establishing a consensus about the nature of the Church and how the Church should be ordered within the world.

Paragraph 15 was warmly welcomed as an area where previously there were tensions but which now represents an aspect of mutual enrichment. Mary, as a woman of faith, has been the focus of ecumenical dialogue, encouraging reflection on the deeper implications of discipleship. The Joint Commission noted the work of the Groupe des Dombes on Mary as largely Reformed-Roman Catholic work. This is a good example of what takes place when we listen sensitively to one another.

1.6 “The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God” (§§17–20)

This section opened up discussion on covenant. The chronological presentation in the text is open to a supercessionist interpretation. We understood that this was not what was intended, but rather the affirmation of the continuing covenant with the people of Israel while emphasizing the covenant in Jesus Christ (§17).

The giving of gifts for the common good and placing obligations of responsibility and mutual accountability on every individual, local community and the Church as a whole was warmly welcomed. This affirmed a conference run by the Joint Commission in March 2013 which focused on the Year of Faith and drew on the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 30th anniversary of the publication of *BEM*. The universality of the gifts given to all people for service was happily acknowledged. Discussion opened up around whether the *triplex munus*, (prophetic, priestly and kingly) gifts are given to every individual or to the Church as a whole, in which individuals have a particular part to play. The gifting to each individual is explicit in the Roman Catholic baptismal rite:

The God of power and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you for sin and brought you to new life through water and the Holy Spirit. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet and King.

Either way, the vital role played by each person was noted with appreciation as an important emphasis in the document and one which relates to our understanding of the Church.

The mutuality of the relationship between the ordained minister and the people was, we thought, well expressed in §19. The description of the minister or priest as one who “reminds the community of its dependence on Jesus Christ” gave us some pause for thought. The prevailing understanding of the minister or priest is as a vicar or representative of Christ. Within the Reformed churches, the emphasis is on the ministerial function as pastor and teacher (teaching elder). In the Catholic Church, this is sacramentally established; and the priest is said to act *in persona Christi*, literally taking on the persona of Christ as teacher and also as priest, the one who presides in Christ’s name at the eucharist. In Catholic and Reformed theology, the threefold mission of Christ is expressed in terms of his priestly, prophetic and kingly character, in which by baptism each Christian participates. We recognize that in both our churches there is an understanding of the role of minister and priest in calling people to share in Christ’s mission: “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” This is an exercise of the kingly or leadership role of ministry which is shared also by the people. Whereas the priestly and prophetic aspects of their calling are clearly spelt out in this section (§19), only five sentences are devoted to the kingly role. Given the emphases on the “People of God” in Vatican II, the Synod of Bishops in 1980, and *BEM*, we would have welcomed a fuller exposition of the kingly role of the *laos theou* in their shared participation with

minister and priest in Christ’s kingly character. It is clear in the document that the Church is always the whole Church in which every member is seen as vital to its life and mission.

1.7 How continuity and change in the Church relate to God’s will

We acknowledge that there is a dialogue for change within *Ut Unum Sint*. Pope John Paul II called for the “the purification of memories,” which is referred to in other documents as the “healing of memories” and the “reconciliation of memories,” and asked forgiveness for historical hurts on behalf of the Catholic Church. In our own Joint Commission we have run a series of conferences marking significant anniversaries (Calvin, the Scottish Reformation, *BEM* and Vatican II with the Year of Faith) which have had as their broad purpose the healing of memories as they have affected the relationship between the churches in our own, Scottish context.

1.8 “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World” (§§25–27)

This whole section gives a picture of the Church as a privileged instrument of God, outward-looking and missionary rather than inward-looking. We had to admit that this grand design, with the Church playing an instrumental role, is a challenge to both our churches. We noted the footnote on the Church as sign and instrument. We agreed that different ecclesiological formulations are understandable as people struggle to find the language to describe the depth of understanding

in which everyone is sent, except God, the Father, who sends everyone for the sake of communion.

1.9 “Communion in Unity and Diversity” (§§28–30)

We recognized that §§28–30 are increasingly important in our context. Diversity is a gift from God, part of God’s design, and demonstrates a consistency. The statement is anti-imperialistic and welcome. There is much here still to talk about.

1.10 “Communion of Local Churches” (§§31–32)

The sense of interdependence in this section is enriching. A local church that is isolated is diminished. The spirituality of the fullness of life has to be about relating within the context of a trinitarian theology.

1.11 “The Church Growing in Communion: Sacraments” (§§40–44)

The relationship between baptism and eucharist highlights the *epiclesis* – a moment which is not just about the water or bread and wine but also about the people being filled with the Holy Spirit. In the Reformed tradition, it refers also to the prayer at the Word before the sermon or the readings.

The language of the transformation of the bread and the wine, if understood to embrace the alteration of the substance, i.e., the underlying reality of the elements, into their becoming that of the Body and Blood of Christ, would satisfy Catholic teaching. While the language of transformation is problematic to a Reformed understanding,

it nevertheless opened an area of fruitful discussion for us, particularly in relation to the transformation of the people.

Liturgical renewal emerging from ecumenical dialogue about the sacraments (§43) resonated with us. Following a report on baptism, the Joint Commission published a *Liturgy for the Renewal of Baptismal Vows* which has been widely received.¹

1.12 “The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church” (§§48–51)

Both churches recognize authority as understood in the context of service (§49); but we acknowledged that remembering this is a challenge. We understand the role of authority as discerning the truth which can also be read in the practice (*orthopraxis*) of the faithful, as pointed out by John Henry Newman, often alluded to as the *sensus fidelium*. The Westminster Confession of Faith, when reflecting on the Church, declares that the Church is “more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced” (Chapter XXV, IV). We recognize the relationship between those who exercise authority and those who are under authority and the influence Christians have upon the wider community. We affirm that those in authority need to be obedient to Christ.

1.13 “The Church: In and For the World - God’s plan for Creation: The Kingdom” (§§58–60)

The Joint Commission welcomed §59 which

1. http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3116/baptism_liturgy.pdf

underlines the point made about authority and makes clear that mission is about proclamation to the whole world, not just in word but also in deed. The broad definition of evangelization which is given more by implication than tight definition is welcomed. The section links to papal documents and gives a concise summary of the WCC programme for the next eight years.

2. A basis for growth in unity

This document provides a helpful tool for further exploration between the churches of their understanding of the Church and its unity. As stated later in this response, we do, however, regret that the document did not give more encouragement to the churches to move beyond a comparative consideration of our understandings towards greater consensus. For there to be growth in unity, there needs to be movement beyond our current positions to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the other. The document could have helpfully pointed the way beyond convergence to consensus (for example, §§25–27, 41–44). It is also important that any understanding of the Church and its unity includes an exploration of legitimate diversity, for example, the concerns noted at the end of this response in relation to §§68 and 69.

3. Challenge to the Joint Commission for further work

We mention a number of challenges for on-going ecumenical study in the Faith and Order agenda in section 5 of our response. Taking all these challenges together along with others that may arise in particular contexts, and acknowledging the

calling of the Church to share in the mission of God through word and action, this document presents a challenge of its own, that we are called to face them together as sisters and brothers in Christ. This has clear implications for the work of the Joint Commission in our particular Scottish context.

4. Ability to form closer relationships in life and mission

Insofar as the document gives us a useful summary of common ground, there is room to hope that closer relationships in life and mission will follow. However, insofar as the document does not push us to look beyond our own ecclesiologies to our understanding of the Church throughout the ages, it does not go far enough. Close relationships in life and mission still rely on church leaders giving encouragement to seek ever more ways of doing more together, and themselves being seen to demonstrate the degree of co-operation that is possible, given the degree of convergence there is in our understanding of the Church.

5. Aspects requiring further discussion

5.1 Sin and the Church

The document opens up a discussion on sin and the Church. As in the first paragraph where “human sin and disobedience” (§1) relates to individuals, so in this section reference is made to the “sinfulness of the messengers” (§5). The relationship between sin and the institution of the Church would require further discussion. This issue comes again in §35, following an honest articulation of

difference (a reduction from the three pages in *The Nature and Mission of the Church*). It is acknowledged that the final victory of Christ brings a great sense of hope for those living in terrible situations. However, the section does not say enough about how awful structures can be, before the victory is won. “Grievous impact” (§36) does not say enough about the misery. It does not bring home the brutality involved in really serious human sin.

5.2 “Discerning God’s Will for the Church”

This section opened up for us a lively discussion on Tradition/tradition and the living Tradition. The terminology may have been seen as quite challenging, particularly for some in the Church of Scotland; yet we acknowledged that it does offer scope here for further reflection and discussion (§11).

5.3 “The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God”

It was felt that the condensing of four pages under the heading of “The History of the Church” in the two previous documents (*The Nature and Purpose of the Church* and *The Nature and Mission of the Church*) into one page (§§19–20) was unhelpful. This section could have been more provocative, encouraging exploration of some of our positions. Some believed that expressing ministry in terms of sacrifice was perhaps not the most helpful approach for today; and it would have been better to use the terminology of the costliness of discipleship, picking up on the work of Faith and Order in this area. This would provide a counter-balance to any danger that the document sound triumphalist

at this point. Opening up a discussion on giving up power would have been beneficial.

5.4 “The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” (§22)

The Joint Commission welcomed the broadening out of division and unity, diversity and catholicity. Our discussions helped us to identify that understanding apostolicity as the lived Tradition requires further reflection, including around the different ways in which apostolicity relates historically to the exercise of oversight within the Church.

We noted the poignant note at the end of this section (§24) and appreciate the serious way in which this is handled. It is not necessarily the case that one church is right and another wrong. It opens up the question which needs to be explored further: What structures does the Church need today?

5.5 “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World”

The last sentence of §25 opens up the theme of mission, which is not developed further in the document.

Paragraph 26 again opens up the possibility of further exploration and discussion. There is a question that arises here concerning spiritual transcendence and its relationship to the Church as it is seen. The document seems at pains to avoid using the word “invisible.”

The italicized section that follows opened up for us the question of the role of the Church in the economy of salvation, especially in relation to the sacraments. Are the sacraments grace for the

journey or a symbol of and a response to grace received? Is the Church a response to God's grace or a space to appropriate it? While the answer may be "both," there are differing starting points involving different ecclesiologies. This is reflected in the many images and metaphors of the New Testament.

It was felt that underlying agreement can be found within different formulations. Such differences may also enrich the Church in undertaking its mission, in that they can challenge churches to think more deeply about the Church. *Sacramentum gratiae* may challenge a Reformed church, as *creatura verbi* may be a challenge to some members of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not enough just to accept such designations as how the other understands it; it may be helpful to move towards acceptance of complementarity as in the WARC-RC Dialogue: *The Church: Towards a Common Understanding*.

5.6 "Communion in Unity and Diversity" (§§28–30)

Who decides the limits of diversity? If the limits are where unity is destroyed, this could equally apply to trivial matters that are non-doctrinal but are nonetheless toxic and difficult to overcome.

There is a danger in the document of pushing towards reconciled diversity, but there has to be some form of legitimizing of diversity. Common criteria are required for the discernment of what is necessary for unity. The Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogue has raised the question of finding what is involved in authentic discernment. We can not emphasize enough how difficult

we find diversity. It has always been problematic – from the New Testament on – especially when the Church is asked to take a new step. Sometimes there is need to sit with an unanswered question for a long time, receiving new insight which leads to new understanding and to changes in perception.

Lacking from the document is anything about the *sensus fidelium* or, indeed, *consensus fidelium* (which can take us into contested ecclesiological waters). Nor is there any mention of the distinction between the hierarchy of truths, as referred to in the Decree on Ecumenism (11) and expanded in the General Catechetical Directory (43) and later in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and *adiaphora*. In our discussions, the Roman Catholic members highlighted the hierarchy of truths as taught in the Second Vatican Council, while the Church of Scotland members spoke of Article 1 of its Constitution, which refers to the Trinity, a particular way of handling scripture and tradition, and foci of discernment.

There have been enough mistakes in relation to diversity to make us pause before saying something is not legitimate diversity. We are growing in the understanding of human nature and need to listen to what a person or group of people is saying. The document is not explicit enough about the harm that is done when we get it wrong. For example §6 – "Notwithstanding such tragic events . . ." – is too weak. The proclamation of the good news has been hindered by the sinfulness of the messengers, especially in the all too frequent failure to give respect and appreciation to the cultural and religious heritage of those to whom the gospel was proclaimed. Complicity

over centuries in imperialistic colonization, which pillaged and even exterminated peoples unable to defend themselves from more powerful invading nations, gives us some insight into the enormous effort required by the churches to build a genuine culture of peace, one that celebrates the different contexts, languages and cultures of the people of the earth. It can take centuries for communities to recover from church intervention that is far from mercy and understanding. When people tell us something about who they are, we need to listen and be hesitant to say that what they are saying is illegitimate. They too are part of the creation God loves. Diversity challenges the church to develop at all levels, including new levels of pastoral care.

In relation to the italicized section, the Joint Commission felt it would be beneficial to revisit the New Delhi Statement and the WCC Nairobi Assembly vision of unity.

5.7 “Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments and Ministry” (§§37–39)

Here we recognized the challenge of living with the reality of our broken ecclesiastical relationships while continuing to push for change.

Both our churches acknowledge that “ecclesial interpretation of the contemporary meaning of the Word of God involves the faith experience of the whole people, the insights of theologians, and the discernment of the ordained ministry” (§39). We also acknowledge that “it is for churches to agree on how these factors work together.” Here there is room for further reflection and discussion.

5.8 “Sacraments” (§§40–44)

The number and purpose of the sacraments is a matter of ongoing theological reflection.

With reference to §§40–44, more discussion is needed. It is recognized from our own Scottish context that (while the sacramental language sits comfortably with the members of the Roman Catholic community) many (from other traditions) struggle with it. For the Reformed tradition, unity is located in the Word of God which is sealed in the sacrament. Proclamation from an evangelical point of view is quite hidden in the document. This is more a question of language, since the document does locate the presence of Christ in calling, healing, teaching, etc., and without that presence there is nothing.

5.9 “Ordained Ministry” (§§45–47)

Discussion on the nature of *episkopé* and episcopacy was opened up in relation to this section. It was clear that there is more reflection to be done.

In relation to apostolicity, again, there is need for further discussion (§46). It was acknowledged that because of the Reformation, the ministry of the Pope had not been spoken about in a positive way within the Reformed tradition until the 20th century. It was noted how Pope Francis refers to himself as “the Bishop of Rome” and that this is very helpful to those who are still reflecting on the ecclesiology of the Petrine ministry.

5.10 “The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church” (§§48–51)

The service aspect of authority is expressed well (§50) and has a strong resonance with the Groupe

des Dombes and *Ut Unum Sint*; but, unlike the latter, it has no reference to the authority of the martyrs. There is a strong tradition of martyrology across all denominations and confessional groups. In Scotland we need to do more work on the *Calendar of Commemoration*, which is produced by Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and which acknowledges the contribution of Scottish women and men who have contributed to the shaping of our society over the centuries. We also suggest a revisiting of the work done by the WCC with the Community of Bose in *A Cloud of Witnesses*. The relationship between the local and the universal and the dimension and role of primacy are areas where we are open to further discussion (§§54–56). As mentioned above, a different style of papacy has fired people’s imagination with the emphasis on poverty and service.

5.11 “The Church: In and for the World – God’s Plan for Creation: The Kingdom” (§§58–60)

We welcome what is expressed about the essential missionary character of the Church in §§58 and 59 with respect to this heading “The Church in and for the World.” “Transformation of the world” (§58) does not go far enough. It does not do justice to the eschatological dimension and the whole creation. “Transfiguration” might convey better the divine-human encounter and would make a better connection between theology and life.

It is clear that, for this document, any genuinely Christian *contemplatio Dei* needs to be in dialogue with the whole of creation. This dialogue is not an option for us, but rather belongs to the

essential nature of the Church as participating in God’s divine dialogue of love with the whole of creation. Indeed, rooted in the mission of the Word and Spirit, the Church itself is commissioned to reach out to the peoples of every land in order to build the culture of peace and unity. The point is well made in §60; and we affirm the need for further work to be done in this area, building on the document *Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding*, which sets out issues of pilgrimage, hospitality and holiness.

5.12 “The Moral Challenge of the Gospel” (§§61–63)

It was noted that there is no attempt to define the moral values that we all share (§§61ff.). They seem to be assumed, though the footnote to ARCIC (italicized section) is noted for further study. A distinction is made between individual moral values and social moral values in the Anglican theological tradition, a distinction that is not made in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, despite references to justice, peace and the environment.

“Authentic” in the phrase “authentic . . . person” is problematic. There is need of a *kyrie eleison* – which was there in the earlier documents. There is a tentativeness in our moral judgements and actions. This was acknowledged in the WCC *Costly* documents. The note of repentance was sounded earlier in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and should continue with ethics. The shadow of the cross and what it means for human flourishing is sketched over. Pope Francis mentions how it is under the cross that we get true authenticity in our human journeying. The need for the churches

to be accountable to each another with respect to their ethical reflections and decisions despite the current state of division (§62) is an aspirational statement which is very difficult when applied to polity.

The Joint Commission was pleased to see the question of anthropology brought out (§63). It was felt that this contained parallels to Pope Francis' Exhortation which referred to the relationship of specifics to culture. "In the world of today" suggests this is a new thing, which is certainly not the case! Moral issues are being rethought all the time. The argument about the divisiveness of moral issues is not the question. At question is the authority behind the moral decisions. This relates to the area of primary and secondary issues. Some will agree that an issue is secondary but it may be founded on the authority of scripture which is primary. While much work has been done on moral discernment in Protestant churches – for instance, the work in relation to the Barmen Confession, and documents from the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the 1990s and the Disciples of Christ in 2009 – little work has been done by the Protestant churches on issues of personal ethics. In ecumenical dialogues, Protestant churches on the whole have focused on issues of social ethics (see Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogues – 3rd and 4th phases). By contrast, *Evangelii Gaudium* calls for moral discernment on both personal and social issues.

It was noted that, in the Church of Scotland, the Barrier Act procedure is not required for ethical issues. It is required only for doctrinal issues, even though, for a Reformed church, the two

should be held together. The implication is that ethics are secondary and derivative. This has provoked a big debate in recent years over the issue of homosexuality.

It is more common to discuss matters of faith than morals in ecumenical conversation. Bilateral dialogues have not taken up moral issues, though it was an implicit aspect of the Reformed-Roman Catholic statements. The taking-up of this issue in the italicized section is welcomed. It was noted that such ecumenical dialogue would deal with matters of principles rather than of application. It could be that there would be distinctions in relation to principles.

5.13 “The Church in Society” (§§64–66)

Here again there is room for further discussion. The Joint Commission appreciated this section, particularly the emphasis in the Church on needing to help those without power in society to be heard, to stand with the voiceless in order to help them find a voice (Paulo Freire).

Members of the Commission were divided as to what the document was intending by its sketching of the complexities to be found when addressing the subject of the role of the Church in society. They recognized the distinctions which arose dependent on whether the church, as in some countries, was a state church, part of the established order, or simply within a country whether formally recognized or not.

All of this heightens the necessity for churches to seek to address together situations affecting the common good and to find a way of responding to them in harmony.

Conclusion

The Joint Commission wishes to reiterate its profound appreciation to the Faith and Order Commission for the production of this text. It has both challenged and encouraged our own Commission in its work, helpfully flagging areas in which we can do further thinking. We have heard the challenge that came from the Ecumenical Conversation on this document in Busan, which encouraged churches to go beyond reflecting on how far it reflects their thinking to the question asked in *BEM*: to what extent the faith of the Church through the ages is reflected in the text. This challenge we would endorse as we look forward to further discussion and reflection.

Overall, this document increases our ecumenical sensitivity and encourages us to enter more deeply into the faith perceptions and even the cultural influences of those with whom we dialogue towards unity.

39. Report on the Anglican-Pentecostal Consultation

Background to the consultation

1. In 2013, the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission released *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* as a convergence text for consideration and response around the world. This provided a potentially significant opportunity for churches to talk with one another about their understanding of the Church in relation to key themes, including mission and unity.

2. Following its debate on the text at the July sessions of General Synod, the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity (CCU) approached Churches Together in England (CTE) to help set up a consultation event for representatives from the Church of England to meet with representatives from Pentecostal churches. The broad aim was to discuss how the document might help to deepen mutual understanding and theological dialogue as part of growth in unity in mission in this country between the Church of England and Pentecostal churches, building on the strong relationships that already exist at many levels, expressed for instance in the message of greeting sent by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Elim regional centenary celebration in London in October.

3. At the start of the consultation, three particular questions were noted:

(i) How useful is the document for Anglicans and Pentecostals seeking to grow closer together?

(ii) How do we bring together focus on practical collaboration with attention to theological issues?

(iii) Do we have a "common vision" of the Church, and how much does it matter?

Churches/agencies represented at the consultation

4. The following churches/agencies were represented at the consultation:

Apostolic Pastoral Congress; Church of England; Churches in Communities International; Churches Together in England; Council of African and Caribbean Churches UK; Elim; Ground Level Network; Ichthus Christian Fellowship; International Ministerial Council of Great Britain; Pioneer; TAPAC (Trans-Atlantic Pacific Alliance of Churches); Woolwich Central Baptist Church; Word of Faith Mission & Apostolic Pastoral Congress.

Presentations

5. The following presentations were given at the consultation:

- “Why do we need a common vision of the church?” Archbishop Fedilia Onyuku-Opukiri and Rev. Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen
- “Mission: Pentecostal and Anglican perspectives,” Bishop Collin Maloney and Rev. Dr David Hilborn
- “Partnership in mission: Pentecostal and Anglican perspectives,” Dave Newton and Rev. Margaret Cave
- “Unity and diversity: Pentecostal and Anglican perspectives,” Rev. Dr Hugh Osgood and Rev. Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen

Issues discussed

6. What kind of *unity* is it that God has given to the Church, that we should be seeking to express fully in our life together, including our structures and institutions? This emerged as a critical question from the day. For some of the Pentecostal participants, the approach represented by *TCTCV* and the faith and order tradition of ecumenism from which it springs – in which Anglicans have played a key role – implies an unhelpful ideal of uniformity, despite the place given to diversity in relation to unity, e.g., at §§28–30 of the document. Why the need to “order” the diversity that flows from the renewing power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church? Even to pair together

“faith and order” sounded wrong to some Pentecostal ears: surely faith is what fundamentally unites us, with church order being very much a secondary matter.

7. This point also relates to a wider concern about how the Pentecostal story fits – or does not fit – in the history of the Faith and Order movement, and how this relates in turn to the development of Christianity globally. The overwhelming predominance of white Europeans and Americans at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, when the modern Ecumenical Movement began to take its distinctive shape, was noted. Global Christianity began to burst its European wine skins from the mid-20th century onwards, and it was agreed that the diversity that has flowed from that – including the variety within Pentecostalism itself – needs to be affirmed. There are questions here about inclusion and prejudice, but also about the need to take seriously the difference of Pentecostal perspectives, for example, on ecclesiology, rather than presuming they can be inserted into an already settled form of theological discourse shaped only by the historic denominations.

8. Nonetheless, participants were agreed that unity matters. Division makes the Church look ridiculous in the eyes of the world. We need to be able to accept one another’s baptisms as baptisms into the one Church of Jesus Christ, welcome one another to our celebrations of the Lord’s supper and respect and receive from one another’s ministers. The Holy Spirit breaks down the barriers between us so that we can witness to the world together. Yet questions

remain about how that unity is best expressed at the level of church structures and institutional frameworks. Ephesians and Acts 15 were discussed as key biblical texts for thinking about the unity of the church, as well as John 17. The question was raised of how far Israel in the Old Testament provides a continuing model for what it means to be one as the people of God, and whether there is insufficient emphasis on our oneness in Christ.

9. How might seeking unity change us? It was argued that all churches need to be open to the possibility of challenge, repentance and transformation as part of what it means to be committed to growing in love and fellowship. The example of Daniel was mentioned as someone prepared to learn a new language and a different way of doing things as part of being faithful to God, not as a departure from it.

10. There was some lively discussion around the theme of *mission*. The historical depth of the Church of England's engagement in mission was stressed, as well as the inclusive understanding of mission expressed in the Anglican Communion's "five marks of mission" and its theological grounding in the widely accepted idea of the *missio dei*. Such an understanding coheres well with the presentation of mission in *TCTCV*. Pentecostal participants could also affirm that mission belongs to God and not to any particular church. They might also want to say that because of that, we should not seek to control it too closely or overdo strategy and organization.

11. While Pentecostals are, like Anglicans, concerned with care for the needy, social justice and the well-being of creation, there would be differing emphases as to how this relates to "mission." Some, for instance, would want to stress very strongly the primacy of evangelism and discipleship in mission, as indeed would some Anglicans. Expectations of the imminent return of the Lord help to generate a powerful sense of urgency for Pentecostal Christians regarding the task of sharing the gospel. Pentecostal evangelism flows from an experience of the living God and seeks to invite others to experience God for themselves. *TCTCV* seemed to be rather weak on this, and also on sin, evil, atonement and spiritual warfare – points affirmed by some Anglican participants as well.

12. At various points, questions about *theological method* were raised. A number of Pentecostal participants urged that we begin with relevant passages from the Bible rather than from the kind of theological synthesis found in *TCTCV*. There was also concern that theological dialogue be grounded both in relationships of fellowship, hospitality and prayer and in common action for the sake of the kingdom of God.

13. Serious reservations were expressed by some present about what it might mean to invite Pentecostal churches to participate in theological dialogue based on the model of seeking "convergence," as proposed by *TCTCV*. There was concern about the possibility of apparent agreement coming only at the price of trading on the ambiguity of key terms, and about the scope for lack

of honesty in that regard. There was also a wish to ensure that serious disagreement is actually faced: one set of participants in theological dialogue may want to tell another that they believe them to be mistaken about fundamental Christian teaching and therefore urge them to reconsider their views. Dialogue needs to have space for that to happen and for such a message to be received with respect.

14. Some very positive stories of *partnership in action* were shared, by both Pentecostal and Anglican participants. There are sometimes significant barriers still to be overcome in bringing together historic denominations (and the structures they have developed) with Pentecostal churches; and participants wanted to be realistic about the challenges here. Nonetheless, through giving time to the building up of relations between church leaders to establish trust, and through identifying concrete projects for collaboration that express common purpose, partnership can flourish. One participant also wanted to stress alongside these things the importance of praying together, of passionate commitment to serving the local community and of acknowledging and respecting differences.

15. A number of possible areas of exploration for *deepening partnership* were considered. Could the “mixed economy” of mission in the Church of England include scope for sharing resources (including buildings) with Pentecostals seeking to plant new churches? Pastoral care was suggested as another area where sharing in ministry could be very beneficial. Many Anglican churches continue to have a strong focus on serving the whole

community in their parish – a focus that may in fact be shared with a local Pentecostal church, as noted above. Sharing church buildings is a practical way of supporting one another, yet it was also agreed that such arrangements do not necessarily lead to relationships of fellowship between the congregations involved.¹

Conclusion

16. As noted above, at the start of the consultation, three questions were raised:

- (i) How useful is the document for Anglicans and Pentecostals seeking to grow closer together?
- (ii) How do we bring together focus on practical collaboration and attention to theological issues?
- (iii) Do we have a “common vision” of the Church, and how much does it matter?

At the end of discussions, it was suggested that regarding (i), the document helped to raise important questions, but probably did not provide the best framework for answering them. As *TCTCV* begins with the theology of mission, so Anglicans and Pentecostals perhaps need to start by working on where they agree in this area, where they disagree, and where they have different terminology and frameworks of reference that may make it hard to know whether they actually disagree or not. On (ii), the need for theological work

1. There are useful guidelines for good practice on the Church of England website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/resources/sharing-church-buildings.aspx>.

to be grounded in secure relations and partnership in the gospel had emerged strongly during the day. So far as (iii) was concerned, more conversation would be required before a clear answer could be given, but a common vision was most likely to be found through prayerful study of the scriptures together, while apparently contrary theological instincts around the oneness/unity of the Church would need to be squarely faced.

17. The consultation made space for a wide range of views to be expressed and heard with respect. It raised a number of important issues for further consideration and possibilities for growth in relations. There was a strong sense of the importance of encouraging and sustaining the conversations that are happening at all kinds of levels between the Church of England and the Pentecostal family of churches,² for the sake of God's mission in our land.

2. It is worthy of note that Pentecostalism and Charismaticism are heterogeneous and this consultation consisted of the Church of England on the one hand, and on the other, several umbrella or ecumenical bodies themselves consisting of many different Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and organizations.

This publication and its companion volume collect the responses received to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* between 2013 and 2020. The responses address the Church's mission, unity, and its being in the Trinitarian life of God in order to encourage and advance the churches' growth in communion with each other in apostolic faith, sacramental life, mission, and ministry for the sake of God's world.

These responses are of great importance, not only because they test the points of convergence and of difference identified in *TCTCV* but also because they express the interests and concerns of many member churches and ecclesial bodies engaging in the work for Christian unity. They also provide invaluable insight and guidance for future work on ecclesiology.



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