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Reconciling Ecclesiologies?

Protestant and Ecumenical Perspectives

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Abbreviations

1. Common Understanding of the Church?

“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church”. Many Christian traditions¹ worldwide confess their faith with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, which the quoted sentence is taken from. This creed has united Christians for many centuries and is regarded as common basis of Christian faith. However, all believers do not always share a common idea on what oneness, holiness, apostolicity or catholicity mean, and do not in any case identify other traditions to be included in the “we” of the creed. What can Christians share and what impedes a common understanding of the Church?

Two official documents published in the last twenty years can help us clarify the different understandings of the Church. This task is very challenging, as ecclesiology in an ecumenical context is regarded to be “delicate and sensitive”² and is also considered to be “the fundamental problem not only for ecumenism, but also for social ethics, missiology, globalization, renewal, sacramental theology, spirituality.”³ The two texts try not only to define the Church, but also seek to demarcate which ecclesial elements are indispensable and to identify the role of the Church in today’s society. The two texts share another point in common: Both were authored by a confessionally mixed group and formulate a common ecclesiological statement by bringing different traditions together. In addition, both texts intend to serve as a model for the continuing work towards Church unity and proclaim to have at least an ecumenical impact on other churches.

The first text, “The Church of Jesus Christ” (hereafter TCOJC) was published in 1994 by the *Leuenberg Church Fellowship*, which became the *Community of Protestant Churches in Europe* (CPCE) in 2003. The CPCE is a communion of European Reformed, Lutheran and United churches, related pre-Reformation churches like Waldensians and Czech Brethren, seven Methodist churches (since 2007) as well as five South-American churches. According to the *Leuenberg Agreement* (1973), they share a common pulpit and table fellowship.⁴ TCOJC is consequently the result of an

¹ As some churches do not identify themselves as *denomination*, this term is not used in this paper.

² Sauca, *The Church beyond our boundaries*, 211.

³ Bria, *Widening the Ecclesiological Basis*, 201.

⁴ On 1st October 1974, 49 churches joined the Agreement, today more than one hundred Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed and United churches are part of the *Leuenberg Church Fellowship*. The churches are from over thirty countries in Europe and South America. Three Scandinavian Lutheran churches, as well as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, participate in the work of the CPCE, but have not

inner-protestant discussion. The declaration wants to demonstrate the contribution of Reformation churches to the ecumenical dialogue on Church unity⁵ and intends to have an impact not only on Protestant churches, but on the whole Church of Jesus Christ.⁶

The other text “The Church: Towards a Common Vision” (hereafter TCTCV) was received by the central committee of the World Council of Churches (hereafter WCC) in 2012 and published in 2013. The WCC defines itself as a “fellowship of churches”⁷ and must clearly be distinguished from being a Church. Currently, the WCC is comprised of 348 member churches. TCTCV is therefore a multilateral text, which brings together not only Lutheran and Reformed, but also, amongst others, Orthodox, Anglican, Evangelical and Pentecostal understandings. The Roman Catholic Church does not belong to the WCC, but sends twelve delegates to the *Faith and Order* Commission, which worked on TCTCV.

The diversity across the participating confessions contributing to the two documents makes the task of reconciling their ecclesiologies very difficult: In TCOJC, different traditions already belong to one “church family” and share the common background of Reformation theology despite all differences. The participating churches achieved an inner-protestant statement without regard for the “problems” that non-Reformation-churches could have in joining such an agreement. In regard to TCTCV, the situation is more complex. The common basis of the WCC (see footnote 7) includes Trinitarian and Christological aspects, but does not presume any agreement about the Church. This illustrates the difficulties of finding common ecclesiological agreements in a multilateral ecumenical context.⁸ The Toronto Statement published by the WCC in 1950, “The Church, the churches and the World Council of Churches”, therefore demonstrates ecclesiological neutrality:⁹ Membership in the WCC does not require

signed the *Leuenberg Agreement* (<http://www.leuenberg.net/node/873> [30.12.2013]; cf. Zeddies, *Wie die Leuenberger Konkordie entstand*, 15; cf. Weber: *Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft*, 177.).

⁵ Cf. Subtitle of the document: “The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity”. However, the content of the document is much wider, also discussing the nature of the Church in general and the task in today’s society.

⁶ Cf. TCOJC, Preface.

⁷ The WCC defines itself as “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us> (28.12.2013).

⁸ Cf. also Henn, *Catholics, Ecclesiology and the Ecumenical Journey*, 334.

⁹ “The World Council cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the Church. It does not prejudge the ecclesiological problem” (III.3).

recognition of the others as churches.¹⁰ In fact, the ecclesiological understandings of the member churches are divergent, and mutual recognition as Church is not always ensured. One challenge for crafting an ecumenical ecclesiological “*Faith and Order* text” is also the participation of the Roman Catholic Church. Due to its self-understanding as the “catholic Church” (in the sense of universal), the Roman Catholic Church does not belong to the WCC as “fellowship of churches”, claiming that the Church “subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.”¹¹ This is the Roman Catholic Church. How can this perspective be integrated into an ecumenical document that includes Orthodox, Anglican, mainline Protestant and free church influences? And is such a document ultimately compatible with the understanding of the Church within the various traditions?

After a short introduction into each of the declarations (2), the foundation, shape and mission of the nature and unity of the Church¹² will be examined and compared (3) in order to identify clearly common points and differences within Protestantism and in a multilateral understanding of the Church. The potential models and conceptions of ecumenism and unity appear indirectly in these documents and through the applied methods (4). Finally, the fifth chapter will enumerate some challenges and will raise various open questions about the ecumenical future (5). The conclusion will search for possible ways to reconcile these ecclesiologies (6).

¹⁰ “Membership in the World Council of Churches does not imply that a church treats its own conception of the Church as merely relative” (III.4); “Membership in the World Council does not imply the acceptance of a specific doctrine concerning the nature of Church unity” (III.5).

¹¹ Cf. LG 8: *Haec Ecclesia, in hoc mundo ut societas constituta et ordinata, subsistit in Ecclesia catholica, a successore Petri et Episcopis in eius communione gubernata [...]*.

¹² The issues of nature and the unity of the Church are closely related and cannot be seen separately.

2. “The Church of Jesus Christ” and “The Church: Towards a Common Vision”: An Overview

2.1. “The Church of Jesus Christ”

A common understanding of the gospel, particularly the doctrine of justification, is the key to common table and pulpit fellowship in TCOJC, without concern to resolve all other points of disagreement. The text is based on the *Leuenberg Agreement*¹³ and draws the ecclesiological consequences from this concord. The work on this text began after the third conference of the churches participating in the *Leuenberg Agreement* (Strasbourg, 1987). It is the first common reflection on the Church presented by the European churches of the Reformation.

The introduction describes the challenges of the churches in a situation of “cultural, national and religious pluralism”¹⁴ and names specific contributions of the churches to life in an increasingly secularized society,¹⁵ where indifference towards the Church is on the rise. Due to the growing awareness “that towards the end of the 20th century the Christian churches can only tackle their tasks together,”¹⁶ the churches of the *Leuenberg Fellowship* considered their cooperation as a starting point for bringing together different traditions, doctrines, histories, and forms of piety.

The declaration is composed of three main chapters. The first chapter “The Nature of the Church as the Community of Saints,” defines the Church as the community of saints,¹⁷ a community of sinful and mortal sinners who are justified by God’s grace. The message of justification and God’s call to faith (Church as *creatura verbi*) strongly characterize the foundation, shape and mission of the Church – three ecclesiological core aspects. Long passages on the shape of the Church discuss *inter alia* questions about ministry. The chapter concludes with a passage about the eschatological hope of the Church.

The second chapter “The Community of Saints in Today’s Society,” describes contemporary pluralistic society and the lack of a fundamental consensus on religious questions. The role of the Church in these such pluralistic societies is e.g. to confess the faith, to provide pastoral care, to counsel other churches, to give space to a kind of

¹³ Cf. TCOJC, Introduction, 1.4.

¹⁴ TCOJC, Introduction, 1.1.

¹⁵ Cf. TCOJC, Introduction, 1.2.

¹⁶ TCOJC, Introduction, 1.3.

¹⁷ Cf. TCOJC, I.

prophetic criticism, but also to live in dialogue with other religions and worldviews. The importance of dialogue with the Jewish tradition is very much emphasized in reaction to the history of Europe.

The third and final chapter discusses the unity and the unification of the Church. The protestant model of unity is fellowship in word and sacrament characterized by the common understanding of the gospel. In this model, the churches accord one another something that has already been given to them. Finally, the document tries to draw results for the worldwide *oikoumene* and asks whether the *Leuenberg Agreement* could be a generally accepted ecumenical model of unity.

2.2. “The Church: Towards a Common Vision”

After a long working process,¹⁸ the *Faith and Order* document was published in 2013 under the title *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. This second convergence document results from the process of the first convergence document (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* [Lima, 1982], hereafter BEM) as well as the ecclesiological questions raised in the study document *One Baptism: Towards mutual recognition* (2011).¹⁹ TCTCV has the same status as BEM.

This final document took the two previous versions (*The nature and purpose of the Church* [1998] and *The nature and mission of the Church* [2005]) and the responses and commentaries given by member churches into careful consideration.²⁰ It has been described as an “invaluable harvesting of the work of the past”²¹ and as an “extraordinary ecumenical achievement.”²² It was sent to the member churches of the WCC who will formulate an official response by December 2015 (as they did in 1982).²³ The text aims to formulate a common statement on the nature of the Church in four chapters.

¹⁸ The process which led to TCTCV as well as the results of different conferences and assemblies of *Faith and Order* and the WCC are described in the attachment to TCTCV (TCTCV, 41-46). It is interesting that work concerning ecclesiology has always been one of the main subjects in the studies of *Faith and Order*: By the first conference in 1927, the “Nature of the Church”, more precisely the relation between the one Church and many concrete historical churches, had been discussed.

¹⁹ Cf. TCTCV, viii.

²⁰ Cf. TCTCV, ix.

²¹ Tanner, *Ground breaking*, 332; cf. also Shastri, *The Future of the Nature and Mission of the Church*, 153.

²² TCTCV, viii.

²³ These answers have been published in six volumes “Churches respond to BEM”.

The first chapter “God’s mission and the Unity of the Church” aims to open a “horizon of meaning”.²⁴ The concept of the Church is rooted in God’s design for all creation,²⁵ in the history of the restored *koinonia* of sinful humans with God, and in God’s Trinitarian engagement in the world.²⁶ The Church has the task and the mandate to participate in God’s mission in the world.

The second chapter “The Church of the Triune God” locates the origin of the Church in the *koinonia* of the Triune God. This concept intends to combine unity and diversity in order to relate to the non-monolithic character of Christianity. The chapter describes, *inter alia*, some biblical images of the Church.

The third and most controversial chapter “The Church: Growing in Communion” describes the Church’s movement towards unity as a “pilgrim community”.²⁷ By summarizing some of its achievements towards a shared understanding of faith, sacraments and ministry, this chapter seeks to formulate a common conception of the ministry and authority of the Church. The points of disagreement are to be seen in light of the common origin and foundation of the Church as described in the first two chapters.

The final chapter “The Church: In and for the World” describes the task of the Church in the world mainly in terms of its *diakonia* and mission. This task includes the dialogue with other religions and the need for an ecumenical response to religious pluralism.²⁸ The conclusion offers a short summary and illustrates some ecumenical implications.

3. The Foundation, Shape and Mission of the Church

In order to identify the common points and discrepancies between these documents, it is helpful to analyze them on the basis of their conceptualization of the foundation, shape and mission of the Church.²⁹

²⁴ Mateus, *Introduction to the Reading of “The Church: Towards a Common Vision”*, point 6 (unpublished).

²⁵ Cf. TCTCV, I.A.1.

²⁶ Cf. TCTCV, I.A.2 and 3.

²⁷ TCTCV, III.A.35.

²⁸ Cf. TCTCV, IV.A.58-60.

²⁹ This structure is certainly influenced by a Protestant background. The question of whether or not this distinction is a valid one for all churches is further discussed below in 4.1.

3.1. Foundation of the Church

3.1.1. Christological and Trinitarian Emphases

Both documents affirm a divine foundation of the Church. However, the foci of the documents are slightly different. While TCTCV describes the Church basically as the “Church of the Triune God”³⁰ and focuses on the restoration of *koinonia* by explaining the history of salvation, TCOJC stresses mainly the Christological basis of the Church and the justification by grace alone. This is already visible in the title of the document “The Church of Jesus Christ”.

TCTCV claims that the diverse Christian traditions share the idea of the initiative of the Triune God in the world – one could say that the text explains the *opera trinitatis ad extra*: God sends the Son and the Spirit to reconcile the world to himself and to reestablish the *koinonia* with the world.³¹ The Trinity’s redemptive activity is indispensable for the concept of the Church³² because this reestablished *koinonia* then should be manifested by the unity in faith, in sacramental life and in service.³³ In these points, the Church on earth is both divine and human.³⁴ In its sacramental life, e.g. in the Eucharist, the Christological foundation of the Church becomes visible.

According to TCOJC, the Church is the community³⁵ of saints (*congregatio sanctorum*). The saints are the sinful and mortal Christians coming together to receive the justifying grace of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Triune God is the one who acts and justifies³⁶ by means of Jesus Christ who became human, was crucified, risen and will come at the end as judge and savior.³⁷ According to the *Leuenberg Agreement*, the “Church is founded upon Jesus Christ alone.”³⁸

Although these two descriptions of the foundation of the Church have different emphases, these concepts do not divide churches. In both documents, the Triune God acts by sending the Son and the Spirit. TCTCV mentions the Protestant concept of the Church as *creatura evangelii*³⁹ as one possible point of view. It adds then to this concept

³⁰ Cf. Name of the first and second chapter.

³¹ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.13.

³² Cf. TCTCV, I.A.3.

³³ Cf. TCTCV, Conclusion, 67.

³⁴ Cf. TCTCV, II. B.23.

³⁵ It is noteworthy that the document does not use the term *communio*.

³⁶ Cf. TCOJC, I.1.1./I.1.2./I.2.3.

³⁷ Cf. TCOJC, I.1.1.

³⁸ LA 2; Larentzakis is afraid of a certain "christomonism" (Larentzakis, *Ekklesiologie in der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft: Bemerkungen aus orthodoxer Sicht*, 97).

³⁹ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.14; *Ecclesia enim est creatura Evangelii* (cf. WA 2, 430, 6-7). The expressions *creatura evangelii* and *creatura verbi* express the same idea; cf. also TCOJC, I.1.1.

a Trinitarian perspective,⁴⁰ probably influenced by Orthodox and Roman Catholic theology (mainly post-*Vatican II*).⁴¹ The different foci become visible also in the divergent usage of the term *koinonia*: TCTCV uses this term very often to express the *communio* with God and amongst Christians.⁴² However, TCOJC regularly uses the term *fellowship*,⁴³ another possible translation for *koinonia*, while *koinonia* is clearly related to the life in community, one aspect of church life together with *leiturgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*.⁴⁴

3.1.2. The Sources of Ecclesiology

a) The Biblical Foundation of Ecclesiology

Both texts search for a biblical basis for their ecclesiologies.⁴⁵ This is not easy because the Bible does not present a clear, systematic ecclesiological theology. Instead, it mainly uses metaphors, stories, examples or the calling of and demands to the disciples to describe the Church. Here, only one example can be mentioned. Both documents refer to the metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:27)⁴⁶ with Christ as the head of the body (cf. Col 1:18; Eph 4:15). Both documents approach this metaphor differently and draw different consequences from it.

TCTCV seeks to explain how human beings can become members of the body. In the understanding of most traditions, this happens by the rites or sacraments of initiation. The Eucharist renews one's participation in this body (cf. 1 Cor 10:16). TCTCV uses this metaphor mainly to emphasize *koinonia* as participation in this body, the Church. In order to find a convergence with all traditions, the document also mentions the importance of faith: "Faith in Christ is fundamental to membership of the body".⁴⁷

⁴⁰It is interesting to compare this coming together of different foci with the enlargement of the basic formula of the WCC in New Delhi (1961): Some Orthodox churches joined the WCC. Under their influence the until then christocentric self-definition was enlarged amongst others by a Trinitarian doxological addition: "To the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit"; cf. Theurer, *Die trinitarische Basis*, 9; cf. footnote 7.

⁴¹ E.g.: In the pre-conciliar encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943) the mystical body of Christ is equated with the Roman Catholic Church.

⁴² *Lumen Gentium* for example frequently uses the term *communio*, one possible translation of the Greek term *koinonia*.

⁴³ E.g. TCOJC, I.1.3./III.1.1./III.2.1./III.2.2./III.2.3.

⁴⁴ Cf. TCOJC, I.3.3.4.

⁴⁵ E.g. TCTCV, II.A.11 et seq.; TCOJC, I.2.1. TCOJC starts even its preface by quoting 1 Cor 12 :12-13 (cf. TCTCV, vii.).

⁴⁶ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.21; TCTCV, vii.; TCOJC, I.2.1.

⁴⁷ TCTCV, II.B.21.

TCOJC, on the other hand, uses the body-head metaphor to describe first of all the dependence of the Church on Jesus Christ and secondly the various relations between the members of this body. Every member contributes equally to the functioning of this body. Here, TCOJC finds a biblical foundation for the priesthood of all believers.

Although the two documents analyze the biblical text differently and focus on different aspects, these varying interpretations do not impede the communion of churches but can be enriching for other traditions as well.

b) The Role of Tradition

Since the Bible does not contain a systematic ecclesiology, the Church started creating ecclesiological theories from the early beginning on. Until today, in many traditions Tradition plays an important role, especially in certain questions concerning the ministry in the Church.⁴⁸ The authors of TCOJC postponed the work on the issue of “Holy Scripture and Tradition”.⁴⁹ Therefore, TCOJC lacks any explicit reference to the importance of Tradition. This topic seems not to have been necessarily taken into consideration by an inner-protestant dialogue commission on ecclesiology.⁵⁰ TCTCV, however, has to deal with this topic. It reflects how the majority of Christian communities accept the importance of Tradition but on the other hand have diverging views about how Tradition relates to scripture.⁵¹ As a result, the document calls into question e.g. the issue of continuity and change in the Church and its relation to God’s will.⁵² The issue of *Scripture and Tradition* is always on ecumenical agendas. It is clear that TCTCV necessarily has to deal with this topic, while the inner-protestant document (TCOJC) can neglect it.

⁴⁸ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.45/III.B.46. Tradition can also be understood in a very broad sense. TCTCV names various sources of authority, such as Scripture, Tradition, worship, councils, synods, the life of the saints, witness of monasticism, but also ecumenical dialogues and common statements of faith (cf. TCTCV, III.B.50).

⁴⁹ Cf. TCOJC, Preface.

⁵⁰ The document does include, however, references to the writings of Martin Luther and to Lutheran or Reformed confessions (e.g. the *Confessio Augustana*, *The Smalcald Articles*, *Luther’s Large Catechism*, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, *Confessio Bohemica*, *Barmen Declaration*); e.g. TCOJC, I./I.1.3./I.2.4.2./I.2.5.1.1.

⁵¹ Cf. TCTCV, II.A.11.

⁵² Cf. TCTCV, II.B.22 (in italics).

3.1.3. The Four Classical *notae ecclesiae*

TCTCV and TCOJC mention the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.⁵³ The distinction between the foundation and shape of the Church is not always obvious here: These attributes are given to the Church by God and are rooted in the foundation of the Church. On the other hand, the churches are called to make them fully manifest in their local life. The *notae ecclesiae* (see 3.1.3.) could therefore also be described by the heading of “Shape of the Church”.

a) Oneness of the Church

Both documents approach the “oneness” of the Church not as something to be achieved (or destroyed) by the churches themselves, but as a gift of God. The Church is one because the Triune God who founded the Church is one.⁵⁴ TCTCV conceptualizes the Church of the Triune God in terms of *koinonia*, such that the Church represents the divine unity in all its diversity on earth.⁵⁵ In TCOJC, unity is understood to be the result of God’s saving action as justification by grace alone. The Church receives what God gives and therefore receives its oneness as a gift of God.⁵⁶ The willingness to accept Christians from other confessions at the table of the Lord’s Supper is one expression of this given and received unity.⁵⁷ On this basis, the *Leuenberg Agreement* has chosen the verb *accord*: Churches “with different confessional positions accord each other fellowship in word and sacrament [...]”⁵⁸ They cannot give or confer each other something as if made by themselves, but have to recognize the justifying action of God in other communities.

b) Holiness of the Church

Both documents address the topic of holiness and failure of the Church. TCTCV and TCOJC affirm that the Church is holy because of its divine origin.⁵⁹

Although the relation between the holiness of the Church and human sinfulness is often seen as a point of ecumenical controversy, TCTCV highlights the “deep, commonly-held convictions”⁶⁰ underlying the disagreements. The document describes first

⁵³ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.3; TCTCV, II.B.22-24.

⁵⁴ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.3.

⁵⁵ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.

⁵⁶ Cf. TCOJC, III.1.2.

⁵⁷ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.4.

⁵⁸ LA 29.

⁵⁹ TCTCV, II.B.22; TCOJC, I.2.3.

⁶⁰ TCTCV, III.A.35.

divergent perspectives and seeks then to determine a common understanding: some Christians argue that the Church cannot sin, while others assert that the Church is sinning, even though this contradicts God's will. Because the Church is still on its way to the full realization of the kingdom of God,⁶¹ sin remains part of the Church. The holiness of the Church resides in Christ's final victory over sin, but at the same time repentance, renewal, reform and conversion (*metanoia*) remain necessary.⁶²

TCOJC also stresses the holiness of the Church. But quoting Martin Luther, TCOJC describes the Church as the "greatest sinner",⁶³ which cannot be infallible or holy by its own power.⁶⁴ Luther's famous dictum *simul iustus et peccator* applies not only to the individual Christian but also to the Church as the community of justified sinners who have received God's gift of holiness. The Church is always on its way to become the true eschatological Church. It is the *ecclesia semper reformanda*.⁶⁵ Protestant churches live in the hope that one day, the inconsistency between the holiness of the Church in its foundation and its shape will no longer exist and that Jesus Christ will not only judge the Church but also redeem and save it.⁶⁶

Concerning the issue of the holiness of the Church, many common points can be found. But the question of whether the Church is able to sin remains unresolved. The perspectives of the two documents diverge because the assertion that the Church is the "greatest sinner" remains a point of contestation.⁶⁷ These divergent understandings stem from biblical interpretation: Some Christians believe that 2 Cor 5:10⁶⁸ or 1 Tm 1:15⁶⁹ are not related to the Church as a whole, but to individual Christians only.⁷⁰

⁶¹ Cf. TCTCV, III.A.33.

⁶² Cf. TCTCV, II.B.22/III.A.36.

⁶³ TCOJC, Preface/I.2.3; *Non est tam magna peccatrix ut Christiana ecclesia* (WA 34 I, 276, 7-13).

⁶⁴ Cf. also Beintker, *The Study "The Church of Jesus Christ" from the Protestant point of view*, 79.

⁶⁵ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.4.

⁶⁶ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.4; cf. TCOJC, I.4.

⁶⁷ Cf. Larentzakis, *Ekklesiologie in der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft: Bemerkungen aus orthodoxer Sicht*, 95.

⁶⁸ "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body."

⁶⁹ "And I am the foremost of sinners."

⁷⁰ Cf. Davie, *The Church of Jesus Christ. An Anglican response*, 79.

c) Catholicity of the Church

Both documents agree that the Church cannot be limited by human communities, because God's mission transcends all barriers.⁷¹ The Church also transcends space and time, but even more, the Church is not bound by confessional confines. The term "catholicity" does not refer exclusively to the geographical extension of the Church. Rather, TCTCV quotes Cyril of Jerusalem as asserting that the "variety of local churches" participate in the fullness of faith and life that unites them in the one *koinonia*.⁷² The Church is catholic when the mystery of Christ is present.⁷³

When the geographical notion comes together with the view of the Church as "participation in the fullness of Christ", individual churches can learn from the diverse foci and viewpoints on catholicity within other traditions. This sheds light on the common understanding of catholicity as a gift that can now be experienced in the life of the Christian communities on earth.

d) Apostolicity of the Church

The Apostolicity of the Church is a point of agreement in both documents,⁷⁴ but precisely how this term is to be understood is not.

According to TCOJC, apostolicity is associated with a relation to the gospel. Apostolic succession means the perpetual return to the apostolic witness.⁷⁵ The *successio fidelium* becomes reality in the Church by the work of the Holy Spirit who authenticates the message as truth.⁷⁶ This *successio fidelium* is also the condition for each *successio ordinis* (succession in the ordered ministry).⁷⁷ The *successio ordinis*, in the sense of an episcopal succession, is neither excluded nor mandatory. It is important to know that the continuity of the episcopal ministry can never be a warranty for apostolicity.

⁷¹ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.22/II.E.32; TCOJC, I.2.3/I.2.5.4; cf. also Larentzakis, *Ekklesiologie in der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft: Bemerkungen aus orthodoxer Sicht*, 95; Wenz, *Kirchengemeinschaft nach evangelischem Verständnis*, 61.

⁷² Cf. TCTCV, II.E.31.

⁷³ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.22.

⁷⁴ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.22; TCOJCI.2.3.

⁷⁵ TCOJC, I.2.3.

⁷⁶ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.3.

⁷⁷ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.3.

TCTCV also claims that the community should be faithful to the apostolic origins⁷⁸ and remain steadfast in the teachings of the apostles.⁷⁹ Apostolicity is conferred by Christological mission: The Son was *sent* to establish the Church and the Son then *sent* apostles and prophets. TCTCV also recognizes the distinction between the *apostolic faith/Tradition*⁸⁰ and *apostolic succession* in ministry, and clarifies the relationship to apostolicity in the broader sense by introducing the idea of an apostolic succession in ministry: “Apostolic succession in ministry, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church.”⁸¹ Apostolic succession in ministry is therefore one possible part of the broader understanding of apostolicity. The wording is chosen very carefully. The verb “intend” calms all who want to make clear that apostolic succession in ministry does not automatically imply apostolicity in a broader sense. For example, the Orthodox Church views the laying on of hands as a visible sign, but this sign does not automatically guarantee apostolic succession, because every apostolic succession has to be within the teachings of the Church.⁸²

Both documents approach apostolic succession in general as a part of apostolicity. However, while the notion of apostolicity is not very controversial in the inner-Protestant document, TCTCV deals with diverse ideas about how apostolic succession in ministry relates apostolicity in a wide understanding. A full consensus on apostolicity has not (yet?) been reached.

3.1.4. Conclusion

Many commonalities exist between the two approaches to the foundation of the Church. A different emphasis on the Trinitarian or Christological basis of the Church can be enriching for the churches and is not Church-dividing. Both documents base their ecclesiological reflection on biblical exegesis. The divergent importance of Tradition can thus lead to divergent ecclesiological understandings. In both statements, the churches share the *notae ecclesiae* and receive oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. However, some different understandings remain concerning mainly the holiness and the apostolicity of the Church. Even if these issues are in themselves not divisive, they are closely linked to conceptions about the shape of the Church,

⁷⁸ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.22.

⁷⁹ TCTCV, III.B.38.

⁸⁰ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.22; II.E.31; III.B.37; III.B.52; III.B.53.

⁸¹ TCTCV, II.B.22; cf. also III.B.46.

⁸² Cf. Larentzakis, *Ekklesiologie in der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft: Bemerkungen aus orthodoxer Sicht*, 95 et seq.

especially with regards to sacrament and ministry. These are divisive issues that threaten Church unity. They will be considered in the next section.

3.2. Shape of the Church

3.2.1. Priesthood of all Believers and Ordained Ministry

TCTCV and TCOJC describe a broad approach to ministry. They do not limit ministry to ordination, but acknowledge a general priesthood of all believers⁸³ or a royal priesthood for all.⁸⁴ TCTCV quotes 1 Pt 2:9-10 that the Church is a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” and draws the conclusion that all believers are living sacrifices that should be holy and acceptable to God (cf. Rom 12:1). Therefore, all people are called to be prophetic, as well as priestly and royal. On this basis, all churches can serve the Church in a variety of forms.⁸⁵ While both documents emphasize the necessity of a special ministry and ordination, they argue differently due to the different traditions which participate in the agreements.

TCTCV argues that some believers are given a special authority and responsibility by the Holy Spirit in order to remind the community of its dependence on Jesus Christ.⁸⁶ In Mt 28, Christ called the Church to a ministry of word, sacrament and oversight. This triple function can equip the Church for service to the world.⁸⁷ While the churches agree that Jesus is the high priest who gave his sacrifice once and for all (Heb 10:8),⁸⁸ they draw different implications from these biblical texts:⁸⁹ Some of the disagreements have to do with whether ordained ministers have a priestly function, and if so, whether this constitutes a “special relationship with the unique priesthood of Christ.”⁹⁰ Further questions are whether ordination can be a sacrament, whether women should be ordained or whether the threefold ministry is necessary. The approaches to these issues are highly diverse. It appears unlikely that an easy consensus will be found.

⁸³ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.1.1.; cf. Tampere-Thesis n°2. The “Tampere Theses” (*Theses on the Discussion of the Ministry Today*) were prepared in 1987 in Strasbourg in order to find an ecumenical consensus concerning ministry.

⁸⁴ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.17-18.

⁸⁵ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.18.

⁸⁶ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.19; cf. also BEM, Ministry § 8.

⁸⁷ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.20.

⁸⁸ TCTCV, III.B.45.

⁸⁹ The Bible does not state very clearly what ministry in the Church should look like. Therefore, many different opinions exist; cf. TCTCV, III.B.46.

⁹⁰ TCTCV, III.B.45; cf. also BEM, Ministry §17.

In TCOJC, the questions about ordained ministry are also approached as questions concerning the nature of the Church.⁹¹ This document stresses first of all the “ordered ministry”⁹² based on the universal priesthood of all believers.⁹³ TCOJC quotes the second thesis of Tampere and asserts that some trained members of the congregations are specially chosen and ordained.⁹⁴ The ordained persons fulfill a particular mission of Christ, namely the task of the *ministerium verbi*,⁹⁵ viz. to teach the gospel and to administer the sacraments in the midst of the whole congregation of believers. Differences regarding ministry between Lutheran and Reformed Churches can be accepted,⁹⁶ thanks to the common view of the teaching of the gospel. All the questions on ministry are subordinate to the gospel.

It is noteworthy that TCOJC does not speak about the ordination of women. One possible explanation for this omission could be that the ordination of women is nearly commonplace and without controversy in Europe.⁹⁷ TCTCV acknowledges disagreement between member churches on women’s ordination in only one sentence: Christians disagree “over the traditional restriction of ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament to men only.”⁹⁸ The only justification for this restriction named explicitly in the document is Tradition. However, this restriction should be read in light of the previous passage concerning the priestly function of ordained priests. Some traditions allow only males to be priests because Christ was male and the priest acts *in persona Christi*. Here, it would have been enriching to explain the different reasons in more detail e.g. that – according to Kallistos Ware – throughout the *anaphora* in the Byzantine Rite, the priest does not speak *in persona Christi*, but *in persona ecclesiae*, who is female.⁹⁹ It would also have been desirable to set the issue of women’s ordination on the ecumenical agenda.¹⁰⁰

⁹¹ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.1.1; cf. also the *rite vocatus* (CA XIV).

⁹² According to Birmelé, the term “ordered ministry” is preferable to “ordained ministry” to make clear that it is not the ministry that is ordained, but the person exercising this ministry. The ministry is “ordered” by Jesus Christ (cf. Birmelé, *Zur Ekklesiologie der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft*, 8). The two terms are both used in TCOJC and mean different things. Below I.2.5.1.2. (“Implications of the Tampere Theses”), TCOJC explains that the ministry confessed through ordination is part of the “ordered” ministry, which is exercised by all believers and refers to the totality of ministries.

⁹³ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.1.

⁹⁴ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.1.1: Tampere Thesis n°2.

⁹⁵ CA V.

⁹⁶ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.1.1: Tampere Thesis n°1.

⁹⁷ *Gender Justice Policy*, 17.

⁹⁸ TCTCV, III.B.45. BEM devotes two little paragraphs to the topic of ministry of men and women in the Church (BEM, Ministry, § 18; §54).

⁹⁹ Cf. Ware, *Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Hietamäki, *Walking together in a House of Mirrors*, 347.

To conclude, in both documents the necessity of an ordered and ordained ministry is not questioned. However, problems appear in defining the shape of this ministry: namely what ministry should look like, who can be ordained, and how ordained ministry relates to the ministry of the congregation as a whole.

3.2.2. Threefold Ministry and *episcopé*

The questions about ordained ministry and *episcopé* are the most difficult and challenging ones in these documents. This has not changed since the *Lima Declaration* (BEM, 1982)¹⁰¹ which constitutes one base for TCTCV.

According to TCTCV, the threefold ministry roots in the New Testament but is not understandable without Tradition.¹⁰² TCTCV quotes Ignatius of Antioch, who insists on this pattern of threefold ministry very early on. Almost all Christian churches share a formal ministerial structure, most of them more or less explicitly the threefold system of *episkopos – presbyteros – diakonos*.¹⁰³ But many remain divided on the question if the “historical episcopate” and the “apostolic succession of ordained ministry” are mandatory.¹⁰⁴ TCTCV cites and endorses an earlier statement of BEM which claims that the threefold ministry “may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.”¹⁰⁵ BEM does not require episcopal succession within all traditions, but recognizes that episcopal succession could be a means to “strengthen and deepen that continuity”.¹⁰⁶ TCTCV asks the WCC member churches to consider whether the threefold ministry could be part of God’s will for the Church and whether it could also be a means of realizing unity.¹⁰⁷ TCTCV does not name concrete suggestions as some ecumenical gatherings have: The Fifth Conference of *Faith and Order* in Santiago de Compostela (*On the way to full koinonia*, 1993), recommended the “participation by churches in each other’s ordinations [...] whether

¹⁰¹ Cf. Link, *The Lima Process*, 352; cf. TCTCV, III.B.37.

¹⁰² Cf. TCTCV, III.B.46.

¹⁰³ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.47.

¹⁰⁴ TCTCV, III.B.47.

¹⁰⁵ BEM, Ministry §22; TCTCV II.B.47. Probably, these passages will be criticized in the answers of the churches. Cf. for example the criticism of Ulrich Körtner concerning the part about ministry in BEM (Körtner, *Wohin steuert die Ökumene*, 196-201).

¹⁰⁶ BEM, Ministry, §53b.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.47 (in italics). According to Körtner, the acceptance of the threefold ministry in the churches of the Reformation would contradict the basic statements of Protestant theology (cf. Körtner, *Wohin steuert die Ökumene?*.197.

by simple attendance or by common prayer, or even in the imposition of hands.”¹⁰⁸ However, it is unlikely that all traditions will accept the threefold ministry as a path to unity.

TCOJC knows as well the task of Church leadership and connects “the task of leadership of the community” to the service of the word.¹⁰⁹ However, it views the task of *episcopé* (as church leadership) more broadly than the ministry of an *episcopus*: “The leadership of the congregation is also exercised through other ministries and does not only fall to the ordained ministry.”¹¹⁰ The Reformed and Lutheran churches also approach the ministry of the *episcopus* in distinct ways. Despite the differences between e.g. the majority of European Lutheran and Reformed churches and some Lutheran churches of Scandinavia, the episcopal question does not impede common fellowship of the churches belonging to the *Leuenberg Church Communion*, because they agree that “no single historically arisen form of Church leadership and ministerial structure can or may be laid down as a prior condition for fellowship and for mutual recognition”.¹¹¹ These different understandings of ministry do not call church fellowship in word and sacrament into question, because these differences pertain to the shape of the Church and not to its foundation.¹¹² Different – this should not be confused with arbitrary¹¹³ – forms of ministry can be accepted, precisely because the foundation of the Church is the origin of Christian freedom.¹¹⁴

In general terms, the documents do not question the necessity of *episcopé* in a broad sense. But each one gives a different relevance to the episcopal ministry in the narrow sense. In some churches, the episcopal and threefold ministry, as well as apostolic succession are necessary for the *esse* of the Church. Other traditions view these structures as belonging to the *bene esse* of the Church and consider them not mandatory. The Protestant emphasis on justification as a measure of all church life does not mean that the ministry is not an essential part of the church’s being. Rather, it has to be judged by the word of God. On this basis, TCTCV recommends very carefully the

¹⁰⁸ Santiago de Compostela, Report of Section III, 22, ii. A certain influence of the Porvoo-Declaration, signed in 1992, can be noticed.

¹⁰⁹ TCOJC, I.2.5.1.1.: Tampere Thesis n°3.

¹¹⁰ TCOJC, I.2.5.1.1.: Tampere Thesis n°3.

¹¹¹ TCOJCI.2.5.1.1: Tampere Thesis n° 3.

¹¹² Cf. TCOJC, 2.5.1.2. But there are also some critical voices concerning this distinction: Neumann, *Leuenberg als ökumenisches Modell?*, 186.

¹¹³ Cf. TCOJC, I; III.1.4; The consensus finds its expression in a legitimate diversity. It cannot be arbitrary because God’s justifying action gives the foundation and qualification (cf. also TCOJC, I.1.4.).

¹¹⁴ Cf. TCOJC, I.1.4.

ministry of an *episcopos* and the episcopal succession as a point of discernment, while TCOJC refers to the freedom of the churches in these vital questions.

3.2.3. Authority and Universal Ministry

TCOJC discusses neither the issue of authority nor a universal ministry. The multilateral document TCTCV, however, has to deal with this topic due to the very different understandings of authority amongst the WCC member churches.

The topic of *authority* can be controversial, and some traditions fear the hierarchical structures of some other churches. TCTCV, however, approaches authority as a gift in the service of the Church. The churches agree that all authority has to come from Jesus Christ, whose whole ministry was characterized by authority (*exousia*). He shared this authority with his apostles, his successors in ministry.¹¹⁵ Authority is then understood as a “humble service”, a *diakonia* of love that builds up the *koinonia* of the Church.¹¹⁶ By drawing on Jesus’ *kenosis* (Jesus “emptied himself” [Phil 2:7-8]),¹¹⁷ TCTCV separates spiritual authority from worldly power. Instead, this concept of *kenosis* and service done by the ministry of oversight allows a new understanding of authority.

TCTCV affirms the mutual agreement on the need for a ministry of oversight in general, even if this ministry is contextually differentiated. This ministry is “a requirement of fundamental importance for the Church’s life and mission”.¹¹⁸ The document goes on to a detailed description of this ministry. The description of authority emphasizes the importance of the personal, collegial and communal functions of the ministry of oversight¹¹⁹ in addition to the synodality or conciliarity of the Church: all members of the body of Christ should walk their way together (*syn-odos*).¹²⁰ Primacy is not contradictory to synodality or conciliarity, but appears along with these structures at the local, regional, and universal levels of the Church. The mystery of the Trinitarian life of God is reflected by the quality of conciliar and synodical cohesion.¹²¹ Therefore, ecumenical synods and councils play an important role in the life of the Church. Here, the orthodox influence on the text is visible.

¹¹⁵ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.48.

¹¹⁶ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.49.

¹¹⁷ TCTCV, III.B.49; cf. also Fritzon, *The Church and the church*, 350

¹¹⁸ TCTCV, III.B.52.

¹¹⁹ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.52; cf. also BEM §26.

¹²⁰ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.53.

¹²¹ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.53.

The chapter of TCTCV concludes by reviewing areas for future efforts on the topic of authority. There is still a lot of work to be done. According to TCTCV, the disagreement over the necessity for universal ministry is one problem, in addition to the need to discern what attributes belong to such a ministry generally.¹²² For some churches, primacy is something important or mandatory and realized e.g. in the primacy of jurisdiction and teaching exercised by the bishop of Rome. By quoting Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995), TCTCV reminds the churches of the invitation to "enter into patient and fraternal dialogue"¹²³ on the ministry of primacy.

TCTCV's preference for universal ministry is evident in its references to two bilateral dialogues¹²⁴ that promote the value of a universal ministry of oversight or consider such a ministry in accordance with Christ's will. The future calls for greater efforts to develop understanding of such a ministry, rather than questioning its necessity at all. The question addressed to the churches underlines this impression: "If, according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?"¹²⁵

The influence of Roman Catholic teaching is highly visible in the discussion on authority and a universal ministry. One might be curious about the answers of the member churches: Some Orthodox churches as well as some Anglicans and Lutherans will probably agree. It should be expected that the answers of some other Protestant and especially Reformed churches as well as those of some free churches will criticize these parts of TCTCV.

3.2.4. Conclusion

The discussions about the shape of the Church are controversial. Even if both documents underline the importance of a ministry, they draw different consequences. In the inner-Protestant document, the questions about the threefold ministry, an *episcopos*, and the ways of apostolic succession in ministry can remain open, while the question about universal ministry is absent. Instead, the document gives local churches

¹²² Cf. TCTCV, III.B.57.

¹²³ UUS, § 96.

¹²⁴ *The Gift of Authority* (Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue); *The Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church* (Orthodox – Roman Catholic dialogue); cf. TCTCV, III.B.57.

¹²⁵ TCTCV, III.B.57 (in italics).

significant freedom to determine the concrete shape of their church. TCTCV, however, has to combine this Protestant approach with that of churches who consider the realization of a concrete ministerial pattern to be essential to the nature of the Church. Most of the paragraphs end with questions.

3.3. Mission of the Church in and for the World

3.3.1. The Moral and Ethical Commitment

Ecclesiology goes beyond the discussion of dogmatic questions and advances a holistic concept of the Church. Both documents therefore emphasize a moral and ethical commitment of discipleship.¹²⁶

TCOJC seeks to view the Church in the light of current problems rather than merely as a historical elaboration¹²⁷ and asks for the specific contribution of the churches to life in society¹²⁸ as the manifestation of the fruits of faith: “Witness and service, the proclamation of the gospel and the diaconal work belong together.”¹²⁹ The Church is an instrument of God’s will to salvation¹³⁰ and has a mission that the Christians are invited to fulfill in *leiturgia*, *martyria*, *diakonia* and *koinonia*.¹³¹ Aspects of a specifically Protestant theology and world-view are visible in the emphasis on the importance of theological formation in the paragraphs on *martyria*,¹³² on the “reasonable worship” exercised by Christians in their families and worldly professions, and on the political responsibility described in the paragraph about *diakonia*.¹³³

TCTCV affirms the role of Church in society as well. Joining in the transformation of the world by divine design is both the proclamation of the Good News and the promotion of justice and peace.¹³⁴ The Church should e.g. be the voice of the voiceless, advocate peace, act against economic injustice and racism, etc.¹³⁵ As the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (cf. Mt 5:13.16), Christians can play an active role in civic life and in doing so promote the kingdom of God there.¹³⁶ This view on

¹²⁶ Cf. TCTCV, IV.B.61; TCOJC, I.2.5.2-I.2.5.4.

¹²⁷ Cf. TCOJC, Preface.

¹²⁸ Cf. TCOJC, Introduction, 1.1.

¹²⁹ TCOJC, I. 2.5.2; Cf. TCOJC, I.2.5.4 ; cf. also LA 11; LA 13; LA 29; LA 36.

¹³⁰ Cf. TCOJC, I.3.2.

¹³¹ These four commissions are described in detail below: TCOJC, I.3.3.

¹³² Cf. TCOJC, I.3.3.2.

¹³³ Cf. TCOJC, I.3.3.3.

¹³⁴ Cf. TCTCV, IV.A.58 et seq.

¹³⁵ Cf. TCTCV, IV.C.64.

¹³⁶ Cf. TCTCV IV.C.65.

mission in TCTCV is reminiscent of the concept of *Missio Dei* which has been influential in the field of missiology since World War II.¹³⁷

In its last chapter, TCTCV refers to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Christians are justified by grace through faith; cf. Rom 3:31-26; Gal 2:19-21)¹³⁸ to emphasize that Christians are called to take moral initiatives in a sphere of forgiveness based on faith and grace.¹³⁹ Here, an already achieved bilateral ecumenical agreement is used in a new context and bears influence on other Christian traditions.

3.3.2. The Church in Society Today

Both texts offer a similar description of modern society as open and pluralistic,¹⁴⁰ and having to deal with religious diversity.¹⁴¹ The variety of different cultures and languages presents an ongoing challenge for the Church.¹⁴² TCOJC roots these challenges in the developments in European history, namely the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Reformation. TCOJC also cites the decline of customs and morality, the understanding of religion as a “private matter” and the marginalization of religious communities as changes in society. In a similar vein, TCTCV mentions popular skepticism about the viability of faith as well as a decline of church membership. Churches of different traditions experience society in a very similar way and have the same challenges. This corresponds to the impression that some contemporaries do not distinguish between different Christian traditions and ignore the differences. This fact could bring the churches closer together in their commitment to society.

3.3.3. Conclusion

Recognizing that churches of different traditions face similar problems could help to build collaboration, mutual support, prayer and common activities across traditions. The documents formulate similar tasks and separate action would therefore be unreasonable in most social and ethical issues. In the history of the Ecumenical

¹³⁷ Cf. for example: “Christ loves the Church [...] and [...] shares with her his mission of bringing light and healing to human beings until he comes again in glory” (TCTCV, Conclusion, 69).

¹³⁸ In a purely Protestant document the *sola fide* would probably have been chosen.

¹³⁹ Cf. TCTCV, IV.B.61.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. TCOJC, II.1.

¹⁴¹ Cf. TCTCV, IV.A.60.

¹⁴² Cf. TCTCV, I.B.6.

movement, the movement of *Life and Work* brought Christians to act and to handle the ethical and moral challenges in the world together. Although churches do not agree on all ethical and moral questions, all of them share the goal of pursuing justice and peace in general terms.

4. Different Implications on the Unity of the Church

4.1. Distinction between Foundation and Shape of the Church – The Visibility of the One Church

4.1.1. The Protestant Understanding

The distinction between the foundation and the shape of the Church is typical for Protestantism: One has to distinguish between the Church (singular) as an object of faith on the one hand and, on the other hand, the historically grown, *hic et nunc* existing visible communities (plural) with many different shapes and historical forms. This distinction is confirmed by TCOJC which explains that the Church as *creatura verbi* “cannot simply be equated with one of the historical churches or with the entirety of all churches.”¹⁴³ Church is primarily understood as an event that happens when believers come together. However, this does not mean that every visible historical church is a false Church, nor that the true Church does not exist on earth.¹⁴⁴ The historical churches have to witness to the justifying action of God and should try to realize the Church as an object of faith on earth. But no church is able to fulfill its task completely. According to Michael Beintker, the Church lives “on a constructive relationship between its foundation and its shape.”¹⁴⁵ One is tempted to use the terminology of *Vatican II* and apply it in a wide sense to a Protestant understanding: The Church of faith *subsistit in*¹⁴⁶ the earthly Church, which is the visible community of believers around word and sacrament.

In a next step it must be asked how it is possible to recognize the true Church on earth in a Protestant understanding. The proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments according to their institution are the criteria of its recognition (*Wahrzeichen*).¹⁴⁷ TCOJC mentions further marks,¹⁴⁸ such as the

¹⁴³ TCOJC, I.2.2; cf. also the explanations in ApolCA VII.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.4.

¹⁴⁵ Beintker, *The Church of Jesus Christ: An Introduction*, 50.

¹⁴⁶ LG 8.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.4.1.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.4.2.

confession of sins, absolution, the order of ministry, suffering for the sake of the gospel, obedience to the Ten Commandments, as well as the whole Christian life. But finally, “just the word and the sacrament are the primary, i.e. the original and fundamental marks of the Church, so its participation in the visible Church as the place of gathering around word and sacraments [is] the primary and unambiguous mark of Christian life.”¹⁴⁹ Christian life is always dependent on the word and the sacrament. There can be various forms of life belonging to the one Church. God provides the foundation – the humans are then free in choosing the shape to realize this foundation on earth. This distinction helps to understand the relation between *opus Dei* and the *opus hominum*.¹⁵⁰ God is the subject, the Church the object. Faith – and therefore the Church – can only be the result of a divine action which takes place *ubi et quando visum est Deo*.¹⁵¹ The Church is first of all the receiving Church. Consequently, TCOJC concludes that the “activity of the Church must point away from itself”.¹⁵²

4.1.2. The Multilateral Understanding

In a multilateral understanding it is impossible to separate the issues of foundation and shape of the Church, as well as the one of visibility, from the questions about the effectiveness and the sacramentality of the Church. In some traditions, the Church becomes visible in the sacraments and as such becomes an effective instrument of salvation.

The idea of a certain invisibility of the Church is also known by TCTCV. TCTCV therefore quotes the purpose of *Faith and Order*, namely to “call one another to visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship.”¹⁵³ From former statements it becomes clear that this means to make visible the unity which already exists: the Commission desires that “the one life and the one body should be made manifest before the world”¹⁵⁴ and seeks to realize the “fullness of that unity.”¹⁵⁵ When TCTCV says that the ecumenical movement had “discovered”¹⁵⁶ many aspects of discipleship that

¹⁴⁹ TCOJC, I.2.4.3.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Beintker, *The Church of Jesus Christ: An Introduction*, 50.

¹⁵¹ CA V; Cf. TCOJC, I.2.2.

¹⁵² TCOJC, I.2.2.

¹⁵³ Cf. TCTCV, vii; cf. also the aim mentioned in the Constitution of *Faith and Order*, which is “to proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ and to call the churches to the goal of visible unity” (Cf. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/faith-and-order> [30.12.2013]).

¹⁵⁴ Lausanne 1927, 464.

¹⁵⁵ Evanston 1954, 84.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. TCTCV, Conclusion, 68.

Christians share, this implies also that the churches did not create these common points, but has revealed something already existing. In addition, TCTCV dedicates the 28th paragraph to the Church as a *mysterion* and stresses the transcendent and spiritual dimension of the Church.¹⁵⁷

However, TCTCV points out that the true Church is partly visible by visible and tangible signs,¹⁵⁸ e.g. the apostolic faith, baptism, the Eucharist, prayer and intercession, serving and helping others... In the Roman Catholic Church, for example, the visible unity finds its “most eloquent expression” in the Eucharist.¹⁵⁹ According to TCTCV, the Church anticipates the kingdom of God and is at the same time still on the way to its full realization.¹⁶⁰ In the Church of today, visible signs of the true Church and of the imperfection of human beings come together.

According to TCTCV, the Church is “sign and agent for the work of God’s love”¹⁶¹ and “sign and servant of God’s design in the world”.¹⁶² This recollects the Roman Catholic understanding of the Church as pointed out in *Vatican II* where the Church is described as *signum et instrumentum*.¹⁶³ The wording of the Church as *sign* is already well-known from the fourth Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala (1968): The Report “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church” explains that the Church “is bold in speaking of itself as the sign of the coming unity of mankind.”¹⁶⁴ In Uppsala, by taking up the idea of *Vatican II* of the Church as sign, a convergence between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC was reached. TCTCV profits in this point from this work already done. It has to be asked why TCTCV uses the terms *agent* and *servant*. It is possible that the term *instrumentum* underlines for some traditions too much the idea of the effectiveness of the Church. The opinions diverge. For some other traditions, for example, it is not enough for the Church to point away from itself,¹⁶⁵ as was mentioned in TCOJC. It has to be asked whether in the understanding of some traditions being an “agent” of divine work means more than witnessing to the work of

¹⁵⁷ Cf. TCTCV, II.B.28.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. TCTCV, III.A.34.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. TCTCV, Introduction, 2; cf. also the following Roman Catholic documents: SC 41; LG 17; LG 26.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. TCTCV, III.A.33.

¹⁶¹ TCTCV, Introduction, 2.

¹⁶² TCTCV, II.C.

¹⁶³ LG 1.

¹⁶⁴ Uppsala Report, 17.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Davie, *The Church of Jesus Christ. An Anglican response*, 73 et seq.

reconciliation and whether the term “servant” is really acceptable to most traditions. In these points, the answers of the churches will be noteworthy.

In addition, some churches understand the Church as a sacrament. The Church as a sacramental institution can then be an instrument for salvation. TCTCV addresses some questions about the understanding of *sacrament* and *ordinance* to the churches, and wants them to reflect on whether the differences between an “effective” and “instrumental” understanding (in the sense that God uses the sacrament to bring about a new reality) on the one hand and a merely “expressive” understanding (in the sense that the sacraments/ordinances express the reality which is already present) is really more than a different emphasis.¹⁶⁶

4.1.3. Conclusion

To summarize, common and diverging points should be mentioned. The documents share the claim that historical churches should realize the given foundation of the Church. Therefore, the churches need to be dynamic and continuously reformed.

While TCOJC clearly underlines the distinction between the action of God and that of humans, TCTCV tries to find a compromise between a more instrumental or effective understanding of the Church on the one hand and an expressive or forensic understanding on the other hand. In a more effective understanding, the foundation of the Church is often realized in a concrete shape which makes the Church visible. It is then not possible to distinguish as clearly between the foundation and the shape as done in the Protestant concept. Both documents can be questioned.

As for TCTCV, Protestants could question the necessity of the three constitutive elements of visible unity cited by TCTCV: unity in faith, in sacraments, and in ministry.¹⁶⁷ From a Protestant perspective, unity in ministry is not necessary for visible unity. TCTCV further states that the idea of the Church as an “effective sign of God’s presence and action”¹⁶⁸ is also accepted by churches which reject the understanding of

¹⁶⁶ Cf. TCTCV, III.B.43.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. TCTCV, Conclusion, 67; cf. also TCTCV III.B. The document therefore purports to ascertain the existing convergence in these areas: (a) The Nicene creed is a common basis of the faith. In the last years, a lot of work has been done by the WCC, for example the elaboration of the study text *Confessing one Faith* (1991) or the document about ecumenical biblical hermeneutics, *A treasure in Earthen Vessels* (1998). (b) Concerning the common understanding of the sacraments, TCTCV refers to the results on baptism and Eucharist achieved by BEM. Firstly, these results are summarized in the text; secondly, additions and comments from today’s point of view are made (III.B.40-43). (c) Many chapters were needed in order to deal with the intricate questions of ministry (see above).

¹⁶⁸ TCTCV, II.C.27 (in italics).

the Church as a sacrament. Perhaps this statement will be discussed in the answers of the WCC member churches.

On the other hand, critical voices from various traditions have challenged the *Leuenberg* distinction between the visible and the invisible Church.¹⁶⁹ The *Wahrzeichen* (marks of recognition) of the true Church are, from a Protestant perspective, the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments according to their institution.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it is unclear who can judge if these benchmarks are met. Furthermore, it is impossible to always distinguish clearly the *notae* of the Church and those of Christian life.¹⁷¹ Finally, it might be doubted whether the sacramental character of the Church is sufficiently taken into consideration by the Protestant statement. Further work on these critical points seems to be required.

4.2. “Convergence” or “Unity in Reconciled Diversity” – Essential Elements of Unity

Both documents claim that a certain legitimate diversity in churches is necessary and has indeed always existed in Church history.¹⁷² The problem starts with the definition of “legitimate”. It has to be made clear when diversity goes beyond accepted limits, who sets these limits, and what could be the criteria.

4.2.1. The Multilateral Understanding

Aiming to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate diversity, TCTCV mentions two problems: the lack of common criteria for discerning legitimacy and the absence of mutually recognized common structures for the Church. Therefore a consensus (*consentire*) has not (yet) been reached and a convergence (*convergere*) document has been written.¹⁷³ Even if a consensus is not yet reached, this convergence represents “a

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Larentzakis, *Ekklesiologie in der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft: Bemerkungen aus orthodoxer Sicht*, 97.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.4.1.

¹⁷¹ Cf. TCOJC, I.2.4.2; Larentzakis, *Ekklesiologie in der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft: Bemerkungen aus orthodoxer Sicht*, 97.

¹⁷² Cf. TCTCV, II.D.28-II.E.32; TCOJC, III.1.4.

¹⁷³ In the work of *Faith and Order* the comparative method has predominantly been used for many years. The different positions and practices have been compared in order to understand other traditions better. The *Faith and Order* Conference in Lund (1952) changed the methodology: They recognized that the plurality of Christianity goes beyond the possibility of comparison, and started to see the unity given in Jesus Christ. This change led to the crafting process of BEM; cf. Vischer, *Die Einheit der Kirche*, 16f.; cf. Congar, *Fünfzig Jahre der Suche nach Einheit*, 272.

remarkable degree of agreement”¹⁷⁴ and intends to be “more than an instrument to stimulate further study.”¹⁷⁵ It tries to formulate carefully, despite all difficulties, a common understanding of the Church and aims to bring together clashing visions and understandings: “It is not a question of either/or, but of both/and.”¹⁷⁶

TCTCV does not seek “reconciled diversity”,¹⁷⁷ a term which traditionally refers to the “model of union” of the *Leuenberg Agreement* explained below. A use of this term in the multilateral context would probably lead to some misunderstandings. To refer to the method used in the *Lima Declaration* as well as in TCTCV, it is more adequate to use the term “differentiated consensus”,¹⁷⁸ a method that is also used in the bilateral Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue.

It is noteworthy that the importance of diversity has been discovered more and more in recent years and is much more present in TCTCV than in BEM. Legitimate diversity is now seen as a gift which can enrich the communities¹⁷⁹ and should never be equated with uniformity. Christ “took flesh” among different cultures, therefore uniformity is impossible. The concept of *koinonia* can bring together the idea of oneness as well as the one of diversity and is appropriate to describe the nature of the Church. Despite all the convergences, the title of the declaration “Towards a Common Vision” shows that the word Christianity is in transit and that there is still work to be done; convergence is not the final goal.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ BEM, Preface, xiii; cf. also the famous principle of Lund: “Should not our churches ask themselves whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conscience compel to act them separately?” (Lund Principle, 463).

¹⁷⁵ TCTCV, Introduction, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Henn, Catholics, *Ecclesiology and the Ecumenical Journey*, 335.

¹⁷⁷ According to Meyer, TCTCV seeks a “reconciled diversity” (“‘Versöhnte Verschiedenheit’ wird zum anvisierten Programm”; cf. Meyer: *Ökumenischer Lagebericht 2013*, 108). TCTCV does not use this expression and speaks about “legitimate diversity” which has a slightly different focus. The legitimacy of differences can be seen as a pre-condition to reconciling them.

¹⁷⁸ TCTCV uses different kinds of affirmations to express this method. The ongoing controversial issues are italicized and printed as short texts between the paragraphs which describe the shared convictions. The convergence was facilitated by being much more descriptive than prescriptive and by avoiding negative terms or formulations (e.g. *defectus ordinis*; UR 22). TCTCV never identifies the churches or communities taking a specific position; consequently the readers are invited to see first the different arguments and points of view without relating them immediately to a particular confession. Another method is formulating the controversial issues as questions.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. TCTCV, II.D.28.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. also TCTCV, III.A (Already, but not yet).

4.2.2. The Protestant Understanding

TCOJC has not reached a full consensus in all questions either, yet it has found a common criterion, i.e. the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*: The common understanding of the gospel¹⁸¹ is the “key” and “measure”¹⁸² to regarding the *evangelium as pure docetur* and the sacraments as *recte administrantur*: These are the two constitutive elements of the Church following the *Confessio Augustana*.¹⁸³ And this is sufficient (*satis est*), so that other historic differences (traditionally seen in the field of Christology, the Lord’s Supper and the doctrine of predestination)¹⁸⁴ cannot legitimate the division of the churches anymore nor be an obstacle for common table and pulpit fellowship. The underlying model can be called “Unity in reconciled diversity”.

From this point of view, it is clear why when the right understanding of the gospel is recognized in other traditions, TCOJC cannot exclude a unilateral recognition of other churches as being expression of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.¹⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the conversations and the theological work concerning the *Leuenberg Agreement* should continue – all the more as the implementation of the results in Church life is a part of the agreement.¹⁸⁶ The declaration of *Leuenberg* is also a step “on the way towards consensus.”¹⁸⁷

4.2.3. Conclusion

To conclude, one could refer to the different understandings and uses of the term “consensus”. While from a Protestant point of view, consensus requires only one criterion, namely the understanding of the gospel, and is hence already reached and consequences drawn (cf. *Et ad veram unitatem Ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina Evangelii et administratione Sacramentorum*),¹⁸⁸ consensus in the other traditions includes much more, e.g. a consensus in the questions about the shape of ministry.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸¹ Cf. LA 8; LA 29.

¹⁸² LA 12.

¹⁸³ Cf. CA VII.

¹⁸⁴ LA 18-26.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. TCOJC, III.4.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. TCOJC, III.2 ; Cf. TCOJC, III.2; cf. LA, part IV.

¹⁸⁷ TCOJC, I.2.5.1.1.

¹⁸⁸ CA VII.

¹⁸⁹ These differences remind of some diverging points in the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue as well: The existence of one or several criteria was, for example, one of the most discussed points in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This declaration presents the justification as “an

A consensus on the *conditiones sine quae non* for the being of the Church thus does not exist. And this makes it difficult to reconcile ecclesiologies.

5. Open Questions and Challenges

5.1. Change of the Ecclesial Landscape

The ecclesial landscape is changing.¹⁹⁰ The number of Pentecostal and free churches are on the rise, while the traditional European churches are losing members. The percentage of Christians living in the global South is steadily growing. Some churches, among them many free churches, do not see the relevance of topics such as ecumenism or ecclesiology. Issues like the idea of a threefold ministry or questions of Church order do not belong to their field of interest. The *Global Christian Forum* was founded to create a space for informal encounter among all churches, separated from the vision of and the work on visible unity. It must therefore be considered whether these changes have an impact on the reception of ecumenical work. It could be that the texts of *Faith and Order* are mainly of importance for Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians, as well as for “High Church influenced” Anglicans and Lutherans, while growing parts of Christianity do not see the necessity of a convergence in these questions. In addition, the WCC is no longer the uncontested center of ecumenism worldwide.¹⁹¹

5.2. Implementation in Church Life and Reception of the Results

5.2.1. Implementation in Church Life

TCTCV describes a “reasonable impatience”¹⁹² concerning the reception of ecumenical dialogue documents. However, this aspired reception does not always take place. How can this work done by *Faith and Order* and the *Leuenberg Church Fellowship* gain attention in the life of the churches and reach a wider public? How can it be avoided that, on the one hand, these results remain in the “ivory tower”, available to a handful of theologians specialized in ecumenical theology?¹⁹³ Or, on the other hand, that the churches live and express a unity that is not yet reached in official ecumenical dialogue?

indispensable criterion”, but not as the only one, and mentions that Catholics “see themselves as bound by several criteria”; JDDJ, §18; cf. also for example: Jüngel, *Um Gottes Willen – Klarheit*.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Johnson/Bellofatto, *The demographic status of world Christianity in the 21st century*, 17-26.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Simon, *Die 10. Vollversammlung*, 82.

¹⁹² TCTCV, v.

¹⁹³ Cf. Vasilevich, *Already but not yet*, 343 et seq.; TCOJC has the intention to be directed to “the practical work of local congregations”; TCOJC, Preface.

How can the tendency of a contrast between “doctrinal ecumenism” and “ecumenism of life” be avoided? Admittedly, it “is very difficult to evaluate if an ecclesiological convergence document responds to the actual, and not only to the declared needs of the churches.”¹⁹⁴

As regards their reception and impact on Church life, the two documents are very different.

5.2.2. The Reception of the Leuenberg Agreement

The *Leuenberg Agreement* has definitely changed the life of Protestant churches in Europe; its reception has direct consequences for the local churches, namely the common table and pulpit fellowship. The most recent example for an organizational consequence is the foundation of the *Eglise Protestante Unie de France*, which has been in existence since 2012 and unites the Reformed and Lutheran churches in France.¹⁹⁵ In addition, the theological work has continued since 1973. To understand the *Leuenberg Agreement* as a final report¹⁹⁶ does not correspond to the self-understanding of this common achievement, whose reception should take shape at all levels of ecclesial life.¹⁹⁷ The continuing theological work seems to be one challenge for the future. Open questions are amongst others the relationship of the *Leuenberg Agreement* to the confessions of the 16th century¹⁹⁸ and the ecclesial quality of the CPCE.¹⁹⁹ The Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches could conceivably also take up the results of the *Leuenberg Agreement* for further work.²⁰⁰

5.2.3. The Reception of the Convergence Document

Even if changes in the order of the churches cannot be immediately expected as a direct result of TCTCV, *Faith and Order* tries as well to involve the churches in the work and the process of reception: The aim in the self-understanding of TCTCV is *inter alia* to provide “an occasion for the churches to reflect upon their own understanding of the

¹⁹⁴ Vasilevich, *Already but not yet*, 343.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. (30.12.2013).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Neumann, *Leuenberg als ökumenisches Modell?*, 187.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. TCOJC, III.1.3.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Weber: *Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft*, 162; cf. also Wenz: *Kirchengemeinschaft nach evangelischem Verständnis*, 64.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Weber: *Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft*, 170.

²⁰⁰ This is recommended by TCOJC, III.3.1.

Lord's will so as to grow towards greater unity (cf. Eph 4:12-16)".²⁰¹ TCTCV suggests, for example, a common discernment of the dividing issues.²⁰² This could be an invitation to shift the focus and no longer ask in the first place whether an opinion is correct, but rather how common criteria to discern the correctness of an opinion can be developed.²⁰³ This requires communal meetings and continuing common theological work in the reception of TCTCV. In addition, TCTCV wants to involve the member churches in the continuing work and the implementation of the results. Thus the churches are invited to answer the asked questions and to submit an official response to the *Faith and Order* Commission.²⁰⁴ It remains to be seen how many answers will reach the Commission and whether this document will find the attention it deserves in a time that is sometimes described as the winter of ecumenism.

5.3. Compatibility of Different Agreements?

Ecumenical dialogues are manifold. Bilateral, trilateral, multilateral agreements, declarations and rapprochements have taken and are still taking place. This raises the question of the compatibility of various agreements.²⁰⁵ Should this not be considered in more detail? One example can demonstrate this issue: Forty years after Leuenberg, the ecumenical landscape is no longer the same, especially since many bilateral dialogues have made progress and brought about common statements and declarations. Examples are the *Meissen Declaration* (EKD and Church of England, 1988), the *Porvoo Declaration* (British and Irish Anglican churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches, 1992) or the *Reuilly Agreement* (British and Irish Anglicans and French Reformed and Lutheran Churches, 1999).²⁰⁶ In these declarations, the issues concerning the concrete shape of ministry cannot be considered *adiaphora* as it was done in the *Leuenberg Agreement*. It had therefore been controversially discussed if the *nec necesse est*²⁰⁷ of other elements than word and sacrament allows to add more elements to the understanding of the Church:²⁰⁸ perhaps if they do not belong to the *esse* but to the *bene*

²⁰¹ TCTCV, Introduction, 2.

²⁰² Cf. TCTCV, II.D.30/IV.B.63 (in italics).

²⁰³ Cf. Hietamäki, *Walking Together in a House of Mirrors*, 347.

²⁰⁴ Cf. TCTCV, Introduction, 3. It is interesting to see that during the work on TCOJC, a project sketch was also sent to the member churches for comment; 17 churches responded to this task (cf. TCOJC, Preface).

²⁰⁵ Cf. TCOJC, III.3.2.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Birmelé: *Leuenberg – Meissen – Porvoo*.

²⁰⁷ CA VII.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Birmelé: *Leuenberg – Meissen – Porvoo*, 46.

esse of the Church? Further work seems required. This example show that, due to the more and more complex and pluriform relatedness of ecumenical dialogues, the question of compatibility of agreements is going to play an important role in the future and consequently requires further study.

5.4. Ethical and Moral Implications

Moral issues have always been discussed in the Church, but recently many developments in society have led to new discussions. It is sure that moral and ethical issues cannot be separated from dogmatic ones²⁰⁹ – there has to be “a reciprocal and mutually informing dialogue”.²¹⁰ According to John Gibaut, the director of the *Faith and Order* Commission, this relationship is obvious: “When the visible unity of the Church in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship is threatened, weakened or impeded, any Church-dividing issue becomes *ipso facto* ecclesiological.”²¹¹ It is probable that the ecumenical and ecclesiological work of the future will have to deal increasingly with moral issues.

6. Conclusion

The comparison of the documents *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and *The Church of Jesus Christ* and the ecclesiological analysis of these documents has revealed the complexities of ecumenical ecclesiology.

The *Leuenberg Agreement* and *The Church of Jesus Christ* are unique in the history of inner-protestant ecumenism. The consequences for the local churches are immense. However, it seems obvious that the idea of *Leuenberg* will not serve as a model for the multi-lateral path towards visible unity. Too many churches have more indispensable criteria for the being of the Church than those presumed in the *Agreement*.

The Church: Towards a Common Vision, which was presented by the Commission of Faith and Order as a “gift”,²¹² awakened and continues to awaken many expectations. This is amply shown by statements such as “An ihr [der Studie] wird zukünftig Theologie und Kirche in der weltweiten Ökumene gemessen werden,”²¹³ or: TCTCV “has the capacity not only to widen the horizons of thinking about Christian

²⁰⁹ Cf. Tveit, *Unity. A call to be strong or humble*, 173 et seq.

²¹⁰ Gibaut, *Building up the body of Christ*, 400.

²¹¹ Gibaut, *Building up the body of Christ*, 399, cf. also TCTCV, IV.B.63.

²¹² TCTCV, v.

²¹³ Meyer, *Ökumenischer Lagebericht 2013*, 107.

unity but also to inspire imagination and build confidence in moving toward this goal of visible unity in a creative and critical manner.”²¹⁴

Asking whether these expectations will be fulfilled and whether this model is one which can reconcile ecclesiologies and bring all the churches together, it is unavoidable to maintain some skepticism. The ecclesiologies could be reconciled if all traditions were open for compromise. There could be, for example, a change for further steps towards visible unity if Protestant churches re-think, for example, the issues of threefold ministry and apostolic succession in ministry. However, it can be expected that some Protestant theologians will see too much Roman Catholic or Orthodox influence in the document. The paragraphs about ministry especially will probably arouse further discussion. Additionally, some theologians do not see the necessity of an ecclesiological consensus, but prefer to compare the divergences. A “Differenzmodell” could replace the “Konsensmodell”.²¹⁵

What, after all, do the two documents contribute to the ecumenical discussion? Which solutions can the texts offer, if the ecclesiologies cannot be reconciled without compromise? Three concrete reflections and encouragements for the ecumenical future shall conclude this research paper.

(1) From a Protestant point of view, it is sometimes difficult to understand why the steps towards visible unity are taken so slowly. For many Protestants, the *Leuenberg Agreement* could have opened the doors for a common celebration of the Lord’s Supper with many other churches. However, TCTCV invites us to open indeed not the doors for a common Eucharist, but our horizon in order to understand the other points of view. In TCTCV, true to its nature as a convergence document, there is no room to expect a one hundred percent representation of one’s own perspective, nor is it central to convince the others. Ecumenical work is characterized by the balance between one’s own identity and the identity of the others, between proclaiming one’s own opinion and being ready for compromise, between arguing and explaining one’s own arguments and trying to understand the others. Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the WCC, observes the need for a new kind of humility in ecumenical work, and this very humility could even strengthen the ecumenical work in the years ahead.²¹⁶ A convergence text

²¹⁴ Rajkumar, *A Prophetic, Polysemic and Proleptic Prompt*, 341.

²¹⁵ Cf. the discussions about *Konsensmodell* and *Differenzmodell*. E.g. Körtner, *Wohin steuert die Ökumene?*

²¹⁶ Tveit, *Unity. A call to be strong or humble*.

should not only allow the members to know each other better, but also to see the possibility that the Spirit speaks through the insights of another confession.²¹⁷ TCTCV should be read and understood in this light. This is a challenge, not only for Protestants, but also for all the other traditions, which probably will also have to struggle with various parts of the document.

(2) Very often, Christians emphasize the differences which divide churches. Ecumenical dialogue is mainly focused on controversial points. The Paper of *Faith and Order* reminds us anew “that the Church is primarily God’s Church.”²¹⁸ TCTCV invites Christians not only to discover common given points, but also sees one objective in bringing renewal to the churches, so that they shall “live more fully the ecclesial life”.²¹⁹ This does not mean neglecting or ignoring the differences, nor signing agreements which do not correspond to one’s own understanding. But it invites Christians to live and to express unity in those issues on which Christians already agree. The accordance on the foundation of the Church for instance can bring Christians closer together to share this common basis, for example in common prayers. In *Unitatis Redintegratio* “spiritual ecumenism” is even regarded as the soul of the ecumenical movement.²²⁰ The convergences about the mission of the Church can lead to common projects and initiatives on the way to justice and peace in society.

(3) Thirdly, the theological work should continue. Creating and publishing the document was the first step, which is now accomplished. The reception of the text, the discussions about it, the work on the answers of the churches and the implementation of the results in Church life are the steps that must now follow. And these steps will play a significant role in deciding the success or failure of the convergence document. The questions in TCTCV invite the reader to clarify his or her own point of view. The text does not reflect only on what common agreements should look like, but also on how common discernment is possible.²²¹ It would also be beneficial for the ecumenical movement to have a common *relecture* of some important ecumenical texts to understand them anew in today’s situation.²²² These common reflections ought to be controversial on the one hand, and full of mutual respect on the other.

²¹⁷ Cf. BEM, Ministry, §54.

²¹⁸ Fritzon, *The Church and the church*, 350.

²¹⁹ Cf. TCTCV, viii.

²²⁰ UR 8.

²²¹ Cf. TCTCV, II.D.30 (in italics).

²²² Cf. Link, *The Lima Process*, 367.

In any case, even if the understanding of the aim of ecumenism, the concept of the nature of the Church and therefore also the idea of unity differ, it is an objective for Christians that one day all churches may recognize in each other the “one holy catholic and apostolic Church”.²²³ If this aim is reached, Christians will finally be able to confess the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, having in mind not only their particular church, but all the churches of different traditions. This will be the true realization of the one Church which has its foundation in the Triune God, and which is the earthly representation of the body of Christ according to God’s will. And therefore all this work is worthwhile.

²²³ Cf. TCTCV, I.C.9.

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Abbreviations

ApolCA	-	Apologia Confessionis Augustanae
BEM	-	Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry/Lima-Declaration
BSELK	-	Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch Lutherischen Kirche
CA	-	Confessio Augustana
CPCE	-	Community of Protestant Churches in Europe
EKD	-	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
JDDJ	-	Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification
LA	-	Leuenberg Agreement
LG	-	Lumen Gentium
UR	-	Unitatis Redintegratio
TCTCV	-	The Church: Towards a Common Vision
TCOJC	-	The Church of Jesus Christ
SC	-	Sacrosanctum Concilium
UUS	-	Ut Unum Sint
WA	-	Weimarer Ausgabe (M. Luther)
WCC	-	World Council of Churches