

GENERAL SYNOD

The Church: Towards a common vision

A note from the Council for Christian Unity

Introduction

1. In 2013, the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC) published *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (hereafter *The Church*). The text was the culmination of two decades of preparatory work and built on a number of previous documents, while theological consideration of the church has been at the heart of the international Faith and Order Movement since the 1927 World Conference. In their joint Preface, the Director and Moderator of the Commission identify two primary objectives in sending *The Church* out to member Churches of the WCC: ‘renewal’, and ‘theological agreement on the Church.’
2. The Introduction describes it 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.’ It is only the second such document produced by the Commission, the first being *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, published in 1982. As with *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the Commission is seeking an official response from member Churches, to gauge how far the document takes us towards the goal of theological agreement. The deadline for such responses is the end of 2015. That is why the Council for Christian Unity is bringing it to the General Synod for debate at this point.
3. The rest of this paper outlines the role of Synod in finalizing such a response, the preparatory work that has already been done and some of the opportunities for growing in unity and mission that the wider process of reception of *The Church* offers to the Church of England.
4. The full text of *The Church* can be accessed at:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>

The role of the General Synod

5. The Church of England is one of the founding members of the WCC and makes a significant contribution to its finances, while there is a significant tradition of Anglican involvement in its work. In the case of a convergence text such as this, the Director of the Commission on Faith and Order and CCU are agreed that the requested response should be approved by the General Synod.
6. The previous convergence document from the WCC, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, was discussed by the General Synod alongside the Final Report of the first round of meetings of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. The two documents were given preliminary consideration in a take note debate at the July sessions in 1983, while in February 1985 it was agreed to consult diocesan synods. The Church of England’s response was finalised through a series of specific motions in November 1986.

7. CCU does not believe such an extended synodical process is appropriate in this case. One reason for this is that *The Church* does not deal with matters that have such a direct relationship as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* to areas of church practice that are the subject of frequent debate both within the Church of England and in its ecumenical dialogues. Indeed, some Synod members may find *The Church* somewhat abstract and uncontroversial compared to its famous predecessor. That is in part because it seeks to deal with the fundamental ideas we have about ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church), ideas that tend to lie behind the positions we take on contested issues in the life of the church. For that very reason, we may not focus on those ideas all that clearly, or even be very conscious that we hold them.
8. An important part of the purpose of the document, therefore, is to move towards identifying an underlying ‘common vision’ of the church, so that we can address more productively those dimensions of church practice that continue to generate barriers between Christians. In order to evaluate its effectiveness in that task, the Church of England needs to draw on significant expertise in ecclesiology. As soon as the text became available, therefore, the Church of England’s own Faith and Order Commission engaged in a careful process of analysis and evaluation, through a series of its meetings in 2013 and early 2014, inviting papers from outside experts as well as its own membership. FAOC’s summary report was passed to CCU for consideration at its meeting in May 2014. CCU endorsed its analysis and its judgment and is now asking Synod to approve the report as the Church of England’s official response, affirming the consonance of the understanding of the church in this convergence text from the WCC with the doctrine of the Church of England.

The response from the Council for Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission

9. The Introduction to *The Church* asked for official responses to be submitted “in the light of” five specific questions (p. 3):
 - i) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?
 - ii) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?
 - iii) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?
 - iv) 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?
 - v) 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?
10. FAOC’s report, shared with CCU, proposes that the Church of England can give broadly positive answers to the first two questions, which are evidently crucial. It notes a number of areas where we might wish to see further work done, emphasises that it missed and limitations of its treatment at certain points, but it does not register significant concerns as to ways in which the document might directly contradict the teaching of the Church of England. The full report is available in Annex 1, with a brief summary provided in the paragraphs below.
11. Regarding question (i), *The Church* ‘is consonant to a high degree with the formal ecclesiology of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, as reflected in documents from FAOC and IASCUFO.... the Church of England can make a substantially

positive response to the content of the report.’ The articulation of the relationship between the doctrines of Trinity, communion and mission is commended, although it is noted that there are some limitations in the treatment of e.g. the imperative of unity and the nature of justice.

12. Regarding question (ii), *The Church* ‘offers a basis for growth in unity between the churches to a significant extent’ and ‘raises helpful questions about both “common vision” of Christ and “limits to diversity” in the churches.’ Two areas are highlighted: pneumatology and apostolicity. With regard to the former, the report suggests that *The Church* offers resources for renewed theological engagement with Pentecostal Churches. With regard to the latter, it notes that though there are some helpful insights, fundamental questions remain for Anglicans about the significance of episcopacy as a necessary sign of apostolic continuity.
13. Regarding question (iii), FAOC identifies two specific challenges: synodical governance and relations with ‘emerging churches’, overlapping with Fresh Expressions in our context.
14. Regarding question (iv), agreement on ecclesiology as a key step on the way to greater unity has important precedents in the Church of England’s ecumenical relationships. *The Church* provides a helpful articulation of the characteristics of the Church that can enrich dialogues with other Churches.
15. Regarding question (v), FAOC suggests a number of areas arising from *The Church* as meriting further attention in terms of developing an ecumenical ecclesiology, including: worship; the Church across time; universal primacy; the church as sacrament; and *koinonia* and conflict.

Opportunities for fruitful reception

16. The opportunity to participate in a global theological conversation about our understanding of the church is clearly of great importance in its own right. By endorsing the report from CCU and FAOC as the Church of England’s official response so that it can be sent to the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC, the Synod would be enabling the Church of England to make a substantial contribution to that conversation. We can underline the extent of our agreement with the direction of travel within the WCC Commission on Faith and Order on this issue and also influence plans for further work that will follow up the publication of *The Church*.
17. Other members Churches of the WCC within Great Britain and Northern Ireland will also be making their official responses in the course of this year. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is organizing a consultation on 24-25 September in Swanick, which will enable representatives to come together, compare their churches’ responses and reflect on what new avenues may open up from that. There is also therefore an opportunity for reception of *The Church* to enable growth in unity among some of the major denominations in this country. Might it become a resource for ecclesiological thinking across denominational divides that can help us to consider in new ways some of the persistent issues that keep us apart?
18. CCU is also mindful that contemporary ecumenism requires serious engagement with growing numbers of Pentecostal and ‘new’ churches, which do not necessarily have a strong, national denominational self-understanding. In many urban contexts, such churches are emerging as primary partners in mission for Church of England parishes, yet there can also be significant differences in theological approach that may impede the development of cooperation and mutual commitment to shared work. Some of these are likely to cluster

around ecclesiology, including the relationship between the local congregation and wider structures of communion, authority and accountability. *The Church* has the potential to open up this vital area of conversation. We believe this would best be done through working with Churches Together in England (CTE), and the General Secretary of CTE has already expressed a willingness to assist us in developing that. Such work could also intersect with our emerging dialogue with the Pentecostal Churches, which is continuing to develop in significant ways.

19. Finally, we hope that the debate at Synod can be the catalyst for further consideration of *The Church* within the Church of England, ideally in dialogue with members of other Churches. This can be through discussion groups or study days at parish, deanery or diocesan level, or through sessions held at our Theological Education Institutions. Various resources have been produced that may assist that process, including a brief study guide on the Anglican Communion Office website, produced by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order,¹ and a more extensive resource from CTBI.² It may be that the CCU could complement this provision with material for a stand-alone study session designed to facilitate initial engagement with some of the key ideas of this landmark document.

The Bishop of Peterborough
Chair, Council for Christian Unity

June 2015

¹ See <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/01/study-guide-available-for-the-church-towards-a-common-vision.aspx>.

² See <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Study-Guide-The-Church-Towards-a-Common-Vision.pdf>.

**Church of England Council for Christian Unity & Faith and Order Commission
Responding to the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Report
*The Church – Towards a Common Vision***

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

1. The text of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (hereafter *TCV*) is consonant to a high degree with the formal ecclesiology of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, as reflected in documents from FAOC and IASCUFO. It gives evidence of a mature appropriation of the fruits of ecumenical endeavour and in matters of faith and order, constitution, calling and position of the church in the purposes of God, the Church of England can make a substantially positive response to the content of the report. It stresses many ecclesiological themes that we would also wish to highlight from our distinctive perspective, including the calling of the Church to foster the well-being of the society in which is placed, challenging injustice and acting jointly with other agencies where appropriate.

Communion, mission and unity

2. The emphasis on the relation between God's gift of communion and the missionary calling of the Church helpfully joins together two themes which have run through ecumenical endeavours since the 1960s and which the Church of England would want to stress: the link between missiology and ecclesiology, and *koinonia* as the concept to denote that unity which is the proper mark both of the church and the fruit of her mission. As *TCV* affirms, citing *Confessing One Faith*: '... there is an indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the *reality* of the Church' (¶3).³ The origin of the church in the purposes of the triune God is in accord with the teaching of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion and is reflected in her ecumenical agreements.⁴ That the Church is missionary by its nature is a truth Anglicans have valued from Scripture, and the Church of England is grateful to find it echoed in Roman Catholic documents.⁵ Furthermore, and this is another point of convergence, at least between Reformation traditions and

³ Non-biblical references within the text here are to the paragraphs of the final published form of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, as made available in PDF form at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>.

⁴ E.g. *The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission*, 1997, available at <http://www.lambethconference.org/1998/documents/report-1.pdf>; *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Statement Agreed by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue 2006*, London: Anglican Communion Office, 2006; ARCIC II (1986), *Salvation and the Church*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/salvation_and_the_church.cfm; ARCIC II (1990), *Church as Communion*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/church_as_communion.cfm.

⁵ E.g. Vatican II 'Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church', *Ad gentes 2*, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

Vatican II, the Church is said to be grounded in the gospel (§14).⁶ While the paradigm of *missio Dei* runs deep within *TCV* and bears with it a profoundly Trinitarian ecclesiology, it is not entirely clear how the Church could be a ‘reflection’ of the communion of the Triune God (§25). This is one area where further consideration might be helpful as part of the reception of the text.

3. The discussion of the relation of unity and diversity is welcome to Anglicans, as is the tracing it back to the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 in the section on ‘Communion in Unity and Diversity’ (§§28–30). The Church of England recognises that diversity belongs to the church of God and that all rites and traditions need not be the same but properly may reflect respective cultures (Articles of Religion, 34). The Cyprus Report, referred to in a note here (§30), states: ‘As long as their witness to the one faith remains unimpaired, such diversity is seen not as a deficiency or cause for division, but as a mark of the fullness of the one Spirit who distributes to each according to his will.’⁷ Nonetheless, Anglicans have generally made a closer connexion between mission and visible unity than is to be found in this text. Moreover, they would also want to speak of the theological character of disunity as dangerous to the church’s life and contradictory to God’s will (cf. §§68–69).

Characterizing the life of the Church

4. That the church is one, holy and catholic and apostolic is integral to the presentation in *TCV* and also basic to the Church of England’s understanding of the church (§22). That this is a matter of God’s gift and call is also something which we teach that ‘believers, in all their human frailty, are constantly called to actualize.’ There is a more extensive analysis of the four marks or notes of the Church here than was offered in the corresponding section of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. This is welcome for general educational purposes, but also because it provides a richer pneumatological account of the Church’s identity and purpose.
5. *TCV* is particularly effective in holding the tension between those churches which are reluctant to attribute sin to the church rather than to her members and those which teach that it may be attributed to her as such. The church is holy because of God’s holiness, because of the gift of Christ’s love for her in the sending of the Holy Spirit. That the church is essentially holy is a welcome statement, ‘witnessed to in every generation by holy men and women and by the holy words and actions the Church proclaims and performs in the name of God, the All Holy’ (§22), as is also the recognition of the contradiction of this by sin and the church’s consequent ministry of a call to repentance. The Church of England can make her own the statement of Vatican II that the church is ‘sancta simul et semper purificanda’.⁸
6. The Church owes her apostolicity to the sending of the Son and the outpouring of the Spirit. This is rightly affirmed in the document, although there could have been a fuller treatment of the reality of Pentecost in the Church. Apostolicity is about being sent in space as well as time; and this requires expansion. Furthermore it denotes forms of life after the manner of the apostles, and such forms of life are not merely incidental to the *koinonia* of the church. That apostolic succession in ministry, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church corresponds to Anglican teaching.

⁶ Cf. Vatican II, ‘Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,’ *Lumen Gentium* 5, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁷ *The Church of the Triune God*, p. 91.

⁸ *Church as Communion*, 8.

Ministry and Church

7. The treatment of the threefold ministry in relation to visible historical continuity (§47) is welcome to Anglicans, though for them the bishop is a bishop in the church and in synod. Although it is traditional to talk of the succession of bishops, it is more accurate to talk of a succession of bishops in and of churches. This is because of the integral position of a bishop in a church and of the role of other members of the people of God in the church: lay participation in synods is something which Anglicans would want to stress. Thus while *TCV* talks about synodality (like *The Gift of Authority*), it does not explore the importance of lay participation in synods – which for Anglicans is an issue of importance. It merely says, ‘The churches currently have different views and practices about the participation and role of the laity in synods’ (§53). Oversight is therefore properly described, following the formulation of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, as ‘personal, collegial and communal’ (§52), and a welcome reference to the question of primacy is made in this context (§§54–57). The question of a universal primate has been addressed by the Church of England in such a way as to see such an office as embedded in the communion of the church, which is in accord with the discussion in these paragraphs.⁹

Ethics and ecclesiology

8. Chapter 4 of *TCV* raises some particular questions in terms of congruence with the theology of our own Church. Anglicans will welcome the affirmation of ethics as rooted in God’s creative work (§62). They may, however, find that the dynamic of resurrection and redemption is insufficiently stressed, together with the place of the Spirit as the subjective power of effective action. They might also want to say more about the church being the ethics of the Kingdom, as distinct from promoting it, demanding it, recognising it etc., and about the redemption of the life of the human community as a whole.
9. It is a complicating factor for ethics in our age that we have to confront extensive changes in moral opinion, not merely as a historical fact to be observed, but as a project which some strands of thought urge forward with something like a crusading spirit. Anglicans may be inclined to think that the document gives too little recognition of this fact as a question for eschatology, and may suspect that in this light the concrete moral disagreements could appear rather less dramatic than the document assumes they are. There is a good case to be made that, within generous limits, Christians find themselves situated within certain points on a wider spectrum of late-modern morality.
10. The document’s recurrent emphasis on the common moral concerns of the religions of the world will be congenial to Anglicans, but they may be concerned that it is stressed to the point of undervaluing, on the one hand, the shared character of human morality as such, religious or otherwise, so as to obscure the conception of the common good as an interest shared by all humanity, and, on the other, the distinctiveness and controversiality of the evangelical demand as a ‘sign of contradiction’.
11. In discussing political society our tradition has made a clearer distinction than can be found within the document between ‘state’ and ‘society’. In relation to the concerns of the state,

⁹ E.g. ARCIC II (1998), *The Gift of Authority*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/gift_of_authority.cfm

Anglicans may feel that the document's talk about the 'advocacy of peace' is not satisfactory as a way of referring to the role of the disciple as 'peacemaker'; it suggests an a priori restriction of admissible responses on the part of political authority to acts of violence and war making, and at the same time limits the Christian contribution to peace to advocacy rather than action. The idea of a just society, on the other hand, receives what is, for our Anglican tradition, an unduly restricted interpretation in terms of the fair distribution of economic resources. The fundamental importance of the rule of law has been important to Anglicans, and they would also expect to see more recognition of the perennial importance of health-care and education to social life.

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

Common vision

12. *TCV* offers a basis for growth in unity between the churches to a significant extent: several areas lend themselves to be taken further in future dialogue. The notion of a 'common vision' even though the teaching and practice of churches may appear to be contradictory is something that was explored in the ARCIC document *Life in Christ*.¹⁰ *TCV* raises helpful questions about both 'common vision' of Christ and 'limits to diversity' in the churches. Some particular themes that seem promising to us here are: embracing plurality whilst seeking unity of purpose; seeking diversity as an aspect of catholicity; and rooting this in the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The 'pneumatological turn'

13. *TCV* addresses more fully than previous work in this area the 'pneumatological turn' in ecumenical ecclesiology, which reflects the growing recognition of Pentecostal and Charismatic approaches as well as renewed engagement with Orthodox thought within the WCC. While the dominant paradigm of the document is the avowedly Trinitarian model of *missio Dei*, there is no question of the Holy Spirit being the 'silent' or 'hidden' person of the Trinity at work in the Church. Rather, it is under the power of the Spirit, through Spirit-inspired preaching and Spirit-endowed sacraments, that people are incorporated into the body of Christ. This body is in turn a temple of the Holy Spirit (§§12-14, 21). Pentecostal emphasis on the charismata of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 is amplified as the document goes on to insist that 'every Christian receives gifts of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the Church and for his or her part in the mission of Christ' (§18). This giftedness in turn compels believers to pursue personal and collective holiness as an ethical corollary of the Church's intrinsic oneness and holiness: they are thus to 'lead a life worthy of their calling in worship, witness and service, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Eph. 4:1-3)' (§21). Likewise, the complementary gifts of the Spirit are bestowed on the faithful 'for the common good' of society as well as for the wellbeing of the Church (§28). The Spirit is thus the 'principal agent' in establishing the kingdom of God, as well as in 'guiding the Church': indeed, it drives 'the whole process of salvation history to its final recapitulation in Christ to the glory of the Father' (§33, cf. §68).

¹⁰ ARCIC II (1993), *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/life_in_christ.cfm; see especially the section on 'Shared Vision' (4-11).

Engagement between the historic denominations and newer Pentecostal Churches will be a critical area for growth in unity among the churches in the twenty-first century, not least here in England. *TCV* should provide a fitting reference-point and resource for this process.

Apostolic succession

14. *TCV* acknowledges that churches remain divided as to whether or not ‘the “historic episcopate” (meaning bishops ordained in historic succession back to the earliest days of the Church), or the apostolic succession of ordained ministry more generally, is something intended by Christ for his community’ (¶47). Yet it does not define what it means by the ‘more general’ apostolic succession of ordained ministry, or what this might look like without the historic episcopate. It also proceeds to introduce the concepts of ‘continuing faithfulness to the gospel’ and ‘the apostolic continuity of the Church as a whole’, noting that some prefer to decouple them from succession in ministry and the historic episcopate – yet it does not define these concepts either. Given that the issues addressed in this paragraph remain among the most divisive in ecumenical debate, it would have been useful to have had a less compressed and elliptical treatment of them at this point.
15. In the matter of historic episcopal succession, the Anglican tradition has seen some significant developments, including, in the specific case of the Church of England, the acceptance in the Porvoo Common Statement and Declaration (1992) of ‘bearable anomalies’ in certain regards. Related issues continue to surface as pivotal in the Church of England’s ecumenical relations, and therefore perhaps the central ecclesiological question posed by *TCV* for us lies in what a Lutheran would describe as the ‘satis est’ of the Augsburg Confession: ‘The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough (‘satis est’) 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’ (Article VII, translated from the Latin text). This is very similar to Article XIX: ‘The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.’ There is no ‘satis est’ in the Article but there is the rider, ‘As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred, so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.’ In its definition of the church, according to Article XIX, the Church of England, like the Lutheran Church, takes a minimalist position and makes explicit its conviction that no earthly church is to be seen as inerrant (so all churches will experience conflict).
16. By this yardstick alone, *TCV*, taken together with *Confessing the One Faith*, usefully clarifies the criteria for mutual recognition by churches. For Anglicans, however, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral also needs to be considered in this context. Its four articles are:
 - (a) the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as ‘containing all things necessary to salvation,’ and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith
 - (b) the Apostles’ Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith
 - (c) the two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with un failing use of Christ’s words of Institution, and of the elements ordained

by Him

(d) the Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

17. Originally set down as the minimal basis on which Anglican Churches could enter into formal unions with other Churches, the articles' inclusion of episcopacy has been recognised throughout the Anglican Communion and played an important part in the negotiations by which episcopacy was taken into the united churches of South and North India. For contemporary Anglicans to regard *TCV* as a sufficient basis for unity with regard to ecclesiology, we would have to broaden our understanding of what 'local adaptation' in the historic episcopate might mean in a radical and indeed unprecedented way.

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

18. The fundamental challenge here is the renewal of our vision of Christ (cf. Rev 1:12-18) – something which can only come through Spirit-led renewal in the life of prayer. With this must go both continuing conversations amongst Christians of differing points of view in which there is careful and humble listening to one another, and continuing conversations with those outside the churches who do not share the vision of Christ but have their own powerful vision of what it is to be a human being.

19. There is also a clear challenge here for us to renew our use of synodical governance – how it can be not a politicised or partisan process, but a means of upholding unity in diversity through the patient discernment of ways to walk together and build up trust. Work in this area is already in progress but there are important theological perspectives for the task in the statement.

20. A particular issue raised by the statement that is highly relevant for us concerns relations with the so-called 'emerging churches', acknowledged in this text (¶7) in a way they have not been previously. The impetus for this diverse new ecclesiological phenomenon is ascribed in large part to the 'stupendous development of the means of communication' in recent times. This in turn has challenged churches 'to seek new ways to proclaim the Gospel and to establish and maintain Christian communities'. In striving expressly to meet these challenges, the emerging church movement is said to have proposed 'a new way of being church' and to have modelled to other churches innovative 'ways of responding to today's needs and interests in ways which are faithful to what has been received from the beginning.' One intriguing aspect of this new reference to emerging churches in the WCC document is the fact that such churches are neither readily nor often associated with formal, historic ecumenism. Indeed, insofar as they have developed much looser, more ad hoc instantiations of Christian unity, they might well be seen as challenging and even critiquing the WCC's own approach to ecumenical ecclesiology.

21. In the English Anglican context, such churches were recognised and incorporated into the strategic planning of the national church in the *Mission-Shaped Church* report (2004).¹¹ Here they were called 'fresh expressions' and were characterised as having been formed in response to postmodern culture – most notably in relation to social 'networks' rather than geographical 'neighbourhoods' or 'parishes'. They were described as typically meeting at

¹¹ Church of England Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, London: Church House, 2004.

times other than Sunday mornings, and as tending to be ‘post-denominational’ in the sense that even if they formally remained within a historic denomination like the Church of England, they sat lightly to its structures and drew adherents from a wider range of Christian traditions, as well as those from no Christian background at all.¹² In 2012 the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain recognised the significance of these churches further in a shared book-length theological study.¹³ In its turn this text was able to draw on a burgeoning literature devoted to the ecclesiology of emerging and fresh expressions of church – both advocatory and critical.¹⁴ This is likely to be a key area for ecumenical ecclesiology to address, especially if the ‘emerging church movement’ expands significantly beyond its current primary location in Britain and North America.

iv) 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?

22. We have already been able to make significant progress towards such closer relationships through ecclesiological agreement that is very much in line with *TCV*. This is evidenced by the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church and the Meissen, Porvoo, and Reuilly Agreements. These provide for practical sharing and cooperation in ministry in a way that might be contrasted with the international theological dialogues of ARCIC and the Anglican Orthodox Commission. However, the work of IARRCUM takes the work of ARCIC, synthesises it (in a way not unlike *TCV*) and suggests a whole range of practical initiatives that can be taken together. Finally, we would mention the service of reconciliation between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church in 2012 to mark the 350th anniversary of the ‘great ejection’ as an initiative grounded in shared understanding of the nature and purpose of Christ’s Church.

23. We hope that careful reflection on *TCV* with our various partners can enable further growth in relationships, not least with Pentecostal Churches as mentioned in the response to the second question. It invites us to identify in ourselves and one another as primary characteristics of being a Church that a Church:

1. understands itself as being in communion with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and called to participate in God’s mission of bringing humanity and all creation into communion under the Lordship of Christ;

¹² *Mission-shaped Church*, pp.43-83.

¹³ *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party, London: Church House, 2012.

¹⁴ For example: Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003; D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005; Eddie Gibbs & Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. London: SPCK, 2006; John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response*. London: SCM, 2006; Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How Are They Authentically Church and Anglican?* London: Moot Community, 2007; Louise Nelstrop & Martyn Percy (eds), *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church: Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008; John Milbank, ‘Stale Expressions: The Management-Shaped Church’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 21/1 (2008), pp. 117-28; Steven Croft (ed.), *Mission-shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today’s Church*, London: Church House, 2008; Steven Croft & Ian Mobsby (eds), *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009; Andrew Davison & Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*, London, 2011.

2. views itself as belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, in communion with all other local churches and with the Church universal;
3. acknowledges the normative role of Scripture for Christian theology and the proclamation of the gospel;
4. proclaims the apostolic faith attested in Scripture, transmitted through the living tradition of the Church and summarised in the Nicene Creed;
5. celebrates the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist;
6. believes in the common priesthood of the whole people of God, but also possesses an ordained ministry exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways and involving the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and the exercise of oversight;
7. witnesses to the gospel in word and deed by proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to all people, including those of other faiths, witnessing to the moral values of the gospel, responding to human suffering and need and caring for creation.

24. These characteristics correspond to the beliefs about the nature and mission of the Church which the Church of England holds, and to which it has borne witness by the way it orders its own life, by what it has said in numerous ecumenical agreements¹⁵ and by the assent it has given to the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission.¹⁶ Mutual recognition of such characteristics between Churches could provide a constructive basis for engagement in shared mission and worship although, as noted above in the response to question 2, further steps would be needed for the Church of England to be able to enter into full sacramental communion with that Church involving the interchangeability of ministry.¹⁷

v) **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?**

25. The description of the church as a community of witness, worship and discipleship (2) is good, but the question of how these activities relate to one another might helpfully be explored further. The Church of England, for instance, gives a high value to the role of worship in the formation of disciples and the nurturing of witness, something which is grounded in the mission of God which creates the church. More generally, one important theme for Anglicans that is not strongly present in *TCV* is the relation between the doctrine of the church and the way she prays, prayer which in the Church of England has always been seen as in the first place corporate and accessible, 'common'. While worship is referred to at numerous points (e.g. ¶67), we would want to be more explicit that this is one of the ends for which the Church was created and redeemed and which belongs to her eschatological reality.

¹⁵ See *The Meissen Agreement – Texts*, London: CCU, 1992; *The Porvoo Common Statement*, London: CCU 1993; *Anglican-Moravian Conversations*, London: CCU, 1996; *Called to Witness and Service*, London: CHP, 1999; *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, London and Peterborough: CHP/Methodist Publishing House 200; *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, London: SPCK/CTS; *Healing the past – Building the future*, London: CCU 2012.

¹⁶ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>

¹⁷ See *Called to Witness and Service* paras 26-27.

26. We would want to emphasize the need to maintain a vision of the life of the Church as spanning the generations and indeed embracing all of time. The departed faithful belong to her still and we continue to enjoy communion with them and are strengthened by their fellowship. This receives an eschatological reference in the conclusion (¶68). Absent, save in the conclusion, is there any exploration of the God-given glorification of the church.
27. Questions about how a universal ministry of primacy in the service of the unity and mission of the Church might be received by Anglicans have been explored in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸ While the Church of England does not have a formal position on this matter, the extent to which it is a good that we should seek is an important area to be addressed in future ecumenical ecclesiology.
28. In ¶22 and ¶35, the report touches on the sensitive and tricky question of sin in the Church, on which it seems impossible to bridge the gap between Lutherans and Orthodox. Karl Rahner called this issue ‘one of the most agonising questions of ecclesiology’. Rahner's own view was that, ‘The Church is a sinful Church: this is a truth of faith ... and it is a shattering truth.’¹⁹ Again, more work is needed in this area, perhaps addressing the imperative of continual reform and renewal (which is a potential point of convergence between the Reformers and Vatican II). Similarly, we appreciated seeing the question of the Church as sacrament raised (¶27), following the articulation of this theme at the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen gentium*. It has been adopted by the Church of England and much more widely in ecumenical dialogue through the language of ‘sign, instrument and foretaste’²⁰ and represents a theologically creative response to one of the fault lines of western Christianity, namely the mediating role of the church. Significant convergence between Reformation theology and modern Roman Catholic ecclesiology is possible on this issue.²¹ This is a particularly welcome discussion and merits further exploration.
29. While Anglicans can affirm the prominence given to *koinonia* in developing ecumenical ecclesiology, we would also note that this can obscure other significant areas of ecclesiological reflection. For instance, *koinonia* theology has tended to overlook or be actively hostile to canon law. In part, this is due to misplaced presuppositions about the transcending of law by grace. In its concern to move beyond restrictive ecclesiastical structures, *koinonia* theology has overlooked the importance of canon law in institutional churches where it may ensure that initiatives can be taken confidently and with a measure of security for the future. This may be reflected in the way that *TCV* has little to say about either commandment or rule and seems suspicious of ‘law’ in the life of the church. There is no reference to the positive role of canon law in the ordering of the church and in facilitating the saving work of God; this is something which Anglicans have learnt to value.²²
30. In the same context, we would also want to highlight the importance of conflict in the life of the church. *Koinonia* theology, rooted in the life of the Trinity, has been developed on the presupposition that it is a theology of unity and harmony. However, the unity and harmony

¹⁸ *Gift of Authority*.

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, Baltimore, ML: Helicon Press, 1969, pp. 253, 260.

²⁰ E.g. in *Church as Communion*.

²¹ Paul Avis, ‘The Sacraments in the Mission of the Church’, Porvoo Theological Conference, Copenhagen, October 2012.

²² Norman Doe, *Canon Law in the Anglican Communion: A Worldwide Perspective*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

of *koinonia* in Christian experience only comes about through the alienation and suffering of the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. The life of Jesus – from which comes the *koinonia* in Christ of the churches – is marked by conflict with his critics and even among the disciples. The conflicts of the early churches are manifest in Acts and Pauline letters like those to the Galatians and 1 Corinthians. Perhaps the most striking instance of conflict within the *koinonia* of the church is when Paul ‘opposed [Peter] to his face, because he stood self-condemned’ (Gal 2:11). The fact that there are major conflicts in all the contemporary churches on sex and gender should not – in the light of the conflict over circumcision within the early churches – surprise us. The ecclesiological issue is how the churches deal with conflict. This was addressed in the Kuala Lumpur Report of the third Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (2008). Paragraphs 50-51 are particularly relevant:

50. Conflict arises because of real differences about our faithfulness to our Christian vocation. Conflict always involves suffering, puzzlement and distress. When harnessed creatively, it can however be a gift from God (e.g. Philippians 3.7-11, 4.11-13; cf. Genesis 33.10; Isaiah 58.4-11). The path towards resolving such conflict will involve following in the steps of the crucified Christ and allowing the presence of the Spirit to bring the conflicted parties to a place of new life. Situations of conflict can, through the power of the Spirit, become opportunities to enhance our mutual understanding and to grow in the faith. The experience of conflict can offer an opportunity for Christians in the midst of their disagreement to discover the love for the other that is at the heart of Christ’s sacrifice and which characterises our vocation in Christ. Our constant temptation is to grasp at the resolution of conflict by deployment of power and by manipulation. This is not the way of Christ. There is always need for a ministry of reconciliation to guide Christians in the way of Christ and to build up the Body of Christ. Sometimes we hear of Communion being broken, and often this language is used in rhetorical exchanges about particular issues in dispute. The greater reality, however, is the brokenness of the church within which communion can and does flourish. Communion flourishes when we accept that discipleship in the church is a call to the way of the cross in the brokenness of the church to which we all contribute.

51. Such costly participation in the crucifixion and resurrection sharpens our sense of the hope we have in Christ. This hope will not permit the fallibility which we bring to handling our conflicts to be the last word. Within the day-to-day process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding we grow up into that unity in Christ which characterises the catholicity of the church in all its fullness.²³

31. These paragraphs strike an ecclesiological note that comes from deep within Anglican experience. Their emphasis on the reality and ecclesiological importance of conflict may represent a distinctive contribution from Anglicanism to a convergence text like *TCV*. This is an important area for further exploration, not least in the light of the fact that for Anglicans questions of how one lives in communion include those areas covered by moral and ascetical theology.

²³ Text available at http://www.aco.org/ministry/theological/iatdc/docs/communion_conflict_&_hope.pdf.