

# God's Mission as a Call for Transforming Unity

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## Abstract

*This article offers a critical reflection on the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelization in 2018 in Arusha, asking for a renewed focus on and discussion of ecumenical and missional theology, especially the relation between unity and diversity among churches and Christians. Based on an outline of the ecumenical discussion on “unity and (reconciled) diversity,” the author asks for a strengthened focus on the unity of the church. She claims that transforming unity is important for the credibility of the church in its communication of the gospel to the world, that transforming unity is a “matter of survival” in times of secularization and in times of religious persecution, and that transforming unity implies a call to diakonia as an unnegotiable part of God’s mission to the world. Concluding, the author asks for further theological discourse on important themes lifted up by the Arusha Conference, like “mission from the margins,” the work of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), deification/sanctification/theosis, and the relation between unity and diversity in worship and spirituality. Finally, the author underlines that the Arusha Conference was an important reminder of God’s call to the churches for the ongoing mission of transforming unity.*

## Keywords

*World Council of Churches, Faith and Order, The Church towards a Common Vision, Arusha Conference, unity, diversity, transforming unity, mission*

In this article, I want to reflect on the World Council of Churches (WCC) Conference on World Mission and Evangelization in 2018 (“Arusha Conference”) from my perspective as a member of the Faith and Order Commission, with a specific interest in

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how the notion of unity was discussed and expressed. The Arusha Conference was an important space for ecumenical encounter and exchange between all its participants, between the different commissions of the WCC, and with the wider ecumenical world. Under the theme “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship,” the conference gave space for a wide range of expressions and made visible “that the nature and character of mission and evangelism are truly multi-directional and multi-faceted.”<sup>1</sup> Arusha underlined both “the richness of the diversity of God’s creation” and “our unity in the transforming mission of God in the world.”<sup>2</sup> Little emphasis was put in the discussion on our unity in our joint faith in the triune God, in our faith in the crucified and risen Christ. A main impression from the conference was that it gave great and unconditional space to very many different expressions and the *diversity* of faith found within the framework of WCC member churches and associated bodies and organizations. There was rather limited reflection on the *unity* of the church, and a number of important theological issues to be discussed were unfortunately not really brought to the public discourse during the conference. The Arusha Conference was primarily a celebration of Christian diversity, and as such an exciting event.

This article is firstly a quest for a renewed focus on and discussion of ecumenical and missional theology, including the relation between unity and diversity between the churches and Christians.

The Faith and Order Commission had from its beginning a specific responsibility to work toward the *unity* of the church, through its theological discourse and agreements on the doctrines of the church. “The Commission on Faith and Order is a study commission of the World Council of Churches. The purpose of the theological studies it undertakes is ecumenical: ‘to serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship.’”<sup>3</sup>

The WCC’s constitution underlines:

The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelization Arusha, “Conference Report” (2018), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Commission on Faith and Order, “What We Do,” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/faith-and-order>.

<sup>4</sup> *Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches*, 30 October 2013 (as amended by the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Republic of Korea, 2013), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules>.

Thus, unity is at the heart of the WCC's identity and self-description. This is not opposed to the awareness that diversity is a natural consequence of the many different contexts, traditions, ages, cultures, experiences, perspectives, and orientations. Coming from a Faith and Order context, a context predominantly working toward the unity of the church, this article seeks to focus on the relation between unity and diversity in the understanding of mission. This includes also a critical perspective on how the Arusha Conference expressed this ecumenical journey toward the greater unity of the church. My main objective is that the call to transforming discipleship that was expressed during the Arusha Conference also needs to be a call to transforming unity.

This article will discuss the relation between unity and diversity and ecumenical models like "unity in reconciled diversity." Based on this, I will consider different arguments for why and how God's mission call, the *missio Dei*, always also needs to be a call to unity, a unity that in itself is transforming God's people and God's world.

## Unity and Diversity

Unity does not mean uniformity; diversity does not mean division. Nevertheless, these terms are easily mixed and confused in the context of ecumenical encounter. The question must therefore be posed: How can the churches combine unity and diversity without falling into the trap of uniformity or division? Unity involves the fundamental recognition of the other in her/his difference, recognizing the diversity between human beings and churches. Diversity, which is torn apart from this unity, easily falls into division. Unity, which is torn apart from the recognition of the world's diversity, easily falls into the trap of power abuse or naivety.

The divisions between human people, between churches and traditions, are an obstacle to the church, because of God's call for Christian unity. Roman Catholic Church leader Cardinal Kasper underlined, "The divisions within the church are . . . structures of sin. They thwart God's plan of salvation, contradict the will of Christ Jesus and are an offense to the world and an obstacle to the most essential mission of the church."<sup>5</sup>

The WCC is committed "to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship." In which way do the mission movement and the Arusha Conference reflect this call for unity? The balance between, on the one hand, the diversity experienced

<sup>5</sup> Cardinal Kasper, "Vatican II: Toward a Multifaceted Unity," in *Origins: CNS Documentary Service* 45:9 (2015), 157.

between Christians and churches, and on the other hand, the fundamental understanding that there is a unity – both a unity that is already achieved and an eschatological unity that we need to hope for – is often experienced as a slippery slope in the ecumenical discourse.

According to the preamble of the WCC's constitution, the "World Council of Churches is 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." Thus, there is a basic Christological unity between the WCC member churches in the confession that Jesus Christ is God and Saviour, that it is the Bible that informs the churches about this doctrine, and that the churches unite in a common call, which glorifies the triune God. This common belief and call form the basis for the churches' cooperation and work toward visible unity. Nevertheless, there is an enormous variety and diversity among the churches when it comes to expressions of faith and spirituality, traditions, and church appearances.

This diversity was clearly visible in Arusha. The Mission Conference offered a great and nonjudicial space for all forms of expressions. In many ways, one might say that Arusha was a festival of Christian diversity.

During the Arusha Conference, the moderator of Faith and Order, the Rev. Dr Susan Durber, related the theme of mission to the theme of "Unity and Diversity." In a remarkable speech, she underlined the need to strive for unity because of God's call in Christ "to be one," because of the nature of God's mission to the world, facing the world's many challenges, striving for "true unity, and bringing down walls": "We speak many different languages. We come from many different cultures and many different churches. And yet, and yet, in all our diversity we are still being made one people, by the one God revealed in Jesus Christ and present with us in the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

Unity and diversity are therefore loaded terms. We need to pose the questions of how unity and diversity can go hand-in-hand in God's mission to the world and how the terms can be qualified to strengthen the churches' "pilgrimage of justice and peace" in a positive way. One attempt in this context is to determine the term "diversity" as "reconciled diversity."

<sup>6</sup> Susan Durber, "Mission: Unity and Diversity," WCC, 9 March 2018, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/rev-dr-susan-durber-mission-unity-and-diversity>.

## Unity in Reconciled Diversity

The concept of “unity in diversity,” or even “unity through diversity,” appears in a number of contexts and traditions. It is impossible to give account of the wealth of mention and discussion of this concept and its application within the ecumenical discourse.<sup>7</sup> In order to show the concept’s relevance in our context, but also its limitations, I want to note two of the theological contexts in which it has been applied and developed, mainly within the Roman Catholic and within a Protestant context.

The Lutheran New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann underlined that this concept is inherent in the New Testament, developing further an earlier understanding that the church of the New Testament time was primarily a church without diversity.<sup>8</sup> Cullmann, starting from his New Testament exegesis, underlined that unity does not mean uniformity. Unity in the church was from the beginning a gift of the Holy Spirit, leading toward recognizing the others in all their variety as true Christians. Thus, he not only recognized the concept of unity in diversity, but also underlined that it is God’s will to work for unity *through* diversity, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Cullmann’s ideas became decisive in different ecclesial and ecumenical contexts, among them the Leuenberg church fellowship/Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE).

The ecumenical model of “unity in reconciled diversity” plays a core role<sup>9</sup> in the context of Protestant churches, like the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). The model on the one hand underlines the need to find and maintain a common basis of doctrinal agreement. The main reformation principle from the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, *Confessio Augustana*, CA VII – *satis est*, “what is sufficient for church unity” – gives the theoretical framework. The unity achieved does not embrace unity in all aspects of church fellowship, but it embraces unity in the most important aspects: the understanding of word and sacrament as a sufficient basis for communion. On the other hand, the model underlines and gives freedom to uphold one’s own identity and culture. Diversity in itself is not a goal, but is a natural part of being different churches, in different contexts, with different forms of ecclesial identity. It is a *reconciled* diversity which in itself does not threaten the fundamental unity achieved on core

<sup>7</sup> See David Carter, “Unity in Reconciled Diversity: Cop-out or Rainbow Church?” *Theology* 113:876 (2010), 411–20.

<sup>8</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Unity through Diversity: Its Foundation and a Contribution to the Discussion Concerning the Possibilities of Its Actualization*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> See Stéphanie Dietrich, “(Sichtbare) Einheit in versöhnter Verschiedenheit? Das ökumenische Modell der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft – Grundlagen, Qualitäten, Herausforderungen,” in *Ökumene-überdacht. Reflexionen und Realitäten im Umbruch*, QD 259, ed. Thomas Breme and Maria Weernsmann (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 208–22.

issues. At the same time, this model obliges the CPCE member churches to strive to deepen and strengthen the fellowship they have found together.

Within the Roman Catholic context, after the Second Vatican Council, following up the council's precautionary widening of the Roman Catholic Church's approach to other church traditions, a number of documents from this church context witness to the use of the concept "unity in diversity." In the church constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which might be seen as the crowning achievement of the council, it becomes evident that the council's salvation-history approach led to a dynamic understanding of the church. A pneumatological and eschatological understanding of the church replaced a more juridical and static approach. This gave space to an explicit appreciation of diversity.

The former Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger, agreed with Cullmann's approach<sup>10</sup> and underlined:

A unity negotiated by men could only be a matter of human right . . . consequently it could not be a testimony to the mystery of Jesus Christ but would merely speak in favor of the diplomatic skill and willingness to compromise of those who conducted the negotiations. I have found very helpful the formula that Oscar Cullmann recently injected into the debate: unity through multiplicity, through diversity . . . Along the path marked out by Cullmann, therefore, we should first try to find unity through diversity, in other words, to accept what is fruitful in our divisions, to detoxify them, and to welcome the positive things that come precisely from diversity.<sup>11</sup>

Pope Francis followed up this positive recognition of Christian diversity in *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2013:

The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity. It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis. Diversity is a beautiful thing when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation and seal a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a "reconciled diversity." As the bishops of the Congo have put it: "Our ethnic diversity is our wealth . . . It is only in unity, through conversion of hearts and reconciliation, that we will be able to help our country to develop on all levels."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cullmann was one of the very few theologians from a non-Catholic church background invited to participate in parts of the Second Vatican Council. His exegetical thoughts truly had an impact on different texts from the council.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2010), 170.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons, and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, 24 November 2013 (Vatican Press), <https://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/files/assets/basic-html/index.html#174>.



Although many Roman Catholic theologians draw on the model of reconciled diversity, and unity in diversity, the model is also criticized as signalling “diversity without real unity,” because “a real unity in diversity, i.e. a unity in faith, in the same sacraments and the same apostolically founded episcopal ministry” is not given.<sup>13</sup> This reveals ambiguity in the acknowledgement of the concept from the Roman Catholic side.

One of the aspects to be discussed in our context of mission theology is whether this model becomes too static, in a way saying that diversity in itself automatically is a common good. Secondly, the unity must be a unity, which serves not only as a declaration but also as *visible* unity with a necessary influence on the living together of churches and people. The challenge lies in the ability to, on the one hand, balance the unity and agreement on fundamental issues, and on the other hand, give space for a diversity that enriches and does not threaten the living together of churches and people.

The model of “unity in reconciled diversity” is also a relevant approach to intercultural and interreligious dialogue. “Unity in reconciled diversity” means community-building based on common values and a continuing discourse on the differences between the different stakeholders in society. The will to define a common platform is decisive for the success of this project of living together with diversities.

An often-cited critique of the “unity in reconciled diversity” model came from Jürgen Moltmann when he, in his memoirs reflecting on his 20-year membership in the Faith and Order Commission, denotes the model to be the “sleeping pill of the ecumenical movement. We all stay as we are and are nice to each other.”<sup>14</sup> This critique should be taken seriously. When enjoying and even celebrating the diversity of the churches, the obligation to work for the unity of the churches and the drive to look for the common foundation easily falls out of sight. In this respect, the model can enforce a static and non-flexible mode of being church and make the churches’ movement together and development toward unity harder.

## Unity and Diversity in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*

The discourse on the limits of diversity and the criteria for discernment and unity has been going on in the framework of the WCC since its institution. The WCC assembly

<sup>13</sup> Cardinal W. Kasper, “Herausforderung zum Dialog. Gegenwärtige Situation und künftige Perspektiven der Ökumene,” *KNA-ÖKT* Nr. 22/23 (2002), 3.6.200, Dok. 7,11 (my translation).

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 86.

in Canberra, Australia, in 1991 adopted a text from the Faith and Order Commission on *The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling – The Canberra Statement*.

Diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic, or historical contexts are integral to the nature of communion; yet there are limits to diversity. Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8); salvation and the final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community.<sup>15</sup>

Also, Faith and Order's latest document on ecclesiology, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV), released in 2013,<sup>16</sup> points to the struggle of finding a good balance between unity and diversity. Within it, §§28-30 deal with the questions of communion in unity and diversity, and §28 draws attention to the understanding of legitimate diversity in the life of communion as a gift from the Lord. Based on a biblical understanding that there is a variety of gifts (see 1 Cor. 12:4-7; 1 Cor. 12:14-26) and a call to unity (see Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37), TCTCV acknowledges unity and diversity as biblically founded and compatible aspects of the Christian church.

In §28, TCTCV uses the somewhat ambiguous term “legitimate” diversity, which presupposes that there is an “illegitimate diversity.” Then, §30 points to the Apostles Council reported in Acts 15:1-29, when the decision was taken to welcome gentiles into the Christian community, thereby providing an example for the principle of “what is essential.” TCTCV explores, based on earlier WCC documents and bilateral dialogues, what it calls “legitimate diversity.” There are good reasons to question the term “legitimate diversity,” which was not widely used in the above-mentioned earlier ecumenical texts, since “legitimate” would hinder the possibility for an open conversation about the possible limits of diversity and suggest a rather juridical solution to the discourse. The question should be what kind of diversity causes division rather than what kind of diversity is “legitimate.” This also raises the question of power relations and abuses, related to the question of authority. “All churches seek to follow the will of the Lord, yet they continue to disagree on some aspects of faith and order and, moreover, on whether such disagreements are Church-divisive or, instead, part of legitimate diversity.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Faith and Order Commission, “The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling – The Canberra Statement,” 20 February 1991, §2.2, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-unity-of-the-church-gift-and-calling-the-canberra-statement>.

<sup>16</sup> Faith and Order Commission, “The Church: Towards a Common Vision,” 6 March 2013, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>.

<sup>17</sup> TCTCV §30.



In a concluding paragraph, TCTCV outlines the dilemmas related to diversity, pointing to the question of criteria for discernment and the need for mutually recognized structures. It finally invites the churches “to consider: what positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible?”<sup>18</sup>

## Transforming Unity And Credibility

The strive for unity is important for the church’s credibility. The Canberra Statement from 1991 underlined that

The calling of the Church is to proclaim reconciliation and provide healing, to overcome divisions based on race, gender, age, culture, colour and to bring all people into communion with God. Because of sin and the misunderstanding of the diverse gifts of the Spirit, the churches are painfully divided within themselves and among each other. The scandalous divisions damage the credibility of their witness to the world in worship and service. Moreover, they contradict not only the Church’s witness but also its very nature.<sup>19</sup>

There is a link between God’s mission to the world and the way it is proclaimed and lived out by the churches. The churches’ witness to the world in word and service is strengthened and becomes more credible when the churches and Christians themselves live what they proclaim. When conflicts between Christians prevail, and disagreement on core doctrinal issues becomes evident, the message itself suffers and the Christian message of salvation in Christ loses its credibility.

For non-Christians, the ongoing divide between Christian denominations and groups around doctrinal, ethical, and practical matters becomes an anti-witness to the message itself. Thus, ecumenical dialogue for unity is not only a godly demand, and inherent to the biblical message, but also a matter of credibility with regard to the world and societies.

One might ask, with good reason: Why can’t Christians even agree on the dates when they celebrate Jesus Christ’s birth and resurrection? Why is there still a divide between Christians when confessing their faith with the words of the Nicene Creed? What role do the different structures and organizations play for the churches? Why are the churches in many places involved in ethnic and military conflicts? Why is there so much disagreement on core issues, both within and between Christian churches?

<sup>18</sup> TCTCV §§ 28–30.

<sup>19</sup> Faith and Order Commission, “The Unity of the Church,” 1.2.

The list of questions could be continued endlessly, reminding the churches that their pilgrimage toward unity is not only a God-given demand and obligation, but also a matter of credibility in the world. The churches can only be faithful to their mission by giving a common witness to Jesus Christ in witness and service, in all realms of life. This includes finding a balance among a witness to the gospel, respect for people's dignity, and solidarity with those who suffer.

## Transforming Unity As a Matter of Survival

Seeking together as Christians and as persons of faith – focusing on what unites the churches rather than what separates them – becomes vital in different circumstances. In many contexts, churches are facing the growth of secularism. In countries shaped by instituted churches, formerly gathering the majority of the citizens, as in many parts of the global North, the decrease in church affiliation reminds churches of the need to concentrate on the essential. This may be distinguished as faith in the triune God and good news about Jesus Christ, rather than focusing on what still divides them and holds them apart. In many contexts, the question is no longer what church one belongs to, but whether one is a Christian – or a person of faith – at all. Thus, secularization is also a vivid call to reconsider what unites the churches, and what essential message we need to communicate to the societies we are a part of. Standing together in search for unity contributes to the reconfiguration of the churches and their identity, reminding us of the essence of their being and their common call and mission.

Another growing issue in different parts of the world is the persecution of Christians and other groups of faith. Persecution of Christians does not discriminate between different denominations. Catholics, Protestants, or Orthodox are Christians and therefore are oppressed, persecuted, and murdered – simply because they are Christians. Traditional aspects of faith and order, of church structure and theology, become of secondary interest when being Christian or a member of a church becomes a matter of survival. Christian unity then is a matter not only of interest or prioritization, but also of mere existence. One might certainly discuss whether having a common “enemy” in constructing identity and seeking together with others is an important factor in this context. Where life and survival are at stake, being Christian officially or appearing as an organized church in public space can be life-threatening, and thus impossible. When confession of faith becomes a matter of survival, traditional church-dividing issues become of secondary interest. Standing together as persons of faith and supporting each other is the paramount aspect of being in communion. Church history through the centuries, beginning in the early church and especially before the Constantine turn,

confirms that persecution plays a decisive role in the formation of Christian communities and churches.

Figures are not always reliable and are often used and misused for political or religious propaganda purposes. It is also well known that persecution of persons of faith and faith organizations not only affects Christians, but also Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other faiths. In this context, it is important to discern between persecution and discrimination, both in everyday situations and officially through legal systems in different countries. The discussion on the impact of persecution on the Christian church needs to take into consideration the danger of victimizing Christians in countries where they have a long-standing history and presence, like the Christians in many countries of the Middle East, and where the Christians themselves prefer to be treated as citizens rather than as persecuted minorities.

Nevertheless, in all these circumstances – where being a Christian and practising one's religion, and organizing this religious practice in one form or another cannot be taken for granted – standing and seeking together as Christians, that is, *transforming unity*, becomes decisive for the existence of the believers and the Christian communities.

## Transforming Unity as a Call to *Diakonia*

The unity of the church and the unity of humanity are fatefully interwoven today. It is the duty of the churches, for the sake of world peace and the communication of the gospel, not to accept division between Christians, but to strive for unity. Conversion to God and conversion to our neighbour belong indissolubly together. Conversion to the gospel therefore includes opening up to other Christians and other churches. The relationship between ecumenism and world mission demands an ecumenism that is not limited to academic theological dialogue but is also an ecumenism of life. That does not mean replacing questions about truth and theological discourse with questions about praxis, but rather practising a more holistic approach to mission, which includes *diakonia*, the service of the church, as an intrinsic aspect of its life.

The WCC has recently discussed a working document on ecumenical *diakonia*, a joint document together with the ACT Alliance and the Lutheran World Federation. The document reflects the growing interest and concern in many churches to have a holistic approach to their mission, where the *diakonia* of the church is seen as an aspect of its identity. The *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* defines *diakonia* as “the responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people.” In her lecture to the All Africa Conference of Churches Assembly in

July 2018, Professor Isabel Apawo Phiri, deputy secretary general of the WCC, underlined that

the strongest point of the working document *Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia* is that it works on the premise that faith and human rights are not mutually exclusive – indeed quite the opposite. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” says Jesus Christ (John 10:10). A faith-based approach means that, through diakonia, the church has a distinctive, authentic, and unique voice in dialogue with civil society actors.<sup>20</sup>

The WCC document emphasizes the link between unity and sharing as a basis for a renewed understanding of ecumenical *diakonia*: “The ecumenical movement is carried by the conviction that unity and sharing are intimately interrelated as God’s gracious gift and vocation. At the same time, this commitment to unity and sharing cannot be limited to the life of the churches and their wellbeing; it is a calling to serve in the world, participating in God’s mission of healing and reconciliation, and of lifting up signs of hope, announcing by word and deed God’s reign, its justice and peace.”<sup>21</sup>

The focus on *diakonia* as “service of the gospel in word and deeds” and intrinsic to the being of the church is also reflected in Faith and Order’s latest study on ecclesiology, TCTCV. Chapter 4 of this document starts by underlining that “service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the church” (58). It emphasizes that God’s primary attitude to the world is love toward every human being and the whole creation. Based on this emphasis on God’s very identity as love, TCTCV underlines: “The Church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for transformation of the world.” The promotion of justice and peace is understood as a constitutive aspect of evangelization and an indispensable part of the church’s mission in the world.

## Conclusion

*The Arusha Call to Discipleship* lifted up a number of important theological themes. It might be well worth giving further theological attention to these and exploring them in the fellowship of WCC member churches, Faith and Order member churches, and other ecclesial bodies and communities in order to deepen our unity. Some of the themes lifted up in this context were discipleship and growth in Christ (*theosis*), mission

<sup>20</sup> Isabel Phiri, “An Overview of the Imperative of Diakonia for the Church,” 6 July 2018, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/diakonia/an-overview-on-the-imperative-of-diakonia-for-the-church/>

<sup>21</sup> *Called to Transformative Action – Ecumenical Diakonia*, Revised draft 17 April 2018. Presented to the WCC central committee June 2018.

from the margins, and the work of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology). These themes are important for mission theology and would be important issues to discuss more deeply theologically.

The Arusha Conference also focused on and incorporated worship and celebration as an important part of it. There was an open space for many different expressions of worship, but little discussion on the relation between diversity and unity in worship and spirituality, which would be an interesting theological issue to follow up. What role does worship play for the ecumenical encounter? What is the relationship between our experience of fellowship in worship and prayer and fellowship in service for the world? How can they be interlinked? How can our unity in worship and spirituality be linked?

The important concept of “mission from the margins” is used widely but might benefit from further theological exploration. What does it mean that mission comes from the margins, that the people at the margins are the subjects of mission? It might be interesting to explore the concept “mission from the margins” together with the concept of “*communio* ecclesiology.”

The life of the church in the world is intrinsically interwoven with the life of the church as *koinonia*, in word and sacrament, and it is based on the triune God’s own identity as divine love and God’s plan for the transformation of the whole cosmos. The church is called to serve, because God has served the world through God’s own son, his incarnation and service, death, and resurrection. By serving the world and human people, the church fulfils its task to bear witness to God’s reconciliation, healing, and transformation of the cosmos. Thus, God’s call to unity goes hand in hand with God’s call to serve and to communicate the gospel in word and deed. God calls the churches to strive for unity. The Arusha Conference was an important reminder of the ongoing mission and the call for transforming unity.