

CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVES: THE CHURCH: TOWARDS A COMMON
VISION—INTEREST GROUP

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This was the second year where contributors were invited to reflect on the convergence statement of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* from a Catholic perspective. The fruit of over twenty years of multilateral dialogue on matters of ecclesiology, this text has been placed into the hands of the churches for their official reception and response, in a manner similar to the reception of the historic consensus on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* in the 1980s.

In his presentation, "Reading *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* Missiologically," Steven Bevans reflects on the presence of a missiological perspective in the document's ecclesiology. He suggests that just as the missional ecclesiology of Vatican II was strengthened in the elaboration of the texts of its final session, that TCTCV ought to be read and studied through the lens of the Busan document of the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, "Together Towards Life," a text that greatly influenced the final stages of drafting TCTCV. Bevans hopes for a day when F&O and the CWME might come together to draft a common agreed statement on mission and ecclesial unity. In general, Bevans finds that TCTCV's ecclesiology could take far more seriously the essential missionary nature of the church. While its starting point, a consideration of mission and unity, has the potential to influence the whole document, this perspective does not have equal weight in every chapter. Were the missional perspective given greater priority, Bevans suggests, the mark of "apostolicity" would be seen as foundational for all the others and thus be treated first, reshaping the understanding of catholicity, holiness, and oneness. At the same time, if mission were the driving force, the purpose and structure of ministry might emerge more clearly as serving, not only to direct the activities of ecclesial life, but as something arising from the nature of the church itself. Finally, Bevans suggests the need to state more clearly that we seek unity, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the mission of the world.

Susan K. Wood's paper examines the correlation between TCTCV's ecclesiology of communion and the recognition of ministries. She finds a number of criteria for recognition enumerated in TCTCV's description of the local church. Citing a study of the Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, "The Church Local and Universal," TCTCV lists baptism, the proclamation of the Word, the confession of the apostolic faith, the celebration of the sacraments, the presence of *episkopé* and other ministries, and witness to Christ's redemptive work for the world (§31). It then notes a persistent divergence between those churches that see the bishop "as a successor to the apostles" as essential to the structure of the local church, and those who hold that communion in faith through time and with other local churches might be maintained through other means (§32). Suggesting that this definition of the local church might serve to challenge Catholic theology to reconsider its approach to ecclesial

recognition, Woods notes that recent examples of Catholic teaching, including *Pastor Aeternus*, *Lumen Gentium*, and *Dominus Iesus*, seem to begin from a single criterion—its particular understanding of the hierarchical structure of ministry, and extrapolate to a judgment regarding ecclesiality. She argues that TCTCV, as well as recent work in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, provide a basis for a more nuanced and differentiated practice for the mutual recognition of ministries—one that would admit a qualified, but immediate, partial recognition. They suggest that any judgment regarding the effective ministry of oversight in service of the apostolic faith must take more seriously the presence of the many “essential elements of communion” as vital signs of ecclesial fidelity. In such a scenario one would proceed from the life of the church to the practice of ministry, inverting the order followed in more recent Catholic teaching.

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