

Shifting Paradigms – Future Ecumenical Challenges¹

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1. The Hermeneutical Shift

1.1 *From Unity to Diversity*

Two trends apply to the ecumenical question in the future. The first is the process of secularization, that is, the segmentation within society that demands that churches redefine their place² – faith being just one option among many. The second is a growing awareness of the global dimension of church and the political challenges that come with it.³

Both trends mean that the classic paradigm of the ecumenical movement and its crucial elements are stretched to their limits. Konrad Raiser describes these elements as a “Christocentric orientation,” “a concentration on the church” (that is, ecclesiology as the central topic), and a kind of “universal outlook.”⁴ He also states that “this approach cannot work in societies that are very differentiated functionally, and it becomes an illusion in societies without one normative tradition, where the faith of individuals is increasingly a matter of individual choice”⁵. That means that the classic paradigm has no relevance,

1 Translation by Christian Henkel on 29.10.2018.

2 See Konrad Raiser, „Ethik und Ekklesiologie,“ in ÖR 44 [1995] 411-421, 416.

3 Cf. *ibid.* 417.

4 Cf. Konrad Raiser, *Ökumene im Übergang. Paradigmenwechsel in der ökumenischen Bewegung*, München 1989, 69; zur ausführlichen Analyse der einzelnen Elemente vgl. *ebd.* 69-76.

5 Anna Marie Aargaard, *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, In: ST 55 (2001) 157-174, 161.

because developing a strategy for dealing with plurality and diversity becomes the litmus test of ecumenism.

Two things become increasingly important. First, a paradigm with universal aspirations cannot be conceived of without being accused of a hidden agenda of domination. How do we deal with this reality? Second, from where does a “global model” even derive its criteria when everyone is talking about inculturation, diversity, and so on? A fundamental theological problem seems to be unsolvable: how does the underlying strict Christocentrism of the classic paradigm relate to the plurality of religions – the new paradigm that has emerged in the last few decades?⁶

Given this perspective, the limits of the classic ecumenical paradigm, and therefore the need to supplement it, become more and more urgent. This problem particularly concerns what Raiser calls the “centerpiece” of ecumenism, ecclesiology.⁷

One observation is crucial. Ecumenical hermeneutics has changed from eliminating differences – by searching for a growing consensus in different ecclesiological issues – to an explicit recognition and appreciation of differences. “Although the previous paradigm was blatantly vertical when it talked about the church [that is, only one true church, one true tradition, one true whatever exists], we now find a horizontal understanding of unity in the sense of mediation between different traditions and positions.”⁸ Plurality now is to be understood not an acceptable evil, but as a good that needs to be preserved. This approach fits well with the late-modern *zeitgeist* and its “praise for diversity.” The consequences are obvious. “Reconciling or balancing the differences between various church traditions becomes the highest form of ecumenical unity that

6 Cf. Aargaard, Ecclesiology, *ibid.*; cf. auch Raiser, *Übergang*, 91: „Aber kann ein dogmatisches Urteil über den Ort der Religionen Im Heilshandeln Gottes mit der Welt als die innere Konsequenz einer exklusiv oder inklusiv verstandenen christozentrischen Grundentscheidung in der Situation der religiösen Pluralität festgehalten werden?“

7 Cf. Raiser, *Übergang*, 112.

8 Raiser, *Übergang*, 119f.

realistically can be achieved.”⁹ Consequently, “this shift in focus means that talking about the unity of the church has become questionable in itself.”¹⁰ No wonder everyone now prefers unity in reconciled diversity as the promising future model. But a closer look reveals that the model of a unity in reconciled diversity also dulls every critical denominational characteristic. Because, as Bruce D. Marshall reminds his fellow ecumenists, the strategy of reconciled diversity “apparently allows only limited possibilities for ecclesial repentance.” Amicable relations between churches seem to assume the integrity of each community’s doctrines, which in turn means that they assume the absence of any qualitative defects in the doctrines and sees them as adequate for Christian communal life.¹¹ No changes needed? Business as usual for every denomination? What about the idea that conversion is at the heart of ecumenism?

At this point, even ecumenical experts start to feel uncomfortable. Thou shalt not dismiss the question of truth! That’s the eleventh commandment, but what then is the truth? Does distinguishing between true plurality and a false pluralism help? Upon closer examination, a closer look at distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate diversity to define the degree of reconciliation leads nowhere. Such a distinction would “at best become trivial – in light of the tensions and contradictions in the life of the churches. In the worst case, it would turn into an instrument of power to suppress diversity.”¹² But what’s the alternative?

Even if it is a necessary feature of a modern church to allow for the coexistence and plurality of churches, and even if every denomination is obliged to reflect upon that reality – what does it mean to be only one of many churches? This question cannot simply stop with the plurality of churches. Plurality and

9 Ibid.; aber auch: *ibid.* 120: „Immer wie er sind im Verlauf der Geschichte der Kirche Andersdenkende unter Berufung auf die »Einheit der Kirche« ausgeschlossen oder gewalttätig verfolgt worden. Ja, man kann die These vertreten, daß die meisten Spaltungen in der Geschichte der Kirche die Folgen eines überzogenen Einheitsdenkens waren; jedenfalls wird die Vielfalt zum Problem erst wenn sie an einer normativen Gestalt der Einheit gemessen wird. So muß die Frage gestellt werden, ob die ökumenische Diskussion nicht auf die Vorstellung von der »Einheit« der Kirche wegen des mißverständlichen und statisch-abstrakten Charakters dieses Begriffs verzichten sollte“.

10 Cf. Raiser, *Übergang*, 120.

11 Cf. Aargaard, *Ecclesiology*, 171.

12 Cf. Raiser, *Übergang*, 117.

differences make sense only if we can deal with them. Talking about the plurality of the churches requires an answer to the question about our acceptance of diversity, because we can only talk about differences where the other is seen as and is taken as seriously as the other. But how do we deal with this question properly?

Although the internal differentiation in every denomination today has, through a process of centuries of learning, become a nonnegotiable characteristic of their identity, it still seems to be a challenging question for the ecumenical journey. Interestingly, both issues are deeply intertwined. In other words, the more you can accept differences within your own denomination, the better prepared you are to accept them as an ecumenical necessity. Accepting plurality in your own community gives you a kind of a master plan for dealing with interdenominational differences constructively. If you think about your denomination as a monolith, you cannot accept a different way of thinking outside of it.

Is there a useful technique for a successful future diversity management? An observation made by Ottmar Fuchs gives us some direction. He notes that ecumenism or interreligious dialogue cannot work unless it dares to engage in the controversy “whether one’s own tradition (solution or way of thinking) is, in part or overall, *more truthful or better*”¹³ than the other. Only the idea of a wholesome contradiction, which starts the struggle for better solutions, makes sense of diversity. I can change my mind only when I truly care how you see the world. Only an open exchange of arguments, challenging one another, and discussing the potential rivalries of truth produce positive momentum. Thus, a culture of controversy and debate must be developed, taking the claims to be better seriously and integrating them into ecumenical work productively. Only those fundamentally willing to question their own approach and argue about the truth can ultimately understand themselves as reconciled in differences. Then we can get down to the brass tacks.

13 Ottmar Fuchs, Dialog im ‚Martyrium‘ der Wahrheit, in: HThKVatII Bd. 5. Die Dokumente des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils: theologische Zusammenschau und Perspektiven, Freiburg 2006, 357-371, 357f.

Yet, what's the reality in our ecumenical committees and dialogues? Some time ago the Swiss ecumenical theologian Eva-Maria Faber rightly asked if anyone engaged in ecumenical committees and dialogues reckons with new insights and new propositions that leave the well-trodden paths of ecumenical dialog and sets out on the adventure of new ways. Are we not simply reading the results, already sure that we will not hear anything fundamentally new?¹⁴ That is a shame! And it is far from the reality that in ecumenical dialogue we must struggle with one another to learn from each other. Because without struggling about the truth, we will not advance the question of what reconciliation really means when we're talking about the unity of the churches as a unity in *reconciled* diversity.

1.2 From Doctrine to Ethics

A second shift in ecumenical hermeneutics has become apparent in the last decade, confronting the ecumenical movement with the experience of a new kind of insoluble problem. The dominant perspective in the ecumenical dialogue has changed from structural and doctrinal questions about the nature and essence of the church (a kind of ontology of the Church) to a new different perspective. Here one looks at the identity of the church that is tied to its function in the ethical and political realms.¹⁵ A new paradigm of a functional ecclesiology has become apparent. It understands acting in the world as a process of the church coming into its own. The world is being renewed, but the church is also renewing itself through its acting.¹⁶ With the idea of church as developed in the 1970s and 1980s, it is now possible to build bridges to Orthodox ecclesiology and to a Roman Catholic church that renewed itself in the Second Vatican Council by moving from a self-definition as the Church of Christ to being

14 Eva Maria Faber, Umkehr und Veränderungsbereitschaft als konstitutive Elemente des ökumenischen Weges, in: SdZ 230 (2012) 723-734.

15 And thus the dichotomy of essential and functional ecclesiology is subverted. "Den Anstoß dazu vermittelten einerseits die zunehmende Verschärfung und Ausweitung des ethischen Problemhorizonts angesichts der wachsenden Globalisierung der Lebenszusammenhänge und andererseits die drängender werdenden kritischen Anfragen an die Glaubwürdigkeit der christlichen Kirchen im Zug der Säkularisierung" (Raiser, Ethik 415).

16 Cf. Raiser, Übergang, 130.

church in the modern world. This development made the 1970s a golden era of the ecumenical movement¹⁷ and made ecumenism, with its political and ethical questions, an attractive issue in many parts of the world. The primary image of any ecclesiology was the church in action. But the halcyon days of ecumenism have come to an end. This “political approach to social ethics, as it has been developed within the WCC, is a project of modern *Western* thinking. But the shared assumptions of the good life on which this approach was based disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s into the particular agendas of different cultures, subcultures, and ethnic groups, and there has been increasing conflict between the many participants with their differing scenarios about what changes are needed.”¹⁸

As a result, the increasing awareness of the fundamentally ethical dimension of ecclesiology, and thus of the relevance of ethical questions for ecclesiology, leads to a fundamental shift in the ecumenical agenda.¹⁹ Ethical questions ultimately can divide churches. Two problem areas now appear. First, how do we escape the temptation to short-circuit the question ethically about what it truly means to be a church? If we fail, we’ll find ourselves between the Scylla of ecclesial Donatism (church as community of the pure, the true believers) and the Charybdis of ethical institutionalism (the sacred magisterium that tells what true Christian behavior is). Here we would need a reassurance of those ecclesiological core beliefs that help prevent such a short circuit. The second problem is that we must realistically assume that traditional ecumenical hermeneutics is not really prepared for new challenges and the cultural and political shifts in late modern times. How do we solve this problem?

We must recognize that ethical questions about the highly controversial relationship between individual and community cannot be answered solely on the basis of a common theological anthropology. If we link them to anthropology only, the focus immediately shifts toward problems of individual ethics, but that narrows our perspective. The question of how communities, individuals, and ethics come together must be open to an appropriate definition of the

17 Cf. *ibid.* 85.

18 Aargaard, *Ecclesiology*, 160.

19 Cf. John Gibaut, *Die Auferbauung des Leibes Christi: Überlegungen zu Ekklesiologie und Ethik im Dialog von Glauben und Kirchenverfassung*, in: *ÖR* 60 (2011), 411-425, 424f.

relationship between individual and community. At the same time, questions about the possibility of pluralization in ethical questions within denominations become apparent along with the problem of how ethical dissent within a faith community – understood as faithful and loyal dissenting opinion – is possible. How can an individual think and act differently and yet remain a full member of one community of believers?

In particular, churches are not seen as solely moral communities – institutions representing a set of ethical and moral orientations – and provide resources of meaning and learning. Rather, the ecclesiological wish list of each denominational ecclesiology comes to the fore.²⁰ No wonder. We can easily find all the classic problems of ecclesiology: questions about authority in the church, representative structures, organization and management, participation, the hermeneutics of scripture and tradition, and so on. Furthermore, in the light of connected aspects like individualization, pluralization, and credibility, we can also talk about the ability of the respective ecclesial concepts to adapt to modernity and democracy.

2. The Sociological Shift: Being Catholic or Protestant in the Age of Authenticity

We are living in an “age of authenticity” (Charles Taylor).²¹ “The faith of the individuals is increasingly a matter of individual choice.”²² Even denominational priorities seem to have shifted fundamentally: My own lifestyle is not de-

20 „Wo die Kirche, wie in der katholischen und orthodoxen Tradition, als der Leib Christi, d. h. als eine neue gott-menschliche Wirklichkeit, verstanden wird, ist der Brückenschlag zu den ethischen Herausforderungen allenfalls auf dem Weg über eine sakramentale Weltdeutung möglich. Die reformatorische Begründung der Kirche aus dem Glauben schaffenden Wort heraus hält an der Unterscheidung von Gott und Mensch und damit auch von Gottes Gerechtigkeit und menschlicher Gerechtigkeit fest und bleibt skeptisch gegenüber ekklesiologischen Zumutungen aus dem Umfeld der Ethik. Am ehesten gelingt die Verknüpfung auf der Grundlage der im freikirchlichen Raum beheimateten Nachfolgeekklesiology, für die alle Ethik Arbeit am Bau des Reiches Gottes ist“ (Raiser, Ethik, 419).

21 Cf. especially Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 473-505.

22 Aargaard, *Ecclesiology*, 161.

terminated by my religious or denominational orientation. Instead, I search for a form of spirituality that fits my lifestyle. I measure my faith practices by how much I benefit from them. “The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this. But if the focus is going now to be on my spiritual path . . . my placing in the broader ‘church’ may not be that relevant for me.”²³ In this observation, we find another limiting factor for the classic paradigm of the ecumenical movement.

Belonging to a church or a denomination today says more about one’s individual preferences than about a denominational identity or system of belief and its idea of God, church, redemption, and so on. What matters is that I “discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual, and on his/her experience. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The basic mode of spiritual life is thus the quest,”²⁴ and religious existence is a kind of pilgrimage through the whole of life. Churches react to this changing demand with a pluralization and flexibilization of their offers. “Churches have gone along with this global tendency of pluralization and individualization by deconstructing to some degree their all-embracing traditions and adapting them to the preferences and shopping habits of contemporary individuals. The monolithic religious institutions and traditions have lost ground as standards and landmarks of religiosity, and the ideals of authenticity and self-spirituality have taken their place.”²⁵

“For many people today, to set aside their own path in order to conform to some external authority just doesn’t seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual

23 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 486f.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 507f. “Moreover, the seekers in this case are the heirs of the expressive revolution, with its roots in the reactions of the Romantic period against the disciplined, instrumental self connected to the modern moral order. This means [...] also that they are seeking a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the inferior and often guilt-ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity. The stress is on unity, integrity, holism, individuality; their language often invokes ‘harmony, balance, flow, integrations, being at one, centred’”; *Ibid.*, p. 507.

25 Peter Jonkers, “Are there any Good Reasons for Our Attachment to Religious Traditions?,” *The Catholic Church and Modernity in Europe*, ed. Pancratius Beentjes (Wien; Zürich; Berlin; Münster: LIT, 2009), p. 207.

life. The injunction is, in the words of a speaker at a New Age festival: ‘Only accept what rings true to your own inner Self’.”²⁶ It is only logical that this “kind of search is often called by its practitioners ‘spirituality,’ and is opposed to ‘religion.’ This contrast reflects the rejection of ‘institutional religion,’ that is, the authority claims made by churches which see it as their mandate to preempt the search, or to maintain it within certain definite limits, and above all to dictate a certain code of behavior.”²⁷

What does this fundamental shift mean for our own religious environment here in Europe? Therefore, the actual question about the “future of the North Atlantic religions” is if there be a connection “between modes of quest and centers of traditional religious authority, between what Wuthnow calls dwellers and seekers?”²⁸

But the future in the crucial territory of Latin Christianity remains unclear: “The fading contact of many with the traditional languages of faith seems to presage a declining future. But the very intensity of the search for adequate forms of spiritual life that this loss occasions may be full of promise.”²⁹

To describe this future, Charles Taylor refers to Mikhail Epstein’s term “minimal religion,”³⁰ which Epstein introduced for “postatheistic” Russia and whose premises, for good reason, bear resemblance to Karl Rahner’s concept of a “third confession,” which he introduced in the 1970s. Taylor talks about a spirituality of people that grew up amidst a militant atheistic regime that kept all confessional options (which were equally unknown) at an equal distance. “‘Minimal religion’ is a spirituality lived in one’s immediate circle, with family and friends, rather than in churches, one especially aware of the particular, both in individual human beings, and in the places and things which surround us. But because this religion was born outside of any confessional structures, it has its own kind of universalism, a sort of spontaneous and unreflective ecumenism, in which the coexistence of plural forms of spirituality and worship is taken for granted. Even when people who start with this kind of spirituality

26 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 489.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 508.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 532f.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 533.

30 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 533-535.

end up joining a church, as many of them do, they retain something of their original outlook.”³¹

Karl Rahner summed up the phenomenon of a third confession in the 1970s. “Above and beyond a mere human relatedness and tolerance, it allows for and demands everything that already happens today in ecumenical closeness and common ecumenical acting. What unifies the third confession . . . is what God gave all Christian churches in Jesus Christ and which all accepted, from which they all lived, and which became the living seed from which a full unity can eventually blossom.”³² However, we still have to find criteria for the description of what is shared by all and for the quest for common answers to the questions of the time, which Karl Rahner – in light of a change in the talking and preaching to a secular, pluralistic, and atheistic world – saw as the yardstick for a future ecumenical confession.

But frankly, I’m doubtful that all of these fundamental changes will end in an enlightened, religiously and culturally pluralistic humanism as a core belief or future mainstream Christianity. The abandonment of tradition in our time (particularly characteristic of Christianity in the secularized and highly developed societies of the North) and pluralism (that for sociopolitical reasons alone has become irreversible) mean that postdenominational religious identities are now constructed from a *mélange* of sociological, political, and cultural convictions, but not from theological criteria. This situation creates two additional risks. First, post- or transdenominational identities simply mirror the fractured mentalities and non-simultaneities of their surrounding societies and stabilize them instead of critically challenging them. Such differences, resting on sociological grounds, are much more difficult to handle than the traditional differences in theological teaching. How and on what basis can we legitimize the criteria on which we judge others? Second, we find that post- or transdenominational identities define their beliefs almost through exclusion, by interpreting the differences they experience not with a view toward unity, but toward dissociation. They feel the need to declare the differences to be

31 *Ibid.*, p. 534.

32 Karl Rahner, “Dritte Konfession?,” *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. 12 (1975), pp. 568-581; now in: Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 27 (Solothurn; Düsseldorf: Benziger, 2002), p. 145.

the crucial marks of distinction. Every attempt at relativizing such differences attacks the root of their identity and is therefore excluded from the start. Every different view of how things are necessarily stands outside the common foundation. The boundary between right and wrong threatens to become more and more apodictic. A crucial tendency thus becomes obvious: a shift toward fundamentalism. “For the foreseeable future . . . the dominant theological tone of emerging world Christianity is traditionalist, orthodox, and supernatural. This would be an ironic reversal of most Western perceptions about the future of religion.”³³

3. The Global Shift: ‘It’s the Economy, Stupid!’ and Pentecostalization as a Marketing Strategy

From the perspective of a religious customer, the plurality of churches is undoubtedly much more sensible as a successful marketing strategy of Christianity than the ecumenical project of a unity of the churches or the idea of only One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church. Because only “competing churches can offer all Christian products”³⁴, the denominational variety can cater much better to the needs of an economized and globalized late modernity with its specific rationalities of supply orientation, competition, sales opportunities, trademark marketing, value of brand recognition, and acceptance by the customer. But one thing should make us a little skeptical. The market always prefers a monopoly of products that have been designed with only consumption in mind. Moreover, to be recognized in the market one needs to be unambiguous. Therefore, the range of different denominations is reduced to the significant and unambiguous ones. Simultaneously, the market meets the very needs that it itself produced.

33 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 9.

34 Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “Ökumenische Selbstaufhebung des Protestantismus?,” *Jenseits der Einheit. Protestantische Ansichten der Ökumene*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 2001), p. 206.

From this perspective, the ecclesial productivity of the Christian communities of the South and their charismatic–Pentecostal self-staging is unsettling. Here, very different types of Christian denominations act like selling companies in an unlimited, free-floating religious market. For all churches in this market, only one rational counter strategy often exists, namely sharpening the profile of their “brand” on the basis of local demand.³⁵ Their religious offers are designed for maximum recognition, and their placement in the market is a mirror of a commercialized, consumer-oriented profile marketing. Religious identity trusts in exclusivity and, with that, in the mechanisms of exclusion. Authenticity means being different, and what is true is what sells. “Questions of religious truth are being interpreted as mere questions of identity and questions of identity are being interpreted as questions about a market profile.”³⁶ A “culturally hegemonic capitalism” is on its way to becoming the dominant religious culture in the Global South. This “culturally hegemonic capitalist . . . takes control over our hopes and desires, our fears and needs. He already designs the joys and the hopes, the grievances, and the anxieties of people today only to satisfy them tomorrow. He provides languages and pictures for this and he provides fulfillment: Concrete and palpable.”³⁷

Looking at the churches of the South, we can see that competition in the religious market is powerful and that the pressure to succeed is enormous. We cannot underestimate the dangers.

First, in the market of possibilities, whoever practices denominational identity by successful branding has an advantage. This approach, however, strengthens those practices within the denominations that do not bear the label of religious enlightenment or even enlightened Christianity. Forced competition in

35 In Germany, the EKD tried to label itself the “church of freedom,” which stylizes our longing for freedom and individuality as the late-modern signature of being a Protestant. In this understanding, Roman Catholicism is left with the strategy of pretentious piety, which might be attractive for the media but is nothing more than a colorfully masked event-culture behind which lurk heteronomy and clericalism.

36 Thomas Schärtl, “Amerikanisierter Katholizismus? Ein Blick aus den USA zurück nach Deutschland,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 230 (2012): p. 464.

37 Rainer Bucher, “Auf ihm bestehen, nicht ihm verfallen. Die katholische Kirche auf dem religiösen Markt,” *Euangel* (2017): p. 4, accessed January 8, 2017, <https://www.euangel.de/ausgabe-2-2017/werkzeuge-auf-dem-pastoralen-markt/auf-ihm-bestehen-nicht-ihm-verfallen.p.2>.

the market of denominations, which in the end produces only consumer-oriented and thus increasingly theologically haphazard ecclesial products, can be won only by adjusting the product portfolio. Who then cares if the longing for a supernatural experience, for a miracle (springing either from social misery, pre-enlightened mentality, or a rediscovery of the emotionality and wholeness or bodylines of the religious³⁸) is satisfied by the Holy Spirit (for Pentecostals) or by the Virgin Mary (for Catholics)? In both cases, we use a theology of revelation that creates an immediate, eventful, and spectacular shortcut between the experience of God and God's reality.³⁹

Second, the societal context also leads to an extensively cultivated and powerful mixture of religious community-building and politico-economic lobbyism or tribalism. It leads to a Gospel of Prosperity designed according to the principles of economic liberalism that, with its health-and-wealth message, mistakes relationships of dependence and utility based on tribe and bribe, which are strengthened by the religious communities themselves, as divine predestination. "Global South Christians retain a very strong supernatural orientation and are by and large more interested in personal salvation than in radical politics."⁴⁰

Consequently, one becomes immune to the need for change in the global economic system, which, and not just according to Pope Francis, presents one of the greatest challenges for all churches today for theological and social-ethical reasons. A Gospel of Prosperity is not just counter-indicative, it also stabilizes the system. Such immunization is also dangerous on an economic level. In an almost paradoxically concrete application of Max Weber's thesis on Calvinism, Evangelical Pentecostals do not see striving for riches and coming into money through one's own accomplishments as a structural sin that needs to be criticized, but as something worth striving for. In the Pentecostal communities, even the common people can rise in status, become pastors, and

38 Cf. Michael Schüssler, "Gott erleben und gerettet werden? Praktiken und Affektstrukturen des pentekostalen Christentums in europäisch-theologischer Perspektive," *Gerettet durch Begeisterung? Anfragen und Veränderungspotential durch pentekostal-charismatische Religiosität* (2018, in press).

39 Cf. *ibid.*

40 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 8.

thus make money. Pentecostal churches are for people who want to climb the social ladder.

One can justly doubt whether the true future of Christianity can be found here. The churches might be packed and the communities might be vibrant, but the question remains: under what conditions? Thus, the triumph of the pentecostalization of the denominations raises the questions if the decisive difference in the future will be between an enlightened and a fundamentalist version of Christianity. This situation would, in my opinion, shipwreck the project of ecumenism.

4. The European Ecumenical Heritage in a Changing World

Despite all the cries of naysayers, no shortage of theological challenges for ecumenism will exist. In the last few years, the political and societal relevance of religion and faith has re-entered the public consciousness even in societies that define themselves as secular. At a time when homeland becomes plural and cultures meet in an unfamiliarity that seems to be unreconcilable at first glance, the shaping of a peaceful coexistence is one of, if not *the* most decisive challenges. “Deep, true, and lasting peace between humans, that is not built on the sacrifice of others and exists without a polarization towards enemies, is hard to obtain. It even goes beyond human powers. But when it becomes reality then it is a true sign that God (the Holy Spirit) is at work in humans.”⁴¹ Only where we are able to testify to that sign in bringing together the other, the foreign, and our own in a struggle for truth as a unity in difference can we develop a new hermeneutical model that establishes the idea coming together, not only coexisting but also accepting each other, learning from each other, inspiring each other, and yet remaining different. Such a model would not solely be a viable option for the future coexistence of the denominations. For that model, the denominational history of Europe is a paradigmatic place where we

41 Raymund Schwager/Jozef Niewiadomski, *Dramatische Theologie als Forschungsprogramm*, in: ders. (u.a.) (Hg.) *Religion erzeugt Gewalt – Einspruch!*, (BMT 15), Münster 2003, 39-77, 64.

can learn about the other and from the other. This approach been shown in analyses of the Reformation jubilee of 2017.

After all the historical conflicts (2018 marks the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the Thirty Years' War) there can be little doubt that, first of all, only the coexistence of a plurality of confessions and denominations that is guaranteed by the constitutional law of a secular state marks the beginning of modern Europe. However, in the same root we also find the values of tolerance and of freedom of religion, faith and conscience –which religious minorities fought for in the wake of the Reformation. The various denominations did not simply remain in a state of confessional opposition. First of all, they opposed – from the midst of their religious convictions – the political instrumentalization of their religious differences. Step by step they then learned to leave their defensive apologetic positions and began to encounter one another, not in a derogatory, but in an appreciative way. They learned to respect other positions, started a dialogue, and began to change themselves. This work led them to understand that they can enrich each other, an understanding that in itself promotes peace and tolerance. But such an insight could only come about as the result of a religious learning process unparalleled in human history. In this learning process, a method was developed that deals productively with different claims about the truth. It not only respects the point of departure of the other but also understands the position of each partner in dialog as mutually enriched by a joint witnessing. It is this constructive cooperation, and not an unconnected plurality of denominations, that is the legacy of the Reformation, which to this day fundamentally shapes European, and in all likelihood German, identity. Thus, whoever talks about tolerance, freedom of faith, and freedom of conscience stands on a foundation that would not exist were it not for the unique and ecumenical impact history of the Reformation. This history is both a common gift and a common obligation. And it's the inviolable heritage of good old Europe for the rest of the world.