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MENIGHETSFAKULTET

Evangelical mission leaders and TTL

“What are the responses of some Evangelical mission leaders on WCC's mission statement Together Towards Life?”

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This thesis is of significance to me because of my church background and interest in Ecumenism and Mission. I grew up in an Evangelical church; the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway (*Frikirken*). They are also members of NORME (The Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelization). My parents were sent out as missionaries to Taiwan through this church and lived in Taiwan for eight years all together. My father worked in a clinic run by the local Lutheran church, and my mother worked with people with intellectual disability. I was born there, but was only 6 months when we moved back. Still, having four older siblings that more or less grew up in Taiwan, and parents with a passion for mission, I could not avoid being influenced.

I did not really have any relation to World Council of Churches before I started learning about it and its history through my theology studies at Norwegian School of Theology (MF) in Oslo. Many of our lecturers seemed to praise WCC, and we learned more about how the relationships between different church families had developed during last century. I had partially taken the good relationships between different churches for granted, growing up in a time where people got together and visited each other's churches despite different church backgrounds. I had many friends and relatives from other churches, and was involved in different inter-denominational activities. I still find it is hard to distinguish what came first of the chicken or the egg; whether Ecumenic movements are strong because of different times, or if we have these different times because of Ecumenic movements. My guess there must be a little bit of both.

Doing a bible school through Youth With A Mission, I was introduced to some of the blessings and challenges of theological diversity. I was also a part of a youth project called "Bridge Builders" arranged by the Palestinian/Israeli organization Musalaha with support from Norwegian organizations. It involved Israeli Evangelical Messianic Jews and Israeli Christian Arabs, Palestinian Christians from both Evangelical and different Traditional backgrounds, as well as a group of Norwegian Christian youth. Our common ground as followers of Jesus Christ was essential to the project.

At MF we also learned about the tensions that has been, and still exist between the WCC and the Evangelical churches represented through the Lausanne Movement as well as World Evangelical Alliance. Introducing the topic to different Evangelicals I knew, revealed there was still much skepticism towards WCC, both amongst clergy and lay people. I was very pleased to have the opportunity to see more for myself through being a “steward” at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan 2013. Most of all, I had a great experience working together with young people from all kinds of denominations and countries I had not heard of. I witnessed Christians from all over the world cooperating as well as worshipping together, also Korean and other Evangelicals. In addition, there were noisy Evangelicals outside protesting against what mostly seemed to be misunderstood assumptions about WCC. Reading some of their leaflets however, I could also see some criticism that I was not really sure if I agreed with, nor knew whether was correct about WCC or not.

I took part in many of the plenaries, and could witness some of the weaknesses and strengths of WCCs consensus way of reaching agreements. I went to almost all of the Mission plenaries and was introduced to WCC's Mission Affirmation from 2012, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”. I knew the Christian Council of Norway had made a Norwegian translation, and people from the Norwegian delegation in Busan seemed to praise it. I was introduced to it as “a step closer to Evangelical Christianity”.

Back in Norway, me and other friends who had been in Busan, was to present our experiences to fellow students. A few of us chose to present “Together Towards Life”. Some of our fellow classmates from more Evangelical backgrounds did not seem too impressed, however.

This, as well as my experiences from Busan, made me wonder: Is there any substance to this criticism of WCC, or is it just caused by stubbornness and ignorance of WCC's development over the years?

Do Evangelical Mission Leaders who are updated on these “politics” hold the same or different views?

1.2 Topic and research question

The topic of this thesis is World Council of Churches' mission statement *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* and Evangelical mission leaders.

More specifically I want to find out what these Evangelical mission leaders think about the document.

I will investigate what they like, what they miss, what they dislike as well as other problems they state about the document. As the main focus of this thesis is to hear the mission leaders opinions and their understandings, I will not go into the relevance and validity of their praise or critique of TTL.

I will also briefly look into whether their views on WCC has changed because of the TTL. As this is very hard to determine without going into detail about their earlier views on WCC, other factors still holding back their enthusiasm and so on, I will base this mainly on the interviewees own commentaries.

To add little bonus perspective to the paper, I will also briefly look into whether there can be seen any patterns in the differences between what the three Norwegian and the other three International mission leaders answer.

When using the word *Evangelical* in this thesis, I refer in wide terms to Christians identifying as Evangelicals themselves as well as emphasising the Gospel of God's saving action through Jesus Christ and the urgency of sharing this message with all human beings.

The research question of the thesis is: *What are the responses of some Evangelical mission leaders on WCC's mission statement Together Towards Life?* The questions to support this is: What do they like? What do they miss or dislike? Has TTL changed their perspectives on WCC? Are there any differences in the responses from the International and Norwegian mission leaders?

1.3 About Together Towards Life, historical background and context

The distance between World Council of Churches and Evangelicals has a long history.

Ever since the WCC was founded in 1948 it has met hostility from different groups. When International Missionary Council was integrated into WCC in 1961, many evangelicals protested (Lundström, 62). It became a “main stage in the separation process between ecumenicals and evangelicals”(Lundström, 63).

At WCC's Assembly in Uppsala 1968, liberation theology had a great impact on WCC's view on mission. The emphasis on *Missio Dei* from Mexico 1963 developed into an understanding that “because the church serves the world, the world sets the agenda”(Ott, 64). It “became something of a catchphrase for the Uppsala meeting in 1968” (Lundström, 66).

This also manifested as “everything became mission at Uppsala”(Ott, 130).

These views again had great influence at WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism(CWME) conference in Bangkok 1973. Especially the emphasis on inter-religious dialogue worried the Evangelicals (Dahle, 32).

This caused tension to rise even more between WCC and the evangelicals(Ott, 65).

“The Lausanne Congress on world evangelization (1974) was an evangelical high watermark in response to the conciliar movement's redefinition of mission and evangelism”(Ott, 110).

WCC Assembly in Nairobi 1975 focused on a more 'holistic evangelism', but still harvested critique from Evangelicals. Amongst other things, the Evangelicals still missed a clear statement about the “uniqueness of Jesus Christ, a sense of urgency about evangelism, and a personal experience of Jesus Christ”(Lundström, 87).

In 1982 'Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation' was written. It states that “it is at the heart of Christian mission to foster the multiplication of local congregations in every human community”(WCC, 18) and hence moved a step closer to Evangelical thinking (Dahle, 37).

Since 1982 WCC has released a multitude on statements, even though they “do not all have the same authority”(WCC, VII). Some of them seem to illustrate further steps towards the Evangelical movement even though some important Evangelical issues still was not discussed.

Even though the Evangelicals also developed their theology over the years, it seemed to stay more conserved compared to the changes withing the Ecumenical movement(Lundström, 301-303).

Norway has a strong Lutheran low church movement incarnated in mission organizations like *NLM(Norwegian Lutheran Mission)* and *Normisjon*. These are heavily influenced by pietism and lay revivals from the 1800s (Borgegård, 11). With few exceptions, most members of these organizations are also members of the Church of Norway. These organizations are therefore not separate churches.

Along with other smaller Lutheran Churches like Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway(*Frikirken*), the Methodists, the Pentecostals and others, they are members of *NORME*(The Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelization).

Church of Norway, on the other hand is a member of WCC, and is represented in CWME. NORME's predecessor NMC left IMC when they merged with WCC in 1961(Fagerli, 138). NORME has not wanted to represent WCC ever since, also resulting in editor of TTL, Jooseop Keum pleading them to (Fagerli, 135).

Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in a Changing Landscapes was produced by CWME and then “approved as an official statement of the WCC by the central committee at its meeting on the island of Crete, Greece, on 5 September 2012”(Keum, VIII).

It includes the ecumenical heritage of social activism, but has also influences from many Evangelicals consoled in the process of making it. There can also be seen traces of Pentecostal as well as Orthodox Pneumatology in addition to “impulses from the Catholic renewed understanding of church and mission that Vaticanum II represented”(Hovland, 7-8).

1.4 Interviewees

To find out what I wanted, I wanted to use qualitative research method; to conduct interviews.

Here I will present the different interviewees and why I chose them. I will later come back to more about methodology under 'Methodological considerations'.

For the interviews, I wanted to be able to question both Norwegian and other 'International' Mission Leaders, to also be able to compare these two different groups.

I wanted people with knowledge and experience with WCC, and also different levels of interaction with TTL. To me, it would be an advantage to have people in both groups who have worked more with the affirmation in detail, as well as people who take it more at its face value. And I was able to do that. I also wanted both men and women represented in both groups, which I also managed to.

In the Norwegian group, I wanted the largest Evangelical groups in Norway represented. I wanted people representing the Lausanne Movement or the World Evangelical Alliance. As NORME(The Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelization) represents both of them, it was the natural place to start asking.

These were the Norwegian interviewees, and their relevant positions before and at the time they were interviewed:

Anne Lise Søvde is both the National Director of NORME as well as a Pentecostal. The Pentecostals form the second largest Evangelical group after Lutheran Evangelicals in Norway.

Rolf Kjøde was director of NORME before Søvde. He also served as many years as General Secretary of *Normisjon*, one of the largest Lutheran Evangelical mission organizations in Norway. Kjøde has also had a study leave where he dug more into TTL in detail.

Øyvind Åsland is a member of NORME, and General Secretary of *NLM*(Norwegian Lutheran Mission), the largest Lutheran Evangelical mission organization in Norway.

I had some more trouble finding good 'International' candidates, as many of them seemed to be very busy or traveling in places without internet. Some also seemed to be afraid of being seen as hostile

towards WCC, and did not want to be interviewed. Because of these 'diplomatic issues' the Lausanne Movement office also politely declined to help me.

On the other hand, WEA's Director of Communications, Timothy Goropevsek, was very helpful with getting me in contact with mission leaders appropriate for my interviews.

In the 'International' group, I wanted a broad representation in nationalities, and I was able to do so with Timothy's help.

These were the 'International' interviewees, and their relevant positions before and at the time they were interviewed:

Bertil Ekström is the Executive Director of WEA's Mission Commission. He is born in Sweden, but grew up in Brazil, and have lived and worked there for many years.

John Baxter-Brown is from UK and works for WEA's Theological commission. Earlier he worked as Consultant for Evangelism for WCC, and helped producing the ecumenical recommendations 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct', which was used as an important resource in the making of TTL. Baxter-Brown was also part of the 'Evangelism working group' that worked on the research paper on Evangelism for TTL.

Pramila Rajendran is Indian and serves as Associate Director of WEA's Mission Commission. Amongst other things also, she is involved in WEA's 'Global Membercare' and 'Leadership Development', as well as 'Missional Networks of Women'.

1.5 Methodological considerations

In this thesis, I want to find out what Evangelical Mission leaders think about TTL. I could have found literature about it, but there is not so much material. In particular there is not much material about what Norwegian Mission leaders think in detail, nor about whether they have become more positive because of TTL. I figured the best way to find out what I wanted, was to do an empirical research.

I wanted more in-depth answers to be able to understand the issue. I also wanted to give the interviewees the opportunity to talk more freely. Qualitative research method was the solution.

Like mentioned under 'Interviewees', I wanted to interview prominent mission leaders. To be able to compare them, I wanted three Norwegian and three 'International' mission leaders. Within both these groups, I wanted different levels of interaction with the document, both genders represented and a broad representation of Evangelicals. I was able to do this by getting different important parts of Norwegian Evangelicals represented, as well as different nationalities represented in the International group. With some help I was able to sample mission leaders who qualified for these criteria.

I was able to meet the Norwegians in person: Søvde at NORME's office in Oslo. Åsland in Spydeberg outside of Oslo, and Kjøde in *Normisjon's* office in Oslo a day he was visiting from the Bergen.

For the International mission leaders, we ended up doing all interviews over Skype. Anything else would be difficult within the limits of time and economy. Of using Skype it is not the same as meeting people in person, and I was not able to get as clear sound quality. But it was clear enough to communicate without too much trouble, as well as getting ok recordings for later transcription. And being able to see the other person helped engaging in a more dynamic and natural conversation than over phone, as I could read the interviewees body language.

All interviews were held between September to December 2015.

I wanted to avoid leading the interviewees. So I created study guide with 12 main questions as well

as subquestions/follow-up questions I could use if necessary to make sure I got all the information I wanted and knew the circumstances I needed to be able to fully understand what the interviewees were saying. The questions is was also asked in a sequence to avoid directing the answers as much as possible. As I had learned from classes on methodology that people representing organizations often would answer on behalf of the organizations rather their own opinions, I had a an extra question in the back of my head to use in case it felt necessary: “Is this your personal opinion, or the words of NORME/WEA/Lausanne?”. I never felt any urgent need to use it, however. Few times, I also asked other impulsive follow-up questions when I thought the interviewee was onto something interesting that might have been relevant for this thesis. The study guide is attached at the end of this paper.

The study guide turned out to work well, except that it gave me too much material for a thesis of this size. I therefore had to adjust/narrow my thesis and helping questions a little, focusing more on the most important parts of the what the mission leaders think about TTL.

Of course it is still possible that the interviewees held back criticism of TTL or WCC to maintain a good relationship to colleagues in WCC. But in general, the interviewees does not seem to censor their statements as all of them had some strong criticism at different points that they shared.

1.6 Structure

I will first look into the positive responses to TTL from the different mission leaders.

Then I will look at the negative ones; What they miss, what they dislike and other general problems they find about it.

During the last parts I will look more into whether the mission leaders have become more positive because of TTL or not, as well as look into the differences between the Norwegian and International group.

In these last parts I will use examples and literature more and be more analytic.

In the first parts my voice will not be as strong as I try to focus on understanding the mission leaders' opinions.

2. What they liked about TTL

All the mission leaders mentioned things they liked about TTL.

2.1 Emphasis on the Holy Spirit

All of the interviewees mentioned that they like the emphasis of the Holy Spirit in this document.

Baxter-Brown is happy to see that TTL ended up with “a lot of the stuff about transforming the power of the Holy spirit, and that is good to see” (Baxter-Brown).

Ekström sees an “emphasis to the work of the Holy Spirit”. He understands this as a result of changes within WCC:

It's somehow response to something that we see in the church independent of origin or theological emphasis, we see a lot of the charismatic or kind of a spiritual revival in many churches. The way they have phrase it with the theme of the spirit is very good.

He even sees a “whole chapter called a Spirit of Pentecost, that was very much written by Evangelicals, but of course incorporation with others as well” (Ekström).

Rajendran was impressed by the passages about the Spirit also:

They talked about mission, the the spirit of mission, which was very good. So that's why I think it's good to be on the paper, but good to be in the practice. Wonderful stuff they've written. They talked about the creation. They've talked about the Holy Spirit. The gifts they talked about. They also talked about how to transform the world. So they are actually talking everything (Rajendran).

Kjøde regards the passages on pneumatology as the better parts of the document:

I think the new thing is on the missionary spirit. That is the new thing which is worth considering. I think most of the rest of it has been – I have seen it before, but what is on the

spirit I think that is the new thing, spirit omission or liberation of community on Pentecostal. It's Pneumatology, which is some sort of a basic. And I need to work and thought it through in my own mind, not sure about everything in it, but there is something challenging me to think it through.

He talks about a part of the pneumatology that challenges him:

And here is given a framework of the Holy Spirit being at work long before us, and asked to give us the breach heads in many countries around where Christ's name is not known, but where the longing for the personal God still is there, and the longing for grace is there. And that is work of the spirit to keep it alive so to say, because we created an image of God. And the spirits, he was there from the beginning and creation. He's been there all the time and he is still there, and what then is the relation between this work of this spirit in wakening or keeping awake the longing and then the spirit driving his church out to proclaim the gospel for people to find the resting place for their longings.

But he is ambivalent about it:

There are definitely important things to think through, and I think we are reminded of important biblical truths in this. And then we must look at shall we buy the whole package or so, but so I will think of it critical on some points as well, but this is definitely an area where I want to be open-minded”.

He sums it up well: “I am curious on Pneumatology so I am definitely not finished in considering the value of it. So I will dig deeper into – I’m still very, yeah, curious on that point”(Kjøde).

Søvde likes the charismatic focus of TTL: “I like that it has a focus on the power of the Spirit of God, as I am a pentecostal”. She sees many resemblances with Lausanne's Cape Town Commitment: “And what they talk about then is this «Holy Spirit on the move». In the Cape Town Commitment it is called something like «God is on the move».”

She particularly likes some of the details: “It also challenges us to seek the gifts of the Spirit, which I like a lot”. It seems she thinks it too charismatic to represent all members of WCC:

“It is interesting. I am curious about how the liberal member mass of WCC reacts to it. Can they say: «this is good, but the Africans have made it»? They cannot do that.”(Søvde).

Åsland also likes the document's pneumatology: “My first impression was that it was a good document with a very innovative language, spirit language which makes sense”.

He believes this is something he can learn from, as a Lutheran:

I think all of us in a Lutheran tradition need to be challenged by the Charismatic Churches, and ask ourselves, why are they growing? And I guess that's what they have been trying to do in the World Council of Churches also, and to integrate this more emphasis on the work of the holy spirit in the world today. And what I heard from my African friends is to be more bold, and to really trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us, and enable us, strengthen us, and making mission and evangelism possible today. So I think, yeah, maybe if I should try and rephrase, I think, what Together Towards Life emphasis in a very good way is exactly this, the work of the holy spirit, and how it can be more open to listen to the holy spirit, and also be able to be led by and strengthened by the holy spirit today.

Åsland even think it might be even more charismatic the Cape Town Commitment: “I guess, I would say that that's an aspect, which is course there in the Cape Town document also, but maybe even better and stronger emphasized in the Together Towards Life”(Åsland).

2.2 Approach to Evangelicals, as well as other church traditions

Several of the the mission leaders mention that they like that there seems to be an approach to Evangelicals as well as other church traditions, and that Evangelicals were included in the process of making the document.

Baxter-Brown was himself a big part of that process:

I also led the evangelism working group for CWMA, and we were tasked with producing a paper on evangelism, which would be one of the feed papers into this new mission statement, what they called a resource paper, and I think, there were four or five such papers, but different working groups. So I led the process on evangelism and we produced – it is about

10,000 word paper that went into a sort of big melting pot for the team that drafted the statement you are looking at.

Baxter-Brown was also involved in “drafting a little document Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”. He describes how it has impulses from different churches:

That’s a joint document between the Vatican the WCC and the WEA, and it’s the first of its type. So, arguably, it is actually a very significant document. And in that process of drafting that I worked very closely with World Evangelical Alliance, and I was reasonably a evangelical.

Material from this was also used in TTL: “they’ve got a reasonable quote from that within this final book”. He is proud of the impact he made himself, as well as he appreciates other contributions:

You know, so there is some pleasure in that, you know, here and there some of the phrases that we put into the feed of paper on evangelism get fed in directly. So that’s also quite satisfying. So there are bits, I think very good – they personally give me a bit of pleasure, but also I think they too make some quite strong and sensible statements (Baxter-Brown).

Ekström has a similar understanding that TTL has a strong influence by Evangelicals: I am not saying that these chapter, talks about evangelisation, is only written by Evangelicals but there was a clear input there. But not only Evangelicals:

Somehow we have in this document, very broad representation of Christian churches from the orthodox and even taking into account some of the- what I was saying more Catholic view of the Gospel and the church, all the way to more historical churches and evangelical churches and Pentecostal Church (Ekström).

Kjøde also sees traces of both Orthodox and Pentecostals involvement in the document:

Reading Peter Halldorf’s books, it’s obvious that there are big overlaps in pneumatology between an Orthodox thinking and at least his Pentecostal thinking. I’m not sure all ordinary

Pentecostals around would think the same, but there must be some overlap definitely, and they have both been part of working this out (Kjøde).

Søvde refers to the same discussion: “Some regard this as an approach to Evangelical, especially Pentecostal charismatic theology, while others say «No, no, it is only about to include input from Orthodox churches».” Both Kjøde and Søvde were part of Missiological forums in Norway where TTL was discussed. Søvde adds: “Some were very content and meant that it described an approach to Lausanne's theology”. Personally, she joins their ranks:

I am a Pentecostal, so I would like to think that they are approaching Charismatic theology. And it is not something I just wish, I stand by it. Because when we had Jooseup Keum visiting we had maybe 73 points. It is not exactly how it turned out, but that draft we then worked with covered all the points. It had maybe more, maybe 120 points.....There Mission is defined as «acts of the Holy Spirits» or something like that, and we are «invited to join in» and that is not far from what was defined in the Cape Town Commitment. It is not a part of the document, but it was there as a basis.

Søvde gives examples on how TTL is more similar to the Cape Town Commitment: “Point three: «Spirit of community, Church on the move», it is a little closer”. This is different from older WCC documents: “When I read the old documents I realize how great the differences have been”.

She understands it as an approach to the Evangelicals: “I want to believe there is a theological approach there, about pneumatology”. This would fit with another Søvde likes: “In statement nr. 65 it talks about a growing intensity of collaboration with Evangelicals mentioning the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance”.

Søvde also believes Jooseop Keum, the editor of TTL, greatly influenced the language of document: “«How can I formulate it so most people will identify with it?». It is like you say. He is South Korean so he is Evangelical in his way of expressing himself, I suppose”(Søvde).

Åsland has a similar way of understanding it:

I guess it's one of the attempts of the World Council of Churches to sense what is going on in the world, and the growth of the Charismatic Movement in Africa and all the places has made an impact on the understanding of mission and evangelism, and has even penetrated the language of the document itself, which I personally find very positive. And my first impression was also that they are now -- they have a language, which is more similar to the Lausanne Movement when it comes to mission and evangelism.

He sums it up as a approach both ways:

I still think it's a very positive document. I view it as a step towards the Lausanne Movement. Many people will say, and I think I partly agree that the Lausanne Movement has moved maybe in the World Council of Churches' direction and the WCC has moved towards Lausanne so maybe we could really meet and cooperate more than we have been doing before (Åsland).

2.3 More emphasis on evangelism

Some of the interviewees experienced TTL as having a stronger emphasis on evangelism than earlier documents.

Rajendran finds evangelism very important, and is impressed with TTL: "And how they can be like Jesus and evangelize the world? How they can move forward? So they have done a great job. I love that material". Even though she has not always been impressed with Ecumenical practices, she sees the document as a good ideal:

So that means they need to find people who can take this vision and run with it. And if they are not able – that means they have to convince people. Yeah. And how they convince? I'm not sure, and if they are able to convince people, and I think we are on the good road. And then people can go forward and evangelize, and if they're not able to convince, then their statement has no value (Rajendran).

Even though Kjøde is not content with all the details, he appreciates the amount of focus on evangelism:

Evangelism, yes, I can see that there is a whole chapter or section on it. And it's relatively strong. Yes, I can confirm that. Even though there's more to say.....And then of course I am glad, I'm glad that there is so much emphasis on the call to evangelize as there is (Kjøde).

Søvde also appreciated this: "I like that TTL talks about Mission and about Evangelism. I like that it mentions the proclamation of the gospel". She adds that she thinks TTL has moved a long way from the statements made during the Uppsala Assembly in 1968:

For example one now say that to evangelize is to proclaim the message of salvation. It don't think, the Uppsala document don't say so. It says that evangelism is dialogue etc. Of course this document also talk about dialogue, but it is more concrete, more clear on what salvation is and what evangelism is.

Søvde values that TTL even challenges churches: "It challenges the church to evangelize in statement nr. 80 to 85, which is a very good challenge"(Søvde).

Like Søvde, Åsland also sees TTL as great development from Uppsala 1968 when it comes to evangelism. Even though he still believes there could be more improvement, he gives credit to the member churches from the Global South for the impact he believe they have made in WCC:

In my view, what has happened is that the churches from the Global South have had a greater impact. So it's not the Western rationalism, which is, I mean, language is very -- it's full of spirit of it. And what the Uppsala document or the Uppsala tendency in the World Council of Churches, what is very negative about it is that what is evangelism and mission really about? Is it just bringing about social change, so called social gospel? Is man really lost without Jesus Christ? What about the uniqueness of Christ, which was the central piece of the Lausanne Movement from '74 and onwards? So I still think that this document has made a very positive contribution when you compare with Uppsala, this is much better in my opinion. And it states more clearly that yes, there is for all the Christians there is a mandate to do mission and evangelism, and tell the good news (Åsland).

2.4 Holistic approach

Another thing that some of the interviewees mention, is the 'holistic' approach to mission; that all aspects of human life is included.

Ekström sees the document as a “very balanced document, with this holistic approach that includes all the different areas of life”. He also thinks the document balances the political and “eternal” understanding of Mission better than earlier WCC statements:

I think there is a clear holistic approach to Mission and to church and to the Gospel. I think that is really good, sometimes maybe we have had the feeling that the World Council Churches is being more, let's say on the political side and more emphasizing the Kingdom or God or earthly terms. More than now and not so much the turn of realities, on the Kingdom in the more eternal way.

Ekström describes how Evangelicals have tended to be sceptical towards the political tendency in WCC, but that he as well as other Evangelicals likes how TTL balances these issues:

It's not that all the evangelicals wants more practical things but there are some, some who are moving to more pragmatic view of mission and so on. But many evangelicals liked the way, this is phrased and the kind of reflection that it produces. So, when you even within evangelicals are broad representation of churches and many different views (Ekström).

Rajendran praises how the document is very versatile and complete in it's understanding of Mission:

They're talking about everything, transforming the world. They're talking about gospel to the margins, and marginalized paper. They're talking about giving a freedom to Spirits to work. They're talking about that. They're talking about how the mission struggles. Yeah, and how to overcome them. They talk about that. They talked about the wholeness of mission. Yeah. They talk, all these things they talk, which is really wonderful actually (Rajendran).

Søvde adds that she likes that TTL addresses human rights: “I like that human rights like religions freedom is a part of it”(Søvde).

Åsland says the holistic understanding of mission in TTL challenges him, as he believes it is something that have been underestimated in his own context: “

I as a Norwegian was challenged by that....The emphasis on the holistic ministry is really something that I think we have lacked in Norway. When we are doing mission abroad, we have this holistic perspective, and we are very clear on serving the whole human being, with emphasis on diakonia health services, schools, education, yeah, serving human beings, and also giving them the gospel, proclaiming the gospel. Proclaiming the gospel and diakonia together has been my understanding of mission. At the same time I have been challenged to try and figure out what does this mean in the Norwegian context? How can we be more concerned about the whole human being in a Norwegian context, and how can we serve God faithfully in Norway, not only by proclaiming the gospel, but also the other part, loving the holy human being, and trying to demonstrate, and to really reach out to people in Norway as human beings with all their needs. Somehow we tend to leave that to the state in our social democracy, social democratic tradition that has somehow been left to other people, and we have missed a very important dimension of the gospel I think, or we are at least, no, I think we can say that we have somehow lost it, and that's something that this document really Together Towards Life challenges me in a very good way there to find out how can we do that in Norway, and how can the spirit lead us to find new ways of serving people in the Western Norwegian context. That's maybe the main area that I have been positively challenged by this document (Åsland).

2.5 Emphasis on the environment

Some of the interviewees appreciate TTL's emphasis on taking care of the environment.

During his praise of TTL's holistic approach, Ekström also includes the environment: “The very clear what I would say political statements about social economics, the environment and so on. And I think it's timely, it's very good”(Ekström).

When Søvde is asked about whether there is something she admires about TTL, she answers: “It is

more focus on the environment, for instance”. She states that she does not agree with TTL's way of defining environmental care as mission: “I would say it is a part of our responsibility of stewardship”. But she still finds environmental focus important:

They would not define it as mission. I am Pentecostal, so I have discussions with the mission movement in the Pentecostal movement, where they say that: «No environmental engagement is not mission». But they end up by doing it anyways, because some people suffer. It is diakonia, but it is something inconsistent about it. Because I would say that people suffer because we use too much oil, and then they will say: «Maybe we should help the poor and those suffering, but we are not to engage in the political situation around it». But I mean we shall (Søvde).

Rajendran also likes that TTL talks about environment, and thinks it important as long as it does not get all the attention: “it should be balanced, because it is God's creation and we need to respect it”(Rajendran).

2.6 Updated perspectives and practical solutions on new challenges in the world

A couple of the interviewees expressed that they liked how the document addresses the constantly “changing landscapes”.

Ekström praises TTL for being up to date:

No doubt about that. I think the WCC document has really looked at the active and relevant issues from today. And probably there will be others, other issues coming out of it, I like the discussion material that follows the document and the way churches in many places are studying the document today. Not as the final, also for anything but more as material for maybe a starting point for discussions. And of course different parts will be applied in different ways, in different places.

He also believes many Evangelicals can benefit from this material:

Many of them are using the document. I mean, we have to understand also that, there's a lot of overlapping between the WCC and the WEA, many churches are belongs to both. So, we have many Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and other churches that belonged to the WCC that goes to the WA. And of course they are using-- probably both documents together towards life or the – WCC but also the Cape Town Commitment that we produce together with Lausanne (Ekström).

Rajendran thinks that setting these goals it is a good, well made and important step in the right direction for for WCC:

It's a good start, and they might come there. Move forward, yeah, they have to. That's why I said that casting of the vision is very important. So they might not be there, but they're heading towards it, because this is their goal. This is their goal. This is what they want to see. This is what they want to achieve through missions and through evangelism, especially, in the changing scenario of the world. So they looked at from different perspectives, and that they've brought up this document. And now it's up to them, and each one of us how to take this far. And we all need to cast the vision, and convince people, okay, this is the way we might move forward and evangelize the world.

She believe many can learn something from it, also Evangelicals:

Oh yeah, definitely many churches can learn. We go to a church, which is very, very evangelical. Yeah, and they do lots of things, lots of ways of evangelizing people, but there is always room for learning...Yeah, learn a lot...There are many churches who don't know what to do. So they could learn from this. Yeah. They can learn how to evangelize. Yeah. And that different ways of evangelism they can see it, because it's very biblical...So it will work.

Rajendran even says she was challenged by the document: “they’ll find something definitely, because see like for me just reading it, I was so challenged”(Rajendran).

2.7 Rooted in the Bible

Rajendran strongly appreciated how TTL is rooted in the Bible:

I just love that whole biblical aspect. Very biblical, which was very, very encouraging for me...They have just not written the statement or their vision, but they have actually supported it from biblical point of view, and I was very encouraged with that. That was wonderful. Every statement, every point, every topic is being supported by biblical view. That was really wonderful. So it was not like a man's way of doing things. It's what God is telling them to do, and I appreciated very much that, very much (Rajendran).

2.8 Challenges to rethink power perspectives and objectification

Some of the interviewees appeared to like parts of the way TTL talks about 'Mission from the margins'.

Baxter-Brown is not only positive, but explains he is still wrestling with it:

And I think also, I mean, you know, the Mission from the Margins stuff has continued to make me think, you know.try and wrestle a bit more with my own perceptions of what that means, and what that looks like. So there is stuff in there that's provocative. And I might be critical of some of it, but I'm deliberately trying to engage with it partly because it might challenge my own personal perspectives and theology, but also because a little work went into that by people I respect, and I need to listen to their voice even if I don't find their voice ultimately compelling. So there is stuff in there that is worthy of reflection, prayer, study (Baxter-Brown).

Ekström is not only positive either, but sees the importance in underlining these issues:

One of the discussions we had in Manila and that came out in Busan as well, was that the hole issue of the marginalized, Mission from the Margins. I think from the beginning, it was seen like a global self and an oath issue that there was a desire to give space for the growing churches and the big churches today in the Global South, where Christianity, regardless of

which family, Christian family belong to the churches has grown a lot and it's strongest today. I think that was maybe the thing from the beginning to knowledge Christianity today stronger in Latin America, African, some parts of Asia, then in the North, although the agenda for the Christian church, again independent regardless of the church family has been more from the north. I think that was a challenge thing to discuss that. At the same time for us, living and working the global south, it was somehow negative to identify margins with the strong church. So, the question was who is at the margin, is it the church in the south that is growing and is strong or is it the church in Europe that is declining and in general quite weak, at least in comparison with others. And this was the discussion has been – I think a challenge for us all. And again, that's hot issue, important issue was among the Evangelical Alliance, how we understand the church in the global south, how we give them opportunity to put the agenda and not control it from the north.

Ekström adds the margins can have many different important interpretations:

I think the document, such now doesn't identify margins with necessary with the global south. But with all of those who don't have strong voice in society, it could be poor but it could also be a children, it could be women, it could be those on the street and so on. And probably that's better somehow. But to take it to the next step, to really give space for those to put agenda for us as a Christian church, that's a really big challenge (Ekström).

Søvde thinks we can learn much from it: “It is probably a lot we could apply from this, about practical matters and this about Mission from the Margins”. She says it addresses some important issues:

Mission has been «from the West to the rest», we have had a prideful attitude, imperialistic and so on, and that that should be changed. This the Cape Town Commitment also states. That is something that probably is as helpful whether party you are from, for the Western mission movement.

Søvde even describes this as something TTL might be addressing in a better way than the Cape Town Commitment:

I looked in the Cape Town Commitment, and I found a passage about Christ's peace for His suffering creation. I one might say that it probably gets more space in WCC's document. And there is one point about Christ's peace for people with disabilities. And one might say that in this document these might easily become objects for salvation, healing etc. But in WCC's document they are defined as actors, subjects. That is interesting. You can add that.\l That they are carriers of the Great Commission and the Gospel also.

Søvde likes how TTL does not underestimate people: “It takes the collaboration of the marginalized and their gifts, callings and resources seriously“(Søvde).

2.9 Unity and cooperation

Rajendran also mentioned that she liked how the document talks about unity: “Interesting topics, I loved it. Yeah. They talked about the theme, and they talked about how they can move towards the life together in one unity with wisdom, with grace”. She believes working together is important for the purpose of evangelism, and likes how TTL addressed it: “They bring good cause and principles and relationships, and I think their own purposes is to unite mission and churches, so that could be the betterment for the evangelism in the days above”. Rajendran believes all Christians need to work on unity:

I’m saying it’s done wonderfully, yeah. And I hope they take it seriously, and work on it in the churches and missions. That could be just wonderful if they work on these issues. Yeah. Sometimes, and we don't make lot of sense statements, and we have visions, and then we sometimes stray away from them. With any organization it is like that you know. You know, that in WEA it is like that. Lausanne is like that. Any organization, any mission, any church it is, you know, sometimes we always stray away a little bit. Yeah. But it’s a wonderful material, yeah. It’s wonderful to read it (Rajendran).

2.10 Clearer than earlier WCC documents

Ekström adds that he thinks TTL is clearer on many issues important to Evangelicals than earlier vaguer WCC documents:

When you write it together with the others, you need to understand that there are some particularities and some emphasis that can be given and I think this just to compare again, this document is much clearer than the one that was producing Edinburgh 2010, the Common Call, that is much more vague in that sense (Ekström).

3. What they missed in TTL

The interviewees stated different things that they missed in the document.

3.1 Relationship with God, sin and responsibility

Ekström and Kjøde both miss a stronger emphasis on the personal vertical relationship to God, especially in relation to personal sin and responsibility.

Ekström would like to see a more holistic view of the gospel:

For us Evangelicals, it is very important holistic view of the gospel, it has to do with all the areas of human kind of and so on, of the human-- person or each person and so on. Maybe it could have been – I mean, there is also emphasis on structures and the evil structures and the structures there have been affected by sin and so on. We would probably put also a lot of emphasis on the personal sin. I mean the responsibly each of us, on our relationship to God. ...And that can be in a political level, social, economic levels. We need to fight that at the same time it has to do with the personal relationship to God as well and our need for for God's forgiveness, relationship we go through Jesus Christ. And that maybe is not as clear as we would like to see it in this document” (Ekström).

Kjøde seems to be astounded by the lack of this:

It has no expressed theology of what the human lostness contains, so it's hard to understand that salvation is from condemnation from the wrath of God. So, well, it's weak on certain points where the Lausanne documents differ very much from it. Very much. So I have not had the opportunity to ask my friends in the southern churches yet about it, but I don't understand really how this could go through unanimously in the General assembly in Busan in 2013 that is quite -- I know that's out of reach for my understanding, because it's so much here where from an ordinary Biblical viewpoint can't follow the text (Kjøde).

3.2 The uniqueness of Christ

Many of the mission leaders miss a clear statement about the uniqueness of Christ.

Ekström wishes TTL was “more clear about the uniqueness on Jesus”(Ekström).

Kjøde has strong opinions on this issue: “It’s not clear enough on uniqueness of Christ. It doesn’t take – it does almost not mention on the uniqueness of Christ. That’s peculiar”.

He thinks TTL misses something vital because of this:

I'm afraid it does not lead us to a putting our focus on the centrality of the gospel understood as the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in salvation. So it widens out and widens out and gives an answer to the universality of Christ. But I'm afraid it doesn't give a good enough answer to the uniqueness of Christ.

Kjøde sees the lack of something of such importance as a lack of any real approach to Evangelical thinking:

I have worked extensively on the theology of religions. And in my opinion, this is not a document bringing that conciliar parts of the church meaning the World Council of Churches now any closer to an Evangelical understanding. It’s very weak on the uniqueness of Christ. It actually doesn’t mention about uniqueness of Christ that the world uniqueness is used once, and then it is about the uniqueness of each faith (Kjøde).

Søvde believes this is a symptom of the split within WCC: “Because there is a theological distance about if Christ is the only road to salvation for them. Therefore they don't say much about that, I believe”. But as an Evangelical and a conservative, she says she needs a stronger emphasis on this:

The Cape Town Commitment is very clear, as clear as the Lausanne-declaration. This is a «stumbling stone» for the conservatives; if there is not written anything about salvation only in Christ.....then it is not sufficient (Søvde).

Åslund struggles with the same issue, and cannot see any proof of approach towards Evangelicalism

in this topic: “I’m not yet ready to say that the World Council of Churches has really made some steps towards the Lausanne Movement in terms of the understanding of salvation, the uniqueness of Christ”. This is central to him, and he points out that there is still a distance between WCC and the Lausanne Movement:

And is Jesus Christ the only way of salvation for people? And what does it mean that Christ atoned for all human kind when he died on the cross, for example? I mean, the uniqueness of Christ is being the slogan for the Lausanne Movement as a reaction to the Uppsala, which somehow find possibilities of man getting saved in all religions more or less at least, yeah, a possibility for people to get saved, and very little emphasis on the uniqueness of Christ. So these are some of the very central issues to me (Åsland).

3.3 Perdition

In relation to the uniqueness of Christ, Søvde would also like to see the document talk about perdition: “I remember I read it and looked for it, but I can't remember the concept of perdition here”. She misses it as it talks about important issues: “The reality of eternal separation from God for those who don't believe in Christ”(Søvde).

3.4 A clearer distinction between creation and redemption

Kjøde says he misses a clearer distinction between what is created and available for everyone, natural revelation, and what is unique and true about God's way of revealing himself, special revelation: “So it's a weak distinction between creation and redemption. It is not strong enough in my opinion on the question about truth and normativity and revelation”(Kjøde).

3.5 Lack of focus on evangelism in TTL's definition of mission

Even though many of the interviewees say they appreciate the increased emphasis on evangelism, they still miss a stronger focus on evangelism in TTL's paragraphs about mission.

Baxter-Brown thinks evangelism still is given too little space in TTL, when it should rather be the main issue:

Evangelism is the queen of all Christian ministers. Then the priority it is given should be greater. It should be I think it was David Bosch. I think it was Bosch. He described evangelism as the sharp point of the sphere of mission, and without evangelism the entire sphere is therefore blunted, and it's not fit for purpose, if you like, and so for me, you know, I think the Biblical argument is that Jesus priority was evangelism. I will just come back to that in a moment. And without that priority being reflected in the way we think and theorize about mission, we lose the sharpness of the mission of God. What I mean by evangelism here though is not simple proclamation. It includes proclamation but it's much richer and broader than that. So I think, you know, I now use the term 'holistic evangelism' because I want to try and say that our current concepts of evangelism are too narrow, and focuses too much on global proclamation whereas the Biblical model is much broader than that.

He is disappointed that TTL does not capture that, and sees this as traces from the Uppsala Assembly, still being present in WCC:

This led increasingly to social and political understandings of mission as participation in God's active liberation in human society. So the church became one means among many, so that's the one crucial point among many of the God may use to accomplish his mission in the world. God could accomplish his purposes apart from either the church or the gospel. And it's such news where especially influence of the WCC Assembly at Uppsala in '68, and this understanding reflected in liberation theologians reached its zenith at the commission on World Mission and Evangelism conference of '72 to '73. So what you've got there is a particular way of understanding mission that I have serious questions about, but what you also got within the culture of the WCC is you do have this very strong and definite concept of political engagement of being a very legitimate part of Christian mission"(Baxter-Brown).

Rajendran is also afraid that the way TTL has a strong social and political understanding of mission, might lead to mission without evangelism in practice:

I mean lot of missions are going into creation like save the Earth, save the environment. It's because it's created by God, but that also cannot, should not become long sided...That you only talk about environment. You only talk about how the Earth is. Yeah. So it should be balanced.

She hopes people don't get engaged in unbalanced or one sided-mission for the wrong reasons:“So hope, I mean, that people don't go into it because they also use similar terminology”(Rajendran).

Kjøde is disappointed about TTL, that there has not been more development in this field, as WCC has had other documents with a strong emphasis on evangelism:

I was told before reading it that this was a document, which emphasized evangelism in an evangelical way much, much stronger than the former leading document from the World Council of Churches, and that was made in 1992 often called the affirmation. And so at first when I read it, I was a little bit disappointed, because I didn't find that evangelism was so much more or heavily emphasized in the affirmation, and seen from the time when the affirmation came in 1982, that was after a long period or in the midst of a period where they discussed the pluralistic theology of religion in very – there were very radical voices on it, and seen from that perspective, the affirmation is relatively evangelical actually, seen in the light of the discussion going on at its time (Kjøde).

Søvde compares the understanding of mission in TTL to the Cape Town Commitment: “There is talk about creation care in Cape Town Commitment, but not as «the road to salvation for humanity», if you know what I mean?” She misses a clearer distinction in TTL between diakonia/social justice and proclamation, as well as an emphasis that they should go together in mission, as she is used to from Evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries:

What separates them, is that they won't use the word salvation about people getting rice, and you will have «rice-Christians». Do you know what I mean? One wants to do good deeds and social justice and diakonia etc. But one don't want to say that it stops there, one says that they need to get words proclaimed in addition. And on that Cape Town Commitment is very clear. Maybe not TTL is as clear.

In the same way, Søvde misses a clearer statement that dialogue as a tool for mission, not mission in itself:

I don't believe the Lausanne movement will go as far as saying that mission is about dialogue, just dialogue. But I have the impression that WCC has been there. But maybe the document is a part of changing that a little. Challenging the established dialogue-thinkers to see that there is something more...That even though mission and evangelism is about sharing Jesus, then one cannot not listen. So in SSM they have talked about dialogue as a basis for evangelism. You can do dialogue to get to know each other, and then one has a platform where I can share my personal faith. Where dialogue then becomes a tool for mission. Because that should also be a part of the dialogue, not only what it says, and what do we agree on and that. How have I experienced Jesus, as a part of the dialogue (Søvde).

Åsland does not think the document answers something essential: "What not the evangelism and mission mean really? What do you – when you are doing evangelism and mission, what do you tell people? What's your message?". Åsland likes TTL's way of describing «evangelism is the outflow of hearts that filled with the love of God for those who do not yet know him»(TTL, 29). But he does not think the rest of the document follows the consequences of that way of thinking:

I would want to affirm that very strongly, but I would want to push that one step further, and I don't think this is where the document goes, that evangelism is motivated by the love of God for those who don't yet know him (Åsland).

3.6 The unreached

Another aspect of evangelism many of the interviewees miss, are statements about the unreached.

Baxter brown refers to Peter Wagner: "«What about the two billion who have never heard?»". He thinks this again is something that has its origin from the Uppsala Assembly:

I think what we have is a bit of an inheritance that goes all over back to the Uppsala WCC Assembly...The simple formula of Missio Dei is that God has mission that he encrypts and

sends the church to do in the world. So you have God acting through the church into the world. And this Dutch guy as I understand, he wanted to invert that, and said: «God has a world that has lots of needs, and the church has to respond to the human need». And so the slogan became «the world sets the agenda», which is quite a radical reinterpretation of mission at that time, because it shifts the whole focus of authority to meeting the human need rather than to, you know, what the tradition and scripture say on the issue. And I think, and again, this is a personal opinion that there are still traces of that echoes of that dichotomy down the year, so that was 1968, and then you had 1974, you had the Lausanne movement kicking off with the Congress in Switzerland.

Baxter-Brown explains how this resulted in a lack of emphasis on the unreached:

The emphasis was no longer on how to reach all these people with the gospel of Jesus. But now that the world was setting the agenda, so it wasn't the gospel setting the agenda about a result in the human need or salvation enhance the ultimate ancestry God and trust Jesus and so on. It was now: «What's the hot potato that the world is facing?» (Baxter-Brown).

Kjøde compares TTL with the Evangelical documents:

There is a huge difference between the documents and on the question about the urgency of the gospel, the urgency for people to be saved and within the Evangelical Movement we have had pretty much focus on the unreached people groups that's totally absent from Together Towards Life. It's not in the scope at all, which it should have been in my opinion.

He sees this as a result of the lack of uniqueness of Christ: “Of course as a consequence they are not at all focused on the unreached. On the other hand, they say that the unreached should be partners in mission”(Kjøde).

Søvde also compares TTL with Cape Town Commitment, and is not satisfied: “I am not sure about unreached. Cape Town Commitment is very clear on this. But I don't think TTL says anything about it”. She explains she would like to see another “urgency of sharing the gospel”(Søvde).

Åsland asks: “Is there a urgent need for salvation for all human beings?” He is disappointed when comparing TTL to his own traditions:

In Norwegian Lutheran Mission, we have a strong emphasis on the least reached people groups, and I don't find anything about them in the Together Towards Life. It's also quite strongly emphasized in the Cape Town document that there are still a number of people groups who have not yet had the chance to hear the gospel, and they represent a huge challenge for us who are involved in church and mission today, how should we reach the least reached people groups, and that's something which is lacking as far as I can see in the mission statement from the Council of Churches.

Åsland explains he thinks this reveals something about WCC's theology, but that there is also an ongoing process on this within the organization:

One could ask why is that not – why is such a central theme not there in the World Council of Churches' document? Is it just something they forgot? Is it not important? Has it something to do with the theology, missiology, which is behind it, which, I mean, in World Council of Churches context, it has not been very usual to talk about the unreached or the least reached people groups, and do they still not want to that? I didn't challenge the presenter in the forum on that issue, and that's something I would have liked to do, because I know my African friends, they are very aware of the issue on their continent and in their countries. They have a very deliberate strategy to reach out to these groups, often Muslim people groups(Åsland).

3.7 Bible as only authority

Ekström and Søvde say they would like to see a clear statement about the Bible as only foundation.

Ekström, as an Evangelical, misses this in TTL: “From the Evangelical point of view, we would like to see a much clear statement about the Word of God, The Bible is the only foundation”(Ekström).

Søvde asks: “is there anything about the Bible as the only authority?” Taking part in working

groups, she knew people had asked that before the document was finished: “Well I remember when we were in Geneva, we discussed that with Jooseup. It was one of our suggestions. And then he responded that the earlier documents have covered that. But I still miss it”. Again she compares it to the Cape Town Commitment:

If I compare with the Cape Town Commitment, it starts off by saying that. «Unchanging», this is translated to Norwegian, so it says «this is unchanged» as an introduction.you might quote me on that the Bible does not take a lot of space in this document (Søvde).

3.8 Practical guidance

Two of the mission leaders expresses that he would like to see more practical guidance in TTL.

Ekström thinks many Evangelicals are “very much into practical things and I want to see a lot of activity”. So he believes many will not be content with TTL:

They may feel that it is not sufficient all that in the document but that's the nature of this kind of document and if you compare it with the – become on call of Edinburgh 2010 or even Lausanne, The Cape Town Commitment (Ekström).

Søvde also thinks TTL lacks the practicality of Cape Town Commitment:

I think that Cape Town Commitment is much more practical, and I like thae way it is arranged that half of it is about love- and pact-language in the Bible. I find that genius. Practical guide in TTL is things we can do in a Bible-study-group. But practical guide or part two of Cape Town Commitment is things you can do on the streets. Hands on.

Søvde therefore believes people won't be as engaged by TTL: “I believe many wish they could recognize their working day.” Cape Town Commitment, is on the other hand much more specific for different situations:

Well, Practical Guide(in TTL) is like: «Think through», there are psalms/hymns etc, right?∩

But part to in Cape Town Commitment is called «For the world we serve». And then it talks about Christ or truth: «Truth in the working place», and you don't do that in the Bible group, one does it at work. So one find help.

So In Cape Town Commitment, you can find resources for whichever part of society you work in. Søvde describes how there are paragraphs for “those who work in the medias to be light and salt, or do Christian media work”. She also states other practical areas it addresses:

«Truth and art in mission», «truth and technology», «truth in public space», in other words in debates etc. In this way part two is out there amongst people, and is not a study guide, it is more practical. For those who the different parts are about. Because I don't work with people with disabilities, for example (Søvde).

3.9 Lack of material from Evangelism working group

Baxter-Brown explains he misses more of what the Evangelism working group produced:

Personally I think, you know, the paper on evangelism that the Evangelism working group put together isn't reflected that clearly in the final document Together Towards Life. I found that disappointing, you know, Together Towards Life in that sense is more sort of filling as I'd like it to be that that's the way it goes. So, you know, it's a mixed bag really.

As he was a part of the working group, he knew the propositions they made:

I was disappointed the first thing I found, because I worked on the paper, on the research paper on evangelism. So the first thing I did was look at that bit about evangelism, and I found it said that we hadn't got – there wasn't something that the original paper reflected in that passage as I would have liked. So it felt like to me that what we had written have been weakened in the final paper. So I found that disappointing.

The priorities WCC has made in TTL bothers Baxter-Brown, as 'Evangelism' and 'following Jesus' was given less emphasis than he and his group had proposed:

And also the position of it in the paper is disappointing, so I'm coming as in primarily my first calling vocation is as an evangelist. For me I would much rather had evangelism right at the beginning of there as the real shock point of the whole Christian mission is about they couldn't use Jesus, excuse me, and calling people to follow him, and calling people to follow him in a life of devotion and commitment to justice and peace and all that sort of stuff. So, for me I would have wanted a structure of the paper disappointed me as evangelism this is God calling you in Christ to follow Jesus, and this is why we're following Jesus in rather than taking the right word to the end of the paper almost as a slightly lower priority, so that's my understanding of evangelism is queen of all Christian ministers, and I don't think that that is reflected in the papers as well as I would have liked it to.

Baxter-Brown is glad his colleges in WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelization consulted the Evangelicals, but he is still not content with the result: "the CWME did make significant attempts until the Evangelical voice was heard, but I don't think it's clear and strong enough for evangelism"(Baxter-Brown).

3.10 Emphasis is on churches and not organizations

Søvde would like to see the mission organizations to be addressed more in TTL.

Again, she explains this was something she already missed during one of the missiological forums where the draft of TTL was discussed:

We missed something in the draft. It might be something about the Norwegian model, because here are the «para-churches» or the mission organizations not churches. And they were only mentioned in one line, but in Norway they are important agents in the church landscape. It might not be the same in the rest of the world, so that was not included. But we talked a bit about that, I remember.

Søvde describes why this is such an important issue in Norway:

Lutheran mission organizations in Norway, they are a part of the Church of Norway originally. And when they go abroad, they start their own churches/denominations. And they are not churches home, but they are so abroad. And what relations are they then going to have in between one another? Home or abroad? And are they going to relate to the Church of Norway or the mission organization? What happens is that they relate to the mission organization, especially when there is a distance. The Church of Norway has not been so important in that kind of mission. But there are quite a lot of practical challenges that we, our mission organization members, meet. And one might say that these kinds of documents does not have a purpose in sorting out these kinds of problems, but what it says in that one sentence I believe is something like «one should work for good cooperation». Because mission organizations are not members in WCC. Churches are. Therefore they are being left a little along the sideline. While it is they who do the mission. So the entire Christianity is included, yes. But not the conflicts of interest or challenges/issues that they meet, they are not included.

Søvde sums this problem up as something that makes the organizations distance themselves from TTL: “People ask: «Is this something we can use in our organization?» Then they read and say: «No, they do not mention para-churches. Then it is not for us. Then it is for the mother church»”. This includes Søvde herself as a representative of the mission organizations through NORME: “I live well with an understanding that this document(TTL) is a document for the churches and not the mission organizations”(Søvde).

3.11 Definition of the Holy Spirit lacks something important

Even though Søvde likes the increased focus on the Holy Spirit in TTL, she still has some objection: “The Holy Spirit is defined as the energy for affirming and caring of life (p.3) while I believe it is a person in the trinity”(Søvde).

3.12 Incomplete definition of healing

Søvde also misses a stated belief in supernatural miracles: “Healing is defines as good health, while I believe in miracles and supernatural signs (p. 50)”(Søvde).

4. What they disliked in TTL

Generally it seems like the document is written in such a way that the mission leaders more easily could name things they missed than things they disagreed on or disliked. This fits the criticism by identified above about the vagueness of the document later in this thesis. But still some of the interviewees was able to point out some things in TTL they could not agree on.

4.1 Evangelism

While some praised what they understood as the increased focus on evangelism, the issue of lack of emphasis of it in the definition of mission is also mentioned. But some also expressed scepticism over TTL's understanding of evangelism.

Baxter-Brown mentions there are parts of TTL's understanding of evangelism he does not like: "I think there's a lot that what we want to be referred in the document, but there's stuff that I would want to be critical that might not be represented of evangelism particularly".

Baxter-Brown does not like the idea of mission existing without a dimension of evangelism:

This might be a good example, paragraph 85, evangelism one was excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel. I would want to try and turn that around more, so that I would say you know, while not excluding the different dimension of the mission. There is a suggestion in that there are other dimensions of legitimate Christian mission that are separate from evangelism, and I would say that's absolutely wrong.

He explains more in detail why he has a problem with that, using a specific example:

Absolutely wrong. That it's all aspects of what we do as a church don't have some dimension of evangelism, some dimension of which the good news of Jesus is being made incarnate within the community in a true working, then we are not doing Christian mission. We are not doing something Christian in that case. We're just doing I don't know, nice community work or social work so that it's not mission work, but that doesn't mean that we have to be

preaching the gospel as we give out blankets to the homeless to keep them warm at night. It means that behind the giving out to a blankets, perhaps to be in the deliberate intent of seeing that act as an expression of the love of God, and the Kingdom of God coming into being made manifest, and that brings a different dimension to what we're doing. So it's, you know, anybody can give out a blanket to a homeless person and it's a good thing to do. Full stop. I'm not going to – full stop. It's a very good thing to do to care for the needy and the least, the last and the last. But as Christians when we come to do that, there has to be if it's genuinely a Christian act of service and kindness, a designer that with this blanket comes a concrete expression of the love of Christ, and the hope that this person or these people who in the receiving of the blanket also receive something of Christ himself, but it goes one step further, because it's also about in giving out a blanket, you know. It is with -- in the act of giving out t he blanket, we are also encountering Christ in the person: «as you did it to the least of least, so you did it to me» (Baxter-Brown).

Kjøde also notes the little emphasis on proclamation in evangelism, in spite of the biblical material:

And I mentioned that it's good that it says so much about evangelism, and I will applaud to that, but – and there is a “but” of course. When it talks about evangelism, it talks about Worship (Liturgia), Witness (Martyria), Service (Diakonia), Fellowship (Koinonia). Then it moves on to a next paragraph saying something about Kerygma, which is probably the most central word in a biblical setting of Evangelism. Not these other words. They are part of a church life. Of course, they are important. They are vital to the life of the church, but coming to Evangelism beside evangelisme or evangelism, Kerygma to proclaim, it's the word that is used in New Testament. But when you come to this word, they have a whole -- this document has a whole lot of safeguarding of the word feeling -- it's obvious that they feel uncomfortable with the word, but it's mentioned in the Bible so they need to mention it. But so many, yeah, safe, so much safeguarding of the word, because it's connected with exploitation, with allurements, with regret, these words are used when they come to the word Kerygma or to proclaim, proclaim the gospel. And this is so different from Cape Town Commitment, for example, which has its strong emphasis on Kerygma. Not that it is not holistic. It's definitely holistic, but the Kerygma has the centrality in understanding evangelism. Here is a big difference. I didn't think it should be so big when I heard so much about the – they talk of

evangelism, which is there of course. So it's a mixed economy I would say even on this sad to say (Kjøde).

4.2 Relationship to other religions

Kjøde also strongly dislikes how TTL states other religions as 'partners in mission':

I know that's out of reach for my understanding, because it's so much here where from an ordinary Biblical viewpoint can't follow the text, especially this comes to expression when it talks about other religions as being partners in mission in the Christian mission where they are partners in the mission that we have. And it's an expression which is unthinkable in the evangelical. It seems to me, so.

He even sees it as something that does not fit inside of Christian theology:

“Yeah, when they come to this point talking about other religions being stakeholders so to say partakers in mission, then it takes definite limit on what Christian theology can say”.

It is therefore also what Kjøde finds the most problematic about TTL: “So that is, yeah, that is the greatest point so to say, I would call it”.

He has attempted to see if it could be understood differently, but unsuccessful:

I've asked the question if it is, I can't find any good reason that, but I understand they try to bring in some sort of new angles, new traditions to find new ways to saying things. But in the end, they end up with a story about an opening up from – and they have an inclusiveness platform of theology of religion, but not opening it up on some aspects towards the pluralist approach as far as I can read it.

Also the context it is written, is disturbing to Kjøde: “It's talk about in my opinion, under the context of it, it's talk about the mission, the evangelistic part or task or mission. At least that is the way I read it, and I find it very problematic actually”. As an Evangelical, trying to reach everybody with the gospel is important to Kjøde: “We have not reached and that the gospel is not in reach of their lives. Therefore, we must go with the gospel. And this is in my opinion this destroys it”. To, Kjøde the partnering is what destroys the need to reach: “So we should partner or they should partner with us. We should partner with each other, and it's not a goal to reach them. I understand it

as keeping a distance to the reaching language”(Kjøde).

4.3 A “step back” from some earlier documents

Kjøde also dislikes that the uniqueness of Christ is so unclear in the document when it is more clear in Edinburg 2010: Common Call:

Yeah, I can understand that, but I haven't mentioned here that in 2010 we got the Edinburgh 2010 common call, which is so to say, it confirms the value of the expression uniqueness of Christ. It's very important. They have a specific paragraph confirming the uniqueness of Christ, and this much shorter statement on mission represents a meeting where all the worldwide church families were represented. And many will consider it a sort of least common denominator. So if they with all the church families present could say so strong words about the uniqueness of Christ, then this is as a part of the least common denominator then in light of this the lack of experience or the lack of the expression in TTL is conspicuous (Kjøde).

4.4 Only focused on this world, not eternity

All of the three Norwegian mission leaders criticizes TTL for bringing the focus of mission only about this world and not eternity.

Kjøde sees this as a symptom of a way of thinking in WCC that has been there for years:

Still it is somehow in the old pitch on the one side of the road where it is more focused on evangelism and salvation as vocabulary which is this side that it is this worldly. They have not come out of this terrible grip of losing eternity.

He refers to paragraph nr. 93 in TTL:

“«We believe that Spirit of life brings joy and fullness of life». It's very unclear by the way understanding of life, what is life here?”(Kjøde).

Søvde dislikes how the world salvation is used about earthly matters in TTL:

I think it is ambiguous talking about salvation in terms like «fullness of life», «a life giving experience», etc....But to me salvation is forgiveness from sin and salvation from eternal separation from God.

She also has a problem with the eschatology she reads out of TTL:

Talking of the Spirit of Liberation, it says the God's purpose for the world is to re-create the world, while I believe the Bible says that John saw a new heaven and a new earth in Revelation 21.1 (and that the old one was gone).

This might seem as a small detail, but it has bit consequences for the eschatology and for the proclamation of the gospel. If the earth will only be renewed, mission is to do eco-justice, like WCC affirms (Søvde).

Åsland ask the same question about salvation:

And what I am still struggling with is how clear is this document on the necessity for salvation for our people, and what does that salvation mean? Somehow the language is still not clear enough for me to really clarify what that means (Åsland).

4.5 The phrasing “mission from the margins”

Even though many of the interviewees liked parts of TTL's paragraphs about 'mission from the margins', Baxter-Brown and Ekström also has some criticism.

Baxter-Brown was one of those who liked parts of the paragraphs about “mission from the margins”, but he still do not like some of the phrasing: “I would like to see is greater priority for holistic evangelism, and slightly less emphasis perhaps on like Mission from the Margins, or at least a rephrasing of that if that makes sense”.

Baxter-Brown says he does not question the intent, and that there also are positive ways of understanding the issue:

I understand in sort of imperial concepts of mission, we were going from the centre to the margins. -That there was a view of the margins that they were somehow inadequate, and we as of our magnality could help make them less inadequate, whether that was, because it doesn't have plumbing and sewage or they were hungry or whatever it might be. And it was with good intent. I'm not questioning the intent, you know, it was a time when people were doing what they perceived to be the best in their time.

He still however, has a problem with it, as he sees there need to be a centre:

But since now is this idea that mission is from everywhere to everywhere, and there isn't really a centre. And so people at the margins have something to contribute to mission. I would agree with if that's what we're saying, you know, that I can meet Christ in the beggar on the streets. As I go he hopefully will see something of Christ to me, but I could also see something of Christ in him. So, you know, that seems to me to be straight forward in that sense. So there is something of a mission from the margins in that I go to receive as well as to give and, you know. So I will learn, I would be transformed. But if I am working within non-Christian environment, then I want to ask a question: Who decides what the content of mission is? Is it the people of the margin that are now able to define what mission is? Or is God still the one who defines what mission is? So it's a question for me about our authority, you know. To me, our authority comes from God through his word, and through the church, and through the administration of the Holy Spirit. So, but I don't perceive myself to be at the centre anyway. So, I struggle with the whole discussion about mission and margins and mission from the margins, because for me mission ultimately is about God being made known everywhere, and mission is from God to everyone. To me it's not just to anybody else. So I struggle with the concept, the concept of Mission from the Margins (Baxter-Brown).

Ekström is also discontent with the term, but more because of the barriers it creates:

I mean every time you use a term that create a barriers, that separates people than an us somehow, it can be seen in the negative way. I think we all are in the margin somehow, it depends on the perspective and depends on what we are talking about. So even a rich person, white rich person in Europe can be in the margins of a lot of things. So, to understand, I am

not 100% happy with the wordings as such. Although, I think, I have tried to minimize the negative aspect of it. I understand the reason for it and intention to talk about it and I think that's good.

Also, Ekström believes people might be offended by the wordings:

I mean, every time, you need to talk about the specific problem, you need to be very clear about you are talking about and that can always be misunderstood because those who we are talking about can feel offended by it. And that's why words like the poor or those without worries in the margin and so on, all these kind of things, that point to some kind of people that you need to, to identify that can cause this kind of reaction and those who have been identified, in the margin, they can feel of course offended by it (Ekström).

4.6 Bad bible quoting

Kjøde criticises TTL for quoting scripture out of context:

I'm a bit surprised that while it using so much, it's just one short quotation from John 10 about giving life, and doing that without looking into the textual context of that saying, it surprises me a lot. Because I feel it's a vulnerable use of this metaphor of life. What is life? What is life giving? What is life in John? Within John's theology, what is life? Definitely it's connected with regeneration, and with eternal life. And that is not the emphasis at all. It's talk of life giving sort of new life to creation, because the spirit is all over.

Kjøde sees this as a general trend that TTL is weaker in it's use of the Bible than the Cape Town Commitment:

There is a big difference between the Cape Town Commitment and to get it towards life on the way it uses the Bible so to say. And I mentioned about it with John 10, for example. So it doesn't see the Bible too much in its textual context. So to me it seems like very much of theology is – it's weaker in its biblical foundation. Then I find Cape Town Commitment that might not be strange, because Cape Town Commitment is written by professor in Old

Testament theology so, and it carries his marks of course (Kjøde).

4.7 Restraint on mission

Søvde is skeptical towards statement nr. 86, as it seems to limit mission work in her eyes:

What is the disunity in mission (see statement nr. 86)? Does this mean that every time missionaries go to a new place, they need to work in unity with the main line churches and its nominal members and not plant new churches?"

She sees these kinds of statements as hostile towards her tradition: "Some statements here are surely written with an edge to evangelical mission work. Another example is what it says about short term mission, see statement nr. 76" (Søvde).

5. Other general problems about TTL

Some of the mission leaders also named problems about the nature of the document, that did not fit within the categories 'miss' or 'dislike'.

5.1 Vagueness

Many of the interviewees mention the vagueness of the document as a problem: The wordings might sound very poetic, but if you try to dig more into they mean, they are often either very open to cover different interpretations, or may be understood as something you maybe can't agree with after all.

Baxter-Brown says the parts of TTL his group proposed became more vague after editing:

I think our draft paper was a bit more explicit than some of this final document is. I think some of the, you know, sharper should we say, and so it feels to me that some of the final document is a bit more blunt than the original source material was, but I mean that's the way it goes.

He also states the lack of clear definitions of important words in the document leaves them open for interpretation:

And so words like evangelism, evangelization, proclamation are understand -- well not Christ Evangelical Commission, but evangelism, evangelization could be misunderstood, because we bring different levels of meaning to them. And therefore we need to, you know, there are issues that need to be addressed I think in terms of how we understand and respond to each other and have different understanding.

He states he thinks there is a deliberate vagueness to make different traditions be able to identify with the document:

And we need to work hard at trying to have shared meaning for our words, so words like mission can be widely understood and different traditions moving in different perspective

today. So very simple one is that the Orthodox, for example, in their understanding in mission many Orthodox would see the divine liturgy as an essential part of their mission in the world. Now I'm not Orthodox and at a personal level, that doesn't touch divine liturgy is not something I'm used to as part of my worship tradition beyond my comfort zone in that sense, because it is strange to me not having an Orthodox background. So I can respect that and I do respect that because I perceive that to be part of their mission, and I am not going to question or challenge that. I will honor it even though it's not something that at a personal, emotional, spiritual level particularly touches me, but it would be very easy for some people to therefore dismiss it as nothing to do with mission (Baxter-Brown).

Ekström moves ahead saying this is a weakness, making no one truly content with it:

The problem with the document like this is that, if all agree that means that no one is fully happy with it. Because if you have to write it in a way that this kind of understanding and everyone can sign under, that means that you can't be so specific, the affirmation need to be open, give at least the possibility to be interpret in different ways. And that can make a document less strong so to say, in the affirmation..

Ekström also says this also makes it hard to find something you disagree on: "I don't think there are lot of things that people dislike, we dislike, it's more that, again, what you – when you write the document like this, you can't be so clear about some issues". He sees the challenge in including suggestions from all different kinds of groups, even though he thinks the editing work could have been better:

But there is no section that just should not be there. Then it's more – how an editorial work to keep it clear and maybe more focused. But that's always a challenge, again, especially if you do it as a group and you have to take to consider all the different suggestions and so on and but some people would like to have these word there, that expression and then you end up, maybe saying the same things in different ways. But in terms of themes, there is nothing I can recall just now that shouldn't be there (Ekström).

Åsland illustrates how he himself was fooled by the vagueness of the document to begin with:

You asked me about my very first impression of the document, which was positive. The spirit, language, and all that, and also more into evangelism and mission than I think they have been for, which I find very positive. So my first impression was very positive. Then starting to debate and discuss, and what does it mean? What is hidden here in the language? When we say mission and evangelism, do we necessarily mean the same? That has been some of the discussion that's been going on in the Norwegian mission -- among the Norwegian mission convention people afterwards. And I find that in debate very interesting.

This makes Åsland sceptic in some ways. He is still positive, but ambivalent:

At the same time, some of the statements made by the person who came to Oslo and presented the document, and some of the things that were discussed later has made me wondering in what is hidden in this language, and what kind of meaning do we ascribe to the words that we are using? So, and I have not come to a conclusion there, and I think may be time will show really how much impact the African, Asian, South American churches will have on the World Council of Churches, and how much they will impact the understanding of mission, evangelism, and the necessity of doing mission and evangelism. So, yeah, that's where I am right now (Åsland).

Kjøde say he is more worried about what the document does not say:

Yeah. The problem with the document is not as much what we can read there. But when you get a comprehensive document on mission which might stand for 30 years, the last one did. -Then I'm concerned about what's not mentioned if you understand.

He explains that he has worked with this problem in his article:

I have asked in my article if they try to circumvent to avoid some of the hard issues of the disagreement on the questions, which I mentioned about here like the uniqueness of Christ, yeah, for example. But I think that doesn't work in a longer run to circumvent the hard, tough questions.

Kjode does not think avoiding difficult questions is sustainable, and thinks that covering up what he sees as inner conflicts within WCC, will not work in the long run:

I think they had a need to find new angles, because there are some tensions within WCC, also between WCC as conciliar and the Evangelical Movement, there are definitely some tensions, but also within WCC, and they try to make a group now, which should try to come around some of these old obstacles. Other ways we could see this where we could find a unifying way of thinking, and I think they found the pneumatology as impossible. It's obvious. They found pneumatology as an entry point and have tried to come around that way. But then, you know, you just can't avoid the truth question. You just can't avoid it. So nevertheless what angle you find or step in point you find, you can't avoid the question about truth.

He illustrates how the pneumatology opening up for both Pentecostal and Orthodox interpretation has partially worked as people from both parties seem to identify with it, even though Kjode himself believes it is really mostly Orthodox pneumatology or creation theology if you dig deeper:

So I can see that there is a footprints of Pentecostals and Evangelicals being part of working on the document, but I will also say that the document, it has a very certain Eastern Orthodox flavor, because it emphasizes so much to Pneumatology. But it is a bit -- still a bit hard for me to understand that because I've also been told that this is an impact also not only from the Orthodox side, but also from the Pentecostal side. I would like some time to challenge some of my Pentecostal missiological friends, and ask them if this is the sort of Pneumatology that has a bearing on Pentecostalism in its traditional understanding. I'm not sure about that, no. So, there is an emphasis of Pneumatology that doesn't necessarily bring a stronger emphasis on Christology, but more bring -- to some extent bring us back to more like creation theology (Kjode).

Søvde also worries about what is not stated in TLL, and has a claims it is on purpose: "There is a theological distance about if Christ is the only road to salvation for them. Therefore they don't say much about that, I believe" (Søvde).

5.2 Gap between theory and practice

In Rajendran's experience, there is often a gap between the beautiful wordings in the documents and practices of members of WCC:

So that's what I think the practicality is mission. It's more theories, and it's more paper work, and more policy making because I was going through all this. It's a lovely policy what they have statements, it's lovely it is, yeah, but I'm not sure how much it is being followed.

She likes the document in it self, but says it does not help if it is not followed:

It's very good on a paper. Yeah. And I feel they are very theoretical, but it will be nice to have a balance. Practical, yeah...And we can make lot of policies. We can have lot of rules and regulations in churches and mission, but if you don't follow it, then it doesn't have any meaning to it.

But Rajendran adds that this problem is not unique for WCC: "I hope and pray that it doesn't stays on the paper or in the files. Yeah. And that's the danger. That's the danger of every organization". But she hopes TTL will be followed:

It's beautiful words, yeah. And I just hope and pray that it is followed. Yeah, and it is put into practice, and I hope so. And I'm sure there are many who are practicing it, but there are many who might not be (Rajendran).

5.3 Does not bring much new in comparison to the Cape Town

Commitment

Søvde often compares TTL to the Cape Town Commitment and seems to usually finds TTL inferior about the topics she cares about.

Åsland adds the lack of new material compared to what is in the Cape Town Commitment. Even though he likes TTL in many ways, he can't see it bring anything new, that Cape Town Commitment does not have:

I'm not seeing any aspects. I really like the Cape Town Commitment document, and I feel it's a very comprehensive -- I also, yes, I admire the language in both documents really, the Together Towards Life with a spirit emphasis, and the Cape Town document with the love language. We love because you loved us, and we love the world. We love the world and we love to serve, and I think the Cape Town Commitment in a very good way covers the most aspects of ministry and how to serve God. So I'm not able to pinpoint and to say that Together Towards Life has something with it, which is lacking in Cape Town unfortunately (Åsland).

5.4 WCC will never dismiss old statements

Baxter-Brown mentions how it can be problematic with a document like this that it will only add on to old WCC statements, and not rebut them:

Within the WCC you also have an organization memory that wants to see themselves building on what has gone before, and so I would be hard pressed to think of any explicit rebuttal from within the WCC of some of the stuff that might have existed in Bangkok or Uppsala. It's a bit like the Roman Catholic Church. You never admit your mistakes. You never. You know, a papal bull will never contradict another papal bull, and except of course it does. But it will never deliberately say. It says even it might slightly, you know, I'm speaking with the authority of God on Earth as a pope as my previous pope did except, in brackets: (He was wrong!).

Baxter-Brown explains that it therefore can be hard to know to what extent WCC has changed or not, as there will not be any explicit dismissals of earlier statement:

You will never get that explicitly and understand. I don't think you ever get that in the WCC, so the echoes of Uppsala and Bangkok will continue reverberating down the years, and still do so. And I think the issue would be how loud are those echoes that I would argue with definitely there, but are they loud enough to be found within to go towards life, or are they very quiet? (Baxter-Brown).

6. Has TTL changed their perspectives on WCC?

To answer such a question can be difficult. Also, what do one relate it to when answering a question like this? Let say for instance, a person was very negative to WCC, but became slightly more positive because of TTL. Or another person used to be very positive but suddenly became rather negative. To get a clearer perspective on this, one would have to look into where a person were on a negative/positive scale, how positive they used to be, what still bothers people, as well as other factors that also have played a role in changing that.

In my interviews I asked some additional questions to be able to understand this better; what the interviewees used to think about WCC, what they think now, what factors played a role in changing that etcetera. As explained, I had to set some of this material aside, as this thesis is not large enough to discuss all these issues properly.

I will therefore here mostly share the mission leaders' own explicit commentaries about whether TTL has made them more positive or not. From this we can at least see whether there has been any movement in any direction because of the document. I will also present a little bit more about the circumstances the interviewees refer to whenever appropriate, to be able to understand their more explicit commentaries better.

If one look at the space provided in this thesis for positive and negative comments about TTL, however, one can see that there are almost twice as many pages with negative commentaries. The space provided should approximately reflect the ratio between negative and positive commentaries during the interviews by the mission leaders.

It is interesting that the negative ratio is so high despite the claims about 'vagueness'; that is is not easy to find anything to directly disagree with. There is, however, a much larger amount of things the mission leaders miss than they dislike or find as 'other general problems'.

I believe, however, that whenever the interviewees stated they believed the document brought something new that others could learn from, or if there were anything that had challenged them in a good way, it says something more than just that you agree with it. Of course, the 'final' result may be that some person still ends up becoming more negative because there are so many things one

dislike. But this list may tell us something about the complexity of it; that there may still be things one admires, even though how many things one misses or dislikes. I have therefore listed here the different themes that the different mission leaders described in this way.

When asked what about the document that brought something new that others could learn from or if there were anything that had challenged them in a good way, the interviewees named:

- How it talks about “missions from the margins: Ekström, Søvde and partially Baxter-Brown
- Its holistic view on mission: Ekström and Åsland
- How it references the Bible: Rajendran
- How it addresses the world today and its changing landscapes: Ekström and Rajendran
- How it challenges us to seek the gifts of the Spirit and being led by the Spirit: Søvde and Åsland
- How it challenges us to see where the Spirit is at work: Kjøde and Åsland
- How it challenges “growing intensity of collaboration” in statement nr. 65: Søvde
- How it challenges the church to evangelize: Søvde

Still, the most explicit answers to the question about whether their attitudes towards WCC have changed is given by the interviewees themselves. Let's have a look at them:

Baxter-Brown says his view on WCC has changed as he has become less positive:

Probably less, over the years, probably less, but the things I appreciated about it more than I ever did in the past some of the staff, some of their commitment, some of their devotion to God and to their particular ministers is extraordinary and rewarding and inspiring. So, I wouldn't want to not have it at all, and I found that deeply enriching.

He mentioned that he was disappointed over how TTL turned out despite his involvement with it, as well as 'structural problems' within WCC he got to know through working with them:

It's a very complex organization that whose culture is difficult to describe and define. So I found for example, as an evangelical working within WCC there were times I found that very, very difficult and problematic at a personal level. So there were personal struggles within my

time that changed my opinion a bit, but also there were other things going on.

So the more he got to know WCC from the inside, the more it changed his views: “Yeah, it changed over the years in different ways the more I got to encounter the WCC. I think the history of missions in the last century has been quite complex”. He does not think TTL itself has changed his perspective on WCC very much. To him, the process of working for WCC and together with colleagues there has been much more important, for better and for worse:

I think the main factors for me would be the experience of being a staff, and getting to know a little bit more about the organization at a firsthand level particularly, this is broad in WCC, but particular the way that individuals shape theology and said like that it’s pitifully simplistic, but actually, a huge amount of the way that our theology develops is because of the particular characters who were involved in developing it really. And I find that -- well I did find that a little bit surprising, but we still have a huge impact on the theology in a way that scientists don’t necessarily have the same level of impact on the science. It’s a different degree I think. So the lived experience of working with WCC has been important I think, on the rubbing shoulders with so many fascinating and interesting people, but that has been both personally enriching, but also professionally very exciting and interesting.

He still mentions TTL as playing a role, even though he seems to highlight the working process, but still finds *Christian Witness In a Multi-Religious World* more important:

In terms of theology it’s been interesting trying to be part of the development of *Together Towards Life*. I have been part of that process, even though a small part of that, the process has been fascinating. Being part of the process is a much bigger part of it *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, I mean, that has been deeply exciting, and theologically that paper is probably more significant than *Together Towards Life* (Baxter-Brown).

Ekström on the other hand, answers yes when asked whether he is now more positive towards cooperating with the WCC than earlier: “Yes, I think so”. He had the opposite experience from Baxter-Brown, and became more positive by working together with people from WCC:

I would say, the more I get to know them, the more positive I am, towards them. because then you see that, we have very much the same challenges and we want very much the same thing. So, I think the opportunity to get to know people, to sit with them, to pray together, to discuss things, makes you closer to them. It doesn't mean that you agree on everything, just to come to the understanding that here we have different points of view but we can work together anyway. But that's very positive.

An experience he shares with Baxter-Brown, however, is that TTL itself not has played a big role, but rather the experiences and people he encountered working with it:

Certainly the all the discussion around this documents and comparing and, I met from time to time with the head of the commission of WCC, the mission commission of WCC, Jooseop Keum. We were together just two weeks ago in South Africa for a week. And all this conversation makes you think differently and change your mind in different areas and grow in that sense. But I wouldn't say that it is specifically the document as such(Ekström).

Ekström illustrates how TTL sometimes challenges the understanding people might have about WCC and nuance it:

I think there is a clear holistic approach to Mission and to church and to the Gospel. I think that is really good, sometimes maybe we have had the feeling that the World Council Churches is being more, let's say on the political side and more emphasizing the kingdom or God or earthly terms. More than now and not so much the turn of realities, on the kingdom in the more eternal way.

Rajendran states TTL has made her more positive towards WCC as she can see their theology and methodology has changed since Uppsala:

I had a good observation for them, because they do play a big role in the world, and so it was good, but after reading this document, I said, okay, they are changing. So that's my – yeah. What they were before they're not, but they are changing. So that particular time was okay for that particular time. And if I would have read this article which was not changed,

then I would have thought okay, oh, they're still sticking to the old methodology.

She states she never had a bad impression of WCC, but is happy to see they are up to date as well as setting healthy goals to work towards:

I see that they are moving forward. So that time also I did not had a bad impression, because I never came across the negative points because their belief for that particular year was correct in that scenario, but today they have moved forward, which is good(Rajendran).

Kjøde states his views on WCC have not changed because of the document. He had a hope it would be better, but was disappointed. So he is still critical in general:

I think I must say status quo, but then I have followed World Council of Churches for a number of years, and read a whole lot of things from them. And so I still have - this document has not softened the necessary critic against it. So, but on the other hand, it doesn't add much negative to World Council of Churches. So I have not become – no, I think it's status quo approximately. It is. At first, I was disappointed, because I had the impression that it should be more, more evangelical than it turns out in my opinion to be.

Kjøde has still become more positive towards WCC over the years, though but for other reasons:

I think two elements. I think I mentioned both of them, but just let me repeat. I think when realizing that the younger churches with which we – as the wish and mission organizations work closely in Africa and Asia, Latin America, a whole lot of them are actually members of World Council of Churches. And so it's also the church in which I'm a member, and then we – I've learnt to think that, okay, let's take the opportunity. Let's look at possibilities, because they are there. We will support them. We will have a good dialog with our partners. So yeah, I think that is one reason why I look into it that way. And yeah, we want to stand together with our southern partners. I think that is summarizing the point. And then of course this breakthrough a number of years ago of the global leaders of the bigger bodies, which had stood on distance from each other, they came together starting to talk. Not to come to agreement in the end, but to know that we have something to talk about and that was what

changed my way of thinking. Yes, that is a good thing. We should talk together. It's not dangerous to do a good dialog, internal Christian dialog. It's not threatening at all. If you know who you are, that's not threatening at all. I hope you know who we are. That's two main reasons I guess why I've gained a more positive attitude.

But he has a limit, and this is what mainly holds him back:

But I don't think we can form a reunion with the – it's impossible for Christian theology to form a union with the liberal, with a liberal theology. It's possible to form some sort of a union with all of the church families, I guess, but with those who reject the Bible as the real word of God, then it's a golf between us. It's a golf, but it's a secular way of theology, and that will be, I think that is the question for World Council of Churches in the time ahead, what will they do with this secular way of thinking theology that we find in what we called a liberal theology sort of religious humanism(Kjøde).

Søvde's opinions seems to have been slightly influenced by TTL. When asked whether it has changed her attitude towards WCC, she answers:

Maybe a little? Yes, a little because of this document it has changed. I will say that a lot that is written here, and the suggestions that have come, have come from parts of the church that does mission much like us. And then I understand that the distance is not so large.

She adds: "Maybe WCC has changed, and the document is some kind of «proof» of that"(Søvde).

Åsland states clearly that TTL made him more positive towards WCC. The other main factor was contacts within the WCC:

The document played a part, definitely. The document together with my friends who are now in leadership of the Council. I think that's the two main factors or maybe the only factors. Because I haven't been involved much with the World Council of Churches the last five years apart from reading the document and talking to my friends and colleagues. So I guess that's the document has definitely played a part in changing some of my perceptions (Åsland).

In this way it appears that both Søvde and Åsland has gotten to know the current WCC, not the one that they might have heard about or seen the old statements of, but the present, first and foremost through relations as well as through the document. If the document is something WCC members identify with, they have therefore gotten an updated, and therefore more precise impression of WCC partially through TTL. The same seems to be true for both Rajendran and Ekström also, even though Ekström does not give TTL any much credit as his involvement with WCC the last years is the main source of his 'up to date' view. Personal relations to WCC members or working together with people within the WCC seems to be maybe the most important factor to become more positive, especially if these WCC members are like-minded or hold some passions or theologies that one admire. Both Søvde and Åsland for instance, refers to Agnes Aboum who was elected moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in 2013, as a person they admire. Ekström illustrates this:

In these last 15 years. I have been working a lot with the Ecumenical Movement and I think that has given me a better understanding of it. It is 'a lot of misunderstanding and just ignorance about what it is about and what they do. I didn't know much about them and maybe just have the common view that many evangelicals have had about them (Ekström).

Rajendran illustrates how this experience is important, but has its limits, of course:

But then there are some people in WCC who are very focused, very focused, yeah. Just recently we met two people from WCC just three months back. They were amazingly focused. I will not mention the name of them. They were amazingly focused, and I was very encouraged with their attitude towards the evangelism reaching out people in different scenarios by various methods, and so that was very good. That was very good, yeah. But then there are many who are still into the old thinking and old methodology (Rajendran).

It appears that whether or not the mission leaders have become more positive towards WCC because of TTL is very individual. It seems however, like the ones who do, only become slightly more positive. And no one becomes more negative towards WCC because of it, but one might get disappointed, like Kjøde, or become more negative because of other circumstances, like Baxter-

Brown. It is interesting, however, that the two who probably have dug the most into TLL, are the ones who are the least impressed. This may fit with the 'vagueness claim'; that TLL looks great at first glance. But your enthusiasm just reaches a certain level before you pay more attention to it, and might be disappointed to find things you dislike or you don't find what you are looking for. The same goes with involvement maybe, as Baxter-Brown seemed to reach a point where he started encountering structural problems he disliked when being involved with WCC:

And having worked with them, and I have worked with churches in England, which was a different model of ecumenism, and I think a healthy one whereas the WCC model of ecumenism having got to know a bit, I struggle with it, because there are points of access, if you like, for say Pentecostals as part of the Pentecostal working between the Pentecostals and the WCC. So there is way in this dialog going on with Pentecostals, but that doesn't lead through to Pentecostals own mass being welcomed into structures of the WCC. So they're still kept on the outskirts, and I have no -- very modest engagement with the central decision making processes. So actually in a sense WCC not by design, but simply by default by the politics, the church politics, which is actually quite excluding in that sense in my view, and that's my own personal view (Baxter-Brown).

A factor that seems to make a positive impression to many of the interviewees, however, is the experience that WCC want to learn from Evangelicals or others or try to make an approach to them. This can be seen both in TLL as we have seen, but also in other ways:

I think they're trying to learn, because they came for WEA conference. WEA Mission Commission conference recently, and that was a good start, because I don't remember seeing them since we became part of it. So it's the first time I met some of them who came to our conference. Maybe in early years they came for WEA conference. I am not aware of it. They must have. But it was wonderful to see that two people of theirs they came for our conference, so that means they are open, open, yeah. That's why they came. Yeah. And they play a big role in the World Churches of Council. They play a big role in the churches (Rajendran).

Kjøde also expresses a hope for influence through this, even though he does not want NORME to join CWME:

The World Council of Churches is variety of churches. And there are a number of evangelicals also among them, and those -- and my experience is that our evangelical voices are wished so they want us to be a part of the theological discussion, missiological discussion, which I appreciate. Of course I do. And these days we would feel probably there are more of us than there used to be due to the strengthening of southern church and weakening of the western church. There is nothing – it's a sad thing of course, but if it can lead to a less dominance in ecumenism, it might be a blessing (Kjøde).

7. Differences between the International and Norwegian mission leaders

In general the mission leaders interviewed seems to have mentioned many of the same aspects of what they like, miss, dislike in TTL and find problematic about the document. There are also many similarities in other factors that have made them more positive towards WCC or keeps them back from fully embracing the organization. There are some variations in the aspects they bring up, but most of these seems to be independent on whether the mission leaders are from Norway or other countries.

One of the things that the Norwegians seem to put more emphasis on, however, is *orthodoxy*; to pursue what one believe to be the *true* and *right* doctrines of faith. This includes how to regard the Bible, salvation, Christ as the only way, perdition.

Søvde illustrates this by summing up what is important to her:

The first thing I would do is to look for its definition on Evangelization, Mission, Salvation, Jesus as the only savior and the Bible as the inspired word of God.

The second thing I would look for is the strategic initiatives and direction of evangelism and reaching the unreached people groups.

Fagerli and Jørgensen illustrate in their article how the Lutheran Evangelicals in Norway think in a similar way:

It is the word of God that creates faith in Jesus Christ, a faith through which the human person receives salvation. The Lutheran notion of *sola fide*, faith alone, has had a strong influence on Norwegian Christendom, particularly in the history of the revival movements, within which the large majority of missionaries was recruited. This Lutheran and pietistic influence on Norwegian mission organizations led to a focus on conversion of non-believers to Christian faith as the primary purpose of mission. The most important method of mission must therefore be evangelization through proclamation. In this perspective, the WCC focus on social and ethical issues was seen as secondary to proclamation, even dangerous, as it could divert mission from its primary purpose (Fagerli, 138).

The “International” mission leaders appears to be more open to cooperation in spite of these different ways of regarding doctrines of faith and do not mention these to the same extent as the Norwegian mission leaders do.

These correlations between nationalities and emphasises may of course have happened by chance as there are only three Norwegian and three “International” mission leaders. But this may also say something about the situation in Norway where doctrinal challenges seems to be important in the relations within and between different churches and organizations. I am especially thinking about the challenges around same sex marriage being accepted in the Church of Norway, and how the more Evangelical part of Norwegian Christianity relates to this. Many have expressed a more hostile attitude towards the Church of Norway because of the new doctrine and practice, including some of the organizations the Norwegian interviewees represent. For instance NLM(Norwegian Lutheran Mission), that only used to be an organization, has registered a church denomination so that those who don't feel like they can still be members of Church of Norway, can register in their new denomination instead.

Also Church of Norway is represented by WCC while most of the the Evangelicals are in NORME.

Søvde illustrates the differences: “When working with the Church of Norway, there is alot we disagree on”(Søvde).

And accepting same sex marriage might have consequences for relations to other churches. Recently Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia has re-evaluated their relationship to Church of Sweden and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) because of this.

Åsland has a good relationship to the Ethiopian Church:

From my perspective, it would be a better way, because I know these, the church leaders, they are from the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia, the president there, and the presiding Bishop in Tanzania Lutheran Church. There are huge churches with more than 6 million members, growing dynamic churches, and I know what these leaders stand for in terms of evangelists

and the mission and their theology in general. And so that gives me a hope that World Council of Churches could move in what I want to say is a good and healthy direction (Åsland).

Still the Mekane Yesus Church being a part of WCC illustrates the complexity of culture, relations and theology inside and outside of WCC, both in Norway and Internationally.

Of course the details they pay attention to may also be affected by each other within the Norwegian group. Rolf Kjøde, that has worked more extensively on these issues, and have shared his critique with his fellow members of NORME, and this might make them pay extra attention to these details.

Åsland Illustrates this dynamic here:

You asked me about my very first impression of the document, which was positive. The spirit, language, and all that, and also more into evangelism and mission than I think they have been for, which I find very positive. So my first impression was very positive. Then starting to debate and discuss, and what does it mean? What is hidden here in the language? Do we -- when we say mission and evangelism, do we necessarily mean the same? That has been some of the discussion that's been going on in the Norwegian mission -- among the Norwegian mission convention people afterwards. And I find that in debate very interesting(Åsland).

The Norwegians also seem to compare TTL more to the Cape Town Commitment, maybe also because this is a thing Kjøde spent extra time on and shared with his colleagues. The Norwegian mission leaders also seem to have a larger ratio of criticism in comparison with the praise. Also theological differences seems to be the most important reason not to join CWME for NORME, which illustrates the focus on orthodoxy.

8. Conclusion

In this thesis I wanted to find out what some Evangelical Mission Leaders responded to WCC's new mission statement Together Towards Life. The subquestions to support this was: What do they like? What do they miss or dislike? Has TTL changed their perspectives on WCC? Are there any differences in the responses from the International and Norwegian mission leaders?

To find this out, I conducted qualitative interviews. I wrote a thorough study guide to get the answers I needed without leading too much. And I found and interviewed three Norwegian as well as three 'International' Evangelical mission leaders to be able to compare the two groups.

The mission leaders liked many different things about the document. All of them had good things to say about the an increased focus on the Holy Spirit compared to older WCC documents. Many also noted how the document marks an approach to Evangelicals as well as other church traditions. The increased emphasis on evangelism was also brought up as something positive by many. Other things were also mentioned, like the 'holistic' approach to mission, the updated perspectives on today's challenges and more.

But the interviewees also missed different themes or aspects of themes in TTL. Many of them mentioned the lack of stating the uniqueness of Christ, as well as the lack of addressing those unreached with the gospel. And even though they said there was an increased emphasis on evangelism, it still did not play an important enough role in the document's understanding of mission. Other themes that were mentioned as missed, was about personal relationship to God and personal responsibility, about the bible as foundation, lack emphasis on organisations etcetera.

There were also different things they explicitly disliked. This was amongst other the way evangelism was defined in the document, how it relates to other religions and how it is very much focused on this world but not eternity. Some people also disliked the phrasing 'mission from the margins' and Kjøde disliked how TTL quotes scripture.

But there were also problems about the document that did not fit into either of the categories 'miss' or 'dislike'. These were claims about the vagueness of TTL, a gap between theory and practice as

well as that it does not bring much new compared to the Cape Town Commitment. Also that WCC never dismisses old statements, was mentioned as a problem.

To the question about whether TTL has changed the mission leaders perspectives, the answer is complex. To some of them it has. And when it has, it has changed their attitudes into being more positive. However, it does not seem to be very much, as other factors seem to be more important in changing their perspectives, like having good relations to people on the inside of the organization or working for or with them. The latter has however, might also have made some of them disappointed or more negative, it seems.

From comparing the answers of the Norwegian and the 'International' mission leaders, it seems that the Norwegians stresses orthodoxy more than the International ones.

The responses to TTL by the mission leaders are therefore very divergent. They are all impressed by the focus on the Holy Spirit as well as a general approach to other Christians. But they all seem to have more criticism than praise. The main problem is not what they dislike, it is what they miss. And they all mention the vagueness of TTL as a problem: So much can be interpreted into meaning many different things, and the beautiful wordings might hide more traces back to Uppsala than it seems at first glance.

Also caring about some of the Evangelical matters like the uniqueness of Christ, I can understand certain reasons for scepticism towards WCC. Through the interviews, I was also introduced to other reasons for “not fully embracing” WCC, for instance the claim that it can be a 'big inefficient paper mill'. At the same time, I see the importance in working together in spite of theological differences, and in CWME there are Christian sisters and brothers from all different kinds of churches. If one want to make an impact, the best way is to do so from the inside. There are already many like-minded 'Evangelical' mission leaders being members of CWME, and clearly there has been some changes for the better already. So I ask myself the same question as Beate Fagerli and Knud Jørgensen in their article 'Together Towards Life: Norwegian Reflections'; “Why should Norwegian mission organizations and NORME not be a part of this dialogue?”

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10. Attachment: Interview guide

1. What do you personally think about the WCC?

2. Have you «always» had this view or has it changed over the years somehow?
-What factors do you think have contributed to this?

3. Do you know the WCC mission statement; «Together towards life»?
-Have you been involved in work with it somehow?

4. So, what was your first impression about the statement?

5. After working more with it, what do you think about it now?

Positive:

-What about it do you like (if anything at all), especially, admire)?

-What about it has challenged you in a good way?

-What do you believe the churches you are representing could learn from this document?

Negative:

-What do you MISS in this document?

-What about the document do you dislike (can't agree with, bothers you)?

6. What do you think was the intentions (motivations) behind the TTL?

7. In what ways have your views about WCC changed because of this document?

8. What other factors outside of this document that have influenced your view on the WCC the last years. Please tell me more about these.

-Positive factors?

-Negative factors?

-Actions/changes from WCCs side? Or theology?

-What other factors other than this document that holds back from fully «embracing» WCC?

9. So, to sum up a little: Are you now more positive or negative towards cooperating with WCC?

-How much of this is because of the document?

10. Do you think there will be more cooperation between your organization and WCC in the future?

-What good can come out of this?

11. In what ways do your views represent «typical» opinions amongst Evangelicals today (grass root or leaders, within Norway/Internationally)?

-Do you think your opinions are progressive or conservative compared to the majority of Evangelicals?"

12. As the leader of NORME/WEA, do you feel bound to have certain opinions about WCC?