



CHAPTER 2

Theological Perspectives of Conflict, Contestation and Community Formation from an Ecumenical Angle

Annemarie C. Mayer

The few reflections that follow are not intended to establish exactly where or how the Christian should engage in conflicts, but simply to emphasize that conflicts have a religious meaning. Even though they are located in activities apparently foreign to the religious domain, and they seem to be opposed to the union brought about by charity, differences can bring us to recognize others and thus open us to a humble but real path towards the reconciliation begun in Jesus Christ. A tacit encounter of the Lord, this recognition drives us to discover more honestly the peace which we have the audacity to profess before people who, like us, seek it, among the tensions and fears in which we, like them, participate.¹

This statement by Michel de Certeau on the religious meaning of conflict puts the stakes for my contribution to this volume very high, proposing to argue that conflict can lead to a real encounter with the other, the stranger, the enemy—and with God, in de Certeau’s words, to an “interpellation of

A. C. Mayer (✉)
Faculty of Theology, University of Trier, Trier, Germany
e-mail: mayer@uni-trier.de

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God.”² For de Certeau, conflict “provides the necessary crucible through which, by acknowledging a diversity of viewpoints, a deeper understanding of reality is possible.”³

This latter claim we shall indeed test out by asking, firstly, why Christianity is so reluctant to acknowledge its own history of conflict and dissent—in other words, what causes the gap between aspirations and reality? Secondly, we look for lessons from the Lutheran Reformation: How have conflicts been handled and what were the outcomes? Thirdly, we delineate an alternative notion of unity and investigate one of the hermeneutical tools developed in line with it. It is a tool that incorporates dissent and difference, the so-called ‘differentiated consensus’ applied in ecumenical dialogues. Fourthly, we sketch the possible alternative function and theological impact of conflict and dissent and conclude by pointing to the ‘third way of conflict’.

“THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE”—THE GAP BETWEEN ASPIRATIONS AND REALITY

At first sight, it seems counterintuitive to speak about conflict and dissent in the context of ecumenical dialogue since such dialogue is usually associated with bringing about reconciliation and unity. However, conflict issues are a daily reality for ecumenism. “That they all may be one” (Jn 17:21) is a *prayer* by Jesus, not the statement of a fact. Even the New Testament reports contentious positions. Just think of the quarrel between Peter and Paul,⁴ a conflict we recognize today as inevitable, yet which was nevertheless a hard and nasty one. Given the controversial stories of Jesus in the gospels,⁵ one must even acknowledge with Boston New Testament scholar Richard Horsley that, “[t]he intensity and variety of conflict that runs through the gospel tradition is overwhelming. Most obvious, perhaps, is the conflict between rich and poor or between the rulers and the people”.⁶ These conflicts are more often than not related to the content of Jesus’ message of the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, it is a deplorable reality that Christians have rather *preached* peace and non-conflict than actually *practiced* them. Conflicts were a fact from the very beginning.

Given that conflict, contestation, and dissent are no ‘extraordinary’ phenomena, the question is rather why the Christian legacy of conflict is neglected or suppressed despite more than 2000 years of church history full of such conflict and contestation. Why do Christians broaden the gap

between their aspirations and the actual reality? To answer this question, we must take a closer look at our standards of evaluation and ask what conflicts can actually mean in the life of a community. Is it a foregone conclusion that they are negative?

A positive appreciation of conflict as an agonal principle that fosters the life of society finds an early and actually quite amusing expression in Immanuel Kant. In his essay entitled *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* dating from 1784,⁷ Kant states more or less the following. Conflict is not an amiable thing, but without it, with people leading an Arcadian philandering life, full of perfect concord, self-sufficiency, and mutual love, all talents would forever remain hidden in their germs. Human beings, gentle as the sheep they feed, would hardly give their existence any higher value than their sheep do. Conflict awakens the powers of human beings and helps them overcome their tendency to laziness. Thanks to conflict society thrives.

According to Christian standards of evaluation, however, conflict is something that should not exist. It seems like a disruption of normal life, like a disease in the social body. Conflicts are morally reprehensible. Were we but more peaceful, agreeable, and accommodating, conflicts could be avoided. Theologically, these standards of evaluation have an uncontested plausibility: peace is better than conflict; every conflict endangers unity, indeed already is the beginning and expression of lost unity. Given these ideal standards, the negative evaluation of conflict is quite understandable and it takes some effort to rethink this.

This applies all the more to conflicts in the church. Precisely in the religious realm, where people quarrel over existential questions and where often decisions of conscience confront each other, conflicts break out in a particularly harsh and irreconcilable way. It is difficult to see how this could be otherwise. Yet, Christianity is committed to a message of reconciliation and peace. Conflict and dissent appear to be un-Christian. Must, therefore, not everything be done to avoid or suppress conflict rather than to resolve it?

This view, in turn, has had a lasting influence on the attitude to conflicts and the approach to conflict resolution. The inevitability of conflicts has never been openly faced by the church. Conflicts were tabooed and relegated to the moral side-lines. The standards of evaluation just mentioned have the disastrous effect that, generally speaking, ecclesial authorities use their authority to suppress conflict for the sake of unity.

What is the default trajectory that follows after dissent and contestation? The main method applied is to personalize the conflicts. The just-described attitude to conflict and dissent, which need not be denied its well-meaning intent, has prevented more sensible methods of conflict management from being developed. A personalized conflict does not appear as an expression of conflicting factual issues but as the malice or stupidity of individuals. People are easier to tackle than factual problems. They can be morally or even canonically condemned; they can be made to obey. Such a conflict resolution works whenever, for the sake of obedience and unity, the factual problems are put aside. One does not solve them by silencing the one who voices them; but one does preserve unity—or rather a façade of unity.

Yet, what happens, if the person cannot be made to obey or silenced, perhaps precisely for reasons of conscience? What if the conflict breaks out openly and continues? Well, firstly, such a situation is embarrassing for the church and its authorities, because there should be no conflicts in the church. Secondly, it is a moral problem, because those causing the stir-up are disobedient, stubborn, quarrelsome, unwise, or unforgiving. The moralized and personalized conflict slops over into the realm of guilt and sin. Moreover, a notion of unity, which does not allow any inner contradictions, takes its toll. In a mechanism, that has been tried and tested a thousand times, the troublemakers are expelled, if they do not submit. The heretics or schismatics, as they are now called, are excommunicated. With the person, one hopes, as it were, to also get rid of the personalized conflict. Inner unity may have been preserved or restored, but the tension has migrated to the outside, and the substance of the conflict remains. It accumulates again to trigger the same mechanisms once more. In short, a ‘Reformation’ happens.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

This ideal of unity and peace with its mechanisms of personalization leads with inherent inevitability to repression and division. Historically speaking, it led, for example, to what we know as the Lutheran Reformation. Then conflict was blazing up on different levels in theology, church, and state governance, as well as society at large. In the realm of theology,

Luther's existential question 'How do I get a gracious God?' played a prominent role in triggering dissent in soteriology and spilled over to other areas like ecclesiology. The hierarchical and political level, in other words, the pope, the Roman curia, and the emperor, saw Luther's protest as a case of insubordination to their authority—perhaps with the sole exception of Pope Hadrian VI, who in his message to the Diet of Nuremberg in 1522 acknowledged the shortcomings of the authorities of the Catholic Church. His nuncio Francesco Chiericati spoke on behalf of the pope about “the abominations, the abuses [...] and the lies” of which the “Roman court” of the time was guilty and called them a “deep-rooted and extensive [...] sickness,” extending “from the top to the members [...] Each of us must examine [their conscience] with respect to what they have fallen into and examine themselves even more rigorously than God will do on the day of His wrath.”⁸ On the societal level, public opinion was incited by the pamphlets of the reformers. In the course of time this resulted in physical aggression and religiously, but also economically and politically, instigated violence and warfare. In 1525, horrified by the Peasants' War, Luther wrote his piece *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants*.⁹

The Reformation was followed, in the period between the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 and the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, by the long-term development and consolidation of diverging denominational identities. This period is usually called Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reform. As the Catholic church historian Hubert Jedin explains, “Catholic Reform is the church's remembrance of the catholic ideal of life through inner renewal, [whereas] Counter-Reformation is the self-assertion of the church in the struggle against Protestantism”.¹⁰ Paying attention to the similarities in the Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic developing identities, the German historian Ernst Walter Zeeden labeled this same period as ‘confession-building’. He defined this as “the spiritual and organizational consolidation of the various Christian confessions that had been diverging since the religious split into more or less coherent ecclesiastical systems with respect to their dogma, constitution, and form of religious and moral life.”¹¹ As an expert on comparative history, Heinz Schilling argued in favor of yet another term:

[...] we should speak of ‘Catholic confessionalisation’, ‘Lutheran confessionalisation’, and ‘Reformed or Calvinist confessionalisation’. By using lin-

guistically parallel terminology it becomes clearer that these are three processes running parallel to each other and that the concept of confessionalisation includes an over-arching political, social, and cultural change. This stimulates the comparisons necessary for furthering knowledge. It reveals both the functional and developmental historical similarities, and the theological, spiritual, and other differences between the three varieties of confessionalisation.¹²

This issue is by no means only a question of terminology. It rather denotes a sociological, psychological, and theological development of coherent ecclesiastical systems with their own identities. Identity refers to the distinguishing characteristics of an entity. In the case of a group, it answers the question 'Who are we?' and helps to distinguish between an in-group and an out-group.¹³ Different denominational identity markers were developed as boundaries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They also served to tighten the internal bonds of the in-groups and the growth of distinct ecclesial identities. At the end of this process of confessionalization ecclesial identities based on contradicting each other had been established. Each of them had become a new delimited community. Although there were attempts at reconciliation at the time, the differences and contradictions prevailed and ecclesial unity in the West was lost.

Yet historical experience also teaches us something else, namely that despite all antagonisms and even in the divisions and beyond them, there can be something like 'unity', even where the bonds of external unity have been broken. This opens up the way to a new approach to cope with these contradictions of identities. Today's Christianity, with its hundreds of denominations and ecclesial traditions, practically all of which have arisen in conflict and are based on differences and contradictions, has nevertheless been able to develop something like a consciousness of unity beyond all separations, even where the differences are regarded as irrevocable. There is a unity and communion of those who, despite all other differences, love the same Lord, read the same Holy Scriptures, and profess the same Creed.¹⁴ This unity is not only a beautiful dream for the future but an ecumenical reality of today, a reality, however, which has its existence in a certain awareness. It is the awareness of unity in spite of and across existing and continuing disagreements.

THE ECUMENICAL ENDEAVOR: OVERCOMING THE CONTRADICTION OF IDENTITIES

This leads us in a new direction when we try to understand what unity actually means and, related to this, what conflict can mean in the life of the church. Unity no longer appears as the result of avoided conflicts and eliminated differences, but as a force that unites the conflicting parties across their differences. This idea of unity that proves itself precisely in embracing differences and enduring conflicts is actually not new. In the Christian context, it can be traced back to church fathers like Basil of Caesarea.¹⁵ It stands in direct opposition to monolithic unity. What a monolithic notion of unity is can be illustrated by considering the word ‘*un-ity*.’ It contains the Latin word for ‘one,’ *unus*. In an arithmetical understanding unity tends to allow only one thing, *one-ness*. Two-ness would already be disunity. Such a model of unity has been for quite some time (and still is in some areas) the ideal of the unity of the Catholic Church. The *ecclesia militans*, which is the church in this world, is supposed to have the unity of a disciplined army. Sociologically, this model of unity is called that of a total institution,¹⁶ ‘total’ because not only external discipline is required, but also the internal discipline of conscience, thought, and opinion. Everything needs to be streamlined. Yet, as we have already seen, in Christianity this is an illusion; it always has been.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop a different way of conceiving of unity, one that does not stop at the simple number ‘one’, at singularity, monotony, and uniformity but understands unity as a force that brings the many together and holds them together beyond the opposites, indeed that connects the opposites with each other. The traditional term for this is: comm-*un*-ion. Communion is the way in which people know that they belong together in serving one common end, beyond all possible factual differences. Where there is communion, opposites and differences are included, not in order to suppress or hide them, but out of greater strength and freedom. There are forms of unity that only prove themselves in the case of conflict and which we, therefore, value more highly than any uncontested unity, although by default our theoretical thinking about the relationship between conflict and unity points in a different direction.

More concretely, this means that (1) a new (or rather old but forgotten) understanding of unity is necessary, that (2) the positive and creative significance of conflicts in the life of the church is to be recognized, and that (3) a changed style of dealing with differences is to be developed,

which would concern both the standards of evaluation and the framework conditions for dealing with conflicts. Let us first look at the changed style of dealing with differences.

On the basis of the revised notion of unity described above, the modern ecumenical movement functions as a laboratory for devising innovative hermeneutical instruments. These instruments are designed for coping with controversy and conflict as well as for enhancing unity. Particularly the so-called ‘differentiated’ or ‘differentiating consensus,’¹⁷ a hermeneutical tool developed by the International Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue (since 1967) and for the first time fully fleshed out in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)*¹⁸ in 1999, merits closer analysis as an instrument to manage conflict and to harvest from dissent. To date, this hermeneutic device has been applied in several national¹⁹ and international²⁰ bilateral dialogues.

However, there are certain prerequisites that need to be in place before it can be applied: firstly, one needs to be able to distinguish between content and linguistic formulation to separate real from alleged contradictions. For, sometimes sentences that contradict each other on the linguistic level do not do so on the content level. Secondly, since doctrinal statements gain their specific meaning through the particular place which they occupy in the whole of a doctrinal system that has a certain structure, their specific place in the whole system must always be taken into account, when they are compared with propositions of other doctrinal systems. In this way, propositions that are contradictory on a surface level in many cases do not contradict each other in such a more comprehensive view.

A differentiated consensus explicitly includes differences. For one can only refer to what is common if one can distinguish between what is common and what is different. In order to integrate the differences, each differentiated consensus consists of two consensus statements. It states that “(1) full agreement has been reached in dialogue on whatever belongs to the essence of a particular statement of faith, and (2) agreement has also been reached that the remaining differences with regard to the statement of faith concerned are not only legitimate but also meaningful and do not call into question the full agreement on the essential aspect.”²¹ The second series of statements thus takes account of legitimate denomination-specific differentiations, which are permissible because they do not fundamentally call into question the consensus on the statement of faith. The prerequisite for the differences not endangering the consensus is that they can be related to each other in this second series of statements. This is indicated

by linguistic markers within the respective series of statements, which can, for instance, be typified on the basis of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*: The statement “According to Lutheran understanding...” is marked as a continuing difference by the statement, “According to Catholic understanding, however...” Yet, the differences are not only stated but positively related to each other: on the Lutheran side, the explanation follows “when Lutherans emphasize ... they do not deny...”; on the Catholic side, the explanation is “when Catholics emphasize ... they do not deny...”²² In a bilateral text, therefore, both sides must know exactly what the other side sees differently on the respective points; and above all, both partners must also agree on the assessment of the differences.

This is the task of the two churches involved. Only once both sides can say that the differences are not church-dividing, i.e., that they do not cancel out what is said in common and that what is common is sufficiently extensive, one can really speak of a differentiating consensus. In this sense, the *Joint Declaration* asserts “that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics” (§ 40). Whether two theologians, who relate the two doctrinal systems to each other and weigh their differences, assess the weight of their church-dividing impact differently does not matter. It only counts whether their arguments convince those responsible for doctrine in the churches concerned—regardless of whether a special teaching office or the community of believers as a whole is charged with this task. What is needed, are acts of judgment that determine whether a differentiating consensus does or does not exist. These acts of judgment refer to the results of theological research and ecumenical dialogue, but cannot be completely derived from them. They are embedded in the context of life and encounter between the churches. The arguments for a differentiating consensus may be as good as they can be, but if the experiences people in the two churches have with each other are bad, or if fears for identity or certain interests suggest demarcations, then a consensus found in dialogue will not be confirmed. Then one has to wait until the time comes for reception and assent. Such assent is ultimately not only a question of theological arguments and experience with one another but a spiritual judgment.²³

The method of differentiating consensus is more than just the comparison of different doctrines; most importantly, it is not indifferent to the truth claims of doctrines. If it is labeled as “a consensus despite differences that still exist,” the conception is not adequately understood, because the

differences which that form of consensus integrates are not confessional residues, embarrassing to come across; rather, they are differences that can be affirmed because it has been shown in the dialogues that what is common to different ecclesial traditions allows for these differences.

Neither is the method of differentiating consensus about compromise, as is often claimed. Rather, its statements are intended to express the common ground on which both dialogue partners agree. The common element, however, is not the linguistic formulation, but what it points to, i.e., “the content.” This “content,” however, is not a pre-linguistic entity in itself. It is not just an agreement “in principle,” beyond any linguistic statement. It is precisely the problem of ecumenical consensus documents that they claim agreement “in substance,” although this substance has so far always been expressed in mutually exclusive denominationally coined terminology. Thus, the point is something other than compromise, namely to show that different perspectives on “the content” actually meet “the *same* content” and that the different perspectives are not mutually exclusive, even if one can only take one perspective at a time.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF CONFLICT AND DISSENT: AN ATTEMPT

Given what has been said so far, a new understanding of conflict should replace the prevailing moralizing view. Conflict is not primarily a shameful weakness in the realm of morality—which admittedly it can be—but a creative force and a means to improve the things that have caused dissent. The creative aspect can be summarized as ‘where there is life, there is tension; life exists only in opposites.’ In the 1920s, Romano Guardini developed his philosophy of life as a philosophy of opposition and conflict.²⁴ Unfortunately, his book *Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* received very little attention at the time. The claim that life itself works and operates in conflicts did not fit into the theological landscape of a monolithic church of obedience. Around one hundred years later, a revised notion of conflict should come to prevail: If conflicts are an expression of opposing, conflicting ideas, then, whenever conflicts are allowed to come to the fore, they themselves are the way to overcome them. Yet, then, the conflicting ideas, not the persons in whom they became vocal, should be investigated since these ideas provide the key to interpreting the conflict and overcoming its causes. Conflicts keep a

community open to historical change, protecting it from one-sidedness. Moreover, the hallmark of a free and thriving community is conflict that is allowed and carried out, just as it is the hallmark of a humane society that it subjects the carrying out of conflict to certain rules—what the Germans call *Streitkultur*. The humanity and wisdom of a community can be assessed by its rules of conflict resolution. Here, peace and unity are not preached in a moralizing way nor are the conflicts suppressed in order to finally make the whole organism ill like unrecognized tumors do, but here they are brought into the movement of life as a tamed force.

This understanding explains why only the modern ecumenical movement as a broad attempt at ‘concerted action’ yielded some success, although it so far did not achieve the goal of “visible unity.”²⁵ It is clear that somewhere there must be a nameable point, a center, and a clear basis of unity. In the church, this is faith in the one Lord and the calling to proclaim the Gospel. This should actually be enough to sustain a community oriented towards this center.

Historical experience shows, however, that the criterion for acknowledging unity is moving from the center further and further outwards to the peripheries. Faith in the Gospel becomes right thinking about the rightly understood Gospel, and out of this come thick textbooks, legal codes, administrative regulations, and ever more precise and detailed stipulations. The criterion for unity moves to the details, to the periphery. In this regard, Vatican II’s notion of a “hierarchy of truths” becomes ecumenically pivotal.²⁶ As we have seen, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Catholic Church has been prone to judging diversity and difference rather negatively and to giving preference to an abstract, monolithic notion of unity.²⁷ It has been reluctant to perceive the unity of the Church in the communion of believers and in the power of cohesion sustained by them. It rather sought it in a uniformity that has been extended to the peripheries. Yet, the unity which is alive must always face the challenge of difference. It can only grow and prove itself in this confrontation. Unity can only be attained through exchange and contestation, even if this seems counterintuitive. Unity is a practice of life.

Simultaneously, the church (thus we!) needs to develop sufficiently fair and recognized rules of conflict resolution and a humane practice in treating all parties involved. And finally, despite a mentality that is prone to play up conflicts as a moral problem of individuals, we need to strive to assess them according to their factual reasons and their objective significance.

If these points can be addressed sufficiently, conflict can indeed enable a true encounter with the other and, ultimately, with God—in the way Michel de Certeau insinuated. When doing so, Christians should adopt an attitude that Pope Francis once labeled “the third way” to deal with conflict:

Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In this midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality. When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened; they wash their hands of it and get on with their lives. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers!’ (Matt 5:9).²⁸

NOTES

1. Michel de Certeau, “La loi du conflit,” in *L’Étranger ou l’union dans la différence*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 22: “Les quelques réflexions qui suivent ne visent pas à déterminer jusqu’où et comment le chrétien doit s’engager dans les conflits, mais simplement à souligner qu’ils ont une signification religieuse. Alors même qu’elles se situent en des activités apparemment étrangères au domaine religieux, et qu’elles semblent s’opposer à l’union opérée par la charité, les divergences peuvent nous amener à reconnaître les autres et nous ouvrir par là un chemin, humble mais réel, vers la réconciliation inaugurée en Jésus-Christ. Tacite rencontre du Seigneur, cette reconnaissance nous conduit à trouver plus honnêtement la paix dont nous avons l’audace de faire profession devant des hommes qui la cherchent comme nous, au milieu des tensions et des craintes auxquelles nous participons comme eux”; transl. by Mary Kate Holman, Fordham University doctoral candidate in theology, as printed in Bradford Hinze, “The Grace of Conflict”, *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): 44.
2. De Certeau, “La loi du conflit”, 28: “Lorsque le chrétien reconnaît ainsi, grâce à l’irruption des autres dans sa vie, interpellation de Dieu, il trouve dans cette rencontre (qui n’exclut jamais la lutte) le commencement d’une réconciliation réelle—avec Dieu et avec les hommes”.
3. Hinze, “Grace of Conflict”, 45.

4. For example, Paul apparently did not respect the decisions which the so-called Apostles' Council in Jerusalem took when he allowed the Christians in Corinth to eat "from what is sacrificed to idols" (1 Cor 8 as opposed to Acts 15:29).
5. Cf. already Martin Albertz, *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche: ein Beitrag zur Formengeschichte des Urchristentums* (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1921), 156–157 and more recently Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). Moreover, in 2021 Christopher Landau, *A Theology of Disagreement: New Testament Ethics for Ecclesial Conflicts* (London: SCM, 2021), tries to develop a biblical "basis upon which disagreeing Christians (however reluctantly) agree as to how the issue of disagreement might be faced" (viii).
6. Richard E. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Imperial Roman Palestine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 156.
7. Immanuel Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht," *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (November 1784); English translation of the original 1784 article: Immanuel Kant, "Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan", *The London Magazine* 10 (1824): 387: "But for these anti-social propensities, so unamiable in themselves, which give birth to that resistance which every man meets with in his own self-interested pretensions, an Arcadian life would arise, of perfect harmony and mutual love, such as must suffocate and stifle all talents in their very germs. Men, as gentle as the sheep they fed, would communicate to their existence no higher value than belongs to mere animal life, and would leave the vacuum of creation, which exists in reference to the final purpose of man's nature as a rational nature, unfilled. Thanks, therefore, to Nature for the enmity, for the jealous spirit of envious competition, for the insatiable thirst after wealth and power! These wanting, all the admirable tendencies in man's nature would remain for ever undeveloped. Man, for his own sake as an individual, wishes for concord; but Nature knows better what is good for Man as a species; and she ordains discord. He would live in ease and passive content: but Nature wills that he shall precipitate himself out of this luxury of indolence into labours and hardships, in order that he may devise remedies against them, and thus raise himself above them by an intellectual conquest, not sink below them by an unambitious evasion."
8. This message was read by Francesco Chierigati on November 25, 1522, and printed in the official record of the proceedings *Was auff dem Reichsztag zu Nüremberg von wegen Bebstlicher heiligkeit an Keyserlicher*

- Maiestat Stathalter vnd Stende Luetherischer sachen halben gelangt vnd darauff geantwort worden ist*, Nürnberg: Friederich Peypus 1523.
9. Martin Luther, *Wider die räuberischen und mörderischen Rotten der Bauern* (1525), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Joachim Karl Friedrich Knaake (Weimarer Ausgabe 18) (Weimar: Böhlau, 1908) 357–361.
 10. Hubert Jedin, *Katholische Reformation oder Gegenreformation? Ein Versuch zur Klärung der Begriffe nebst einer Jubiläumsbetrachtung über das Trienter Konzil* (Luzern: Josef Stocker, 1946), 38: “Die katholische Reform ist die Selbstbesinnung der Kirche auf das katholische Lebensideal durch innere Erneuerung, die Gegenreformation ist die Selbstbehauptung der Kirche im Kampf gegen den Protestantismus.” English translation John W. O’Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*, (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 55.
 11. Ernst W. Zeeden, *Die Entstehung der Konfessionen. Grundlagen und Formen der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe* (München/Wien: Oldenbourg, 1965), 9–10: “Unter Konfessionsbildung sei also verstanden: die geistige und organisatorische Verfestigung der seit der Glaubensspaltung auseinanderstrebenden christlichen Bekenntnisse zu einem halbwegs stabilen Kirchentum nach Dogma, Verfassung und religiös-sittlicher Lebensform.”
 12. Heinz Schilling, “Confessionalization in the Empire. Religious and Societal Change in Germany between 1555 and 1620”, in *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society. Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill 1992), 209–210.
 13. Cf., e.g., Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985).
 14. However, already for the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed this needs to be taken *cum grano salis*, given the *Filioque* issue.
 15. Cf. Annemarie C. Mayer, “Ecclesial Communion: The Letters of St Basil the Great Revisited”, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 5, no. 3 (2005): 226–241 as well as ead., “Κοινωνία on Purpose?—Ecclesiology of Communion in the Letters of St Basil the Great”, in *Studia Patristica* vol. XLI. Official Proceedings of the Patristics Conference 2003, ed. by M. Edwards, F. Young, P. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 375–382.
 16. The concept is mostly associated with the work of sociologist Erving Goffman in his 1957 paper “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”; cf. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) and Samuel Wallace, *Total Institutions* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishers, 1971).

17. For the reasons to call it a “differentiating consensus” cf. Theodor Dieter, “Zu einigen Problemen ökumenischer Hermeneutik”, *Una Sancta* 70 (2015):163–170.
18. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation 1999).
19. E.g. Bilateral Working Group of the German National Bishops’ Conference and the Church Leadership of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, *Communio Sanctorum: The Church as the Communion of Saints* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), nos. 86–89.
20. E.g. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006).
21. Lothar Ullrich, “Differenzierter Konsens und Komplementarität”, in Harald Wagner (ed.), *Einheit - aber wie? Zur Tragfähigkeit der ökumenischen Formel vom ‘differenzierten Konsens’* (Quaestiones Disputatae 184) (Freiburg i. Br./Basel/Vienna: Herder, 2000), 112; cf. also Harding Meyer, “Zur Gestalt ökumenischer Konsense”, in Wolfgang Beinert/Konrad Feiereis/Hermann-Josef Röhrig (ed.), *Unterwegs zum einen Glauben* (FS Lothar Ullrich = Erfurter theologische Studien 74) (Leipzig: Benno-Verlag, 1997), 629.
22. Cf. for this pattern of reasoning for instance JDDJ nos. 20–24 on the issue of human cooperation with divine grace.
23. To give an example: When the Second Vatican Council recognized “elements” of the Church of Christ also outside the Roman Catholic Church (cf. LG 8 and UR 3), it made such a spiritual judgement. Those elements had been there for centuries; it took a lot of theological work to understand them properly, but also many experiences of common threat and mutual support during and after the Second World War; but without the Council’s courage to make that spiritual judgement, this recognition would not have happened.
24. Cf. Romano Guardini, *Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* (1925) (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 3rd ed., 1985).
25. Thus the primary purpose of the WCC as an ecumenical institution is actually formulated by the *Constitution of the World Council of Churches*: “The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe”; <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/constitution-and-rules-of-the-world-council-of-churches> (accessed 15/09/2022).

26. Cf. The Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, *Sixth Report* (1990) Appendix B: “The Notion of ‘Hierarchy of Truths’: An Ecumenical Interpretation”, in *Growth in Agreement* II, ed. by Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch (Geneva: WCC, 2000) 876–883; cf. also William Henn, “The Hierarchy of Truths and Christian Unity”, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 66, no. 1 (1990): 111–142.
27. Karl Lehmann, “Dissensus: Überlegungen zu einem neueren dogmenhermeneutischen Grundbegriff”, in *Dogma und Glaube: Bausteine für eine theologische Erkenntnislehre*, Festschrift für Bischof Walter Kasper, ed. by Eberhard Schockenhoff and Peter Walter (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1993), 69–87.
28. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), no. 227, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost-exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed 15/09/2022).

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