

**Book Review** by John Littleton

Olav Fykse Tveit, 2016. *The Truth We Owe Each Other: Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement*. Geneva: World Council of Churches (WCC). 353 pages  
\$59.75

The Rev'd. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, Lutheran pastor from the Church of Norway, is General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

*The Truth We Owe Each Other* is an eye-opener. The author highlights a topic sometimes taken for granted in ecumenical forums of the worldwide Church, the 'body of Christ' (1-2,14,16). He explores the theme of mutual accountability, the importance of human relations and ecumenical attitudes in interchurch conversations and dialogues.

Tveit concluded that "Mutual accountability comprehends reliability, faithfulness, trustfulness, solidarity, openness, ability to give and take constructive critique and receptivity. These elements are interrelated and to some extent integrated" (333).

He discusses ecumenical ecclesiology, studying the nature of the Christian Church world wide (7-14). Tveit concluded that the quality of interchurch relations (mutual accountability) be considered as an essential dimension in the quest for the unity of the Church (324-333), alongside the traditional dimensions of faith (doctrine) and order (ministry).

Tveit's 2001 doctoral research study on the quality of interchurch relations is published in this book (viii). He aimed "to identify and discuss the theological meaning and significance of mutual accountability as a necessary attitude for the quality of interchurch relationship" (25). The learning question was: "Does a church need to be mutually accountable to other churches to be accountable to God?" (20).

In giving a positive answer to that question Tveit traced the evidence (sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit) of mutually accountable ecumenical attitudes in the WCC Faith and Order documents 1948-1998. He tracked key themes over that fifty year period, themes related to the issues of church unity, for example: the image of the Church as the 'body of Christ' (31-75, 317-319), conciliar fellowship (77-222) and *koinonia* (223-301).

The documents revealed a strong Christological focus. Tveit wrote "Christ as the living tradition in all churches makes it necessary to be mutually accountable to one another" (75); "To learn from one another in the body of Christ is the way to learn

what is the mind of Christ" (73). Many memorable quotations can be found in this book.

Churches are encouraged to act in the light of the rich fifty year history of ecumenical thinking and acting. Tveit wrote "The accounts of each denomination should get beyond the 'partisan' and confessional histories of their own traditions"(73); "The willingness to give account must, in mutual relationship, be combined with the openness to receive the accounts of others"(334).

The final paragraph summarises the study. "To be mutually accountable in an ecumenical relation is to be accountable to God, sharing and exchanging *in practice* the gifts of God - to the honour of God and for the benefit of the other. Therefore, in mutual accountability the churches can go together toward *koinonia* in ortho-*doxy* and ortho-*praxis*" (334).

The processes and quality of relations (mutual accountability) are essential components in the ecumenical endeavours of leaders and theologians from various denominations across the diversity of Christian world, when they explore together their understandings of the nature of the church. Impressively, the author's theory of mutual accountability as an ecumenical attitude is summarised in Chapter Five.

An extensive bibliography is provided (335-353). The 1982 WCC Faith and Order (BEM) document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is discussed in depth (144-171). BEM, Tveit wrote, was "A Result of a Mutually Accountable Process" (144).

*The Truth We Owe Each Other* serves as essential background for the study of twenty-first century inter-church documents, like the 2013 WCC Faith and Order Paper No. 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

Tveit's seminal work is a significant contribution to ecumenical ecclesiology (viii). The elements of mutual accountability "are criteria for the qualities of interchurch relations" (308).

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