

The Theological Line of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in the Dialogue with Orthodoxy in the 2010s

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The purpose of the article is to analyse the degree of theological diversity and coherency displayed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in theological dialogues with different Orthodox churches in the 2010s. The ELCF engaged in a bilateral dialogue with the Orthodox Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church. Theological diversity and coherency are dependent on the composition of the delegations, in which gender balance and the chosen theological lines both play a role. The chosen theological line and gender balance are also interwoven.

Keywords: *ecumenical dialogue, Lutheran, Orthodox, 2010s, ecclesiology, gender, Finnish, Russian, bilateral*

1. Introduction

The change of decade from the 2010s to the 2020s is a great opportunity to look back on the achievements and results of the ecumenical dialogues from the last decade, though the results have not yet been collected or sufficiently analysed.¹ The purpose of this article is to give an overview of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's (ELCF) theological dialogues with different

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¹ The newest overviews on the dialogues the ELCF has had with the ROC and the ORC, see: Pekka Metso, "Arvioita ja tulevaisuuden näkymiä luterilais-ortodoksisesta kansallises-ta dialogista", in: *Reseptio* 1/2016, p. 15-17, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39531482/Reseptio+1_2016+verkkoversio.pdf/c56482e9-6374-fcf1-7fdf-2b87b-63963d5?t=1534333061000, viewed on March 14, 2020; Juha Pihkala, "Venäläisneuvottelut Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon eri ryhmien keskustelufoorumina", in: *Reseptio* 2/2018, p. 53-54, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39531482/Reseptio+2_2018+saavutettava.pdf/1a9cf335-7607-963b-7370-c30896360d8a?t=1579678911000, viewed on March 14, 2020. Non peer-reviewed article: Tomi Karttunen, "Teologia ja konteksti", in: *Reseptio* 2/2018, p. 46-52, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39531482/Reseptio+2_2018+saavutettava.pdf/1a9cf335-7607-963b-7370-c30896360d8a?t=1579678911000, viewed on March 14, 2020. Research: Juha Pihkala, *Faith and Love. Shared doctrine reached on the basis of the dialogues of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church*, Helsinki 2017, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41126994/Yhteinen+oppi+ENG+verkkoversio.pdf/be643e4d-d3aa-9ba6-208d-2e224b4186fa>, viewed on March 14, 2020; Heta Hurskainen, "Warum der Dialog zu einem Ende kam? Der Abbruch des ökumenischen Dialogs zwischen

Orthodox churches. The article reviews the bilateral dialogues and gives a short introduction to the presentations given by the ELCF members during each dialogue. The focus is on the composition of the delegations and the theological and ecumenical lines of the ELCF in these dialogues. The purpose is to analyse the degree of theological diversity and coherency the ELCF displayed in different dialogues from one confessional entity. The ELCF participated in dialogue with the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF) and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The ELCF also sent delegates to the International Joint Commission between the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Orthodox Church.² Because the Joint Commission is different by nature compared to the bilateral dialogues and the ELCF is just one Lutheran member of it, the work of the Joint Commission is left out of the analysis.

I will deal with each of the dialogues separately. First, I will briefly present the history and framework of each dialogue along with an analysis of the ELCF's participation in the dialogues during the 2010s.

Church Law for the ELCF includes a demand to include a 40% gender quota in any institutional organ from 2014 onwards.³ Whether this de-

der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche und der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Finnland im Jahr 2014", in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 65 (1/2016), p. 77-98.

² This dialogue started in 1981. During the 2010s, there were three plenaries: the 15th plenary in Germany, 2011, the 16th plenary in Rhodos, 2015 and the 17th plenary in Finland, 2017. Numerous preparatory meetings were arranged before the plenaries and preparations were underway for the 18th plenary (planned 2021 or 2022). Three different representatives from the ELCF have taken part in these meetings. In addition, Kaisamari Hintikka, an ELCF member, has taken part in the dialogue as an LWF representative.

Participation in the International Joint Commission between the LWF and the Orthodox Church has been active from the ELCF's side. Prof Risto Saarinen was the delegate from 1994 until 2017. During the 2010s, other ELCF participants in the commission's work have been women. From 2019 onwards, the signatory of this article, Dr Heta Hurskainen, has been nominated as the ELCF's delegate to the Commission. In addition, Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, as assistant general secretary of the LWF and a responsible party from the LWF, has taken part in the dialogue, while doctoral student Heidi Zitting has taken part in the dialogue as a visiting delegate. Zitting presented twice on episcopacy in the LWF, which is also the theme of her dissertation project. Compared to two other Lutheran Orthodox dialogues, this dialogue had strong ELCF female representation, with three of its four ELCF members women. Similarly, it is notable that two of these three women have presented a paper in the dialogue and Hintikka has had a role as an organiser from the LWF side. The dialogue had three plenaries during the 2010s: in 2011 in Wittenberg, Germany on the theme "The Nature, Attributes and Mission of the Church", in 2015 in Rhodes, Greece and in 2017 in Helsinki, Finland on the theme "Ordained Ministry/Priesthood". In addition, several preparatory meetings have been organised and the preparations for a new plenary were started in 2019 with the theme of the Holy Spirit. See: Lutheran-Orthodox Joint commission, <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue/>, viewed on January 9, 2020.

³ Kirkkolaki, luku 23 § 8, <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1993/19931054#O6>, viewed on March 10, 2020.

mand applies also to the official delegations in the ecumenical dialogues is not entirely clear, but the spirit of the law at least encourages this direction, and it resonates with the long historical roots of the LWF's gender policy. As far back as 1984, in its seventh assembly in Budapest, the LWF introduced a 40% gender quota in its committees and governing bodies. In 2013, the LWF introduced a *Gender Justice Policy*, which states:

While the quota system is one important tool to ensure the presence of women, frequently serious obstacles remain in the way of full participation. There seems to be a disconnection between decisions taken globally, at an assembly, and what happens locally. Simply fulfilling quotas is not sufficient. While quotas may ensure presence, they do not necessarily guarantee participation.⁴

As a founding member of the LWF, it is justifiable that the ELCF is expected to use gender quotas in any of its compositions in ecumenical activities. As the LWF paper states, the quotas ensure a presence but not participation. It also points out the possible differences between the LWF level and the local level. In analysing the framework of the dialogues, the presence and participation of genders in the ELCF delegations is an important aspect to zoom in on.

The equality aspect is also analysed in the context of the content of the ELCF delegates' presentations in the bilateral dialogues and their content and theological emphases. I conclude by showing the commonalities and specialities of these dialogues on the ELCF's side. The analysis thus gives an overview of one church's way of organising its own work and ecumenical line. The results of the dialogues are briefly described from the point of view of how the common results reflect the ELCF's standpoints. This is, however, a minor role, since only one dialogue round out of the total included common theses. All the other dialogue rounds mainly summarise the given presentations and do not try to build a common understanding of the discussed topic. Bearing this in mind, it is justified to view the dialogues only from the point of view of one church – the analysis thus may reveal motives for the dialogues, although the dialogues do not produce concrete common results.⁵ The article does not aim to give a full picture of the dialogues because it does not include an analysis of Orthodox participation.

⁴ *Gender Justice Policy*, The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva 2013, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf, viewed on March 10, 2020.

⁵ About the ELCF OCF dialogue, see: P. Metso, "Evaluation on the dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland", in: *Reseptio* 1/2009, p. 191-203, 193: "Common opinions and/or disagreements are compactly presented after the summary of the papers". A similar structure was taken in the communiqués of 2001 and 2007. Similar habit continued in the 2010s.

2. The settings of the dialogue

The ELCF's oldest series of dialogues with Orthodoxy is the one it conducted with the ROC. The dialogue started in 1970 and continued in a cycle of three years until 2011. The series came to an end in 2014,⁶ but the dialogue partners were able to continue the connections and organised a theological conference in Finland in 2016. The best-known result of the dialogue stems from the 1970s when the connection point between the Lutheran justification and the Orthodox theosis was found and explicated in the form of a "participation in Christ". This theological line does not cover the whole dialogue series. Of the 14 dialogue rounds before the 2010s, participation theology was especially visible during the following five dialogue rounds: 1977 Kiev, 1980 Turku, 1989 Pyhtitsa, 1992 Järvenpää and 2005 Turku.⁷

The dialogue series with the OCF started in 1989, and the churches met nine times before 2010. The focus of the dialogue was on practical questions, which touched on both domestic churches having a similar official legal status in Finland. Because the dialogue between the ELCF and the ROC has been marked so clearly by "participation theology" in its international publicity, the question has been asked whether the domestic dialogue also reflects a similar emphasis. It has been shown that this theological line has had a role in the domestic dialogue, although not as visibly as was assumed in the dialogue between the ELCF and the ROC.⁸

The dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF reached especially high levels of intensity during the last decade. During the 2010s, the dialogue partners met five times: Helsinki 2010, Järvenpää 2012, Oulu 2014, Mikkeli 2016 and Kajaani 2019. In addition to this the churches organised a festivity seminar in Helsinki in 2015 to mark the 25th anniversary of the dialogue.

This short, quantity-based introduction to the dialogue reveals how the quantitative focus of the ELCF's ecumenical work with Orthodoxy has been on the domestic dialogue. By contrast, the weight of the earlier strong dialogue with the ROC seemed to diminish. This does not show the whole truth of the situation, since the broken dialogue with the ROC demanded

⁶ H. Hurskainen, "Warum der Dialog", T. Karttunen, "Oikeutetun erilaisuuden rajoja esittäessä: Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen ja Venäjän ortodoksisen kirkon oppineuvottelujen keskeytymisen arviointia", in: *Teologinen aikakauskirja* 4/2016, p. 306-321.

⁷ Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Orthodox Dialogue 1959-1994*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997, p. 51-78; H. Hurskainen, *Ecumenical Social Ethics as the World Changed. Socio-Ethical Discussion in the Ecumenical Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 1970-2008*, Luther-Agricola-Society, Turku 2013, p. 446-447.

⁸ P. Metso, "Evaluation on the dialogue", p. 194-195.

preparation and reconciliation work during the 2010s, which cannot be seen as dialogue results. However, the fact is that only one official dialogue round was held between the ELCF and the ROC during the 2010s. The direction of the dialogue now looks a bit more promising, since Moscow Patriarch Kirill will visit Finland in May 2020 and the dialogue partners will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the dialogue later that same month.

3. Dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church

3.1. History and the delegations in the 2010s

The dialogue with the ROC has been the most well-known internationally. There has also been a great deal of interest in the dialogue because of its results, especially in the 1970s, and because of the common contact points found between the Lutheran and Orthodox theologies on salvation, justification and theosis.⁹ Especially during the years 1977, 1989 and 2005, the common contact points between the justification and theosis were used as a basis for common socio-ethical theses.¹⁰ The dialogue started in 1970 and the dialogue rounds were held mainly every third year until 2011.

In the 2000s, the main theme of the dialogue can be said to be values and human rights. In Moscow 2002, the discussion partners evaluated their earlier achievements, in Turku 2005 they discussed the socio-ethical premises and the European values and in St. Petersburg 2008, the focus was on human rights and religious education. A strong socio-ethical emphasis thus penetrated the whole discussion. It also needs to be acknowledged that the parallel dialogues between the ROC and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) ran into huge difficulties in 2009, when the EKD chose Margot Kässman as the first female to be the Chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany.¹¹ The ROC understood the election of a female to this position as a sign of the secularisation and liberalisation process

⁹ R. Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness*, p. 38-53. For the original results, see: *Kiovan neuvottelujen päätöksiäsiakirjojen suomenkielinen teksti 1977*, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/SELK+SOK+tiedonanto+2019+Kajaani/8b9bb0af-5bc9-a9d2-eacf-d91e0e0014a3>, viewed on January 9, 2020.

¹⁰ H. Hurskainen, *Ecumenical Social Ethics*, p. 446-447.

¹¹ In the Finnish context, the first female Bishop was Irja Askola, a bishop of Helsinki from 2010 until her retirement in 2017. Before Askola was elected bishop, she took part in the dialogue with the ROC in 2002 and 2005. From 1990 onwards, the ELCF has nominated to the dialogue with the ROC the archbishop, bishop of Mikkeli and bishop of Tampere. This means that the gender aspect did not play a role, when the ELCF did not nominate Askola for the dialogue with the ROC after she was elected as a bishop. See: *Ibidem*, p. 513-516. The ELCF now has one female bishop, Kaisamari Hintikka, the bishop of Espoo.

in the Protestant churches.¹² The ROC thus saw the female leadership as a topic connected with the overall theme of values and human rights – which it had discussed with the evangelical-Lutheran churches in the 2000s.

Finnish law recognised registered partnership on the first of May 2002, followed by same-sex marriages on the first of March 2017. The working group that was set by the bishops' council of the ELCF recommended to start preparing pastoral instructions for the church's employees, who deal with requests to consecrate same-sex marriages.¹³ Up to now (2020), there are no official guides or practices consecrating or marrying same-sex couples.¹⁴ However, already in 2012, when same-sex marriage became an issue for discussion with the ROC in the ecumenical dialogue, it was possible to pray for same-sex couples, although there was not and still is not an official pattern for this.¹⁵

The preparation for the dialogue that should have been held in 2014 started, somewhat surprisingly, in June 2012. At that time, three Finnish bishops, Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox, travelled to Moscow to invite Patriarch Kirill to Finland. During the visit to Moscow, the ROC expressed a desire for the Lutheran Church of Finland to clarify its practice of prayer for same-sex unions.¹⁶ This clarification would determine the continuity of the ecumenical dialogue between these two Churches. This also launched the preparations for the upcoming dialogue round. The preparations were strongly connected with moral issues, and so somewhat logically followed the themes that were discussed in the 2000s, as it was agreed that the themes would be “Christian understanding of marriage, the Christian upbringing

¹² Christoph Mühl, “Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche unter Patriarch Kyrill I. – Rückblick auf sein erstes Amtsjahr”, in: *Ost-West. Europäische Perspektiven* 1/2010, <https://www.owep.de/artikel/768-russische-orthodoxe-kirche-unter-patriarch-kyrill-i-rueckblick-auf-sein-erstes-amtsjahr>, viewed on March 24, 2020.

¹³ *Kirkko ja rekisteröidyt parisuhteet*. Suomen ev.lut kirkon keskushallinto sarja B 2009:1, [http://notes.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/1BA828829A360BDEC2257E2E0012D463/\\$FILE/rek-parisuhteet.pdf](http://notes.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/1BA828829A360BDEC2257E2E0012D463/$FILE/rek-parisuhteet.pdf), viewed on March 24, 2020.

¹⁴ “The Marriage Law”, in: *the webpages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland*, <https://evl.fi/current-issues/the-marriage-law#d27502ad>, viewed on March 24, 2020.

¹⁵ “Samaa sukupuolta olevien avioliiton rukous”, in: *the webpages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland* <https://evl.fi/perhejuhlat/haat/samaa-sukupuolta-olevien-avioliiton-rukous#d27502ad>, viewed on March 24, 2020.

¹⁶ Same-sex couples have been allowed to register their partnership in Finland from 1st of March 2002 according to Law of Finland. <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2001/20010950>, viewed on April 24, 2020. The Council of Bishops of the ELCF has given pastoral instructions for informal prayer with people, who have registered their partnership and for them on 10th of November 2010, <http://kappeli.evl.fi/KKHasha.nsf/fb61ff18981701fdc225740e0053afc9/d34e45a2226c4039c2257845003412dc?OpenDocument>, viewed on March 14, 2020. The ELCF does not officiate same-sex marriage.

in homes and the challenge of the current interpretations of human nature and their calling”.

The dialogue round in 2014 was planned to take place in Moscow, but the round was cancelled and the theological dialogue came to an end.¹⁷ In 2016, the participant churches organised a theological conference, for which the ecclesiastical profile was lower than the official dialogue rounds, and the conference was held behind closed doors. Only a short press release came out. Plans are in hand to organise an official dialogue round in 2020 in Turku, Finland. Patriarch Kirill's official visit to Finland will take place before the dialogue round at the beginning of May 2020.¹⁸

During the earlier decades of the dialogue, two themes were discussed in each round: a doctrinal and a socio-ethical one. This classification, however, had already broken down in the 1990s and, since then, the dialogue has had one theme more or less, which has been dealt with from the doctrinal and practical perspectives.¹⁹

Looking at the fulfilled gender equality aspect in the ELCF delegation in the dialogue with the ROC, in 2011, two of eight delegates were women, though neither gave a presentation. The press release of the theological conference from 2016 does not give the names of the delegates, except the leaders.²⁰ Of four ELCF speakers in 2016, one was a woman. During the 2010s, around one in four of the ELCF's delegates in the dialogue with the ROC was a woman. This is 15 percentage points less than the LWF quotas require. Professor Jaana Hallamaa gave a presentation during the theological conference in 2016 (not a dialogue round). Her theme was “The challenge of the current interpretations of human nature and their calling”. Of the presentations of the 2010s, only one in eight was from a woman. The presence and participation of ELCF women in dialogue with the ROC and in its theological content both seem clearly to have been below the LWF quotas. The number of presentations compared to the number of women delegates well reflects the relationship between the presence and participation of women in the dialogue and shows that the participation of women has been significantly less than the expected gender quotas.

¹⁷ H. Hurskainen, „Warum der Dialog“, p. 77-98.

¹⁸ *Patriarkka Kirill vieraillee Suomessa 5.-7.5.2020*, <https://ort.fi/uutishuone/2019-11-14/patriarkka-kirill-vieraillee-suomessa-5-752020->, viewed on January 9, 2020.

¹⁹ T. Karttunen, “Oikeutetun erilaisuuden”, p. 306-321.

²⁰ *Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen ja Venäjän ortodoksisen kirkon teologinen konferenssi kristillisestä ihmiskäsityksestä ja avioliitosta*, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/Tiedote+teologisesta+konferenssista.pdf/1a71ef6c-ba3f-eaea-be97-aed4d0206132>, viewed on January 10, 2020.

The dialogue partners made efforts to restore the dialogue after the breakup in 2014. There is no evidence of female participation from the ELCF's side in the common preparatory meetings with the ROC before or after 2014. The presence and especially the participation in the preparation and therefore also in the subjects of the dialogue has been zero for women in this dialogue.

3.2. Themes of the dialogue

Whereas the domestic Lutheran–Orthodox dialogue has been the most intensive one as regards the number of meetings, the dialogue between the ELCF and the ROC has included the most presentations during the one discussion round. Also, the preparation of the dialogue rounds and the struggle to restart the dialogue after it broke down required numerous meetings between the ELCF and the ROC officers during the decade. The following section gives details about the ELCF presentations during the last decade.

2011 The Church as community: Christian identity and church membership

Tomi Karttunen's presentation was an overview of the ecclesiological statement in the ELCF–ROC dialogue from its beginning in 1970. Karttunen suggests that although ecclesiology has been dealt with in the dialogue, its old-churchly connections have remained without wider deliberation. However, Lutheran confessional writings do support the communion–ecclesiological or Eucharistic ecclesiological approach as some of the Finnish theologians have shown in the dialogue over the past decades. Interestingly, Karttunen warmly welcomes the new-patristic school and its ideas in the dialogue's newest phase in the 2000s.²¹ The consequences of this approach, especially its origins in Palamistic theology, has not been studied in this dialogue in the context of the convergence between the Lutheran justification and the Orthodox theosis in the formulation of a “participation in God”.

Antti Laato gave a broad presentation on the topic “Christ's Church: From the Shadow of the Jerusalem Temple to the Global Church”. Laato gives an exegetical interpretation and foundation to several ecclesologically essential doctrines, such as the Church as eschatological and universal aspects of the Church, its sacrificial nature, the sacrament as a ground for sanctity, God's presence in the Church and the unity of Christ's body. Laato also explored the socio-ethical aspects as the social mission of the Church

²¹ T. Karttunen, “Kirkko yhteisönä ja kristillinen identiteetti Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen ja Venäjän ortodoksisen kirkon teologisissa keskusteluissa 1970–2008”, in: *Reseptio* 1/2012, p. 17–18. <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/Reseptio+1+2012+netti.pdf/78958b1c-8e3b-48d2-923f-3e68376a362b>, viewed on January 7, 2020.

and how its relations with politics gain their grounds from the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as well as their interpretation by the early Church Fathers.²²

The presentation of Bishop Matti Repo was a systematic analysis of the theme “The Church as Community”. Repo’s analysis was clearly based on the idea of participation in Christ and its manifestation in the Church as the communion. Repo showed how baptism and the Eucharist are constitutive for the Church and how participation in Christ is realised through them.²³ Repo drew the following picture of the Church as a spiritual and bodily community:

The physical and concrete church consists of real people. On the other hand, the Church of Christ is spiritual and trespasses all human borders. It is a community of faith. This Church can be scattered in different parts of the world, but it still is spiritually under the one head, Christ. As such it is one whole, one community, which consists of all those who believe in Christ everywhere in the world.²⁴

Repo’s main intention is on communion ecclesiology and the connection it has with the idea of participation in Christ. This can be seen in numerous uses of the words “participation in, partake of, to take part in” and its explanations, one of which was:

God has given birth to the church by sending His Son to atone for the sins of the world. He has sent his Holy Spirit to make all people part of this reconciliation in Christ. Through the sacraments, people partake of this reconciliation in the church. In the church different people receive the gift of life in Christ. This life of Christ they share amongst themselves as members of his mystical body. Partaking of Christ’s and each other’s lives culminates in the sacrament of the holy Eucharist.²⁵

²² *Ibidem*, p. 44-62.

²³ Matti Repo, “Kirkko yhteisönä: systemaattisteologinen näkökulma”, in: *Reseptio* 1/2012, p. 81-87, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/Reseptio+1+2012+netti.pdf/78958b1c-8e3b-48d2-923f-3e68376a362b>, viewed on January 10, 2020.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 88. Translation from *Sinappi, St. Petersburg and Siikaniemi. The 13th, 14th and 15th theological discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church*, Documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 13, Helsinki 2013, p. 356, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41126994/KKH_venalaisneuvottelut_2013_verkko.pdf/c421c2bc-638d-deed-802e-7acd2fee33b2, viewed on January 10, 2020. For the original Finnish word ‘ruumiillinen’, a better translation would perhaps be ‘bodily’ and not ‘physical’, because then it better denotes the Biblical notion of the Church as the Body of Christ. Also the word ‘trespasses’ could be better translated with the word ‘crosses’.

²⁵ M. Repo, “Kirkko yhteisönä”, p. 93. Translation from *Sinappi, St. Petersburg and Siikaniemi*, p. 362.

The dialogue round for 2011 included a strong focus on the “participation in Christ” theological accent from the ELCF’s side. This kind of theological thinking resonated well with the ROC’s theological line, since the theses frequently repeat the participation idea connected with the *koinonia* idea.²⁶

A practical paper was given by Bishop Seppo Häkkinen, who reflected on the relationship between the theological ideal of commitment to the membership of the Church and the practical realisation of the membership as a sociological reality. Häkkinen showed that the theological ideal emphasising baptism as joining a person to the unity of the Church, through the means of grace – that is, God’s word and the sacraments – God brings about faith and love and enables a person to live in communion with the Church.²⁷ According to Häkkinen, sociological research shows the reality is far from the ideal. The ELCF’s membership rates sank during the 2000s. Häkkinen named three reasons for the gap between the ideal and reality: first, a decline of the sense of community, second, a blurring of the identity of the Church and third, the context of the relationship between the unchangeable message of the Church and the changing societal environment.²⁸

The commonly prepared theses repeat the connection between the theologically and historically interpreted and manifested ecclesiastical identity.²⁹

2014 The Christian teaching on human beings. The Christian understanding of marriage, the Christian upbringing in homes and the challenge of the current interpretations of human nature and their calling

The demand from the ROC’s side to connect the continuity of the dialogue with the ELCF’s clarification of the prayer for same-sex couples came in 2012. After marriage was chosen to be the theme of the next dialogue round, Metropolitan Hilarion suggested a theme that would be less controversial and not likely to danger the continuity of the dialogue. The ELCF preparatory group rejected the suggestion and wanted to keep the chosen topic.³⁰

²⁶ Sinappi, *St. Petersburg and Siikaniemi...*, p. 278-279. Siikaniemi, thesis group I, theses 1-6; Thesis group II, 1; see: J. Pihkala, *Faith and love*, p. 48.

²⁷ Seppo Häkkinen, “Ihanne ja todellisuus – jäsenyyteen sitoutuminen Suomen evankelis-luterilaisessa kirkossa”, in: *Reseptio* 1/2012, p. 103. <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/Reseptio+1+2012+netti.pdf/78958b1c-8e3b-48d2-923f-3e68376a362b>, viewed on January 7, 2020.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 110-111.

²⁹ Sinappi, *St. Petersburg and Siikaniemi*, p. 280-281. Siikaniemi thesis group II. See: J. Pihkala *Faith and Love*, p. 48-49.

³⁰ H. Hurskainen, “Warum der Dialog”, p. 77-98.

The ELCF's rejection is crucial here and shows that it was ready to bear the consequences that could be triggered by the obviously difficult topic.

Because the ROC did not receive, from its point of view, proper preparation material from the ELCF before the dialogue round, it decided to make its own draft version and presented it to the ELCF in June 2014. The document declared the following:

We, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran church of Finland, jointly declare that we recognize as Christian marriage only the union of a man with a woman and that we reject as impossible the equating of "same-sex unions" with church marriage.³¹

The ELCF did not accept this declaration nor did the ROC accept the reformulation: "In the traditions of our churches we recognize as Christian marriage the union of one man and one woman. Our liturgical practices don't recognize «same-sex unions» as a Christian marriage."³² So, the dialogue round and the whole dialogue had already broken down before the round could start in August 2014. The reason was the different views on what could be said together during the forthcoming dialogue round about same-sex marriage.³³

2016 The Christian understanding of human beings and marriage³⁴

Since the official dialogue round did not take place in Moscow in 2014 as was planned, the former dialogue partners decided to organise a closed theological conference in 2016 on the same themes as the intended dialogue round for 2014. The Finnish delegation was slightly changed from what it would have been in 2014, and the conference was held on a lower hierarchical level; for example, the archbishop of the ELCF did not participate in the

³¹ *Draft statement by the participants of the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland*, unpublished available in Helsinki: Archives of the Foreign Office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 23.6.2014.

³² As of now the ELCF does not have liturgical practices to consecrate same-sex marriages. However, because pastors of the ELCF have the right to marry people according to Finnish law, the same-sex marriages officiated by a pastor are valid if the ceremony meets the pre-conditions and formal requirements in the Marriage Act. At the same time, "According to the Church [ELCF], marriage is a union between a woman and a man; this was also the General Synod's position, which it announced in its November 2015 report. The Bishops' Conference on the Church's current marriage doctrine also stated in August 2016 that the right of pastors to officiate church marriages would remain unchanged in 2017, when the amended legislation took effect.", see: "The Marriage Law".

³³ For a detailed description of the breakdown of the dialogue, see: H. Hurskainen, "Warum der Dialog"; T. Karttunen, "Oikeutetun erilaisuuden", p. 306-321.

³⁴ *Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon*.

dialogue. The Finnish delegation was led by the Bishop of Mikkeli, Seppo Häkkinen, and no metropolitans from the ROC's side took part in the dialogue, while the ROC delegation was led by Archbishop Amvrosi from the Spiritual Academy of St. Petersburg.³⁵ The participants published only a short informational letter about the conference, otherwise the meeting was closed to everyone except the delegations. No common statements or theses were published.

Three presentations were given from the Finnish side. Jaana Hallamaa, Niko Huttunen and Antti Yli-Opas had already prepared presentations for the 2014 dialogue round, and in 2016 they presented updated versions of those papers.³⁶

Exegetical papers were prepared by Niko Huttunen, who explained how Paul's teachings on marriage were about striking a balance in the hierarchical social structure, which did not need reform, and the Christian reality, which had renewed everything of the past and set equality in the place of hierarchy. Therefore, although Paul demands the primacy of man in the marriage as socially accepted, he, at the same time, demands equality between men and women in marriage as its inner and spiritual reality, which belongs to Christian marriage.³⁷ Following this main idea, at the end of his presentation Huttunen maintained that although revoking the leadership of man in marriage is against the Bible's instructions, this kind of development seems to practice the spirit that is written in 1.Cor 7. According to Huttunen, a change in the concept of marriage does not necessarily mean giving up Christian values; it can also mean that those values become even more real in the world, which is in a process of renewal.³⁸

Antti Yli-Opas gave a systematic-practical presentation on the concept of marriage in the ELCF. He used John Witte Jr's model, which names four dimensions of marriage, all of which must be considered. Its dimensions are: 1, marriage as a natural institution; 2, marriage as the expression of mutual commitment between the couple; 3, marriage as spiritual union; and 4, marriage as a social class. Yli-Opas expressed the idea that as a natural institution, marriage is of interest also outside Christianity, but as a natural institution, it also has roots in the Creation. As a mutual expression of com-

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Copies of the versions of the papers from May-July 2014 are kept in trust by the author of this article. Presentations held in 2016 are published in: *Reseptio* 1/2016.

³⁷ Niko Huttunen, "Valtasuhteiden rapautuminen. Miten Raamatun eskatologia muovaa yhteiskuntaa ja avioliittoa", in: *Reseptio* 1/2016, p. 35-37, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/Reseptio+1_2016+verkkoversio.pdf/b6f78ea5-3806-d047-c248-81f8f750d34e, viewed on January 9, 2020.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

mitment, marriage belongs to the private life of the couple; it is their expression of commitment – not of anyone else. The spiritual union emphasises the Church's own understanding of marriage, which may differ from that of society. For the ELCF, it also means that marriage is based on love, which is both a gift and a task between the spouses and between parents and children. Marriage as a social class is, according to the ELCF's theological interpretation, part of God's action; He aims to protect life and restrict evil in the world through marriage. The church supports the societal interpretation of marriage as the one that governs the social aspect of marriage.³⁹

The ELCF interpretation of marriage at the time when Yli-Opas wrote his presentation was to maintain marriage as between men and women. Therefore, despite the Church's support for a societal interpretation of marriage, the fact was that from the beginning of 2017, when the law on equal marriage in Finland came into force, the Church's and society's interpretations on marriage continued to separate further from each other.⁴⁰

Jaana Hallamaa's presentation focused on the challenges that have been created by the current interpretations of human nature and the human calling. For understanding human nature and the human calling, Hallamaa differentiates between three models. In the title's word "challenge", Hallamaa's main focus was human sexuality, living it and interpreting it.⁴¹ She named the models as naturalism, essentialism and voluntarism. Hallamaa rejected naturalism's relevance for Christianity and the present-day discussion on human nature and the human calling. However, the paper, which the ROC sent to the ELCF before the intended discussion round of 2014 and which content revealed the differing understandings of the ROC and the ELCF on (same sex) marriage, depended strongly in its reasoning on natural-based arguments.⁴² This indicates that naturalism also had a place in the ROC's interpretation of a human being. However, Hallamaa's argument was that the churches tend to use essentialism as the interpretation horizon when approaching questions on the human being as a sexual creature. Essentialism entered into the Church with hierarchy during the Roman Empire: to support the idea of hierarchy, the philosophical idea of *scala naturae* was borrowed for theology.⁴³ Hallamaa criticised essentialism, because Christianity

³⁹ Antti Yli-Opas, "Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon avioliittokäsityksestä", in: *Reseptio* 1/2016, p. 42-48, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/Reseptio+1_2016+verkko-versio.pdf/b6f78ea5-3806-d047-c248-81f8f750d34e, viewed on January 9, 2020.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 47-48.

⁴¹ J. Hallamaa, "Nykyisten ihmisluonto", p. 55-56.

⁴² H. Hurskainen, "Warum der Dialog".

⁴³ J. Hallamaa, "Nykyisten ihmisluontoa", p. 58-59.

is life, not a conceptual system. Instead of essentialism, the Church should count on the Gospel, the message which the Church has been able to newly interpret for people through changing times.⁴⁴

Hallamaa explained voluntarism as a model challenging the church and its essentialism. According to voluntarism, human nature or the human calling can be understood only in terms of what an individual human being wants to be or feels to be. But Hallamaa also claimed that voluntarism was a wrong interpretation horizon for human nature and sexuality. Its inaccuracy is based on its rejection of all kinds of biological borders for human beings; sociology has proven that even extreme individualism is the product of a society.⁴⁵

According to Hallamaa, a Christian view of life as having limits is not in opposition to the idea of life as a gift. Life together with other people has borders, but, according to Christianity, a human being as a co-worker of God has the right to overcome borders. Also, the eschatological perspective and the promise of a new world and a new Creation shows that our current knowledge of sexuality should not be limited by strict borders.⁴⁶

Compared to the dialogue round of 2011 the ELCF delegates' presentations did not touch the question of participation in Christ at all. In contrast, Huttunen's and Hallamaa's presentations had very similar theological argumentation styles, which have not been so popular in the ELCF's presentations with the Orthodox. This line emphasised the renewal power of the Christian message, its extreme demand for equality and breaking off from hierarchy, also in the cases where hierarchy has occupied Christianity in its relation to its own message. This might have been difficult for the Orthodox participants of the theological conference to understand.

4. The dialogue with the Orthodox Church of Finland

4.1. The history of the dialogue and the ELCF's representation in the 2010s

A theological dialogue with the OCF started in 1989. Before the 2010s, the dialogue rounds usually took place every second or third year, but a six-year gap also appeared in the dialogue during the 2000s. The decade now under study has been a very regular and active time for the dialogue. In addition, the churches celebrated the 25th anniversary of the dialogue in 2015 – one year later than the actual anniversary. Each discussion round has included doctrinal and practical themes – the latter one consisting of combined

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 64-65.

themes or those of relevance for the two churches, both having official status in Finland. One delegate from each side presented a paper on each theme.

On the ELCF's side, 11 of 35 participants were women, which is around one-third of all participants. All the ELCF's speakers have been men, with one exception. This one woman was family councillor Saara Kinnunen, who presented a paper in 2012 on the theme, "The Home as the Source of Christian Upbringing". Contrary to other presentations, Kinnunen's presentation has not been published.⁴⁷ Through the 2010s, less than one-third of all the delegates were females, while only one-tenth of the given presentations were from women. Also, the dialogue with the OCF shows how the gender quotas were not fulfilled concerning the presence or participation in the dialogue. One alarming fact is that the only presentation given by a female has not been published anywhere, unlike the other papers. Another concerning notion is that after the change in church law concerning the ELCF and the publication of the LWF gender justice policy paper, no women have presented in the domestic dialogues. This indicates a worsening equality situation for the ELCF in the ecumenical dialogues the ELCF has with the Orthodox Church.

4.2. Dialogue rounds of the 2010s

2010 Interpretation of the Bible in the Church's teaching and ecology and moderation in everyday life

In the presentation Sammeli Juntunen gave in 2010, he clarified the Lutheran teachings on the Bible that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the New and Old Testaments are the only norm and rule, according to which the Church's doctrines and teachers are to be judged. However, the Holy Bible has to be interpreted in the Church's context following the ancient church's symbols and the testimony of the fathers of the apostolic times.⁴⁸ Juntunen

⁴⁷ See the original Finnish versions in: *Reseptio* 1/2013, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/KKH_Reseptio_1_2013.pdf/d225273e-4c83-24b1-e079-65a4ee27e542, viewed on January 2, 2020. Translated English versions of the papers can be found at: *From Oulu to Järvenpää. The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Theological Discussions from 2001 to 2012*, Helsinki 2014, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/From+Oulu+to+Jrvenp+Sakasti+2014.pdf/43aac171-f077-32e0-5b11-e0774f50a177>, viewed on January 2, 2020. This dialogue's other presentations are published in the information bulletin *Reseptio*. The presentations of the dialogue round 2019 are not yet published.

⁴⁸ Sammeli Juntunen, "Raamatun tulkinta kirkon opetuksessa", in: *Reseptio* 1/2011, p. 62, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/Reseptio1_2011.pdf/6068c79d-3828-1e4a-2a4c-89ab145cd64b, viewed on December 28, 2019. See: Jari Jolkkonen, "Jesus Christ as the Word of God", in: *Reseptio* 3/2004, p. 44, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39531482/Reseptio+3+2004_1_osa.pdf/c823570b-b61d-210c-ee57-bc330a305e7e, viewed on December 28, 2019.

made a distinction between the Word of God, which is the actual and ontologically deepest manifestation of God's Revelation and the Word of God, which is the information and proclamation of the Word. However, the Bible is not ontologically on the same level as the Word of God, who is Christ. The Bible belongs to the created, it is not the Word of God, nor does it have the creative power of the Word of God.⁴⁹ The holiness of the Bible is based on the fact that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and especially the fact that it testifies Christ. That the Bible testifies Christ is not just the effect preaching brings out in a believer. It is about receiving communion with Christ. Therefore, the teaching of the two natures of Christ and their unification in the one person of Christ is the essence of the Lutheran interpretation of the Bible.⁵⁰ Juntunen thus explicates how the Lutheran real-presence and to some extent the Christ presence in faith are the Church's principles for interpreting the Bible. In the common communique, the need to discuss the meaning of the Bible for Christians' beliefs was mentioned, as well as the idea that a Christ-centred interpretation of the Bible offers a way to approach present-day questions on human beings and society according to church tradition.⁵¹

Antti Raunio's presentation on ecology and moderation in life built strongly on the idea of participation in Christ. First presenting the social and theological general lines of thought, Raunio concluded by describing moderation in life as an expression of God's self-giving love.⁵² According to Raunio, in the Creation, God gave Himself in the form of life and everything that was necessary for maintaining and protecting life. Therefore, He is present in everything that has been created. According to Lutherans, God is present in the world He has created in two ways: first, He is present everywhere, maintaining the world by giving it life. Second, He is present in faith, bringing people salvation through His Word and sacraments.⁵³

On the sanctity of the created universe, Lutherans have been somewhat guarded, but Raunio clarifies that the ELCF has spoken about the sanctity of creation in a specific sense. Creation can be sacred on the grounds that it is a place where God resides. This does not lead to pantheism, because the whole

⁴⁹ S. Juntunen, "Raamatun tulkinta", p. 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁵¹ "Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen ja ortodoksisen kirkon väliset neuvottelut. Tiedonanto", in: *Reseptio* 1/2011, p. 44-46. https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/Reseptio1_2011.pdf/6068c79d-3828-1e4a-2a4c-89ab145cd64b, viewed on March 9, 2020.

⁵² Antti Raunio, "Ekologisuus ja kohtuullinen elämäntapa", in: *Reseptio* 1/2011, p. 86, 89, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/Reseptio1_2011.pdf/6068c79d-3828-1e4a-2a4c-89ab145cd64b, viewed on January 4, 2020.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

of creation is and lives “in God”. The whole of creation reflects the holiness of its Creator. This demands also that mankind respect nature and accept it as God’s gift to humankind.⁵⁴ Raunio then explains the destruction and abuse of nature as a consequence of sin and goes further to explain how salvation as God’s self-giving love is the ground for healing the relationship with God, between human beings and also relations with nature. Raunio mentions that salvation also concerns creation and refers to Romans 8:19–23.⁵⁵ However, Raunio does not specify the background of nature’s position or why it needs salvation. It looks like the Lutheran teaching of creation’s holiness and its need for salvation needs further clarification from the Lutheran side, even to explain the role of non-believers. The position of Christians is clarified here in light of the participation in Christ. The communiqué’s emphasis is on the request for the churches to act more responsibly and even prophetically when responding to questions concerning ecology and well-being.⁵⁶

2012 God, Known and Unknown: The home as the source of a Christian upbringing

God, Known and Unknown, was the theme of ELCF member Ari Ojell, who took the theology of Gregory of Nyssa as the starting point of his paper. The title was “God, Known and Unknown – the Confessed God”. After a broad patristic analysis, Ojell reached this conclusion:

For Gregory of Nyssa the unknown nature of the essence of God does not by any means imply that there is nothing that we can know about him. On the contrary, the unknown character of (the essence of) God who is known to us through the categories of self-sacrifice, communion, presence and love associated with his person, means that there is always something new to be discovered about him, and growth in knowledge of him is indeed an everlasting process as we follow him in Christ in accordance with his will. It is in Christ that we learn to know God, not statically but dynamically, always as a form of active communion in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a divinely inspired life in which we are able as human beings to participate in the Holy Spirit through Christ in accordance with the will of God.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 92–95.

⁵⁶ “Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen”.

⁵⁷ Ari Ojell, “Tunnettu ja tuntematon Jumala – tunnustettu Jumala”, in: *Reseptio* 1/2013, p. 56, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/KKH_Reseptio_1_2013.pdf/d225273e-4c83-24b1-e079-65a4ee27e542, viewed on January 6, 2020. Translation from: *From Oulu to Järvenpää*, p. 241.

Ojell's point emphasised the communion of the Trinity, which can be known through the participation in Christ. The emphasis thus built on participation theology.

Another Lutheran presentation was given by Tomi Karttunen on the topic "God Known and Unknown – A Lutheran and Ecumenical Viewpoint". The presentation focused on the latest decades of Orthodox theology and the interpretations of Finnish Lutheran Research on the relationship between the ousia and hypostasis of God as well as how the energies of God are to be understood in these relations. After focusing on the history of theology, Karttunen analysed what participation in Christ in Finnish Lutheran Research and in the different Orthodox emphases can mean.⁵⁸ "Ecumenical" in Karttunen's presentation seemed to refer to those possibilities in the theology of the dialogue partner, which could be useful parallels for the idea of God present in faith and the participation in Christ in Lutheran theology. This analysis is valuable since, for example, between 1970 and 2000 the Palamistic tradition did not play a role in the ELCF–ROC dialogue and, therefore, the way the participation has been expressed in the dialogue documents has remained somewhat open.⁵⁹

The communique emphasises that God is something that Christians can speak about. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the experience of God, who came to be a man and revealed himself, is put in the middle when the known God is mentioned.⁶⁰ It remains unclear; did the participants really mean that God is known by experience? The deep participation theology present in the Lutheran papers cannot be found from the final common formulations. The common formulations concern the emphasis of family as the "little church". The expression used is exactly the same as the one used in the dialogue between the ELCF and the ROC. The whole common description of a religious upbringing resonates well with the results of the ELCF–ROC dialogue and seems to be largely influenced by the dialogue round held between those churches in 2011 in Siikaniemi.

⁵⁸ T. Karttunen "Tunnettu ja tuntematon Jumala – luterilais-ekumeenisia näkökohtia", in: *Reseptio* 1/2013, p.74-80, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/KKH_Reseptio_1_2013.pdf/d225273e-4c83-24b1-e079-65a4ee27e542, viewed on January 6, 2020.

⁵⁹ H. Hurskainen, "Ecumenical Social Ethics".

⁶⁰ "Tunnettu ja tuntematon Jumala sekä Kotien kristillinen kasvatus luterilais-ortodoksi" sessa dialogissa. Tiedonanto", in: *Reseptio* 1/2013, p. 43-46, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/KKH_Reseptio_1_2013.pdf/d225273e-4c83-24b1-e079-65a4ee27e542, viewed on March 10, 2020.

2014 The folk church: A theological and practical overview

A paper by Tomi Karttunen in this dialogue round was “A Theological and Practical Overview of the Folk Church – A Post-Constantinian Church”. Karttunen’s paper dealt broadly with the history of the concept of the folk church. The relevant aspects to analyse the present day evaluation can be summed up in the problem he describes as a tension between the inner pluralism of the folk church and the inner theological cohesion that enables the folk church to practice its mission independently from the state but still be part of the “public space”.⁶¹ The tension between inner pluralism and inner cohesion is the approach Juntunen took in his presentation in 2010. Karttunen used a similar distinction in his presentation in 2011. Karttunen makes this point by referring to other ecumenical documents, like the theses of the Finnish Lutheran–Russian Orthodox dialogue round on the “The Church as Community” and the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) document, “The Church – towards a Common Vision”.⁶² Theologically, Karttunen emphasises *koinonia*-ecclesiology⁶³ as theologically deep but at the same time sufficiently flexible to proclaim the mission of the Church in today’s context. The ecumenical discussion of *koinonia* also touches the question of legitimate diversity among churches as well as using the concept of a local church to describe the fullness of the Church on the local level, though none of the local churches are the Universal Church of Christ alone.⁶⁴ These ecumenically significant questions consider whether the local churches regard themselves as folk churches. The local churches’ answers to these questions determine their position also in many practical cases of church–state relations and their understanding of the relationship between the nation and the church and the nations and the Church.

Teemu Kakkuri’s practical overview of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as a folk church focused on describing the revival movements, mainly their history and their contemporary position within the ELCE.⁶⁵

⁶¹ T. Karttunen, “Kansankirkko teologisena ja käytännöllisenä kysymyksenä – jälki-konstantinolainen kirkko?”, in: *Reseptio* 2/2014, p. 34-35, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39531482/Reseptio+2_2014+Sakasti.pdf/50dafbf3-05c9-e53c-36bd-96091a2525a8, viewed on December 30, 2019.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 36-38.

⁶³ Communion ecclesiology is an exchangeable term for Karttunen here.

⁶⁴ T. Karttunen, “Kansankirkko teologisena”, p. 41-42.

⁶⁵ Teemu Kakkuri, “Kansankirkko käytännöllisenä kysymyksenä”, in: *Reseptio* 2/2014, p. 77-95, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39531482/Reseptio+2_2014+Sakasti.pdf/50dafbf3-05c9-e53c-36bd-96091a2525a8, viewed on December 30, 2019.

The common summary focuses on the equal right of different religions and convictions to exist, but at the same time, the ELCF and the OCF representatives stressed the importance of taking into account the historical and cultural environments and their impact on religious identities.⁶⁶ The results thus did not reflect the theological content of the papers.

2016 The evaluation of our dialogues and the common legacy in our liturgical lives

The years 2015 and 2016 must be omitted when presenting the history of the dialogue and evaluating its results. It is hard, perhaps even impossible to find some kind of through line in regard to the ecumenical line on that kind of material. The reason is easy – the meetings did not aim to create anything new. Still, I want to highlight some aspects of Antti Raunio's presentation and evaluation of the dialogue from its beginning in 1989 until 2014. According to Raunio, the results of the dialogue can be divided as follows: preconditions of the church unity, ecclesiology and the folk church, the position and ecumenical validity of the canons, the Church as a liturgical community, anthropology as a theological problem and the known and unknown God.⁶⁷ Raunio's theological analysis showed that the themes of the dialogue had been very much focused on the nature of the Church. On the one hand, this is perhaps somewhat surprising, because earlier research on the dialogue maintained that the dialogue focused mostly on the practical questions faced by the two folk churches in Finnish society living side by side.⁶⁸ On the other hand, choosing to focus on the nature of the Church is very understandable. A big challenge to overcome for the Orthodox and in the dialogue with the Orthodox in the ecumenical relations is that of ecclesiological self-understanding.⁶⁹ The challenge and

⁶⁶ "Tiedonanto Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon ja Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon XII teologisesta dialogista Oulussa 21.-22.10.2014", in: *Reseptio* 2/2014, p. 22-24, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39531482/Reseptio+2_2014+Sakasti.pdf/50dafbf3-05c9-e53c-36bd-96091a2525a8?t=1534333067000, viewed on March 7, 2020.

⁶⁷ A. Raunio, "Jumala, kirkko ja ihminen. Suomalaisten luterilais-ortodoksisten oppike-skustelujen teologista arviointia", in: *Reseptio* 2/2016, p. 60-66, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/Reseptio+2_2016.pdf/7b1370df-9996-211a-0451-dda712b8bd80, viewed on January 8, 2020.

⁶⁸ Kalevi Toiviainen, "Teologinen dialogi Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon kanssa – tausta, lähtökohdat, arviointi", in: *Reseptio* 1/2016, p.7, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/Reseptio+1_2016+verkkoversio.pdf/b6f78ea5-3806-d047-c248-81f8f750d34e, viewed on December 30, 2019.

⁶⁹ The work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC is an example of this, see: Elina Hellqvist, *The Church and its Boundaries: a study of the Special*

the task is to overcome the false prejudices each has towards the other⁷⁰ but in a deeper sense to seek for the theological reasoning that enables us to formulate commonalities in two different, Lutheran and Orthodox, ecclesiological models.

Raunio's analysis revealed cohesion in the theological topics of the dialogue. It seems that this national dialogue, in a theological sense, has been much more coherent than regarded earlier. Actually, this coherency was highlighted even more by the fact that, firstly, the other theme of the presentation in the 2016 evaluation meeting was not about evaluation but the common liturgical life, on which Lutheran delegate Veijo Koivula gave a presentation, in which he compared the structure and contents of the Orthodox liturgy and the Lutheran mass.⁷¹ This was again a topic defining the nature of the Church. Secondly, the topic of the next dialogue round was to be the "Prerequisites of the Church's Visible Unity". Raunio proposed that after 25 years of dialogue, the aim of which had been to increase mutual understanding, it should be time to make the dialogue more known among the churches and parishes, to specify the purposes of the dialogue and to put the purposes in relation with the starting point and the goal of ecumenism; in other words, the unity of the Church.⁷² It seems that this proposal was taken seriously, since the common purpose was formulated so that the dialogue would continue and deepen the topics already discussed. In addition, the common understanding was that the starting point of the Christian liturgy is the secret of the Trinitarian God and participation in Christ.⁷³ For the first time during the 2010s, the widely used theological approach of participation in Christ was written as the common understanding.

Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches, Luther-Agricola Society, Helsinki 2011.

⁷⁰ Tiedonanto. *Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon ja Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon väliset teologiset neuvottelut 1989*, p. 2, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/Mikkeli+1989+tiedonanto.pdf/74b352e3-9972-a51b-64c9-427e37d3af71>, viewed on January 10, 2020.

⁷¹ Veijo Koivula, "Jumalanpalveluselämämme yhteinen perintö", in: *Reseptio* 2/2016, p. 91-106, https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/Reseptio+2_2016.pdf/7b1370df-9996-211a-0451-dda712b8bd80, viewed on January 8, 2020.

⁷² A. Raunio, "Jumala, kirkko ja", p. 68.

⁷³ *Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon ja Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon XIII teologinen dialogi Mikkeli* 5-6.10.2016, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41131087/Tiedonanto+XIII+lut-ort+teologinen+dialogi+Mikkeli+2016.pdf/bed625f2-e055-13df-8932-fab9477603f8>, viewed on March 11, 2020.

2019 Prerequisites of the Church's visible unity

Miika Ahola's presentation can be regarded as an introduction to the theme of the 2019 dialogue round, in which Ahola sorted out six perspectives to approach the question of visible unity: 1, unity – legitimate differences; 2, invisible–visible church; 3, koinonia – ecclesiology; 4, prerequisites of the unity; 5, consensus; and 6, time – perspective.⁷⁴ Ahola did not propose that the dialogue should follow any of these models or viewpoints in its procedure. The intention was more to start a discussion on the ways to visible unity and identify which models could be the easiest ones to approach for the dialogue partners. The discussion emphasised the dialogue's dependence on the wider ecumenical relations of the Lutheran and Orthodox Church families.⁷⁵

Guided by the previous dialogue, Tomi Karttunen accepted the task of setting clear objectives for the dialogue in order to take further steps on the way to unity. Karttunen gives a reason for the Lutheran–Orthodox joint efforts towards unity: For Lutherans, it is important to keep the pure gospel in preaching and instituting the sacraments correctly as prerequisites of the visible unity, whereas in the Orthodox interpretation of canons, the Church has to remain true to its original purpose and principles.⁷⁶ According to Karttunen, in both models the focus is on the church's true purpose and message, not the details. Thus, a differentiated consensus could be the way to unity.⁷⁷

As concrete steps for the dialogue, Karttunen proposes to express the common belief and commitment to the Nicene Creed as follows: 1, a common statement on the theme "Nicaean faith and preaching the Apostolic Gospel today"; 2, the sacramentality of the Church and therefore a statement on "Christ and Initiation to his Church: Baptism, Chrismation and Confirmation"; 3, a discussion on the Church as eucharistic communion, liturgical life and sacraments; 4, a discussion on the ministry of the Church, its sacramentality and connection to the Church's apostolicity, synodality and general priesthood; and 5, a discussion on the practical implementation in the light of the seven ecumenical synods, church order and moral questions. Each topic would be discussed in at least one meeting and the participants would prepare a common document on each topic.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Miika Ahola, *Kirkko: yhteistä näkyä kohti–asiakirja ja ekumeeninen keskustelu kirkon ykseyden perusehdoista*, unpublished, held by the author of this article, p. 1–10.

⁷⁵ Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon ja Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon XIV teologinen dialogi Kajaanissa 14.–15.3.2019, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/SELK+SOK+tiedo+2019+Kajaani/8b9bb0af-5bc9-a9d2-eaef-d91e0e0014a3>, viewed on March 11, 2020.

⁷⁶ T. Karttunen, *Kristittyjen yhteys ja Kirkon näkyvä ykseys yhteisenä luterilais-ortodoksisena tavoitteena*, unpublished, held by the author of this article, p. 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9–11.

Karttunen's proposal was programmatic and set clear steps to be deliberated among the dialogue participants. The communique of the 2019 dialogue round did not accept Karttunen's proposal as such, but definitely showed an interest on focusing and deepening the discussion during the following years. If the proposal had been carried out,⁷⁹ to go through the whole program would have taken at least 10 years and it might be that the ecumenical discussion elsewhere would already be going in a different direction. At least Karttunen realised in his presentation the aims of the ELCF's ecumenical line to 2020.⁸⁰ The strategy document says that the Church (ELCF) evaluates the domestic dialogues until the end of 2017 and sets new concrete aims for these dialogues.

5. Conclusions

Measured by numbers, the ELCF's most intensive dialogue with the Orthodox was the one with the Orthodox Church in Finland in the 2010s. According to analysis of the gender balance in the ELCF delegations revealed in the bilateral dialogues of the ELCF, women occupied less than one-third of the delegations. In the number of presentations given by the ELCF women in the bilateral dialogues with the OCF and the ROC, two presentations from the ELCF's side were given by women. Based on these facts, it is possible to surmise that ELCF female members were not present or given full possibilities to participate in the dialogues. This is especially alarming because, after the change in the Church law of 2014 and the publication of the LWF Gender Justice Policy, the presence and participation has not changed in response to the directions, which would encourage gender justice and thus the fuller picture of the ELCF theological potential would actually have theological diversity and coherence. In the bilateral dialogues with the Orthodox, the ELCF has not taken full advantage of this internationally recognised potential.

Theologically, the decade was strongly marked by dealing with ecclesiology in different perspectives with the Orthodox dialogue partners. This shows the interconnectedness of the different dialogues. Dialogues between

⁷⁹ *Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon ja Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon XIV teologinen dialogi Kajaaniissa 14.-15.3.2019.* p. 4, <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/41123836/SELK+SOK+tiedonanto+2019+Kajaani/8b9bb0af-5bc9-a9d2-eaef-d91e0e0014a3>, viewed on January 10, 2020.

⁸⁰ *Kohtaamisen kirkko. Kansainvälisen ja ekumeenisen toiminnan sekä uskontojen kohtaamisen suunta vuoteen 2020*, Helsinki, Kirkkohallitus, ulkoasiainosasto, 2016, p. 26. <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/52567042/Kohtaamisen+kirkko+Kv+ja+ekum+toiminnan+suunta+2020+verkkoversio.pdf/76ae4a4a-ff4e-4a12-0457-4651323389f8>, viewed on January 9, 2020.

two confessions like Lutheranism and Orthodoxy on the bilateral and multilateral level are mutually beneficial. Also, dialogues between several confessions influence the dialogues between Lutherans and the Orthodox. As a theological example, one of the most important documents of the World Council of Churches is “The Church – towards a Common Vision”. It is important that in the LWF–Orthodox Joint Commission there was an ELCF member to present on Ministry and episcopacy. The ELCF also have theological capital in this field, which it can share in the international arena.

Although ecclesiology was one of the combined themes of the different dialogues, not all the dialogue rounds can be gathered under this umbrella. Especially the dialogue with the ROC in the 2010s did not entirely follow the ecclesiological emphasis. It stepped away from this direction in 2016 during the theological conference, which focused on anthropology and marriage – topics that caused difficulties for this dialogue. There is no corresponding theme to be found from other ELCF–Orthodox dialogues. The closest parallel can be found in the international dialogue and its discussion on Ministry, especially when the role of women was discussed. This topic also proved a difficult one when it came time to formulate a common communique.

In the 1970s, a convergence between the Lutheran justification and the Orthodox theosis was found in the ELCF–ROC dialogue. The finding was a start for a new direction in Finnish Lutheran research. This research line, especially its emphasis on participation in Christ and God as self-giving love, was widely used by the ELCF for theological rapprochement in domestic dialogue with the Orthodox in the 2010s. This was also true for the one official dialogue round with the ROC. The theological conference with the ROC showed that the ELCF’s theological self-understanding includes other theological approaches: the ELCF papers were surprisingly coherent in the theological conference in their emphasis on the dynamic power of the gospel.

Even given the unequal gender balance in the ELCF delegations, it would be overly simplistic to say that any change in the theological line would depend on an equitable gender representation. Taking into account the intention of the ELCF to retain the difficult topic of marriage as a dialogue theme with the ROC for the dialogue round of 2014 shows that the theme of same-sex marriage was for the ELCF only a discussion topic as such and did not depend on female participation in the ELCF delegation or preparatory group – in which there were no female participants. Therefore, the topic of same-sex marriage cannot be linked with female participation in the ELCF delegation. Female participation in the ELCF delegations and in its limitations has had an effect on the theological input – though not on the chosen topics as such.

It is reasonable to assume that the gender justice aspect plays a role in ecumenical dialogues. Of course, this can only be tested in future bilateral dialogues of the ELCF if this aspect is taken seriously when composing the delegations. At this point, the place for a different kind of theological orientation than that of a “participation in Christ” – which has proven its success already – in future dialogue rounds with the Orthodox remains open. The use of other theological lines than participation in Christ depends on what the ELCF wants: deeper theological discussion, as seems to be the case in the domestic dialogue with the OCF, or more peaceful and easier discussions in relation to chosen topics, which might be the case for the ROC. There is no evidence that the habit of overlooking the gender justice aspect would have been caused by pressure from the dialogue partner. The aspect of gender justice and how the ELCF has or has not put it into practice seems to be dependent on the inner emphasises and interests of the ELCF.