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# **REPORT ON**

## **CHURCH AND CHURCH COMMUNION**

**Result of a series of consultations mandated by the  
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and  
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity**

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Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)  
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## Preamble

As part of the General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, on 16 September 2018 we signed a declaration of intent during a celebratory service in Basel Cathedral. This declaration calls for the commencement of an official dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. The dialogue will focus on an understanding of the Church and ecclesial communion. Numerous dialogues have been conducted over the last decades at the global level between the Roman Catholic Church and the different Protestant confessional families. It is now necessary to undertake for the first time a dialogue at the continental level, and more particularly in Europe. Such a development is of interest for three reasons. Firstly, it was in Europe that the division of the Western Church occurred some 500 years ago. Secondly, the Protestant churches united in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe are willing to pursue this dialogue together. Thirdly, the Vatican is now engaging along a new path; while up to now it preferred dialogues conducted bilaterally, there is now a commitment to a multilateral dialogue with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

This envisaged dialogue is aware of its particular responsibility for Europe, with its opening of a new perspective on ecumenical dialogue. It is promising because it can draw upon background work. A series of consultations devoted to this theme took place from 2013 to 2018 between the Pontifical Council and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. These consultations compared the 1964 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) with the ecclesiological text of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, *The Church of Jesus Christ* (1994). This comparison has clearly highlighted the major points that remain open. Yet it has contributed to mutual understanding and has outlined remarkable convergences. Protestants have shown a certain openness to the understanding of the Church as a sacrament, Catholics their readiness to understand the Church as the creation of the Word of God.

By referring even more to the foundational texts, this dialogue will be able to deepen the understanding of the Church, a theme which has too often been underestimated in the past, and subsequently to deal with the issues closely related to it, namely ministry and Eucharistic communion.

We are pleased with the progress we have made so far and we thank the working group chaired by Bishop Dr Karl-Heinz Wiesenmann and Church President Christian Schad (both of Speyer) for its valuable contributions. We also want to gratefully remember Bishop Friedrich Weber, who until his death in 2015 led the delegation of the CPCE, offering the group the benefit of his

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knowledge and commitment. May this publication of the preliminary report allow us “to speak the truth in love, (and grow) in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15).

Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Gottfried Locher, Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

Rome and Vienna, November 2018

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## Preface

The quest for the visible unity of the Church has enjoyed high importance in the ecumenical movement from its inception. Its principal goal was - and is - to pave the way for still divided churches and communions towards the Church's visible unity in the one Faith and towards eucharistic fellowship in witness and service. Ecumenical dialogue carried on with this goal for more than 80 years has led to a degree of clarification. Understandings have been reached in difficult questions of theological controversy. Consensus on basic issues of the doctrine of justification, the core of Reformation theology, has been achieved. Significant convergence has taken place in understanding the Sacraments. The churches have come closer on questions of ministerial office. Is this enough to allow for communion and the celebration of the Lord's Supper?

Even if this question cannot yet receive an affirmative answer, the Christians of today already maintain communion with each other in many and increasing ways. They read the Holy Scriptures together; there is mutual recognition of the sacrament of Baptism, a common Creed, common prayer, a common liturgy of the Word of God and common witness to the world. Christians are, therefore, on the way to full communion with one another. Can there also be agreement on basic questions of Church and communion, able to accommodate the differences that still subsist? Achieving agreement on this question is the primary task of the current protestant-Catholic dialogue.

Accordingly, the Consultation between the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, which began in 2013 and is documented in this Report, focussed upon the subject area 'Church and Communion'. This was the first time the Vatican has pursued a dialogue with a regional - in this case European - fellowship of churches, one to which Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist churches belong. The principal question addressed was how far a conversation between the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the CPCE on questions of Church and Communion might offer the prospect of a successful outcome. This Report indicates what points and arguments favour the likelihood of such a dialogue's success. In our opinion, its provisional character offers a workable basis for such a decision by the two bodies that commissioned us. The Report claims to achieve so much, but no more.

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The 'differentiated consensus' technique has already made a significant contribution to clarifying ecumenical questions. We therefore made it the basis for our conversations as well. Such a consensus, if reached, does not offer a theological compromise formula, but rather contains a meaningful jointly formulated agreement, which the parties must jointly make their own. Confessional distinctions, expressed alongside and so complementing each other, are part of this. Consensus achieved on this basis allows for varying forms of theological thought and expression, and for presentation in terms each confession can recognise. It allows dialogue partners a chance together to render their various forms, formulae and theological traditions fruitful, those of one partner supplementing those of the other.

We have, further, brought our differing confessional traditions into the conversation in the spirit of 'receptive ecumenism'. This sees the chief ecumenical challenge as asking what we can – or what we are allowed to – learn from the other confessional tradition. It was also our experience that meeting the other on such terms deepens one's own confessional identity. It leads simultaneously to a better understanding of the ecumenical partner and a closer relationship between partners.

Against the background of the complex methodology we have adopted, the following Report brings into dialogue various texts of the CPCE and the Roman Catholic Church on ecclesiological principles. The 1973 Leuenberg Agreement is itself understood as a fundamental ecclesiological decision by churches deriving from the Reformation, and seeks to define prerequisites and conditions for ecclesial communion. To that extent a contribution to ecumenical dialogue on church unity can be seen in the Leuenberg model. For its part, Catholic theology in questions of church unity rests on the fundamental text for an understanding of the Church, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* of 1964. The surprising discovery in our conversations, as summarised in this Report, was that these source texts themselves set out common elements of ecclesiological understanding; in that it proved possible to discern implicit references to *Lumen Gentium* at various points in the CPCE's seminal 1994 document *The Church of Jesus Christ*. In turn *Lumen Gentium* makes mention of questions regarding communion that were later addressed on the protestant side. This made possible a mutually fruitful conversation, revealing many-sided connections and shared references. Thus the conviction, long held as correct, that the two sides' fundamental ecclesiological texts contain incompatible and mutually exclusive conceptions of the Church, can in our view no longer be maintained.

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In saying this we are not blind to the continuing differences. Even though common horizons of understanding have opened up in our dialogue, specifically on the issue of the Church's sacramentality and in relation to the ecclesially constitutive nature of the ministerial office, there remains a need for more detailed clarification, particularly concerning how unity in legitimate diversity is conceived, and on the question of the concrete arrangement of ministry in the Church. The following Report is certainly not a statement of consensus: its conclusion is rather a substantiated recommendation to open an official dialogue on questions of church and communion between the CPCE and the Roman Catholic Church.

In the face of the challenges facing current protestant-Catholic discussion, a deeper exchange seems to us – especially at this level – both sensible and likely to lead further, given that on the protestant side Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist churches can make the Reformation contribution to ecumenical dialogue jointly. During our Consultation we found it enriching for each side to place itself in the other's position, and so to reflect on its own tradition. Conceptual horizons were thereby widened and dimensions attained in which our common ground was much more apparent than what still divides us. The outcome of our conversations is that we are much closer to one another on ecclesiological issues than we had hitherto imagined. We are together convinced that communion arises from common confession of the one apostolic faith, sacramental fellowship and a common ecclesial ministry focussed on Word and sacrament. Not least, the striving within protestantism towards pulpit and Table fellowship against the background of the last four centuries shows a common will to overcome divisions and a purposeful quest for the visible unity of Christ's Church. The resulting common points of contact give scope for a hopeful protestant-Catholic conversation, which should in our view be pursued and deepened, *ut unum sint*: 'that they all (who believe in Jesus Christ) may be one' (John 17:21).

**Dr Karl-Heinz Wieseemann**

Bishop of Speyer

**Christian Schad**

Church President,

Protestant Church of the Palatinate



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## **Introduction**

### **Ecclesiology as an ecumenical task**

1. The ecumenical movement of the 20th century unleashed an incredible dynamic. Starting with discussions in the Twenties, in which church representatives sought tentatively to break through centuries of mutual silence, it proved possible soon after the Second World War to find and develop forms of regular theological conversation. These led to systematic discussions with real content, initially between Protestants; then, following the Second Vatican Council, also involving the Catholic Church. Understanding was reached on many questions until then considered controversial. In 1999 a Common Declaration was signed between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church recognising fundamental consensus on questions of justification. The World Methodist Council concurred with this in 2006, as did the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion in 2017.

A question still left open concerns understandings of Church. Ecumenical discussion has been content up to now to differentiate various types of church and to set out, on the basis of these, various approaches to questions of union and communion. Up to now there has been no consensus whether or how far such approaches are consistent with one another, nor on the related ecclesiological questions.

### **The Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 and its ecumenical significance**

2. For centuries no church communion existed between the churches of the Reformation on account of their differences of confession. Protestant Christians of different confessions were unable to share the sacrament of Holy Communion before the union movements of the 19th century. After the Second World War, dialogue on declaring and realising church communion took place for the first time, aimed at overcoming differences over christology, the Lord's Supper and predestination. This was achieved in the Leuenberg Agreement, on the basis of which the Lutheran, Reformed and United churches of Europe were able to declare church communion and establish pulpit and table fellowship. The Leuenberg Agreement formed the basis for the

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Leuenberg Church Fellowship, which has called itself the 'Community of Protestant Churches in Europe' (CPCE) since 2003.<sup>1</sup>

Although differences dating from the Reformation era and dividing the churches on central points of the Reformation confessions were thus overcome, questions of 'being Church' were not at that stage addressed. That happened only in the study *The Church of Jesus Christ* (CJC), adopted by the General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1994. In this, for the first time, the Reformation churches of Europe set out their common understanding of the Church and its task. This text drew out the ecclesiological implications of the Leuenberg Agreement and fulfilled a prerequisite for grasping the implication of the communion declared in the Agreement from an ecumenical perspective.

### Church communion as a shared challenge

3. Up to now there have only been approaches to concepts of church communion common to protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> A broad dialogue at that level regarding a common ecclesiological declaration has not so far taken place. Specific questions concerning justification, the sacraments and ministry have stood in the foreground. In such individual questions of theological controversy it has often been possible to achieve notable convergence, frequently even consensus; but the question of the church remains open. On this the issue of communion between protestant and Catholic depends. It is urgent to bring clarity to this question, not least because of the fact that insufficiently theologically based practice has established itself in many places.

### The starting point of the present Report

4. 'The importance of this study should be made clear by comparison with the texts of the Second Vatican Council ... The theological significance of the Leuenberg church documents should be assessed by comparing them to Roman Catholic conciliar texts' Wilhelm Hüffmeier begins and ends with these remarks his Introduction to the bilingual edition of the study *The*

**Kommentiert [JB1]:** I'm not quite sure what to do with this sentence – because the name is the CPCE in English, but in the rest of the document we're translating it out as 'communion'. We might need a footnote

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: The official German name „Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa“ was translated as Community of Protestant Churches in Europe” in 2003, although more recent discussions have led to the decision that "(church) communion" better corresponds to the German term "(Kirchen)gemeinschaft" in this connection.

<sup>2</sup> Mention should be made here of the 1984 Lutheran-Catholic document *Facing Unity: Models, forms and phases of Catholic-Lutheran church fellowship* (GinA 2, 443-484).

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*Church of Jesus Christ*;<sup>3</sup> for in this text ‘the essence of the Church according to protestant understanding, its task in today’s world, its ecumenical outlook and the main principles of its relationship to Judaism and to non-Christian religions and world-views are set out’ (*ibid.*). The thoughts that follow adopt Hüffmeier’s remarks. Their aim is to assess and measure in concrete terms what convergence exists between the understanding of the Church in CJC and in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. In particular the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), is placed alongside CJC, giving rise to an extraordinary dialogue. The comparison shows clearly that CJC makes implicit reference to LG; conversely, there were ideas from earlier ecumenical dialogue integrated into LG, albeit without express reference to the connection. The present Report aims to uncover these implicit references and to show that a further conversation on ecclesiological questions would stand a good chance of bringing results.

### **The structure of the present Report**

5. The Report is divided into four parts. In the first Chapter it considers the starting-point from which each ecclesiological question is posed. Confessional ecclesiologies are admittedly founded on different basic concepts – the church as *creatura Verbi*, the church as sacrament of salvation – but their relationship to each other is one of complementarity rather than of mutual exclusion. This is emphasised in the second Chapter, which pursues the relationship between justification and Church. If there is agreement on basic truths of the doctrine of justification, that must show itself in ecclesiology; including in the issues around ministry, which will be pursued in the third Chapter. If this, finally, points to a mutual understanding on fundamental ecclesiological issues, it will raise the question why agreement on the question of church communion should not also be possible. That will be addressed in the fourth Chapter.

### **The methodology of the present Report**

6. In seeking mutual understanding on the question of the Church, this Report adopts a methodology developed in earlier ecumenical debate. Such understanding was sought in reaching the Leuenberg Agreement, by the following two stages: (1) A basic consensus was sought, which seemed capable of sustaining the communion that was to be declared; (2) On certain controversial questions relevant to the confessions concerned, the goal was not consensus, but rather

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<sup>3</sup> CJC, p. 17. 20 (1st-3rd Ed., pp.9 *et seq.*). He expressly names the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG), the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* (UR), the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* (NA) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Today’s World *Gaudium et Spes* (GS). In this context mention should also be made of the Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH).

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a mutual understanding whether condemnations formerly pronounced still applied to the teaching of the partner church. If such mutual understanding could be achieved, no obstacle was seen to further convergence. The Lutheran-Catholic dialogue followed a similar approach: not working on the basis that consensus must be reached on every specific question, but rather asking whether agreement on fundamentals was in a position to carry those differences still existing. The present Report points to the possibility of mutual understanding in individual, still controversial questions, whose detailed clarification appears vital to a consensus on basic questions of ecclesiology and likely to produce results. In the quest for such understanding the Working Group allowed itself to be led in part by the 'receptive ecumenism' method. This takes account of the fact that the churches engaged in dialogue are not static entities, but themselves experience constant tensions, growth and upheaval. They are in the midst of learning processes that are in part coloured by their ecumenical relationships, but which also themselves facilitate and encourage such relationships. Dialogue partners contribute not only their strengths and gifts, but also their open questions. Thus the confessional traditions contribute to enriching each other and foster an ecumenism of gifts. In this way the 'receptive ecumenism' method has complemented the 'differentiating consensus' method and decisively influenced the discussion. Thus the road to full communion becomes a process of self-examination, repentance and mutual reception.

### **Purpose and goal of the present Report**

7. This Report asks after the likelihood of a dialogue over questions of Church and ecclesial communion between the Roman Catholic Church and those protestant churches in membership of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe ('CPCE') producing results. It indicates those points and arguments which militate in favour of a successful discussion. Thus it offers the authorities and institutions competent to give such a commission a basis on which to decide.

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## 1. Foundation, shape and mission of the Church

### 1.1 The ecclesiological significance of the distinction and connection between foundation, shape and mission

8. It is, in the first place, decisive for the Christian understanding of the Church that it has its foundation in God. The Church owes its being, nature and life to the action of the triune God, Creator, Redeemer and author of final consummation. In his creative action God not only bestows upon his creatures an independent existence; he also sustains and guards them from day to day. He does this, in particular, by rescuing them from the alienation caused by sin and leading them, in the power of the Spirit, into new communion with himself and each other. In both *Lumen Gentium* and CJC the action of the triune God forms the starting-point for an understanding of the Church's life and shape. The mystery of the Church is revealed in its foundation by the triune God (LG 5; cf. CJC I, 1.1). Thus the Church, as the Communion of Saints, is on the one hand distinguished from God as its foundation; but, on the other hand, it is only the Church of God insofar as it corresponds in the reality of its life to God, its foundation and origin. How this can happen in a situation of societal secularisation and religious pluralism is a major theme of the Second Vatican Council texts and of the CPCE's study of the Church (CJC).

9. The Church's nature is expounded in the CPCE's ecclesiological study through its treatment of the Church's foundation, shape and mission. These three dimensions are fundamental. The Church has its origin and foundation in the action of the triune God, by which it lives. This origin and foundation determines *how* the Church lives (its shape) and *to what end* (its mission or purpose). The mission of the Church must be seen against the horizon of eschatological consummation. Thus the distinction between the Church's foundation, shape and mission is superimposed on those contrasts between true and false Church, invisible and visible Church, which were decisive for Reformation ecclesiology. Both Reformation contrasts had primarily a critical function. The distinction between true and false Church emphasises the need to ask repeatedly whether the Church is consistent with God's Word in its message and its way of life. The distinction between visible and invisible Church takes account of the fact that the Church, as visible worshipping community, is a *corpus permixtum* comprising both sinners and righteous, in contrast to the *communio sanctorum* which is, in the understanding of the Reformation, the communion of all those who, in the true faith, share in holy things.

In its concentration on the Church's foundation, shape and mission, the CPCE's study of the Church is concerned 'to explain what the church is, whereby it is recognized and what specific

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contribution to the life of society' can be expected from the churches in Europe (CJC, Introduction 1.1). This is a different perspective from that of the Reformation era. It results from the fact that different ecclesiological questions are posed by modern conditions since, in the light of secularisation and developing religious pluralism, it is no longer self-evident why there should be something like Church at all. Accordingly it is no longer a primary concern of CJC to make the distinction between the visible Church and the true, invisible *communio sanctorum* into a critical touchstone for gauging the ecclesial validity of existing church structures. Its concern is rather to make clear what Church is, and where and how it can be experienced. This change in ecclesiological perspective can therefore be understood as an answer to the multiplicity of religious forms, and the process of secularisation as the context in which the churches in Europe exist. At the same time and combined with this, CJC pursues the ecumenical goal of progressing the quest for unity in the face of the churches' divisions and dissociation. It thus falls into line with the ecumenical movement and sees itself explicitly as a Reformation contribution to church unity.

10. On the horizon of the Second Vatican Council a shift in ecclesiological thinking can also be made out. From the time of the Reformation, the attention of Catholic theology, and above all of the teaching magisterium, had long focussed on a contentious theological safeguarding of the concept of Church. Admittedly the Council of Trent did not produce an officially formulated ecclesiology; but the direction was clear: nobody could be saved outside the true Catholic faith.<sup>4</sup> Though medieval scholastic theology had offered another terminology of Church, the ecclesial concept of the Italian contentious theologian Robert Bellarmine S.J. encouraged a one-dimensional perspective. He defined the Church as the community of men and women bound together by confessing the same Christian faith and sharing in the same sacraments, under the oversight of legitimate pastors and principally of Christ's one representative on earth, the Roman Pontiff.<sup>5</sup> This concept of Church was totally driven by the perspective of the Church's organised juridical form with the associated aspect of visibility. The *congregatio sanctorum* was interpreted as *societas perfecta*. It was clearly recognisable from outside: its members were those who had received baptism, adhered firmly to the Creed, and made obedient submission to the Church's leadership. Anybody excluded from the Church on account of grave fault was unable to share in

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Heinrich Denzinger: *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*; improved, expanded, translated into German and edited by Peter Hünermann in collaboration with Helmut Hoping; 40th Impression, Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, No. 1870.

<sup>5</sup> R. Bellarmine, *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos* IV, 3,2 (*Opera omnia*, ed J. Fèvre, Vol. II, Paris 1870, 317 et seq.).

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the sacraments, was straying from the Church's way and headed towards perdition. Those who dissociated themselves from the Church were therefore also incapable of salvation. The Catholic Church never fully adopted this juristic-institutional definition, still less was it raised to the status of church teaching; but references to such thinking can be found in ecclesial teaching documents, not least in Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis* and beyond that, in *Lumen Gentium* (Nos. 13, 14, 15).<sup>6</sup>

11. *Lumen Gentium* makes the perspective shift in Catholic ecclesiology apparent by presenting the Church's nature, mission and form from various perspectives. The concept of the 'Body of Christ' flows from growing criticism of the stagnation of the Church's outward life in hierarchical and institutional terms, and from growing awareness of the *actuosa participatio* (SC 14)\* of the entire People of God. The concept of the 'People of God' can be understood in theological terms as a reaction against the clericalisation of the concept of the Church occasioned by the term 'Body of Christ': it aims to place stronger emphasis on the Church's historicity and historical relativity, its pilgrim character. At the same time, the concept of the Church as 'Universal Sacrament of Salvation' seeks to bring out the relationship between the Church's hidden reality, which can only be grasped in faith, and its visible institutional form; it expresses the newly-achieved salvation-historical point of view. Finally, the concept of 'Church as *Communio*' responds to the primeval longing of human beings for personal communion with God and with each other, and prepares the way for understanding the Church as local church and local congregation. All these perspectives serve to introduce a basic vision founded on a sacramental thought pattern: to that extent the notion of sacramentality is one of the bases of conciliar ecclesiology (*v. inf.* §§ 19 & 34). As God's pilgrim People on earth, the Church is simultaneously a sacrament in God's community of salvation. In this way one can identify Jesus Christ as the foundation of the Church; the form of the church is expressed in its hierarchical and synodical constitution and in the apostolate of the laity; and the universal call to holiness in the Church through Christ is consummated in the Church's eschatological destiny, revealed as communion with the triune God in Heaven.

12. The change of ecclesiological perspective manifest both in CJC and in *Lumen Gentium* in the distinction they draw between the Church's foundation, shape and mission brings with it at the same time the task of transcending together the misunderstanding, linked in the Reformation

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<sup>6</sup> To the extent that the Church is both spiritual and necessarily externally visible, it also comprehends those who, despite having outwardly separated from it, continue to seek God. Robert Bellarmine never ruled out that view of the Church's boundary.

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era and repeatedly since then with the protestant distinction between visible and invisible Church, that that distinction means the Church as Communion of Saints must *in principle* be invisible. The charge levelled by Catholic theologians is that the Reformation understanding makes the Church a *civitas platonica*. The Reformers tried to guard against this misapprehension; but it has persisted stubbornly to the present day, furthered by certain phases in the post-Reformation development of doctrine.

13. In the face of this misunderstanding CJC makes clear that the Church as Communion of Saints is founded on God's 'creative action' (CJC I 1.2) and "realises itself as the body of Christ ... in its historical life' (CJC I 2.1); for the biblical image of the Body expresses 'how the church lives and wherein its being exists' (CJC I 2.1). The Church of Jesus Christ, therefore, does not exist as Body of Christ *beyond* the form in which it lives. The traditional Reformation distinction between visible and invisible Church is thus held and explained as differentiation between two linguistic forms: the language of the Church of faith, and the language of the churches' visible reality. CJC maintains that the Church is itself 'an object of faith and ... at the same time a visible community, a social reality that can be experienced in a multiplicity of historic expressions' (CJC I 2.2). This pronouncement is reminiscent in its terminology of the distinction and connection between visible gathering and spiritual community in LG 8, and shows a convergent interest with the statement that 'the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things... [are] not to be considered as two realities, but ... [form] one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element'.

Insofar as the distinction between foundation, shape and mission begins by *not* understanding the Church of faith and the visible Church as two distinct entities, it can be read as an implicit answer to the conciliar formulation which, for its part, offers an implicit examination of the Reformation distinction between visible and invisible Church. The differentiation between foundation, shape and mission can be shared together if it is indeed true that the Church is not capricious in its form, but transparent for its foundation, hence recognisable as Church of Jesus Christ and ultimately in terms of its purpose.

14. But the convergence in the understanding of the distinctions between Church of faith and visible Church in CJC and between visible assembly and spiritual community in LG goes further. For these distinctions leave space for the thought that no historic church can claim for itself fully to represent the Church's reality, nor to be directly identical with the Church of Jesus Christ. CJC accordingly stresses that the Church as creature of the divine Word cannot 'simply be equated with one of the historical churches or with the entirety of all churches' (CJC I 2.2). LG, on the one hand, teaches that the one Church of Christ 'subsists in the Catholic Church, which



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is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him'. But this leads into the assertion that 'many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible structure' which, 'as gifts belonging proper to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity' (LG 8). The reality of the church entails elements of sanctification and truth which can also be found outside it: there is ecclesial reality outside the Catholic Church. The line of argument of the Constitution on the Church and the Decree on Ecumenism does not therefore make a *direct* and *undifferentiated* identification of the Roman Catholic Church with the Church of Jesus Christ. To do so would also not be consistent with the fact that the Orthodox churches are recognised as sister churches, though they cannot be said to be 'governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him'. But, in the conviction of the Council, as expressly stated in the Decree on Ecumenism, the recognition of ecclesial reality outside the Catholic Church applies also to the churches and ecclesial communities separated from the Catholic Church in the West

## 1.2 The Church as *creatura Verbi* and its recognisability in the world

15. The introduction to the first chapter of CJC, on 'The nature of the church as communion of saints' states that 'The churches of the Reformation share the conviction with other Christian denominations that this community does not have its foundation or mission in itself; that therefore its shape is not arbitrary and that it cannot set autonomously its own historical task' (CJC I). Here, therefore, it is expressly stated that the shape of the Church is not an arbitrary matter. The distinction between foundation, shape and mission is often misunderstood as though it justified a random variety in the structuring of the Church. But that is not the intention of the distinction. The point is rather that the Church – which does not exist otherwise than in the historic forms of its life – has to be consistent in form with its divine foundation. As CJC expressly maintains, the Church has, as the chosen People of God and as the Body of Christ, the task 'of witnessing in its historical expression to its true original nature' (CJC I 2.2). God's action in founding and maintaining the Church 'provides the norm for shaping the church and defines its mission from which the commission of Christians then results' (CJC I). This is consistent with Reformation theology and with the third proposition of the Barmen Theological Declaration, rooted in it, which rejects the false teaching 'that the Church could have permission to hand over the form of its message and of its order to whatever it itself might wish or to the vicissitudes of the prevailing ideological and political convictions of the day'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cited from the Website of the United Reformed Church ([http://www.ucc.org/beliefs\\_barmen-declaration](http://www.ucc.org/beliefs_barmen-declaration)).

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16. But how is the Church now to reflect its foundation and origin in the form of its life? CJC answers this question, first, by maintaining that the Church is ‘the creature of the Word that calls for faith by which God reconciles the alienated and rebellious human race and binds it to himself by justifying and sanctifying it in Christ, by renewing it in the Holy Spirit and by calling it to become his people’ (CJC I. 1.1). God’s Word is both origin and foundation of the Church and instrument of the Holy Spirit (CJC I 1.2). The Church is thus the creature of the divine Word (*creatura Verbi*, cp. CJC I 1.1) and at the same time formed by the Spirit through that Word. It is accordingly ‘the task of the ecclesial community constantly to examine its shape, and to reform it (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) so that it is in accordance with the essential attributes given in its origin’ (CJC I 2.4). The shape of the Church and its orientation towards its goal, by repeatedly examining whether the form of its life reflects its foundation, are themselves a gift of the Holy Spirit.

17. As *creatura Verbi*, the Church reflects its foundation when – and only when – it proclaims the Gospel purely and administers the sacraments in accordance with their institution. This point is made by CJC with an appeal to Art. VII of the *Confessio Augustana* and consistently with the Leuenberg Agreement. Agreement in the true preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with their institution are stated in CA VII to be necessary, but also sufficient, conditions for church unity. That Article appears in the first Part of the CA, whose aim is to articulate agreement in faith. The ecclesiological statement in CA VII builds on the conviction that the condition for church unity which it sets out is shared (or should be able to be shared) equally by Catholics and protestants (or, as they were then described, adherents of ‘the old religion’ and of reform). That the Church, as Communion of Saints, is constituted by Word and sacrament and that agreement in the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments is constitutive for the Church’s unity and recognisability, is firmly held today on both sides of Catholic-protestant dialogue.<sup>8</sup>

18. Pure preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments in accordance with their institution are described in CJC as ‘distinguishing marks’ of the Church (CJC I 2.4.1). They make it possible ‘to recognize whether an actual visible church may be acknowledged as a member of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church’ (*ibid.*). This implies that the Church of Jesus Christ can be recognised and experienced in the world, and how that can be done. But it

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. for instance the study of the joint working group of the German Bishops’ Conference and the Church Leadership of the United Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD): *Communio Sanctorum – The Church as Communion of Saints* (Paderborn & Frankfurt-am-Main, 2000).

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is also stated that these are not the Church's only distinguishing marks. Further such marks, by which God's grace is made present, have been named in both the Lutheran and the Reformed tradition (CJC I 2.4.2). For Luther and the Lutheran doctrinal tradition the list includes 'the office of the keys (confession of sin and absolution), the order of the ministry of the word (bishops, pastors etc.), prayer, suffering for the sake of the gospel as well as obedience to the second table of the Ten Commandments' (CJC I 2.4.2). The Reformed tradition adds in particular the identifying marks of discipline and obedience in faith. From this it is first of all clear that the *satis est* of CA VII should not be read restrictively; for the Church of Jesus Christ does not derive its recognisable form only from the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament, but also in the aspects of its life just described. It is, however, maintained that the Church can be *unambiguously* known in Word and sacrament, whereas the identifying marks of Christian life are not unambiguous in the same way. One cannot 'recognize from the good works of Christians in the everyday world whether and in what way they are being done in faith' (*ibid.*). The ministerial office plays a particular role here (*vid.* Ch. 3).

19. Catholic ecclesiology is also influenced by the question of the relationship between the Church's foundation and its shape. In its concept of sacrament, Catholic theology postulates a relationship between Christ and the Church. The Constitution on the Church introduces the sacramental understanding of the Church under the title *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (LG 1-8), and thus links the concepts of sacrament and mystery. Altogether this is an ecclesiological scheme which aims to identify and explain the following connections: (1) 'The Church is in Christ, like a sacrament' (*Ecclesia sit in Christo veluti sacramentum*, LG 1). The Church is therefore not a sacrament in itself, but has sacramental character only in relation to Christ. In Christ the Church has its foundation. Thus the statement regarding the Church is in truth a christological one. Christ himself – not the Church – is the Light of the world; yet Christ's light shines in the Church. Christ, therefore, is the author of all salvific action. (2) 'Sign and instrument' (*signum et instrumentum*, LG 1): in Christ's saving work the Church must be understood – in a derivative sense – as a sign and instrument which he himself institutes. It operates like a sacrament 'of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race', but is not itself a sacrament. Thus the Church is the mediation between God and humanity; in him the Church acts as a subject in its own right. (3) The Church is 'the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery' (*Ecclesia, seu regnum Christi iam praesens in mysterio*, LG 3). In the trinitarian economy of salvation the Church is anchored, through the Holy Spirit, in the mystery of God's self-revelation in Christ. Its foundation lies in God's creative action for humanity, its goal in Christ's eschatological Second Coming to redeem humanity. To that extent the Church is itself the mystery of God's King-

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dom and thus an object of faith. (4) 'Visible in the world' (*In mundo visibiliter*, LG 3): Through God's power the Church grows visibly in the world. Its visibility is thus an essential aspect of its sacramentality, corresponding to the mystery of the trinitarian economy of salvation, and expressly includes the manner of its earthly existence.

20. Nor is the understanding of the Church as *creatura Verbi* foreign to Catholic ecclesiology. Though this expression cannot be found in the language of the church's teaching, it is nonetheless present in practice. The Church of Jesus Christ emanates as a whole from the Word of God (LG 5.1). That Word is proclaimed, heard and lived in the Church. For God has created all things through the Word; his Son, the eternal Word, lives among humanity to bring tidings from God; the faithful receive God's Word in their faith and life with the support of the Holy Spirit. The Constitution on Revelation *Dei Verbum* contains a theology of the Word of God according to which the Word is the briefest summary of the entire revelation. In its tradition as Holy Scripture, the Word of God is the bedrock of the Church. To that extent the Church bears witness to the presence of the Word of God in the world, and sees its mission in proclamation of the Gospel. Thus the Church is wholly directed to the spread of the divine revelation.

### 1.3 The Church's essential attributes in their significance for its life

21. What role do the essential characteristics ascribed to the Church in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed play in relation to its form and recognisability? Until now no sufficient understanding has been reached on this question in protestant-Catholic conversations. By maintaining in LG 8 that the one Church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church, that church asserts that the essential attributes of the Church belong to it as *visibly* constituted; whereas CJC, following the tradition of the Reformation, views unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity as characteristics of the Church *of faith*, thereby emphasising that they belong to the Church of Jesus Christ by virtue of its divine origin (CJC I 2.3), rather than by any human act. Since the Church owes its nature to its divine origin, unity is not an 'ideal still to be achieved' by human activity (*ibid.*).

22. The point, therefore, of characterising the essential attributes as characteristics of the Church of faith is to maintain that its nature is wholly grounded in the action of God. That does not mean, though, that these attributes cannot find any perceptible expression; for that would imply that the Church were not in principle recognisable by its essential attributes – a notion that has already been rejected above. For though it may not be the task of human beings to realise the Church's essential attributes, yet belief in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church leads

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inexorably to the task of giving expression to the Church's nature in its outward form, i.e. of testifying to the Church's essential attributes in its life.

23. CJC illustrates, for each essential attribute in turn, the consequences of confessing the Church's unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity for its form and witness as it lives its life. This takes place by reflecting which aspect of the divine action each characteristic brings out. The Church's unity as Communion of Saints is founded on, and points toward, the work of the triune God 'who in the power of the reconciliation in Jesus Christ brings the creation to its completion through the Holy Spirit' (CJC I 2.3). The implication of this for the churches is the 'task of witnessing in visible ways to this gift of God as the foundation for living fellowship among the churches in the diversity of their historic shapess' (CJC I 2.3). In protestant understanding, the task of bearing witness to the unity founded in God's action includes the ecumenical obligation of striving to overcome the divisions between the churches. CJC reflects how this might be possible, and is thus itself a contribution to that striving for church unity.

24. It is similarly deduced in LG 3 and 4 that it is Christ's will and prayer that the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit realised in the Godhead should also become historic reality in the unity and communion of the Church. For that he gave his life (Jn 11:52). According to *Lumen Gentium*, the Church's unity is decided in the mystery of the triune God. The Church itself arises covertly from this unity of the Trinitarian mystery and grows visibly in the world. The Church is in Christ the visible sign and instrument of the unity which has its foundation in the triune God's action in the world.

25. The *holiness of the Church*, according to CJC, is founded on this and points to the triune God's action by which he 'has overcome the power of sin in Jesus Christ, sanctifies people in the Holy Spirit by the assurance of forgiveness and thus brings them together to be the community of saints' (CJC I 2.3). From this follows, for Christians and for the whole Church, 'the task of shaping their lives in obedience to the command of God' (CJC I 2.3). In relation to the ecumenical controversial question of the relationship between holiness and sin, CJC maintains that God's sanctifying grace enables the Church and individual Christians to acknowledge the guilt of their faults – indeed allows the Church to recognise itself as 'the greatest sinner' (M. Luther; CJC I 2.3) – and to ask God for forgiveness. Holiness is therefore understood as the factor which enables the Church's recognition of sin as well as that of the individual.

26. Without denying God's holiness as the factor enabling the Church's and individual Christians' recognition of sin, Catholic ecclesiology rejects explicit language referring to 'the Church as sinner', since the Church's holiness and divine origin rule out the possibility of the Church – as

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Church – sinning and thus estranging itself from its foundation. But the Church is a sinner insofar as it sins in its members and groupings and – supported by Christ – takes upon itself the burden of sin in solidarity with sinners. The Church’s holiness is indestructible, for Christ is the ‘uniquely holy’ (LG 39) who gave himself for the Church and thereby sanctified it. All are, through Christ’s grace, called to this holiness in the Church and made truly partakers in it through baptism. This by no means implies, however, that the Church’s holiness is comprehensively realised in its life. LG 8 states rather that the Church, by contrast with Christ, is ‘at the same time holy and always in need of being purified always follows the path of penance and renewal’. The Church is to that extent affected by sin.

27. The *catholicity of the Church*, according to CJC, is founded on its living communion with the triune God, who in his Word promises salvation to the whole world. The Church is thus not limited by human associations, but all-embracing (‘catholic’) as a communion created by God (CLC I 2.3); hence at all times and in all places. The gift of this communion, which transcends the boundaries of human associations, gives rise in protestant understanding to the task of witnessing to the all-embracing Communion of Saints ‘in transcending boundaries of nation, race, society, culture and gender’ (CJC I 2.3). For ‘the Church is the promise of a community that comprehends all humankind’ in its catholicity (*ibid.*).

28. LG labels the wealth of salvific gifts entrusted to the Church ‘catholicity’. It is the Church’s purpose to realise this wealth bestowed by Christ in its entire, and also in its sacramental, life. One can receive the full abundance of the means of grace only through the Catholic Church (UR 3). This catholicity, as a characteristic of the Church, is a gift, and at the same time a continuing task. The Church is called to give ever stronger expression to this catholicity in its life. Christianity’s divisions are however a hindrance for the Church in making the fullness of catholicity entrusted to it a reality (UR 4). Since the Catholic Church alone cannot fully realise its catholicity, the quest for the restoration of unity can never be abandoned. Pursuit of the Church’s goal makes the search for unity compelling. Every step of ecumenicity is catholicity; and catholicity would be self-contradictory if it were not aimed at ecumenicity, at unity in diversity.

29. The apostolicity of the Church, according to CJC, is ultimately grounded in ‘the Word of God, which constitutes the church’ (CJC I 2.3). The Church is apostolic insofar as it is built on the foundation of the Gospel witnessed to by the Apostles and passed down in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. From this apostolicity flows the Church’s commission of ‘authentic missionary witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithfulness to the apostolic message’ (CJC I 2.3).

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30. It is here that the Catholic understanding of the apostolic succession also has its theological origin and foundation. Apostolicity – meaning loyalty to the mission entrusted to the apostles by Christ – needs to be secured and worked out in concrete historical terms. Christ placed Peter at the head of the other apostles: the bishops, as successors of the apostles, together with the Successor of Peter, are together sent by Christ to proclaim, to lead and to sanctify. The apostolic mission is entrusted to the College of Bishops. This mission of the Church will last until the end of the world (LG 18, 19).

31. The Church stands, once and for all, on the foundation of the apostles. The churches participating in ecumenical dialogue confess together in the Creed the continuing normativity of the apostolic witness. Far-reaching convergences exist in the more detailed description of apostolicity. So, with a view to this, the ecumenically significant question to which ecumenical dialogue seeks an answer is raised: in what sense does the *successio apostolica* belong to the *traditio apostolica*, and how does each relate to the other?

#### **1.4 The Church in the salvific work of Jesus Christ**

32. In its exposition of the essential attributes, CJC makes two points. First, it explains the essential attributes as essential goals, grounded in God's nature, towards which the Church's shape must necessarily be directed so as to enable it to bear witness to its foundation and origin. Secondly, it makes clear that (and how) the Church can also be seen from the protestant side as 'sign and instrument' of salvation. For the Church is an instrument of the Holy Spirit in staying true to its task of witnessing to, and becoming ever more comprehensively and deeply, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. Just as the Holy Spirit eternally realises the community and reciprocity of the Father and Son within the Godhead, so as Christ's Spirit in the world it united human beings with Christ and each other in community and reciprocity. 'The Spirit of God does not isolate, but unites. The Spirit is the power for community originating in the communion of the Father and the Son' (CJC I 1.3). A corresponding statement is made in *Lumen Gentium* that God 'does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness' (LG 9). Thus the Church is able at the same time as Communion of Saints, through the working of the Spirit, to be a *sign* of the coming salvation in the rule of God, by witnessing to participation in God's salvation as the foundation of its communion and realising this communion in the form of its life.

33. The Church is 'sign and instrument of the deepest unification with God and of the unity of all humanity' (LG 1) in that it lets itself be oriented wholly by its divine foundation and origin in the

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form of its life as Body of Christ and in its witness, and points as a communion towards the coming community of salvation in God's Kingdom. The Church's goal 'draws' it on its way in and for the world: that goal is not yet achieved. Its completion will come as the Father's gift in Christ through the Holy Spirit; waiting, praying and endurance (*hypomonē*) thus remain common basics of all ecumenical endeavour.

34. The description of the Church in *Lumen Gentium* as sacrament has long been a point of contention between protestant and Catholic teaching. But convergence is also possible on this point. It should first be noted that LG 1 states the Church to be, as sign and instrument of the deepest unification with God, *similar to a sacrament*. That means the term sacrament is not being used of the Church to define it; rather the Church is being compared to a sacrament because intimate unification with God is communicated through it. In like manner in protestant teaching, the Church is understood as means of salvation, in that the Gospel is proclaimed in it and the sacraments administered. Through the means of salvation, God gives communion with himself and for human beings amongst themselves. To that extent 'the life of the Church is communion with the triune God' (CJC I 2.3). In this it is important for the protestant understanding that the Church is wholly directed and permeated in the form of its life by its foundation in God and its eschatological goal. The distinction between foundation, shape and mission aims to show this inward connection as a constitutive factor in the Church's identity as Church. The christological foundation of this connection is implicit in *Lumen Gentium* 3 when it is stated that 'All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the Light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains'.

35. These leading purposes of the Church have long been expounded in a theologically controversial sense. But today the Church as *creatura Verbi* and the Church as similar to a sacrament can be interpreted in their relationship to each other. The sacrament concept, in particular, suggests a relaxation of absolute insistence on the Church's visibility in favour of a more balanced relationship between the Church's foundation, form and eschatological goal. Seen from this common viewpoint, the once theologically controversial characterisations lose their divisive importance.

## 2. Church and Justification

36. Agreement on an understanding of God's salvific action as expressed in the doctrine of justification has been a central theme of several bilateral conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation. This made it possible to express a consensus on basic questions of that doctrine in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*



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(JDDJ) and in the *Official Common Statement*. Significant points of agreement have also been maintained in other reports of conversations, which all lead to the question what consequences such agreement on this teaching, so central to the Reformation, can have. If consensus on this point is taken seriously it must have implications for questions of the churches' ecclesiology and practice. Such implications were touched upon but not realised in JDDJ (§ 42), and some voices were raised against the Declaration on account of this gap. The relationship between justification and ecclesiology therefore appears a highly charged question in ecumenical dialogue. The remarks which follow aim to show the possibility of ground-breaking common statements on the relationship between justification and Church, which would open the way to further agreement and hence open the churches' eyes to the dangers of confessional narrowing.

## 2.1 The common origin of justification and Church

37. The process of justification is a 'work of the triune God', in that Christ, as God's Son, is himself our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father' (JDDJ 15). This saving action of God in Christ is the foundation and source from which the faith and salvation of the individual, and simultaneously the Church as community of the faithful, emanate. In the Reformation theology of justification, the term 'justification' relates specifically to the justification of the sinner,<sup>9</sup> and thus to the *fruit* of God's saving action in the individual human being. This should be understood when the question of the correct relationship of Church and justification is raised below and both are said to have the same origin. This expresses the fact that the justification of the sinner and the sinner's admission into the Body of Christ – in other words, soteriological and ecclesiological aspects – should not be separated.

38. The message of the Gospel both testifies to and transmits God's saving action in Jesus Christ. It has its roots in God's promises to the People of Israel and is directed to the acceptance of all humanity into fellowship with God and each other. In the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God ascribes righteousness and eternal salvation to humanity, but in faith and not on the basis of human deserving.

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<sup>9</sup> The 1993 dialogue document *Church and Justification* (GinA 2, 485-565) uses the term 'justification' in this sense and therefore juxtaposes it to the term 'Church'. 'Our faith encompasses justification and the church as works of the triune God, which can be properly accepted only in faith in him. We believe in justification and the church as a *mysterium* ...' (§ 5). But this juxtaposition is not to be understood as though the Church were something of itself, which can be understood separately from or without belief in justification. 'When Paul describes the God's church in Corinth as 'those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints' he shows that the church and its members live entirely by the unmerited gift of Christ's grace, for which he expressly gives thanks (cf. 1 Cor 1:2-4)' (§ 8). 'The one and only foundation of the church is the saving work of God in Jesus Christ which has taken place once for all. that is to be said on the origin, nature and purpose of the church must be understood as an explanation of this principle.' (§ 10 = ch. 2, § 1).

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39. God grants human beings his salvation for no merit of theirs, and accepts them into the fellowship of his life. In this they recognise themselves as justified sinners, saved by God himself from sin and death. Christ himself is our righteousness: 'Together we confess: By y grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works'.<sup>10</sup>

40. The salvation of the individual and the fellowship of believers are both founded on God's free work of grace. That precedes every human response, whether in the faith of the individual, the ordering of the ecclesial community, in witness to salvation received or in service to the world.<sup>11</sup> In calling humanity to fellowship with himself and between themselves, God creates at the same time an instrument of his action: 'The Church is at once the place, the instrument and the minister chosen by God to make heard Christ's Word and to celebrate the sacraments in God's namethroughout the centuries'.<sup>12</sup> So the Church is simultaneously the fruit and the instrument of God's saving action in respect both of the individual and of the human race: it is *creatura et ministra Verbi*.<sup>13</sup> As such it always stands below the Gospel. 'This primacy of the gospel over the church was also attested jointly in regard to church order and the ministry'.<sup>14</sup>

41. The goal of God's redeeming and sanctifying action is an accepting and responding human faith. In faith humanity receives God's witness (Heb 11:2) and is called to a new life, a life of discipleship and service. Since it is part of this salvific action that God's will to save should reach its goal in human beings, should make them members in the Body of Christ and enlist them as 'colleagues' (II Cor 6:1) in his work, it amounts at the same time, originally and inseparably, to the salvation of the individual and the constitution of the community of the faithful. The process

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<sup>10</sup> JDDJ § 15: the formulation was borrowed from the 1980 dialogue document *All under one Christ* (§ 14) and used also in other documents (e.g. *Church and Justification* of 1993 § 4).

<sup>11</sup> The concluding document of the 1990 international Reformed-Roman Catholic dialogue formulates it as follows: 'Because we believe in Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind, we believe that we are justified by the grace which comes from him, by means of faith which is a living and life-giving faith. We believe that the faithful acceptance of justification is itself a gift of grace.' (*Towards a common understanding of the Church*, § 77). NB – All quotations here from the Reformed-Roman Catholic dialogue are taken from Chapter 2 of that document, which expresses the dialogue commission's agreement under the heading 'Our common confession of faith'.

<sup>12</sup> *Towards a common understanding of the Church*, § 86.

<sup>13</sup> This excerpt from the Malta Report is taken up again by the document *Church and Justification* (§ 38.).

<sup>14</sup> *Church and Justification* (§ 38 = ch 2, § 29), with reference to the Malta Report. DV 10.2 expresses it thus: 'This teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it, in teaching only what has been handed on, listening to the it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed'.

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of becoming church and the justification of the individual derive as a *single* original event from God's saving action. 'Together we confess the Church, for there is no justification in isolation. All justification takes place in the community of believers, or is ordered toward the gathering of such a community.'<sup>15</sup> Divine service is the strongest expression of this belonging together. In it, not only is justification proclaimed and accepted in faith; but this salvific event takes place, sustained by Christ, as the celebration of the Church which itself thereby becomes visible.

42. Church (including the sacraments and the ministerial office) serves the directness of the divine relationship of the individual and the Church's fellowship with each other. Church and justification therefore belong indissolubly together and by no means stand in rivalry to each other. This connection is expressed in the correlation of faith and baptism. 'Catholics and Lutherans in common believe in the triune God who for Christ's sake justifies sinners by grace through faith and makes them members of the church in baptism. Thus faith and baptism link justification and the church; the justified sinner is incorporated into the community of the faithful, the church, and becomes a member of it. Justification and the church thus stand in a vital relationship and are fruits of the saving activity of God.'<sup>16</sup>

43. Baptism incorporates the believer into Christ's death and resurrection. This is illustrated by the various expressions and similes by which Paul expresses the Christian's existence with Christ (*syn Christō*). Whoever believes in Christ is aligned (*symmorphos*) with him in vocation, justification and glorification (Rom 8:30 *et seq.*), is united (*symphylos*) with him in his death and will also rise with him (Rom 6:5). This shared experience opens for the believer a 'new life' (Rom 6:3), namely a life 'in Christ Jesus' (Rom 6:11, 8:1). But according to Paul, 'to be in Christ' always means at the same time 'to be one body' (Rom 12:5); it signifies membership of and in the community of the faithful, which the Holy Spirit creates and shapes (I Cor 12:13 *et seq.*)

44. The Lucan story of the 'birth of the Church' explains this in its own way, offering a view simultaneously back to its roots and into the future. The reception of the Spirit by simple members of God's people, as in the ancient prophecy of Joel, inaugurates 'the last days'. Peter explains what has happened to the surprised audience by reference to this prophetic promise. 'So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added (*prosetethasan*) [to their fellowship] that day about three thousand souls.' (Acts 2:17 *et seq.*, 41). Conversion leads not only to faith and sanctification, but also to community and unity. The Spirit 'gives birth' to the Church by its

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<sup>15</sup> Towards a common understanding of the Church, § 80.

<sup>16</sup> Church and Justification (§ 1).

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activity, brings it so to speak 'into the world' and thereby unites past and future. New members are constantly added to the fellowship. Sanctification and gathering are undivided. God gathers a people and makes it holy. That is the fundamental message of Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17.

45. A 'common origin' does not mean that the Church is separated from the salvation event as something secondary or other (although contemporaneous): so to speak as form (Church) alongside content (those who are justified), nor as 'house' alongside 'inhabitants', nor in the abstract as mere 'means' (proclamation, sacraments) to an 'end' (the salvation of humanity). Rather the language of common origin emphasises that the Church has always existed as the communion of the justified, *communio sanctorum*, and that there is no justification without incorporation into the Church, which is effected and shown forth by baptism into the body of Christ. This event is *eo ipso* Church.

## 2.2 Foundation in the Protestant tradition

46. CJC brings out that incorporation into the fellowship of the Church is not something secondary or subordinate to the promise of justification that leads to faith. Rather it is a case of a single, indivisible event. 'The church has its foundation in the Word of the triune God. It is a creature of the Word calling for faith by which God reconciles the alienated and rebellious human race and relates it to himself by justifying and sanctifying it in Christ, by renewing it in the Holy Spirit and by calling it to be his people' (CJC I 1.1). The same Word that calls to faith at the same time creates the Church.<sup>17</sup> 'The Spirit of God does not isolate but unites. The Spirit is the power of community originating from the communion of the Father and the Son. (cf. 2 Cor 13:13 with Romans 15:13 and 2 Tim 1:7)' (CJC I 1.3).

47. In making such assertions, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship's texts stand in the tradition of the churches associated in it. The indivisibility of salvation history and hence the indissoluble link between salvation and Church were self-evident to the authors of the Reformation confessional documents. These give expression to differing but complementary perspectives.

48. In the *Confessio Augustana* the emphasis lies on proclamation in word and sacrament. After Articles 1-4, whose topic is human sin and God's salvific action in Christ, the necessity of the

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<sup>17</sup> This has already been stated more briefly in LA 13 (*infra.*, § 64).

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preaching office is declared in Article 5.<sup>18</sup> This fundamental task of proclaiming the Gospel is, according to Article 7, constitutive for the existence and unity of the Church. The reason the Church is *congregatio sanctorum* is because, within it, the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are administered in fidelity to the divine Word. The true Church is recognised as Body of Christ by these 'outward signs'; and through these means Christ, as the Head, brings about fellowship in faith through his sanctifying and strengthening Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

49. The Reformed confessional documents lay stress on the statement that God's covenant with his people is constituted anew in Christ. A broad meaning is ascribed to the term 'Church', as in Chapter 17 of the Second Helvetic Confession, which begins 'Because God from the beginning would have men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth, it is altogether necessary that there always should have been, and should be now, and to the end of the world, a Church.'<sup>20</sup> The formulation 'must always have existed' is here concerned not only to emphasise the necessity of the preaching office for the proclamation of the saving Gospel, but at the same time to stress that the call to salvation is *eo ipso* a call to the Church as communion of saints, assembled for the praise and worship of God. 'The Church's vocation calling is set within the triune God's eternal plan of salvation for humankind.'<sup>21</sup> The Reformed confessional documents emphasise the connection between the Old and the New Covenant.<sup>22</sup> They speak of one 'Church', albeit varying in form, since Abraham. 'This Church was set up differently before the Law among the patriarchs; otherwise under Moses by the Law, and differently by Christ through the Gospel.'<sup>23</sup>

In the Old Testament the focus is always on the People as a whole and on its salvation. There are naturally individuals among the People who sin, and also 'righteous' as individuals; but that always has a close connection to the fate of the entire People. Since only later layers of the Old

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<sup>18</sup> 'Ut hanc fidem consequamur, institutum est ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta' (BSELK, 101,2-3). The German original text reads: 'Solchen glauben zuerlangen, hat Got das predig ampt eingesetzt, Evangelium und Sacramenta zu geben, dadurch als durch mittel der heilig geist wirckt ....' (BSELK 100, 2-3). 'The preaching office' refers to the office of proclaiming the Gospel in Word and sacrament.

<sup>19</sup> Melancthon stresses it in this way in the *Apologia Confessionis Augustanae* VII, BSELK, 414-419 (No. 234 *et seq.*).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted after Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Part One. The Book of Confessions. Louisville 2016, p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> *On the way to a common understanding of Church*, § 81. This is developed in more detail: the Church was already present in creation (citing Col 1:15-18), in the history of all humanity since Abel and in the formation of the covenant people of Israel.

<sup>22</sup> Calvin spoke of a single Covenant; see *Institutio Christianae religionis* Book II Chs. 10 and 11.

<sup>23</sup> Second Helvetic Confession XVII. (The Book of Confessions. p. 110)

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Testament make rudimentary reference to an individual afterlife following death, it would be impossible to narrow that focus to salvation of the individual soul. Reformed theology particularly stands in this tradition: whenever reference is made to salvation there is an automatic simultaneous inclusion of the 'Church' in the sense of God's People.

### 2.3 Foundation in the Catholic tradition

50. It is stated in *Lumen gentium* that God 'does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness' (LG 9). For, according to the opening sentence of the Chapter on the People of God, 'At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right' (cp. Acts 10:35). Here is made explicit what has already been hinted at in *Lumen Gentium's* key sentence: 'The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument, both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race' (LG 1). The basis for this is election by the Father: 'The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a participation of the divine life.' (LG 2) God's election raises human beings and leads them together out of all peoples into one People, his People.

51. The language of the common origin of justification and Church makes the necessary distinction between Church and Christ, Church and salvation event, implicitly. In speaking of the sacramentality of the Church (as universal sacrament of salvation, LG 48), the language makes precisely this distinction and sets out the resultant relationship. As already explained in § 19, the Church is not a sacrament in the sense of the seven sacraments, but it is sacramental and operates accordingly; that is, it shares the structure and the nature of the sacraments. The opening sentence of LG already distinguishes between Christ, who is the Light of the nations, and his reflection in the face of the Church. The Church is not itself light, nor does it possess light of its own; but it reflects (like the moon, in patristic imagery) the light of Christ, the light of the Sun. Only thus can it pass on light.

52. In its distinction between and new relating of Church and salvation event, the Council made a new view of Church unity possible. LG 8 speaks of 'many elements of sanctification and truth' outside the structure of the Catholic Church. Thus it extends the concept of Church beyond the visibly constituted Catholic Church, and places the latter under an obligation to the one Church of Jesus Christ and to its own fractured catholicity (UR 4). This directs the Church towards its service to the world, whilst taking these elements into account, and excludes any closed-

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mindfulness or self-sufficiency on its part. These elements are named in more detail, albeit not comprehensively, in LG 15 and expressly recognised for their power to unite (*coniunctam*) and to demand renewal.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.4 A common quest for depth

53. If the common origin of justification and Church, and therefore their indissoluble intertwining, are understood in the sense here set out, then the Reformation understanding of the doctrine of justification as centre and criterion of theology does not contradict the Catholic emphasis on the Church as sign and instrument of salvation.<sup>25</sup> Church and justification point to one another and presuppose one another. This means that, just as there can be no community of the Church without individual trust in God's justification, so conversely the Church's taking of visible form belongs within the salvation event.

54. A common quest to unlock this notion of common origin becomes possible when one considers that the fellowship of the church builds on God's covenant with humanity. Justification is an expression of God's will to covenant. It is directed not only toward the relationship between the human individual and God, but simultaneously toward human beings' relationship with each other as covenanted comrades. In this, God's covenant with humanity is not concerned with an impersonal collective, but with people, considered both as individuals and as social beings. The social dimension is no afterthought, but something original: the covenant is made with this community and thereby, at the same time, with each of its members as an individual. Baptism reveals this double perspective in exemplary fashion.

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<sup>24</sup> LG names the following as effective factors toward the goal of a complete faith and the community's unity under the successor of Peter: the Holy Scriptures as standard of faith and life; an earnest zeal for religion; belief in the Father and in the Son as Redeemer; trinitarian baptism and other sacraments in their churches and ecclesial fellowships; the episcopate; the celebration of the eucharist; veneration of the virgin Mother of God; community in prayer and other spiritual goods; a true union in the Holy Spirit, who confers gifts and graces also upon them by its sanctifying power and has strengthened some of them even to the shedding of their blood (recognition of non-Catholic martyrs); a longing and active search for unity, awoken by the Spirit (LG 15; cp. UR 3.2). The way to unity is commitment: 'Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope. She exhorts her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the earth. In order to achieve this, our Mother the Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this may come about. She urges her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the earth'. Here too the difference between Christ and the Church finds expression.

<sup>25</sup> The connection between them can be expressed in the words of the international Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue: 'Everything which is believed and taught regarding the nature of the church, the means of grace and the ordained ecclesial ministry must be grounded in the salvation-event itself and bear the mark of justification-faith as reception and appropriation of that event. Correspondingly, all that is believed and taught regarding the nature and effects of justification must be understood in the total context of assertions about the Church, the means of grace and the church's ordained ministry.' (*Church and Justification* § 168 = ch. 4, § 62).

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55. Covenant righteousness means, for humanity, imitating God in his initiative and his faithfulness, and acting in a manner worthy of their covenant partner's activity and nature. The covenant fellowship is characterised by the dual commandment of love for God and neighbour. By acceptance into God's covenant, human beings are not merely redeemed as individuals, by attaining a right relationship with God and by liberation from their self-centredness; but also as social beings, gaining the freedom to notice their neighbours for their own sake and thus to show love of neighbour.

56. Focussing on God's will to covenant and faithfulness to his covenant means for an understanding of the Church that, in the Incarnation, God assumed not just human nature in a general sense, but the human race in its historical concreteness: in its development and processes of change, with all its risks, potential for false starts and failures. The Church as community of the faithful is always in need of cleansing where it does not correspond to the Spirit of Jesus; yet is the common belief of Catholic and protestant Christians that it will not founder in its entirety or in its reality as Church, but will exist for all time. Through the working of God's Spirit, the Church remains in the truth and does not cease to be Church, although this can only be partially seen in its historically developed forms and institutional connections.

### **3. Ministerial office**

#### **3.1 The ecumenical dialogue on the ministerial office**

57. Agreement on the ministerial office remains a challenge, following centuries of theological controversy and despite decades of hard ecumenical effort. The question of ministry remains until today the crux of ecumenical conversation. Core questions seem to be those of transmission and apostolic succession, the threefold ministry, ordination, episkopé, magisterium and the Petrine task. Building on the 1982 announcement of convergence *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* by the Commission for Faith and the Ecclesial Constitution, many of the last decades' bilateral and multilateral dialogues have produced far-reaching convergence. Here too the question is raised how far one tradition can challenge and enrich the other.

58. The comprehensive study *The Church's ministry in succession to the apostles*<sup>26</sup>, published by the "Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis" (ecumenical working group) in Germany, works out baseli-

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<sup>26</sup> See the final report: *Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge. III. Verständigungen und Differenzen* (The Church's ministry in succession to the apostles – Agreements and Differences), ed. D. Sattler & G. Wenz, Freiburg im Breisgau/Göttingen 2008, 167-267.



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nes and perspectives of the biblical witness and shows that the theological controversies over charismatic ordering of the congregation, over the developed ordering of offices and over function and office do not do the matter justice. A specific ordering of offices and ministries, fixed from the beginning and able in itself to guarantee the authenticity and apostolicity of the Church's faith, is historically speaking a fiction, which disregards the complex development of ministerial structures. Against this background it can more clearly be seen that differing theological accounts of ministry are often motivated by a desire for controversy and can divert attention from common insights and convictions on the ministry question.

59. The Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, carried on over many decades both at global and national levels, has a significance of its own. It has been directed to examining confessional differences existing on each side, with the aim of overcoming theological obstacles. The international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue commission has described the disagreements over the priesthood of all believers and particularly ministerial office in the Church, over episcopé as personally, collegially and communally exercised in various forms, over ordination and ministry, over transmission and succession, as capable of being overcome.<sup>27</sup> It can be stated on both sides that the ministerial office was instituted by God and is necessary to the Church's existence. Further, a discussion has been set in motion on the basis of New Testament study regarding a universal ministry for the unity of Christians. It has been possible to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings on questions of papal primacy, especially on a primacy of jurisdiction and an infallible teaching authority on matters of faith. Nevertheless weighty differences remain.

60. Whilst LA 13 only touches briefly on the significance of the ministerial office for the Church (*v. infra* § 64), CJC makes the point that 'that the ministry of the public proclamation of the gospel and of the administration of the sacraments is fundamental and necessary for the church' (CJC I 2.5.1.2). This 'ordained ministry' belongs to the being of the church' (CJC I 2.5.1.1, quoted from the Tampere Theses). The Leuenberg Agreement assumes that the current differences between the protestant churches in the ordering of ministerial offices and in their ordination practice cannot be seen 'as church-dividing' (LA 39) if there is agreement on the understanding of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments and those offices serve the pure proclamation of the Gospel and right administration of the sacraments. This difference in doctrine and order is therefore no hindrance to church communion in the sense of pulpit and table fellowship, but can rather be viewed as legitimate diversity. The LA, accordingly, does not aim at a 'union

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<sup>27</sup> Mention should be made here of one outstanding document *The Apostolicity of the Church* of 2006 (GinA 4, 169-266).

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detrimental to the lively diversity of styles of preaching, ways of worship, church order, and diaconal and social action'; for that would 'contradict the very nature of the fellowship inaugurated by this declaration' (LA 45). The LA's understanding of unity thus refers back to Art. VII of the *Confessio Augustana*: 'Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike'.

61. Although the churches of the CPCE take for granted a legitimate diversity in the ordering of offices, it is essential for church communion to deepen understanding of the Gospel both ecclesio-logically and in the theology of church office. The CPCE churches therefore committed themselves in LA 39 to work further on questions such as those of ministry and ordination: not only insofar as these belong to 'doctrinal differences that persist within the participating churches and between them', but also with a view to their common task 'to bear their witness and perform their service together' (cf. LA 35). That concerns, *inter alia*, questions which in practice limit the exchangeability of ministries declared in principle in the mutual recognition of ordination; such as the differing concepts and standards of training and the different rules as to the offices conferred by ordination. The question of admission to ministerial offices also belongs in this category: this has also led in the recent past within the CPCE to the question of 'limits to diversity' (cf. *Ministry – Ordination – Episkopé* 18 *et seq.*).

In order to deepen communion in the understanding of ministerial office and ordination, doctrinal discussions took place in the CPCE from 2007. The General Assembly of 2012 adopted their conclusions, which were published in 2013 under the title *Ministry – Ordination – Episkopé* (MOE).<sup>28</sup> This document represents a milestone on the path to developing a common protestant doctrine of ministerial office. Work done on this topic has aimed not only at reaching a common understanding, but also at discussing practical questions, with a clear (though cautiously expressed) tendency towards altering practice in the direction of wider common ground (cf. MOE 13).<sup>29</sup> The doctrinal discussions themselves stated that agreement in understanding and ordering of the ministerial office is essential for the communion of the CPCE. But it remains a fundamental insight that 'neither the ministry of word and sacrament nor the various forms of episkopé guarantee the true being of the church by themselves or in themselves' (MOE 17).

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<sup>28</sup> Published, with another document, in Michael Bünker & Martin Friedrich (eds.): *Amt, Ordination, Episkopé und theologische Ausbildung / Ministry, ordination, episkopé and theological education* (Leuenberger Texte 13), Leipzig 2013. Parts 1 und 2 are consecutively numbered and cited only by paragraph number. Quotations from the recommendations or study material are identified as such.

<sup>29</sup> Reference should be made here to the Neuendettelsau Theses (1982/86; text in *Sakramente, Amt, Ordination* (Leuenberger Texte 2), Frankfurt am Main 1995, 87-93) and the Tampere Theses of 1986 (complete text in: *Sakramente, Amt, Ordination*, 103-112; Theses 1-3 also in CJC I 2.5.1.1).

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### 3.2 Convergence in the understanding of office and ministry in the Church

62. In the question of ministerial office, there is today a common position that the institution and exercise of that office (*ministerium ecclesiae*) in the Church is grounded in the mission of the whole People of God. The Church has its roots in the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the world. All members of Christ's body share in his threefold office as prophet, priest and king. The designation of Christians as participants in this office follows from the common priesthood of all believers based on baptism. Every Christian is called and equipped by baptism to bear witness to the triune God in word and deed. All members of the Church therefore share in its mission, task and ministry. Thus the priesthood of the baptised and ordained ministerial office in the Church do not compete with each other; rather they have their common roots in the mission of the whole Church. Ordained ministry, in fact, serves the priesthood of the baptised. It therefore stands in the same relationship in, and in relation to, the congregation as does the office-bearer. The congregation assembled for worship is the place where people hear the Gospel and receive the sacraments. Ordained ministry is an element integral to the Church since it is service to the Gospel (CJC I 2.5.1.1 and 2.5.1.2). It is given and instituted in the Church by God (*ibid.*, Thesis 1 of the Tampere Theses).

Ordained office-bearers have a specific task in the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Such office is necessary for the existence of the Church.<sup>30</sup> In the same way, according to LG 10, the priest (*sacerdos*) 'by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people ... But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity'. Similarly, for the churches of the CPCE, the particular ministry 'consists in the public proclamation of the word and in the dispensation of the sacraments before the congregation and yet within the congregation, who exercise their functions of priesthood of all believers in prayer, personal witness and service'.<sup>31</sup>

63. In the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church described the nature, purpose and mission of the Church in a new and unaccustomed way. 'The Church lives from the Word of God';<sup>32</sup> that is, it flows from Jesus Christ's mission and is sign and instrument of the visible Kingdom of

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. MOE 38-43

<sup>31</sup> Neuendettelsau Theses 1.3.C.

<sup>32</sup> So in the Annexe to *Communio Sanctorum* (*supra* n. 8), No. 43

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God on earth. In the mutual engagement of Word and sacrament the Church grows as the divinely-willed instrument and sign of God's Kingdom which will only be fully visible at the end of time. Sacrament and ministerial office constitute likewise an ecclesiological 'cosmos' in which the interplay of various forms of witness takes place. Starting from the Word of God and its proclamation, from which Christian faith ultimately draws its life, the ministerial offices in the Church perform a function of service, since they are defined by this task.<sup>33</sup> It is conclusive when the institution of these ministries of service is considered from the point of view of the goal set for them. Ministry and offices do not exist for their own sake, but discharge specific tasks connected with their institution. It is the mission to proclaim God's Kingdom which renders the institution of such ministries necessary. The bishops, as successors of the apostles, exist in service to Christ's mission (LG 18). The expression 'mission' points to the ecclesial context in which office-bearers fulfil their tasks. The authority conferred by Christ can therefore not be separated from the goals for which Church offices and ministry were instituted. Service is, in this sense, participation in mission.

64. Such an understanding of ministerial office as service, in which ordained ministry is ascribed to the Church's overarching task of the *missio Dei*, is also shared by the protestant churches. If questions are raised from a protestant quarter regarding the Roman Catholic understanding whereby ministerial office is derived from the apostolate created by Jesus' call and its task is seen as *repraesentatio Christi*, this is explained by a fundamental looking back to the New Testament description of the development of ministerial structures. This witnesses to the freedom of the Spirit which can have effect in various structures. The organisation of the Church's offices and ministries must take place on this New Testament basis. The most important point, for protestant theology, is that offices and ministries must be consistent with the Church's foundation, belong to its shape and serve its mission. By such consistency they are related to Christ's sending out of the apostles and to the building up of the Body of Christ.

The Leuenberg Agreement declares in § 13 that the Church has the 'task to transmit this gospel through the spoken word of preaching, through pastoral comfort and through Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In preaching, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ is present through the Holy Spirit. Justification in Christ is thus imparted to people, and in this way the Lord gathers his church together. He works through various forms of ministry and service, and through the witness of all members of his church.' In this way the fundamental outworking of that which, in the

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<sup>33</sup> *Communio Sanctorum*, Nos. 39 *et seq.*

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Christian context, is called ministerial office is recognised in its constitutive significance for the Church; and the intimate connection between such specific ministries and the 'priesthood of all believers' is brought out.

65. For the protestant churches, the conviction that the Church is created and maintained by God's Word (Church as *creatura Evangelii* or *creatura Verbi divini*) provides an essential premise to the doctrine of ministerial office. It follows that the Church which owes its being to the divine Word cannot itself control this activity of the Word; hence that there must be responsibility within the Church for the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments.

The CPCE documents, from the Tampere Theses of 1986<sup>34</sup> through *The Church of Jesus Christ* (1994)<sup>35</sup> down to MOE (No. 41), have all stressed that the *ministerium Verbi* belongs to the essence of the Church. This assertion shows a clear convergence between protestant and Roman Catholic understandings of ministerial office. CJC emphasises that different concepts in the understanding of ministerial office, and the variety of forms in which such office is embodied, concern the Church's shape, not its foundation' (CJC I 2.5.1.2). Account is thus taken, in relation to the necessity for particular offices, of both the distinction and the independence of the Church's foundation, form and purpose. Questions of the Church's form, including those which concern office and episkopé, should be addressed in such a way as to take account of their consistency with the Church's foundation and their focussing upon its purpose.

### 3.3 Ministry and offices

66. The worshipping congregation, gathered around the Word and sacraments, is the Church's principal location for Gospel proclamation and the ministry of salvation. A supralocal office is necessary in order that this task of proclamation, along with ministration of the sacraments and leadership of the congregation, can take place at one with the whole Church. Its task is to care for the Church's unity and constantly to remind the Church of its apostolic beginnings. Such supralocal, regional leadership was increasingly concentrated in the early Church on the bishops, to whom deacons were assigned, whilst presbyters became leaders of congregations. In the later progress of Church history, charitable work in the congregation to care for the poor, widows and the sick was entrusted to the deacons. Protestant and Catholic viewpoints concur that the basic

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<sup>34</sup> *v. supra* n. 28. Thesis 1 asserts, on the basis of the Barmen Theological Declaration, Article III and CA 5, that 'a ministry pertaining to word and sacrament, the *ministerium Verbi* [...] belongs to the being of the church'.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. CJC I 2.5.1.2.

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functions of Gospel proclamation through Word and sacrament, episkopé and diakonia are necessary to the Church's existence and are reflected in its pattern of offices and ministries.

67. The Roman Catholic Church's understanding of ministerial office passes through various developments, evolutions and emphases, beginning with a threefold ministry already discernible in the New Testament, which acquired a hierarchical and collegial structure in the second and third centuries. According to the Council of Trent there is a 'visible and external priesthood' (*sacerdotium*) instituted by Christ.<sup>36</sup> This priesthood has authority to consecrate and to absolve from sins, and is different from a mere ministry of proclaiming the Word. Oriented toward Christ's sacrifice, it is distinguished from the invisible, inward priesthood of all believers. This visible priesthood thus becomes the epitome of the understanding of ministry (*ministerium sacerdotii*). That admittedly left the hierarchical relationship between bishops, priests and deacons largely open; but the Council of Trent maintained a hierarchical ordering of office (*divine ordinatione institutam*) in that bishops rank above priests by divine mandate, possessing the power (*potestas ordinis*) to confer ordination and confirmation. The Second Vatican Council, reaching beyond the Council of Trent to a broader ecclesiastical tradition, described the episcopal office as the fullness of the ordained ministry and made this the starting-point of its understanding of church office. By contrast with the approach of the Council of Trent, its description of that office then draws upon the doctrine of the three *munera* – teacher, priest and pastor. The teaching function belongs to the bishops, who exercise oversight over the congregations of their diocese; the priests share in the bishops' task but do not possess the fullness of the sacrament of ordination. They exercise their office in a subordinate relationship to the bishops and in communion with them. The Second Vatican Council, finally, restored the diaconate in its own right as a permanent grade of the hierarchy.

68. In the New Testament no single designation or correlation of offices can yet be found, but a distinction is already made between the proclamation and diaconal ministries. Distinguishing between *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi* provided in post-apostolic times a basis to differentiate between supralocal and local ministries of proclaiming the Gospel in Word and sacrament. Protestant churches do not dispute that early forms of a threefold office can be discerned in late New Testament times; but they point out that the New Testament contains no concept of an abstract 'office' or 'ministry'. The word *diakonia* is indeed an important precursor for the emergence of a concept of *ministerium*, but is not used consistently in the New Testament. The

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<sup>36</sup> Council of Trent, Doctrine and Canons on the Sacrament of Order (DH 1764-1778).

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two principal strands of the Continental Reformation, the Lutheran and the Reformed, admittedly concurred on the fundamental purpose of ministry in the Church, but exegesis led them to different approaches to the ordering of ministerial office. Decisive for Lutheranism was the principle of the unity of church office as *ministerium Verbi* (ministry of the public proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament), as expressed in CA V (*De ministerio ecclesiastico*). In contrast Reformed theology emphasised the necessary diversity of ministries, by reference to Calvin's teaching of the fourfold or threefold office. Already in the twentieth century, therefore, thinking based upon a sophisticated relationship of unity and diversity in relation to church office or offices, ministry or ministries, has emerged within Reformed and United churches; but without a consistent terminology. In the light of what they find in the New Testament, therefore, the churches of the CPCE speak of a legitimate diversity in the forms by which ministerial office is ordered.

For protestant Christians it is essential that, under the name *ministerium*, one should think first of a set of tasks, and not of an 'office' in the sense of an official position with associations of dignity and authority. The language of 'ordering of ministries' and of the 'three basic ministries' used in *Ministry, Ordination and Episkopé* (MOE) takes account of this understanding, in allowing the ministry of Word and sacrament to be assigned to the office of priest (parson, pastor), diaconal ministry to the office of deacon and the ministry of oversight to the office of bishop. Whereas the Roman Catholic Church regards the hierarchical arrangement of its orders as the fruit of divine institution, the protestant churches do not directly ascribe the 'ordering of ministries' to God's institution, although indeed the office of proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament does belong unalterably to the essence of the Church. Whereas each Roman Catholic order contains within itself the tasks and authority of the preceding order, the three fundamental tasks of public proclamation, episkopé and diakonia are in protestant understanding mutually related to each other. In protestant understanding, the prerequisite for public proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament is ordination. Although the task of episkopé is essentially directed towards supralocal and inter-regional unity, congregations and their ministers – including non-ordained persons – also carry responsibility for the Church's unity (cf. MOE 76-79, v. *infra*). Diaconal service is, likewise, according to MOE 49, a duty of those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament, as it is of those specifically holding diaconal office and, ultimately, of all believers. There are various models of the actual exercise of diaconal ministry: thus some Scandinavian churches have introduced an ordained diaconate, which is also known to the Methodist churches (cf. MOE 51). Other churches confer diaconal office by commissioning.

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69. Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church agree that those who serve in the *ministerium Verbi* do not exercise their ministry on their own initiative, but require an orderly call by the Church, which from their point of view confirms a call of God. They therefore concur that ordination is an indispensable prerequisite for exercise of the *ministerium Verbi*. They also agree that ordination is an unrepeatable event, by which a specific ministerial office is entrusted permanently to an individual. Just as the baptised remain baptised for all time, so also the ordained remain called to public ministry in the Church.

The fact that the protestant churches do not see ordination as a sacrament is based on their definition of a sacrament as a means of salvation instituted by Jesus Christ himself. They do not, however, dispute that ordination by the laying-on of hands and by prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, confident of that prayer being heard, is an effective event.

The Catholic teaching of the sacramental character of order does not imply a superior holiness in those who possess it. It is not the basis of a holy estate separate from that of the laity. 'It is important to see that the Council of Trent only guarantees the existence of this "indelible sign" and the consequent unrepeatability of ordination. It deliberately says nothing about the nature of this character.'<sup>37</sup>

### 3.4 Episkopé

70. In order to fulfil its mission, the Church needs a ministry of unity at local and supralocal levels as well as proclamation and the ministering of the sacraments. It has emerged as a consensus in ecumenical discussion that episkopé must be exercised at the supralocal level for the sake of the Church's unity, and that the Church needs an ordered ministry of supralocal episkopé or oversight. For episkopé is understood as an instrument of the unity, the fidelity, the growth and the order of the whole People of God under the leading of the Holy Spirit. All members of the Church are called to co-operate in this task according to their various gifts of grace. Since the fundamental structure of the Church is community, this ministry of the Church must also be exercised communally. There are differences in the form this ministry takes in the churches; but there is agreement that the ministry of oversight is exercised personally, collegially and communally. Collegiality relates to the common tasks of leadership; communality or 'communality' covers forms of synodality. Ordination and oversight by visitation are specific to

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<sup>37</sup> Writings on the priestly office by the Bishops of the German-speaking region: a biblical and dogmatic guide (1970), 52.



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the ministry of episkopé in its service to unity. Fundamental for the exercise of this ministry is fidelity to the apostolic beginnings.

71. So far as concerns the structure of the ministry charged with the ministry of oversight, there is great variety in the protestant churches. At the local church level, episkopé is exercised by full-time congregational ministers with an academic training. Ecclesiastical rules regulate the office of the pastor in such a way that the ordained person can dedicate him- or herself wholly and permanently to the tasks of proclamation, ministration of the sacraments, pastoral care and (together with the eldership or church council) leadership in the congregation, taking responsibility for the congregation and relating to the church's supralocal leadership. Some protestant churches retained the office of bishop at the time of the Reformation; others have reintroduced it over the centuries; still others have leadership posts (Church President, *Präses* or similar) which can be considered functionally equivalent to the episcopate. There are, lastly, churches in which the leading office is filled afresh each year in the person of a Moderator of the General Assembly. Despite these differences, the protestant churches concur that episkopé in the sense of oversight and a ministry of unity is necessary for the Church to be Church. It is always exercised communally, founded in God's mission and its confirmation by the Church, and serves as ministry of oversight and leadership of the ecclesiastical communion.

72. Catholic doctrine speaks, in relation to the structure of episkopé, of a hierarchical constitution of the Church built on the office of bishop. As successors to the apostles, bishops exercise their office as members of the College of Bishops, which takes the place of the College of the Apostles. 'Hence, one is constituted a member of the Episcopal body in virtue of sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body' (LG 22). Admission into the communion of the bishops takes place by consecration; collegiality and fellowship are rooted in the sacramentality of consecration. 'Therefore it pertains to the bishops to admit newly elected members into the Episcopal body by means of the sacrament of Orders. the bishops to admit newly elected members into the Episcopal body by means of the sacrament of Orders' (LG 21): this takes place when bishops, by their apostolic commission, together confer the sacrament of consecration by laying-on of hands and prayer and thus admit the person ordained into their fellowship. Sacramental transmission of episcopal orders and admission to the College of Bishops take place at the same time: the collegial character of the sacrament of consecration has been an element of its constitution from the first. Forms of synodality accompany this.

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73. There is a further element to this: communion with the head and members of the College is essential to the exercise of the sacrament of ordination. Stress must first be laid on the 'and': nobody can have communion with the Bishop of Rome alone. It is always a communion of all bishops with the Bishop of Rome. The College is not, therefore, a papal creation, but a sacramental 'given'. On account of its sacramental purpose the office of bishop is constituted synodically and collegially: one is always a bishop as member of the community of bishops. The episcopate as a whole is not to be identified in retrospect with the sum of the individual bishops and the authority of each: rather, the individual bishop gains his authority as member of the College in which he is enrolled by consecration (dependent on the agreement of the Bishop of Rome) and as participant in the College's authority. Thus the College of Bishops follows the College of the Apostles in its teaching and pastoral office: the apostolic succession is linked to the College of Bishops' basic communal ordering. 'That means that it is not about a linear chain of succession from office-bearer to office-bearer, but about co-option and incorporation of new members in the apostolic college and its mission lasting across time'.<sup>38</sup> Thus the *transmissio* of the episcopal office as the passing-on of the apostles' mission derived from Christ to proclaim the Gospel, *successio* as the concrete form of *transmissio* in the *corpus episcoporum*, and *communio* in the sense of the bishops' communion with each other, show an inward, essential coherence thanks to its *divina institutio*. The succession, standing in the service of the apostolic tradition, must therefore (according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council) be understood in the context of the notion of *communio*. So it is not one bishop following another in the sense of a pipeline that creates a framework for the apostolic succession, but the College as a whole by virtue of its divine institution.

When the Roman Catholic Church, with the Council of Trent, names priests and bishops 'successors of the apostles', it is not unaware of the impossibility of directly continuing the work of the apostles of the New Testament as eye-witnesses of Jesus Christ's activity, death and resurrection. That historic apostolic witnessing role is not transferable; but the collegial apostolic office takes over the apostles' witnessing function.

74. For the churches of the CPCE too, the ministry of ordained office-bearers stands in continuity with the witness of the first apostles, and must be measured by the criterion of fidelity to that

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<sup>38</sup> W. Kasper, 'Die apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem' (The apostolic succession as ecumenical problem) in *Lehrverteilungen – kirchentrennend?* vol 3, ed. W. Pannenberg, Freiburg im Breisgau-Göttingen 1990, 333; also in W. Kasper, *Theologie und Kirche*, vol 2, Mainz 1999, 167.

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witness. They reject, however, the notion that such continuity is primarily to be determined by means of an unbroken chain of laying-on of hands in ordination.

The possibility of convergence follows from the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has, in more recent pronouncements, clarified that the decisive element in the notion of apostolic succession is not the chain of laying-on of hands but 'communion with the whole order of bishops'.<sup>39</sup> However, that also requires that agreement can be reached on the criteria for this *communio* with the *ordo episcoporum*.

### 3.5 Conclusion

75. From these considerations it is apparent that agreement exists on the following basic questions of the theology of ministerial offices: The ministry of public proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament is constitutive for the Church's existence, derives from its divine institution in Christ, and is linked to ordination by laying-on of hands with prayer. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the basis and the measure of its proclamation in word and sacrament. In the understanding of apostolicity in both ecclesial traditions, what matters is the right proclamation of the Gospel in accordance with the apostolic tradition to which the Bible bears witness. The ordained ministry of proclaiming the Gospel serves the common vocation of all Christians to spread the Gospel, but is exercised also in relation to the congregation. The ministry of word and sacrament cannot exist without the ministry and office of oversight for the unity of the Church at local and supralocal levels. Episkopé comprises personal, collegial and communal elements and is constitutive of, and inseparable from, the Church of Jesus Christ. There is agreement, further, that, besides the offices of public proclamation of the Gospel in word and sacrament and of episkopé, the ministry of *diakonia* is constitutive for the life of the Church. The question whether sufficient consensus regarding the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon can be found to rank as binding for the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches belongs on the agenda of a further discussion. The question of what the Roman Catholic Church calls the sacramental quality of ordination also needs to be raised, and with it the question how transmission and apostolic succession are to be understood, with special reference to the understanding and role of the episcopal office in the apostolic succession. If one recognises, with the Common Declaration on Justification, that the protestant ordained ministry faithfully proclaims the apostolic doctrine, one must ask what consequence this has for the Catholic understanding of that pro-

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<sup>39</sup> The Apostolicity of the Church, No. 291.

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testant ministry. Against the background of these reflections, an exchange concerning the meaning of synodical structures for ecclesial identity, and the question of church members' participation in the structuring of both Roman Catholic and Protestant church life, seems necessary and enriching.

## 4. Church Communion

### 4.1 The understanding of church communion in ecumenical dialogue

76. The topic of church communion has been treated in ecumenical dialogues for decades.<sup>40</sup> Lutheran-Catholic dialogue at the global level was already focussing in the 1980s on forms and phases of Lutheran-Catholic communion based on the idea of *koinonia*, and attempted in the 1990s to steer towards a common understanding of the Church in the light of the doctrine of justification.<sup>41</sup> At the national level in Germany, the 1984 document *Kirchengemeinschaft in Wort und Sakrament (Church Communion in Word and sacrament)* concentrated on the question whether the Church's communion, once broken, could be achieved again. *Communio sanctorum – The Church as Communion of Saints*, published in 2000, took the ecclesiological question further and associated itself with the description of the common goal of a communion 'in which the churches agree on an understanding of the Gospel, recognise each other as Church of Jesus Christ, have unrestricted communion in the sacraments and practice mutual recognition of the offices to which Word and sacraments are entrusted'.<sup>42</sup> The international Old Catholic-Roman Catholic dialogue also seeks to make the concept of church communion fruitful.<sup>43</sup> But in relation to the basic ecclesiological questions that need to be clarified on the way to church communion, these conversations have not, up to the present, advanced beyond an (admittedly sophisticated) identification of ecclesiological problems.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. W. Thönissen: *Gemeinschaft durch Teilhabe an Jesus Christus. Ein katholisches Modell für Einheit der Kirchen*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1996, a comprehensive study addressing the question of church fellowship by reference to various ecumenical dialogues; also G. Hintzen & W. Thönissen, *Kirchengemeinschaft möglich? Einheitsverständnis und Einheitskonzepte in der Diskussion* (Thema Ökumene 1), Paderborn 2001.

<sup>41</sup> Thus the documents *Facing Unity* (1985) and *Church and Justification* (1993), GinA 2, 443-484, and GinA 2, 485-565.

<sup>42</sup> *Communio Sanctorum* (v. supra. n. 7), 128. Protestant comments on this text are summarised in *Communio Sanctorum. Evangelische Stellungnahmen zur Studie der Zweiten Bilateralen Arbeitsgruppe der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Kirchenleitung der VELKD*, ed. O. Schuegraf & U. Hahn on behalf of the church leadership of the VELKD, Hannover 2009.

<sup>43</sup> *The Church and Ecclesial Communion*, 2009.

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77. The Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 is of pivotal importance for the concept of church communion in the realm of the churches of the Reformation. Fundamental for the CPCE, on the basis of which its member churches have declared communion, is the basic insight set out in the Agreement: 'The Church is founded on Jesus Christ alone. Through the gift of his salvation in preaching and the sacraments, he gathers the Church and sends it out. This is why, according to the understanding of the Reformers, the necessary and sufficient pre-requisite for the true unity of the Church is agreement in the right teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments' (LA 2, drawing upon CA VII). To overcome church-dividing doctrinal differences is accordingly a condition for the possibility of communion. The fundamental differences between Lutheran and Reformed churches on the doctrines of predestination and the Lord's Supper and in their Christology were therefore bridged by basic common statements. Based on their agreement on the Gospel, the Protestant churches adopting the Agreement were able to recognise each other, with their varying confessions, as churches (cf. LA 1) and to commence pulpit and table communion. The declaration of church communion is not, however, confined to such recognition; rather it brings with it further steps necessary for its realisation (*ibid.*, cf. LA 29; 35 *et seq.*). The direction of the path to be taken by the Leuenberg Church Fellowship is pointed by the distinction between *declaring* communion and *realising* it.

78. The Second Vatican Council made no explicit proposal for restoring communion between hitherto separated churches. But the Decree on Ecumenism does speak of communion with other churches and ecclesial communions. If one draws together the main factors that speak for such a concept of church communion, the conclusion is that communion between the churches requires, at the visible level, an order expressed through the Creed, through the sacraments and through church leadership.<sup>44</sup> Church communion (*communio ecclesiarum*) thus unfolds in a common confession of the apostolic faith, in sacramental association and in a ministerial office dedicated to the service of word and sacrament. The concept of a congregation of the faithful (*communio fidelium*) gathered around the pulpit and the sacrament of the altar requires, finally, the universal communion of episcopally constituted particular churches (*communio ecclesiarum*), in the service of which the communion of bishops (*communio episcoporum*) stands.<sup>45</sup> This includes the office of the Bishop of Rome, who exercises a universal ministry serving the Church's unity in a special way.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. LG 14

<sup>45</sup> Cf. LG 23

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## 4.2 Conditions and criteria for church communion

79. It is a principle of protestant understanding that: Where agreement exists on the understanding of the Gospel and in the administration of the sacraments and the service of the Gospel, there church factual church communion already exists, and should be declared and practised'.<sup>46</sup> Being in communion does not, therefore, exclude variety in the forms of church order; rather this can, where consensus exists on the proclamation of the Gospel in Word, sacrament and service, be welcomed as legitimate diversity, and enrich the churches' communion.

80. On the question of the limits of diversity and the criteria for setting these, CJC states: 'It is possible for Lutheran, Reformed and United churches to concur in distinguishing between those points where full consensus is required and those questions where legitimate diversity may be admitted. The criterion is the common understanding of the gospel as the message of justification and its recognition as the decisive norm for the proclamation and order of the church. Where this criterion is satisfied, church fellowship as fellowship in word and sacrament can be declared and practised' (CJC III 1.3). This means, in other words, that the churches of the Reformation can emphasise the legitimate diversity of their structural forms whilst at the same time being conscious that such diversity needs to be measured against the fundamental criterion of the Gospel as message of justification. Thus on the question of ministry, differences in structure are legitimate, provided these serve the pure proclamation of the Gospel in word and sacrament. So neither the concrete structuring of the ministerial office, nor the understanding of that office, are viewed as unimportant for church unity; rather they are measured against the criterion of the message of justification.

81. The Catholic Church has also attempted to solve the problem, raised here, of unity in diversity. Starting from the notion of *communio*, it has worked out the concept of a complete form of the eucharistic-ecclesial mystery. The Decree on Ecumenism speaks expressly of the original and complete substance of the eucharistic mystery (*integra substantia Mysteriorum eucharistici*, UR 22), revealed in the eucharistic celebration. Starting from this basic reality of the Church, from the celebration of the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection in which the fullness of the mystery of salvation can be seen, it describes elements and goods of salvation of fundamental

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. CJC III 1.4: 'the understanding of the Gospel can and will find expression in a legitimate variety of doctrinal formulations. Unity effected by the Holy Spirit neither creates uniformity, as is already documented in the New Testament, nor an arbitrary variety. the common understanding of the gospel call church fellowship as community in word and sacrament into question and thereby threaten or prevent the unity of the Church. Their divisive character needs to be overcome.'

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importance for the Church's visible and institutional form. Continuing from there, it focusses upon the Church's whole sacramental life. Ministerial office in the Church is service to the Church, and hence belongs to the sacramental form of the eucharistic-ecclesial mystery. The Council regards a failure to identify this adequately as a defect: *defectus sacramenti ordinis*.<sup>47</sup> This indicates that the Church's catholicity consists in the guardianship of the means of salvation in their fullness, directed to growth and completeness. The Roman Catholic Church cannot always – so the Decree on Ecumenism explains – truly give expression to the fullness of catholicity. The division of Christendom casts a shadow over the fullness of the mystery and the completeness of the Church's means of salvation. Ecumenical endeavour is therefore an integral part of this catholicity entrusted to the Church. Catholicity thereby includes a constant reform of the Church, directed in the first instance to the search for its visible unity.

### 4.3 Declaration and realisation of church communion

82. The churches participating in the CPCE declare communion based on their overcoming of doctrinal differences in the Leuenberg Agreement. They recognise each other as churches and practise pulpit and table communion. Baptised members of one church are welcomed in other member churches as are those churches' own members. CPCE member churches do not thereby surrender their own confessional identity; nor do they take a single organisational form. But their communion is not exhausted in mutual recognition and a declaration of that communion. Declaring communion is a step aimed at *realising* and deepening such communion. The Leuenberg Agreement stresses that 'It is in the life of the churches and congregations that church fellowship becomes a reality. Believing in the unifying power of the Holy Spirit, they bear their witness and perform their service together, and strive to deepen and strengthen the fellowship they have found together' (LA 35).

83. Living out communion entails, first, the practice of pulpit and table communion, and thus a common witness to the Gospel and common service born of the Gospel. But for the deepening of that communion further theological work is essential, both in the form of doctrinal discussions and also in concrete ethical and liturgical projects. For 'the common understanding of the Gospel on which church fellowship rests is based must be further deepened, examined in the light of the witness of Holy Scripture, and continually made relevant to a contemporary context' (LA 38).

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<sup>47</sup> For an interpretation cf. Peter Walter, '*Sacramenti Ordinis defectus*' (UR 22,3), '*Die Aussage des II. Vaticanums im Licht des ökumenischen Dialogs*' in 'Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge', III (v. *supra* n. 26), 86-101.

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One of the challenges within the CPCE is to encourage growth in the Community's life through convenient common structures. Catholic teaching sees in this communion, based upon the overcoming of doctrinal differences and designed to encourage growing together, a decisive contribution to the visible unity of the churches. It was therefore no coincidence that the initial spark for the Protestant-Catholic process interpreting and working on the sixteenth century doctrinal condemnations, which was later tackled in the study '*Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*', was kindled by the Leuenberg Agreement.

84. The realisation of church communion in the Roman Catholic sense requires first a declaration of mutual recognition of churches as churches. Full eucharistic communion is then possible. A basic prerequisite for mutual recognition is agreement on the ecclesial status of the churches and ecclesial communions linked to the Roman Catholic Church. Subsisting differences in church teaching and practice notwithstanding, there exist graduated forms of church communion, some of a sacramental nature. Despite continuing differences, there is an express wish for sacramental communion with the Orthodox churches on the basis of valid sacraments and the power of the apostolic succession. Church communion begins with baptism and its recognition on a mutual basis. This founds a communion which already exists and is lived out. Church communion in the Roman Catholic understanding implies Eucharistic communion. Communion in faith and in baptism prepares for the fullness of complete communion. The Second Vatican Council's understanding of particular churches supports such a model of church communion. A particular church is not, however, a part (*pars*) of the whole so much as a *portio populo Dei* (CD 8). Christ's Church is fully present and realised in the particular churches (LG 26). They and it are realised in each other. Thus the one Church cannot be seen as the sum of all particular churches, nor is it (as the whole) present and realised on its own: the vision is rather of a relationship between parts and whole. Hence the one and only Church exists in and from the particular churches (*in quibus et ex quibus*, LG 23). The unity of the Church, given in Christ, therefore implies – according to the Second Vatican Council<sup>48</sup> – a multiplicity of particular churches. However, LG 23 understands by 'particular churches' also such churches and communions which acknowledge a bond of liturgy, spirituality, discipline and law. The language of a *ecclesia sui iuris* (church with original authority) has since come into use.<sup>49</sup> A legitimate diversity is thus im-

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. LG 23

<sup>49</sup> During the compilation of the 1990 Code of Canon Law for the Oriental Churches (CCEO), the concept of the particular church or 'ritual church' was studied afresh. The legislator decided on the term *ecclesia sui iuris* to make clear that this was not just a matter of differences of liturgical rite (cf. CCEO can. 27).



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plicit in catholicity. Such a multiplicity of particular churches is geared to a dynamic growth of mutual fellowship. The Church itself illustrates a living multiplicity of churches. The question is whether and how this distinction and mutual relating between parts and whole can show itself also as productive in ecumenical discussion.

#### **4.4 On the way to Protestant-Catholic church communion?**

85. Is Protestant-Catholic church communion possible? For a clear answer to this question it is necessary to address in detail the fundamentals, the conditions and the principles of church communion which have been mentioned in this document. To make progress towards a Protestant-Catholic concept, four insights need to be kept in mind. (1) Realisation and declaration of communion entails a common witness to the apostolic faith. Protestant and Catholic Christians are agreed that fellowship in faith in the salvation for humanity revealed in Jesus Christ finds expression in their understanding of Christ's Gospel. (2) Church communion is founded on agreement in Word and sacrament. Protestant and Catholic Christians are united in confessing that Jesus Christ is present in proclamation, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The foundation of communion in Word and sacrament is already laid wherever that understanding is held in common. (3) Implicit in church communion in Word and sacrament is the ministerial office which serves such communion. Protestant and Catholic Christians agree that ordained ministry, serving the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament in association with the priesthood of all believers, belongs to the essence of the Church. (4) Church communion demands forms of community in which the Church's origin in the Gospel is lived out and realised as communion in Word and sacrament. Protestant and Catholic Christians are agreed that common mission and service call for common structures and forms of lived community.

86. Declaration and realisation of pulpit and table communion based on an agreed understanding of the Gospel is part of church communion as understood by the churches of the Reformation. It is essential that the declaration of communion is aimed at realisation in witness and service. Church communion is not exhausted by the mere declaration, but comes to fulfilment in the churches' life together. We see here a pivotal foundation laid for further clarification of the question of compatibility of the two understandings of Church.

87. Many Christians yearn for a closer communion, expressed also in the celebration of the Eucharist. Christians who live in interconfessional marriages and families long for the signal this would give. Although obstacles to complete fellowship at the Lord's Table still remain, it cannot be ignored that the Lord's Supper is never only sign and symbol of unity, but also a means and

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instrument of deepening communion – something which the Second Vatican Council expressed in the Decree on Ecumenism (UR 8). In principle, no baptised person is excluded from such fellowship: whoever shares belief in the sacrament of unity can – under certain conditions – share in the Supper. But the point is to give effect to the sign and instrument of fellowship and unity together. Although at present it is not possible to answer every concrete question regarding church and table communion, these point to a certain dynamic, open to future developments. Thus mutual understanding is already emerging regarding a protestant-Catholic church communion which would leave room for a plurality of churches forming an association with each other. Protestant and Catholic Christians wish to see their community of faith in Jesus Christ, already grounded in baptism, grow in ever deeper fellowship with one another.

88. The Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the CPCE face the same societal challenges in Europe, marked in particular by rapid and increasing secularisation and growing religious pluralism. This emphasises more strongly the task of witnessing to the Gospel by word and deed together, rather than in competition with each other. Seen historically, decisive steps in ecumenical convergence have often taken place against the background of major crises and upheavals in society, which convinced the churches that they must stand together in witness and service for the sake of humanity and the credibility of the Gospel. Growing church communion therefore entails not only closer agreement on dogmatic questions, but also – indeed primarily – growth together in witness and service to the world. The 2017 commemoration of the Reformation was taken by many Protestant churches and Roman Catholic dioceses as an incentive to seek and deepen such common ground when thinking back to that event. A high point in this was the festival service in Lund on 31 October 2016, at which Pope Francis and Bishop Younan, then President of the Lutheran World Federation, jointly presided.

89. In conclusion, it must be asked whether progress towards an agreed understanding of Church and church communion can be achieved. Does a more nuanced consensus in the understanding of the Church seem possible, as for example on the question of justification? Is consensus on fundamental ecclesiological truths attainable, in the light of which continuing difference on issues like the sacramentality and structuring of ministerial office, episcopacy or the Petrine ministry need no longer divide the churches? Consideration of basic ecclesiological statements of the Roman Catholic Church and the CPCE has shown that we do not have to begin from two mutually exclusive types of ecclesiology. The convergence on distinguishing the Church's foundation, form and purpose is decisive. The Second Vatican Council offers a picture of the understanding of the Church which leaves room for ecumenical agreement. Numerous

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statements in *Lumen Gentium* are manifest which are reminiscent of the body of Reformation thought – in particular the *Confessio Augustana*. The Leuenberg Church Fellowship's document *The Church of Jesus Christ* makes this common ground apparent, sharpening further the insights won from *Lumen Gentium*. We have therefore presented here a reconstruction documenting these mutual effects. They show that the Leuenberg conception does not present a model exclusive to the Reformation, but one that is ecumenically open. Of course it needs to be unpacked and updated in order to offer a basis for reaching a protestant-Catholic understanding: that is clear particularly on the question of ministerial office. If the convictions suggested here can be made the basis, the path will be cleared for further conversations on the issue of the understanding of Church. We are clearly closer to one another on ecclesiological questions than we have hitherto thought. Against the background of the considerations set out here, it seems to us no longer correct to speak two mutually exclusive and fundamentally incompatible understandings of Church. We therefore believe an official dialogue on questions of Church and church communion to have a prospect of positive results, and invite the ecumenical partners in this consultation series, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Roman Catholic Church, to initiate such a dialogue.

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## Appendix I : Abbreviations for cited sources and literature

Documents of the Second Vatican Council are cited from the edition on the Vatican website:  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index\\_ge.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index_ge.htm)

The following abbreviations are used:

- DV *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)  
LG *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)  
SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)  
UR *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism)

Documents of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe were cited from the following editions:

MOE Ministry. Ordination, Episkopé

‘Amt, Ordination, Episkopé’ in: *Amt, Ordination, Episkopé und theologische Ausbildung* (Leuenberger Texte 13). ed. Michael Bünker & Martin Friedrich. Leipzig 2013

CJC The Church of Jesus Christ

*Die Kirche Jesu Christi* (Leuenberger Texte 1). ed. Michael Bünker & Martin Friedrich, 4th impression Leipzig 2012

LA Leuenberg Agreement

*Konkordie reformatorischer Kirchen in Europa (Leuenberger Konkordie)*. trilingual edition, ed. Michael Bünker & Martin Friedrich, Leipzig 2013

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Other sources and documents:

BSELK      Confessional documents of the Lutheran Church

*Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche: Vollständige Neuedition.*

ed. Irene Dingel on behalf of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Göttingen 2014

CA      *Confessio Augustana*

GinA      Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. Vols. 1-4 World Council of Churches 1984-2017

## **Appendix II : Participants in the consultation series**

### **Delegates of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity**

Leader of the Delegation: Bishop Dr. Karl-Heinz Wiesenmann (Speyer)

Bishop Philip Boyce OCD (Raphoe)

Prof. Dr. Michel Deneken (Strasbourg)

Prof. Dr. Josef Freitag (Erfurt)

Prof. Dr. Angelo Maffeis (Brescia)

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Thönissen (Paderborn)

Prof. Dr. Myriam Wijlens (Erfurt)

Secretary: Mgr. Dr. Matthias Türk (Vatican City)

### **Delegates of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe**

Leader of the Delegation until 2015: Bishop Prof. Dr. Friedrich Weber (Brunswick)

Leader of the Delegation: from 2015: Church President Christian Schad (Speyer)

The Rev. Dr. John Bradbury (Cambridge)

Prof. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich (Oslo)

Prof. Dr. Fulvio Ferrario (Rome)

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Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel (Heidelberg)

Prof. Dr. Miriam Rose (Jena)

Prof. Dr. Stefan Tobler (Hermannstadt)

Secretary: Prof. Dr. Martin Friedrich (Vienna)