

Response
of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)
to the
Commission on Faith and Order Study
“The Nature and Mission of the Church.
A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement”¹

The Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) welcomes the fact that, in this Study on the Nature and Mission of the Church, the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC) has reflected theologically on the similarities and differences in the understanding of the Church. The Council recognizes helpful aspects in the text “Nature and Mission of the Church” but sees the need for further theological work on other points, and asks that these reservations be taken into account in the final version of the Study. In a convergence statement there can be no question of presenting a particular ecclesiology as the only valid one. Any such statement can only claim to represent a genuine convergence on ecclesiological issues if, in presenting the common points and differences, it correctly reflects the convictions of the churches involved, and duly respects these.

The theological basis for the Protestant churches’ Yes and No to the questions of the nature and mission of the Church is the result of the findings of the 4th Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1994, published under the title “The Church of Jesus Christ. The Reformation churches’ contribution to the ecumenical dialogue on church unity” (Leuenberg documents 1). In the view of the Council of the EKD, this document sets out the basic features of Protestant ecclesiology.

One of the main strong points of the paper on “The Nature and Mission of the Church” (NMC) is that, from the start, the Church is defined as “*creatura Verbi et creatura Spiritus*”. This understanding of the Church as the creature of the Word and of the Holy Spirit is very welcome and echoes important aspects of Protestant ecclesiology. Although the exact ordering of Word and Spirit remains unclear, this is nevertheless one of the points where “an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the Church” (8) can be seen most clearly. This is more precisely expressed in the previous study on “The Nature and Purpose of the Church” (NPC).

As in so many ecumenical documents, NMC also reflects a lack of clarity about the goal of ecumenical endeavour. The standard phrase “visible unity” is used repeatedly, but what is meant by it in the text is shifting. This is hardly surprising since the term is used to mean different things in the different churches - in the Reformation churches, for instance, it is used in the sense of church communion, while in others it is taken to mean a common institution. The fact that there is no consensus as to the end goal of ecumenical efforts, indeed that this is actually one of the main differences between the ecclesiologies of the Christian churches, is a question that the

¹ These comments are based on the English text (The Nature and Mission of the Church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement. Faith and Order Paper 198, 2005) because the German translation is not always clear and actually includes some obvious mistakes (see below). Where no title is mentioned the paragraph numbers in brackets refer to the English text of “The Nature and Mission of the Church”. Where reference is made to the title itself, the abbreviation NMC is used. In occasional references to the earlier paper “The Nature and Purpose of the Church. A stage on the way to a common statement.” Faith and Order Paper No. 181, November 1998, the abbreviation NPC is used.

paper itself should have addressed. The commentaries contained under b) in the box following para. 63 would have been a good starting point for this.

Our response will be guided by the questions asked at the end of the Introduction, although these will not be dealt with one by one, but linked to one another and answered as we examine central passages of the text. We shall be looking in particular at how far, from the standpoint of Reformation ecclesiology, the text allows us to speak of “common ecclesiological convictions” and so to identify where, from our point of view, there might actually be an “emerging convergence”. The points where there are shortcomings in the paper, and likewise suggestions for improvements, will emerge automatically as we do so.

I. The Church of the Triune God

It is not absolutely clear why the explications in this section are set apart from those in the following section on the Church in history. “The Nature of the Church” - as in the title of the opening chapter - cannot be seen separately from the history of the Church (cf. Section II). For here too many things are said about the life of the Church in history, which is inevitable, given that the Church is a reality created by God in history. The danger of talking of a supra-historical nature is certainly partly averted by the beginning and large sections of the chapter on “The Nature of the Church (I.A), but the headings and sub-divisions (see below, comments on I A) do encourage this all the same. Significantly enough, it is stated at the beginning of the section on “The Church in history” that the Church is “*also* an historical reality” ([our italics]. See below, comments on II A/48). We recommend that the titles of chapters I and II, and the sub-titles be reconsidered.

I. A. The Nature of the Church

What has just been said above applies in particular to this title. Although the concrete definition of the nature of the Church as creature (see below) and the extensive New Testament references do strike a counter-balance, the fact that the mission of the Church is then dealt with independently of its nature (in II B) is ecclesologically misleading. The Church’s mission is inherent to its nature; this is the only way that it can be an instrument of reconciliation, as is said later (cf. I.C).

I. A. (I) The Church as a Gift of God: Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit (*Creatura Verbi et Creatura Spiritus*)

The starting point chosen here for the understanding of the Church is particularly welcome: first, the Church is defined as creature (*creatura*), so that any metaphysical exaltation is excluded from the start. Second, it is defined as “the creature of the Word” (*creatura Verbi*) and “the creature of the Holy Spirit” (*creatura Spiritus*), which always has to be understood in the context of God’s trinitarian action - as is also explained in (9). The detailed explication in the previous version “Nature and Purpose of the Church” was actually considerably better, and the text should return to that version (NPC 9-13, instead of NMC 9-13). Moreover, the opening statement in the box on p.15 should be incorporated into the main text, perhaps as part of NPC 9, because the relation of the two definitions of the Church as the creature of the Word and the creature of the Holy Spirit is very clearly stated in the first paragraph of the box on p. 15 : God creates the Church and binds it to himself “through the Holy Spirit by means of the living voice of the Gospel proclaimed in preaching and in the Sacraments”.

(9) It is appropriate - as was done in NPC - to begin by emphasizing that the Church belongs to the God who accomplishes all his *opera ad extra* in the unity of the persons of the Trinity, and not only to the Father (as in NMC), before setting out the specific attributions.

(10) The fact that the Church is the creature of the Word refers not only to its dependence on the eternal Logos but also to its creation and maintenance through the proclamation of the Gospel. This is watered down in NMC as compared to NPC, where the explication of the definition of the Church as the creature of the Word expressly states that the Church “is grounded in the Gospel, the Word of God”.

(12) The anchoring of the attributes of the Church in its being created by God is very much to be welcomed, although this idea is more clearly followed through in NPC.

[Box after 13] After the excellent introductory sentence (see above), the alternative outlined in (a) is not needed as such. Lutherans stress the function of proclamation and sacraments as means, the Reformed its nature as witness, which they do however also understand as the means of the Spirit. An “immediacy” without proclamation would not only contradict the introductory sentence which is presented as a consensus, but would also be difficult to imagine.

We are glad to note that (b) and (c) express the position of our churches which says that however much the rule of God’s Word and Spirit makes use of church institutions, including the ordained ministry, it can also work against the institutions, so that the continuity of the Gospel may under certain circumstances be seen most clearly through a break with institutional continuity.

This precludes seeing the church institution, and especially one particular form of it, as “guaranteeing” the presence of truth and the power of Word and Spirit. We agree with the statement that the ordained ministry is to be seen as a “necessary means” in the sense that it constitutes the vehicle that the church requires in public to convey the “necessary means” which are the spoken Word and Sacrament; however, we could only agree with its being understood as an “effective means” in the sense that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, proclamation, which the ordained ministry specially serves, is the “effective means”.

This statement becomes church-dividing when it is asserted that the church institution in one particular form is the necessary and effective means and the guarantee of the truth of the Gospel, and other churches with a different institutional form and history are denied as such to be loci of truth.

I. A. (II) Biblical Insights

This section sets the ecclesiological considerations, especially those on the communion of the churches, on a good biblical foundation. It is very welcome that it allows the great variety of biblical statements and images to stand and does not compress them into a systematic corset.

(15) If what is said of Scripture as a “uniquely privileged source” can be taken to mean that Scripture occupies a critical role in relation to all other possible sources, and if an “interplay of different kinds of material” with the concrete examples that follow can likewise be understood strictly in this sense, then we can agree.

(24-26) This important presentation of the New Testament understanding of the Church as *koinonia* or *communio* provides a key to understanding church unity as a communion of churches. Everything that is said about the “visible unity” of the Church should be dictated by this key concept of *koinonia*.

I. B. The Mission of the Church

We can broadly agree with this section, but there is a danger that in some of the phrasing the role

of the Church is exaggerated.

(34) Instead of “to manifest God’s Grace” (which, as the German translation shows, can easily be understood to mean “to reveal God’s Grace”), the text should read “to proclaim God’s Grace”. The phrase which says the Church is called “to bring humanity to its purpose” overplays the Church’s purely instrumental role in this process in which God is the prime mover.

(35) We welcome the fact that apostolicity is seen as an attribute of the whole Church and not only, or even chiefly, as belonging to ordained ministers going back to the apostles. The Reformation churches understand themselves as churches in the apostolic succession, in this sense of the succession of apostolic proclamation.

(36) The phrase “the church, embodying in its own life the mystery of salvation” ignores the church’s sinfulness.

I. C. The Church as Sign and Instrument of God’s Intention and Plan for the World

We agree with the way in which the Church is described here as “sign and instrument” so that, from our point of view, the concessive clause in the relevant box is correct.

(45) Here too we welcome the definition in the first sentence describing the character of the Church as a God-given reality. The phrase “celebrated in the liturgy” is a later addition - as can be seen from a comparison with NPC - which cannot hide this character. This is not made evident by the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews indicated here. If this is to be retained it should appear after the words “salvation in Christ”. From a Protestant point of view the text should read: “as proclaimed in the Gospel and celebrated in the liturgy”.

[Box] The box should be placed under (47), on p. 28.

The outline of the different positions is very good. Our churches do not use the concept of “Sacrament” for the Church for the reasons correctly given here. They do however affirm the last sentence which indicates a certain rapprochement with the opposite position.

II. The Church in History

Regarding the separation of this section and section I, “The Church of the Triune God”, see above.

II. A. The Church in via

(48) The Church is rightly described as an “eschatological reality”, already anticipating the Kingdom of God, though it is not yet its full visible realization. However, it is not an eschatological reality besides the fact of being “also” a historical reality; it is that reality as such.

(50) We are glad to note that sin, which also affects the Church, is mentioned here, even though this is dealt with only very briefly.

(52-56) We welcome the strict definition of the attributes of the Church mentioned in the Creed as God’s gifts already realized in Jesus Christ, and the fact that these are consistently distinguished from its *notae*. The following paragraphs show logically and very convincingly that any contradiction of this in the church as it is today also has to be seen as a contradiction of the reality already given to it.

[Box after 56] Our churches see their position adequately reflected in the third paragraph. Like

the document “The Church of Jesus Christ” (cf. p 27), we stress that precisely because the Church is holy, it is able to recognize its sinfulness and pray for forgiveness.

The disagreement that exists here is certainly clear, but the final paragraph does seem to suggest a possibility of bringing greater openness to the contrasting positions.

II. B. In Christ - but not yet in full Communion

(57-59) The argument in this part is not clear. Its scope is not clarified so that it is difficult to see how the three paragraphs advance the thinking of the study. Above all, it remains unclear what is meant by the “not yet” full communion - the communion of the churches (as in 58) or humanity’s fellowship with God (as in 59), which will only be realized at the end of time. Both are important for the Church’s historical existence but are not the same.

(57) To state that the divisions of Christianity are primarily, or indeed only, a problem to be eliminated because they hinder the Church’s mission is insufficient. This condition has to be overcome first and foremost because it contradicts the unity that belongs to the nature of the Church.

II. C. Communion and Diversity

(60) The justification for making the step from the diversity of gifts which, according to the Bible passages indicated here, the Spirit gives to Christians, to an acceptable diversity in the churches needs to be spelled out. This is not intended to say that this diversity should not be affirmed, but the argumentation does not support the conclusion of the statement.

(61) We find it questionable that culture should be made the subject of the activities criticized in the indented sentences at the end of this paragraph, when in fact it should be the churches concerned.

[Box after (63)] We welcome the term “visible communion” used in para. b) as a concrete expression of “visible unity”.

For the Reformation churches, the “limits of diversity” according to Art. 7 of the Confessio Augustana, are to be found where differences in proclamation and in the administration of the sacraments actually cover contradictions of the norm set by Scripture itself. Then it is not just a matter of “different emphases” but of “illegitimate diversities”. This understanding corresponds to the third type of ecclesiology outlined in the box. It combines theological firmness in faithfulness to the Gospel with the possibility of many forms of ecumenical openness.

II. D. The Church as Communion of Local Churches

(66) The text states that the communion of local churches is sustained by the living elements of apostolicity and catholicity which include Scripture, baptism and communion (no doubt here in the sense of “Holy Communion” - concerning the terminology here, see below), as well as “the service of a common ministry”. We affirm this, provided that what is meant is the mutually recognized ministry of public proclamation in the different churches.

[Box after 66] The Reformation churches hold the position outlined in the second paragraph. It is rightly stated that the differing definitions of the term “local church” are not simply a matter of language usage but are based on different ecclesiological concepts. It would be helpful to have these reasons set out so that we could explore the possibility of bringing the positions closer together.

III. The Life of Communion in and for the World

This section, in particular chapters A-E, draws on earlier Faith and Order papers, notably the Study on the Apostolic Faith and what came to be known as the “Lima Document” (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. A Convergence Statement by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, 1982) and shares their strengths and weaknesses. More attention should have been given to the churches’ responses to these.

The reliance on previous texts can be seen in the subjects dealt with here: while Sacraments and Ministry are dealt with at length, the subject of the proclamation of the Gospel is missing although, together with the Sacraments, this is the means by which God founds and sustains the Church and its community. The fact that the Church is programmatically defined at the beginning of this Study as *creatura verbi* should have called for a chapter on this subject. Instead we find the explications on the “Apostolic Faith” (III.A.) While the object of this is the same - the living God himself and his action - in the medium of proclamation he *encounters* human beings, creating and sustaining faith, and hence also creating and sustaining the Church (as 10, 4th sentence rightly says) , so much so that it is also the community of believers that carries out the proclamation. As earlier in the Lima document, in this text too the chapters on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not accompanied by a chapter on “Apostolic Proclamation”, with only a chapter on “Apostolic Faith” being offered. As a result, the dependence of faith and of the Church on the proclaimed Word of God is obscured. There is a danger that faith could be seen as an inherent possession of the Church (*depositum*).

III. A. Apostolic Faith

In the light of the foregoing, the title should be changed to “Apostolic Proclamation” and the text modified accordingly.

(67) The logic behind the thinking in this introductory paragraph shows clearly that this change is necessary. For, besides baptism and Eucharist, the means of grace which God bestows on the Church to enable it to fulfill its mission include the (spoken) proclamation of the Word.

(69) We accept the pre-eminence given to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed because it is more closely defined in appropriate terms in (72).

(70) The statement that “The faith transmitted through the living tradition of the Church is the faith evoked by the Word of God” is not acceptable in our view because, as we indicated above, it makes faith the inherent *depositum* of the Church; the Gospel is considered here only as the original starting point or impetus for faith, which from then on is deposited in the Church, and no longer as the encounter on which faith - and hence also the Church, as the community of the faithful - constantly depends. The text should therefore read: “The faith, which is created by the Spirit through the Word/Gospel, is confessed in the Creeds of the Early Church and also testified to in other forms.”

(73) In line with the Trinitarian construction of sentences three to five, the third sentence should say: “that the Father is creator of all”.

III. B. Baptism

(76) The formulation “faith...nurtured by the faith of the church” is unacceptable from the point of view of the Reformation churches. The text should say, that Christian faith “is nurtured by the Word of God, proclaimed by the Church”.

[Box after 77] Here it needs to be said in the strongest terms that the non-recognition of baptism between Christian churches is a scandal that urgently needs to be eradicated. It is

therefore all the more welcome that many churches see baptism as an ecumenical sacrament that is mutually recognized.

III. C. Eucharist

Even though the NMC text does try to employ all the terms used for Holy Communion in the different churches, there is still a clear tendency, especially here in III, C) to prefer the term “Eucharist”. This reflects the language of the Lima document, which was regretted by various churches in their responses. As each of the terms used in our churches carries a particular theological interpretation, we would urge that a good path to follow is that chosen in bilateral dialogues, where the term “the Lord’s Supper” is used throughout. This term is confessionally neutral, as well as biblical, and expresses the fundamental theological characteristic of this Sacrament, which all the churches accept. This should be done in III. C and in the other sections of the text.

(79) Not all the elements listed in the second sentence refer to what the Lord’s Supper *is*: some refer to - actual or possible - components of the *celebration* of the Lord’s Supper. Thus the Lord’s Supper as such is “proclamation of the Gospel”, “memorial”, “communion”, “anticipation” and “foretaste of the Kingdom”. As for “glorification of the Father”, “invocation of the Spirit” and “intercession”, on the other hand, some or all of these elements are partly included in the liturgy of some, but by no means all the churches, as in our case. They should therefore not be spoken of as though they were defining characteristics and necessary liturgical elements of the Lord’s Supper.

[Box after 81]

The present state of the discussion following the Lima document and the ecumenical debate arising from it, is set out in a very precise and nuanced way which clearly shows the points where further theological work is called for. From the standpoint of the Reformation churches it should be noted that the Lord’s Supper is in essence a meal where Christians receive the body and blood of Christ and respond to this with thanksgiving. The traditional difference between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions concerning the presence of the body and blood that is to be received has been resolved by the Leuenberg Agreement.

The use of the term “full visible unity” in the second last paragraph is unfortunate, as it is not clear what the text means by “visible unity” (see above). We can agree with the content of the sentence if what is meant here, in contrast to the “eucharistic hospitality” mentioned earlier, is unrestricted, regular sharing in the Lord’s Supper, in other words, inter-communion with inter-celebration.

III. D. Ministry of all the Faithful and

III. E. Ministry of the Ordained

These two chapters should be combined. We very much welcome the fact that NMC starts with the ministry of all the faithful (priesthood of all believers), but the link with the ordained ministry is not clear. The calling and sending of the Apostles with which section E begins, cannot be taken quite so directly as the one historical line of descent of the ordained ministry as it is here (86). Furthermore, the Box after (89) also shows that the questions dealt with here and the ecumenical difficulties belong together.

(87) We welcome the statement that no single structure of ministry can be derived from the New Testament and that the churches have developed different patterns of ministry in the course of their history.

(89) What is said about succession in ministry as a means of serving the Church's apostolicity can be affirmed from the Reformation point of view if it is understood that this does not mean insisting on a particular structure and that, for the sake of the Church's continuity in the apostolic truth, it may also be necessary to break with institutional continuity (cf. Box after 13 above).

[Box after 89] In the first sentence it would be advisable to speak more cautiously of "points of convergence" rather than "**the** points of convergence" supposedly identified by recent ecumenical papers. As for the "issues to be explored further", we note that, in several cases, these are formulated in a way which assumes a perspective and a corresponding view of the goal which are not those held by the Protestant churches.

a: Here we can agree with the formulation.

b: The issue of "Eucharistic presidency" should not be addressed in isolation, but taken together with whole question of the administration of the Sacraments.

c: With reference to the "threefold ministry" the immediate question is not about its function, but about its justification. From a Protestant point of view, a graded ministry like this, with corresponding grades of ordination is not acceptable.

d: With reference to the classification of ordination as a Sacrament, we also first have to ask if this is justified, instead of treating it as established and only discussing the details.

e: We welcome the fact that the problem addressed is the restriction of ordination to men only and not the ordination of women.

f: From a Protestant point of view, there first has to be discussion of whether or not the so-called apostolic succession in ministry is a meaningful concept, and if so, what it should look like, before more far-reaching questions can be broached.

g: The same applies to the assertion taken for granted here, that the ordained ministry is constitutive of the Church.

III. F. Oversight: Personal, Communal, Collegial

(93) The presentation of the development in the Reformation is inappropriately tendentious, especially in comparison to the favourable outline devoted to the previous period (91-92). The text should not simply say "they (the Reformers) considered [the apostolicity of the Church] to have been corrupted" but that "they found [the apostolicity of the Church] to have been corrupted". The phrase "they continued to see the need for a ministry of *episkope*" is too weak and should be supplemented by the statement that the Reformers deliberately undertook the renewal of oversight structures. The statement that they did this "in different ways" needs to be expanded to explain that these different ways - both personal and synodal - were drawn from Holy Scripture. Moreover, the beginning of the second sentence should read "the Reformers", not "these Reformers".

[Box after 93] We can on the whole agree with the description of the state of discussion as set out in the first paragraph - although historically speaking the reference to "bishops ordained in apostolic succession back to the earliest generations of the Church" should be formulated more modestly.

Among the ecumenical achievements outlined at the start of the second paragraph, the recognition that forms of church leadership of a personal nature but not associated with the title of bishop do correspond to the episcopate should be mentioned as a genuine step forward. At the same time, it should be stated more clearly that the duties of *episkope* are fulfilled by other structures in non-episcopal churches which do not have a personal episcopal ministry. The way it is presented here simply as "parallels" is too weak: *episkope* has to be understood in terms of the

function, not the person.

The ecumenically open approach of the Reformation churches to this particular issue should also be highlighted. They have *episkope* in obvious forms, but most do not have it in the form of unbroken succession in the episcopal office. This does not prevent them from recognizing churches that do have such succession, nor from maintaining or seeking communion with those churches.

In this connection we refer to the statement published by the Council of the Lutheran World Federation at its meeting in Lund in March 2007, “The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church”. This makes clear how the character and purpose of the ministry of oversight is to be understood from the Lutheran point of view, bearing in mind that this ministry cannot guarantee the apostolicity of the Church, which lies in its faithfulness to the apostolic Gospel, but can serve it if it is itself exercised in faithfulness to that Gospel.

(94) Neither church discipline nor the ordained ministry can be placed on the same level as Word and Sacrament as the means of furthering God’s Kingdom; both should therefore be deleted in the first sentence. The aspect of discipline - not in the sense of church discipline, but of oversight over ministers and congregations - should be taken up in its own right in a new sentence linking in to what is then said about *episkope*. This should be done in a way that emphasizes the necessity of preserving the purity of preaching and worship and ensuring that the attitude of the preachers is in keeping with God’s Word. The second sentence of (94) then follows on quite naturally.

III. G. Conciliarity and Primacy

(96-97) The juxtaposition of “communal” and “collegial” exercise of the ministry of *episkope* in the form outlined here poses a problem from a Protestant point of view because the former simply means the participation of all the baptized, that is, a general involvement in all the different aspects of the church’s life. Collegiality, by contrast, which concerns the “corporate, representative exercise in the areas of leadership, consultation, discernment and decision-making” is restricted to ministers entrusted with oversight. In the Protestant understanding of the Church, however, parish ministers, i.e. non-episcopal ordained ministers, male and female, as well as Christian men and women who are not ordained also have their place among the representative decision-makers, be it in synods, church authorities or an official body like the Council of the EKD.

(100) In our understanding, synods do not meet only in decision-making situations but are a regular element in *episkope*. This is not to say that there are not also synods that are required to meet because of unusual circumstances.

(103) We cannot endorse the statement that in the present climate the primacy of the Pope “can be seen as a gift rather than a threat”. Regardless of the merits of certain individuals in the Roman see, we still see the universal doctrinal authority and jurisdiction of the Pope as fundamentally calling in question the asserting power of the Gospel and a threat to evangelical freedom. Given the dogmatization of the role of the Pope, we find it impossible to distinguish any “essence of primacy” that would be free of these deeply problematic aspects.

[Box after 104] The lack of agreement over the issue of primacy is correctly described. From the Protestant side it can be said that we recognize the papacy as an institution within the Roman Catholic Church, but not as a universal Christian institution. The inter-regional and worldwide fellowship of Christians would have to be conciliar in form, a universal ministry of unity would

have to be exercised collegially, perhaps with a rotating presidency (founded on *iure humano*). Both the Lutheran and the Reformed Reformation postulated conciliar models (cf. Schmalkaldian Articles and Conf./Gallicana/Discipl., Conf. Scotica). At the same time, there is no saying that a universal Christian council, like all councils, would be exempt from the possibility of error.

III. H. Authority

It seems inappropriate in our view to conclude chapter III with the topic of “Authority”, thus lending it the highest ecclesiological importance. Moreover, the treatment of the subject is incomplete and patchy. From the Protestant point of view, it has to be stressed as a matter of principle that all authority in the Church lies with God and God’s truth. God uses the Church, including its ministry, to establish truth, but truth is not inherent in the ordained ministry, nor guaranteed by it.

(107) The linking of authority and holiness is difficult to understand. Listing Scripture, tradition, worship and synods together as “sources of authority”, as in the third sentence, is inappropriate. In the case of tradition and synods it would certainly be more appropriate to say that they are bound to God’s holiness than to say that they reflect it.

(108) It is difficult to see why the discussion of authority should conclude with a paragraph on ordination. God’s authority asserts itself as, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s Word imposes itself and creates faith and the church as the community of the faithful. The ordained ministry has an important function in this, but it does not itself become the bearer of God’s authority.

IV. In and For the World

We approve the fact that this chapter highlights the ethical consequences of proclamation. The concrete situations in the contemporary world seem excellent examples of areas for Christian ethical engagement. It must however be admitted that Christians draw different ethical conclusions from the one faith, and these may be equally legitimate.

(114) We welcome the de-ideologizing of ethics expressed here. However much Christians may have their own motives for ethical action, the fact remains that in many ethical fields they have to work together with all people of good will.

(116/117) A common Christian stance on ethical issues can demonstrate the unity of the Church. Nevertheless, there are differences of judgment among Christians on certain issues which, because they are not illegitimate, do not represent a cause of division, whether it be in inter-church relations or within the churches. This is not to say that there may not also be differences over ethical issues that are church-dividing. At present it does look as if ethical differences are contributing to ecumenical tensions, though they are not the triggering factor. We agree that a dialogue among the churches is needed on these matters.

Conclusion

(119+120) The self-centred optimism concerning ecumenical work seems to us exaggerated in view of the actual ecumenical situation. The rapprochement achieved among the churches on certain points cannot mask the fact that mutual recognition by the churches and church communion have been achieved in only a few cases.

(121) One of these successful exceptions is the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in which churches of different confessions have achieved visible unity in the form of full church communion. “Re-confessionalism” is therefore not anti-ecumenical per se. On the contrary, reflecting on its own

doctrinal base can be a sign of a church's vitality if that base contains ecumenical resources that encourage ecumenical work, as is the case with the churches participating in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. It makes it possible, on the one hand, to enter into fellowship with churches that represent a different confession and have different church structures if it is seen that there too the Gospel is properly taught and the Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. And, on the other, it makes it possible vis-à-vis churches whose doctrine and structures cannot be accepted without problem, to establish all the same that, thanks to the faith-creating power of the Gospel, in them too the Church of Jesus Christ exists, and to seek and maintain fellowship with these churches in differing degrees.

(122) We agree with this paragraph in that it defines the ecumenical goal as communion among churches which recognize one another as the Church of Jesus Christ. Whether this can be achieved through reception of convergence documents is questionable, however.

(123) This paragraph should be deleted and the text should end with (22).

Translated by WCC Language Service