

**NB. PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION ONLY**

**The Fellowship of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK)**

**German Ecumenical Study Committee (DÖSTA)**

**RESPONSE**

**to Faith and Order Paper no. 198  
'The Nature and Mission of the Church' 2005.**

**Approved on 9 November 2007 in Frankfurt am Main**

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**1. Purpose and context of this response**

**a) Purpose**

The Faith and Order Commission is inviting all churches worldwide to examine whether the statements contained in the study document 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' reflect an emerging convergence and to what extent it provides a helpful framework for further ecclesiological discussions<sup>1</sup>. The German Ecumenical Study Committee (DÖSTA), which is accountable to the Fellowship of Christian Churches in Germany, considers that as a multilateral body it is thus appropriate for it to be involved for a number of reasons in the reception of this

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, para. 8

study. It none the less appreciates that the expectation is that responses to it should be made mainly from a confessional standpoint.

Moreover, the fact that DÖSTA itself produced in 1993 a study on ecclesiology<sup>2</sup> encourages us to continue our efforts from that time in examining the confessional diversity in ecclesiological stances and thus arrive at a common position. That study was DÖSTA's follow-up to the statement of the WCC's 1991 Canberra assembly 'The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling'. At the present time we are reaching decisions on the following next steps: efforts to achieve mutual recognition of baptism; to identify the apostolic faith in other churches; to achieve table fellowship in the Lord's Supper; to arrive at spiritual recognition of ordained ministries; to engage in common witness and service; and to make visible our already existing communion.

The following comments on the Faith and Order study document have been produced by a small multilateral working group and then discussed and approved by DÖSTA as a whole. In contrast to responses that are purely confessional, they have the following characteristics:

- They reveal which critical issues raised by individual DÖSTA members are also understandable by others. That gives rise to a critique of the arguments presented within our ecumenical fellowship. Suggested additions to the text can thus be tested with a view to the possibility of reaching ecumenical convergence.
- Local and national factors in the reception process can be clearly expressed and show that ecumenical controversy and convergence should be considered with regard to their cultural and psychological, and not simply their confessional, aspects.
- Multilateral ecumenical discussion makes us sensitive to perceive concerns raised by minority churches. The majority or minority status of a particular confession varies greatly from one part of the world to another. This response has been prepared in the specific ecumenical situation in Germany, with the numerical predominance of the confessional traditions represented by the Protestant regional churches and the Roman Catholic Church. It thus has a particular concern to pay due regard to the ecclesiological positions presented from Orthodox, Evangelical Free-Church and Old Catholic viewpoints.

## **b) Context**

All reception processes take place in a context determined by history and region. The reception process of ecclesiological studies in the country of the Reformation is even still today quite specific:

- A feature of German history is the close relationship between secular and ecclesiastical power. Ecclesiological questions – especially those aimed at possible change in institutional structures – have to reckon with resistance from established church structures, which in Germany are very varied, particularly within the Protestant churches.
- The Protestant regional churches in Germany and the Evangelical Methodist Church have achieved church fellowship on the basis of a common understanding of the Gospel, which is also a cause for rejoicing for the other confessional communities. It is now possible for European churches in the Reformation tradition to speak with one voice on ecclesiological issues in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)

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<sup>2</sup> Cf Peter Neuner and Dietrich Ritschl, eds, *Kirchen in Gemeinschaft – Gemeinschaft der Kirche. Studie des DÖSTA zu Fragen des Ekklesiologie*, Frankfurt, 1993. Cf, also the joint report on the issue, *Kirchen in Gemeinschaft*, op. cit., 8-38

(formerly the Leuenberg Church Fellowship)<sup>3</sup>. Despite the outstanding issues, that fact is a sign of hope in the contemporary ecumenical movement.

- Achievements, such as ecumenical cooperation in the form of interconfessionally recognized marriages, are more clearly relevant in Germany than they are in areas discussing reception where such real-life situations rarely occur. Ecclesiological differences in Germany always have implications for the day-to-day life of Christians. That is increasingly, and painfully, noticeable with regard to table fellowship in the eucharist.
- Beyond all differences in our understanding of institutions and the ordained ministry, all confessions in Germany agree that spiritual renewal of the ecumenical movement is necessary in the form of a recovery of the Christological and soteriological foundations of the ecumenical movement, and can have effective results. It would be desirable to see included in the study text 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' an examination of that theme in accord with that insight. Such an approach is now being made in particular from the Roman Catholic side<sup>4</sup>. The CPCE has also recently indicated in several ways the great importance of spiritual renewal for the ecumenical movement. In Germany in particular at the present time ecumenical concern for a deeper spiritual understanding of baptism is of major importance.

## **2. A critical evaluation of 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' within ecumenical studies on ecclesiology as a whole**

### **a) Method**

The worldwide ecumenical movement is today once again facing a critical situation in which hermeneutical questions are of particular importance. In light of that background, the method used in 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' is highly appreciated by DÖSTA.

DÖSTA particularly appreciates the efforts by Faith and Order (F&O) to contribute to an overall view of the achievements reached by those involved in bilateral and multilateral dialogues throughout the world as they have grown closer together in their ecclesiology. The evidence of convergences achieved and the identification of outstanding issues are helpful towards reaching a realistic assessment of future perspectives in our ecumenical endeavours. This Faith and Order study serves to keep the ecumenical ecclesiological memory alive, which in the present situation is particularly valuable. For many decades now, church bodies, commissions and individual theologians have laboured to develop their ecclesiological positions in an ecumenical perspective.

The invitation in para. 8 of 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' is addressed to confessional communities worldwide to examine whether their own position is adequately described, what convergences are emerging, what seem to be the next steps that could be taken, and what further development of the text would be meaningful. That invitation brings together the achieved results and place them before an open future, which is what is appropriate in the current state of ecumenical work. At the same time, it is becoming clear at this point how difficult it appears to Faith and Order at the present time to expose to critical debate a particular theological position that they themselves have adopted. That raises the question whether it is ever possible to achieve convergences acceptable to a majority by means of such a widely structured reception process. Does not this result in confessional differences emerging even more sharply, differences which could (apparently) already have been dealt with in previous ecumenical dialogues? Such disillusionment also attended the results of the comprehensive reception process of the Baptism,

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to German original

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Walter Kasper, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, New York, 2007

Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document. There is, however, no alternative to such a procedure. No body requesting reception can claim universal validity for its own standpoint. DÖSTA here agrees with the position taken by the WCC that only through a comprehensive process of coordinating all ecumenical efforts worldwide, through a process of ‘reconfiguration’<sup>5</sup>, is it possible to make lasting progress. In the ecumenical movement we need to make renewed efforts to come to an agreed answer to the question: who can, and should, bear responsibility for the overall coordination?

Closely related to the questions addressed to ecumenical hermeneutics is the quest for a clear goal for our ecumenical endeavours. The study ‘The Nature and Mission of the Church’ mentions positively several times the full visible unity of the churches which we are striving for (eg. para. 53). That is to be welcomed. However, it is not definitively explained in the text how far convergences on this controversial issue will take us. As in many other ecumenical documents, proposed common clear criteria for possibly achieving the aim of the ‘visible unity of the churches’ are thus missing. In not a few places, the text takes up the formulation, now widely used in the ecumenical movement of *koinonia*/communion of the churches as the goal, and affirms the possibility entailed in it that the diversity of the confessions that have come into being in history will be respected (eg. para. 66) This continuing vagueness as regards the goal of the ecumenical movement could slow down the reception process by the confessions. That fear seems not unfounded to DÖSTA in light of the results of previous F&O studies on this issue, beginning with the outcome of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela in 1993<sup>6</sup>. After more than a further decade of ecumenical work, this item appears again on the F&O agenda with great urgency.

## b) Contents

The study ‘The Nature and Mission of the Church’ takes up what are without a doubt central issues in the current state of ecumenical ecclesiological dialogue, which DÖSTA will have to deal with and approve:

- Linking ecclesiology with the Trinity is basically convincing. Further clarification is, however, needed on its connection with the description of the Church as ‘Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit’ and the relationship of the Church to God’s people of the Old Testament (Covenant?).
- The use of the diversity of metaphors in the Bible to describe the Church seems promising for future ecclesiological study.
- The missionary dimension of the Church’s work should – as the study indicates – be a central ecumenical concern. In multilateral ecumenical work in Germany the concept of mission-driven ecumenism has long been intensively pursued<sup>7</sup>. In this regard DÖSTA welcomes the reflection on the common mission of the churches to proclaim the one Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is immediately expressed in the title of the document.
- It does seem appropriate to give doctrines of ministry a place subordinate to the celebration of the faith in both baptism and the eucharist / Lord’s supper. However, the proclamation of the Word itself conspicuously receives no attention, even in the structure of the document. In this regard the relevant convergences in ecumenical documents must be borne in mind. The intensive examination of the themes of ‘oversight

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC, Geneva, ??? (CHECK)

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Thomas Best and Günter Gassmann, eds, *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia : Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993*, Geneva, WCC, 1994

<sup>7</sup> This footnote refers to inner German documentation

/ episcopate' and 'authority' take up major central issues in many bilateral dialogues on ecclesiology and are ecumenically promising<sup>8</sup>.

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that there are issues to which the document gives little attention:

- In the DÖSTA study on ecclesiological issues<sup>9</sup> an examination of the various confessional expressions of ecclesiology provided a starting point for further reflection. Each confessional community began by setting out the theological basis for its stance. Those presentations on the historically conditioned and then institutionalized church structures immediately removed any expectation that we would quickly discover a form of church unity to which all traditions could agree. It will probably not be possible to adopt this method in the study document before us. However, it might be possible to find a point at which such factors could be more clearly spelt out. To that end it would be necessary, if the opportunity arose, to request the confessional communities to give a short presentation of themselves.
- 'The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification'<sup>10</sup> and the preceding bilateral studies 'The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do they still Divide?'<sup>11</sup>, 'Justification by Faith'<sup>12</sup>, and 'Church and Justification'<sup>13</sup>, are of great importance in this reception process – and not only in the German churches, but also with regard to the ecclesiological consequences arising out of the achievement of that Christological and soteriological agreement. DÖSTA has recently produced a multilateral study on the theme of justification<sup>14</sup>. The document could make stronger reference to this connection.
- In addition to the basic missionary aspect of church work, the Church's mission to serve is also of considerable importance. In Germany we are particularly aware of this because of our experience in post-war years of the practical help given by church-related organizations. References to service/diakonia are largely absent in the document.
- DÖSTA has recently begun a study project that will engage in critical reflection on the process of how tradition is formed in confessional communities. It would also be an enrichment to the F&O document if it included the concept of admission of guilt in light of our lost unity and the call to all churches to repent<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. Comments on 'The Nature and Mission of the Church'

#### a) Method

DÖSTA welcomes the text as a whole as an attempt to describe existing convergences in ecumenical debate on issues of ecclesiology. Following the ecumenical methodology of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order, Lund, 1952, the text describes differences against the background of what is held in common and displays 'differentiated consensus'. The aim of the document, to achieve 'convergence' on ecclesiological issues that will enable the churches 'to recognize in one another the Church of Jesus Christ' and, on that basis, 'be encouraged to take

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<sup>8</sup> This footnote refers to inner German documentation

<sup>9</sup> *Kirchen in Gemeinschaft*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Commentary by the Institute for Ecumenical Research*, Strasburg, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg (eds), *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era : Do they still Divide?*, Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1989

<sup>12</sup> Cf. There will be an English version of this somewhere

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Harding Meyer et al. (eds), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung*, op. cit., 317-419

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Uwe Swarat, Johannes Oeldemann and Dagmar Heller (eds), *Von Gott angenommen – in Christus verwandelt. Die Rechtfertigungslehre im multilateralen Dialog*, Frankfurt 2006

<sup>15</sup> Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, Geneva, WCC, 1993.

steps on the way towards visible unity' (para. 6), deserves all appreciation and support. It can be stated that the text comes very near to achieving that aim. The distinction between parts of the text that express what is held in common and other parts, in boxes, that outline outstanding differences is helpful for the study of these issues in the churches. However, it is a hindrance to reception that as a rule it is only possible to surmise which statements reflect which confessional positions.

## **b) Overall assessment of the document**

The Trinitarian foundation of the Church's nature is of constitutive significance for this text, as it is also in the WCC Basis and previous dialogues within Faith and Order. The Church is aptly characterized as 'creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit' (para. 9), to serve the reconciliation of humankind (para. 33), for the transformation of the world (para. 109), for repentance (paras 37, 59 and 111), through justification by grace (para. 113) to the glory and praise of God (para. 33). As opposed to the foregoing study 'The Nature and Purpose of the Church', the missionary dimension of the Church of Jesus Christ is emphasized as an historical fact (paras. 7, 9, 57, 103ff and 110). It is however, noticeable that the biblical metaphor of 'God's people' is hardly developed. If this omission were corrected, the relation of the Church to Israel could also be made more explicit.

The recognition of ecclesiology as the key issue in the multiple dialogues between the Christian churches has always been a central concern of the ecumenical movement. At the same time, dialogue focussing on issues of ecclesiology has often found it difficult to make any progress. It is to be questioned whether unity in ecclesiological questions should remain the sole means of testifying to the Christian faith. The document rightly underlines in the introduction that 'no single text can say everything there is to say about the Church' (para. 4). This aspect is also taken up in the main body of the text, where the 'visible organizational structures of the Church must always be seen and judged... in the light of God's gifts of salvation in Christ, celebrated in the liturgy' (para. 45). That does not deny the need for a concrete study of the Church as an actual historical reality. It is to be welcomed that the document bases its reflection on the nature and mission of the Church on diverse 'actual stories of Christian life and witness' (para. 4). It is thus possible for all the voices composing the richness of the Church to be heard.

The structure of the document is helpful, with its sub-headings and the juxtaposition of things held in common and differences, which are then yet further differentiated. The text does not name names, which is an advantage, but there are, none the less, some places where it would have been helpful to have a described position confessionally identified. Without that, it is difficult to make a response, for in some places some churches will wonder if a particular remark is directed at them. Since such confessional labelling is consistently avoided, some descriptions are not quite clear. For example, on the box entitled 'Limits of Diversity?'. (1) Is the 'diversity in our worship' really a problem, or is it not rather that the problem lies in the value attached to particular elements in worship (sacraments, ordination / consecration, etc.)? And (2) is it true to say that 'one type of ecclesiology identifies the Church exclusively with one's own community, dismissing other communities... into an ecclesiastical void'? Here the categorizing into many types and sub-types seems very confusing.

By contrast, the attempts to clarify concepts such as 'local church', which are used in different ways, are helpful (cf. box following para. 66), thereby avoiding misunderstandings. Similarly helpful are the attempts to propose the actual wording for a consensus or convergence.

The preceding document ‘The Nature and Purpose of the Church’ (1998, German translation 2000) raises in article 6 the question ‘how Scripture is used’. It takes as its basis ‘a common understanding of the unique and normative revelation of **the Scripture**, and thus the need to ground our agreement in the witness of Holy Scripture’, even though “in the Holy Scripture there is no systematic ecclesiology”. The present version ‘The Nature and Mission of the Church’ unfortunately contains no section referring to the basic importance of Holy Scripture for determining the nature and mission of the Church. It is true that the number of biblical references has increased, but in many places they seem incidental and rarely provide the required basis looked for in Holy Scripture. A revision of the text would have to give stronger scriptural support for the statements it makes.

The structure of the document is generally acceptable although the division into (i) and (ii) of sub-section A in section 1 makes little sense.

### **c) Comments on particular points**

#### **Introduction, paras 1-8**

No comments.

#### **Section I. A ‘The Nature of the Church’, paras 9-33**

*The sub-heading I A (i) ‘The Church as a Gift of God: Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit’* correctly emphasizes that the Word *and* the Spirit of God are involved in the creation of the Church – not in the sense of two entities working alongside each other, but in the sense of their inseparable cooperation, so that it could also be said that the Church is a creation of the Word in the Holy Spirit.

*Para. 9 et passim.* Very often (15 times in all) the Church is described in this text as God’s ‘instrument’ to testify to the faith (eg. paras 9, 12, 34, 43, 46, 47). This is a problematic concept in ecumenical ecclesiology and no clear definition is given here. Moreover, if the mission of the Church in the world is of foremost priority, it should in no way be downgraded, and emphasis on its nature as ‘instrument’ lays particular stress on the institutional dimension of the Church, and less on the dimension of the divine communion/koinonia with humans that is realized in the Church. Moreover, ‘instrument’ is not a biblical description of the Church, but a construct of tradition, which has combined in this concept the mission and the task of the Church to proclaim Christ. It was taken up in this sense by the Second Vatican Council (cf Lumen Gentium, chapter I, section 1). Frequent reference to the Church as ‘instrument’ is not to be expected in an ecumenical document and requires further explanation (cf. the reference to the Church as ‘sacrament’ in the box after para. 47). It would also be helpful in this connection to have a closer examination of the relation between ‘sign’ (signum) and ‘instrument’ (instrumentum). As a metaphor the concept ‘instrument’ runs the risk of being misunderstood in a technical or mechanical way. None the less, when it is understood in the sense that Christ, or the Triune God, calls the Church, i.e. the community and individual believers, to be his messengers, witnesses, servants and co-workers in the final work of salvation, then it does lose something of its impersonal character. However, the concept of communion/koinonia, as the form in which the love of God takes concrete form in God’s world, could perhaps provide a better entry point for ecclesiological issues.

*Para. 10* We have here an apt description of the Church: ‘The Church is the communion of those who, by means of their encounter with the Word, stand in a living relationship with God,

who speaks to them and calls forth their trustful response; it is the communion of the faithful.’ That presents the nature of the Church as a community of persons in which all institutional aspects can only be assigned a secondary place. Unfortunately, that sentence is somewhat tucked away in the paragraph dealing with the nature of the Church as *creatura verbi*. It would be logically and theologically better if the exposition under A ‘The Nature of the Church’ began with that definition. That would make it quite clear what is being talked about. The German word ‘Kirche’ (Church) is very ambivalent and cannot be used without being defined. If, at the beginning of that section, the definition were given that ‘Church’ means the communion/community of believers in Christ, that would also make it clear why the Church is the *creatura Verbi et Spiritus Sancti*, since faith and the communion of the faithful are created by the Word and the Spirit of God, and thereby the Church.

The mention of Mary in this paragraph seems strange to Protestant Christians. It does not follow from that that it should be deleted. It should, however, be explicitly stated in which traditions this belief is represented, possibly as follows: ‘The Church is the communion of the faithful. This is the common vocation of every Christian. In continuity with the theology of the Ancient Church, a theological interpretation has been maintained in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, according to which the Church has its archetype in Mary, who hears God’s Word and believes God’s call (Maria-Ecclesia-Typology). Mary is here seen as a symbol of the Church and of the individual Christian called to do the will of the Father in heaven.’

In addition, a question arises at this point concerning the way in which dogmatic statements in this document are supported by biblical texts. The role of Mary ‘as a symbol of the Church and of the individual Christian’ is, inter alia, supported by a reference to Matthew 12: 50, a verse in the narrative on Christ’s true family (cf. also Mark 3: 31-35), according to which Jesus’ family is not composed of his relatives but of those who do the will of God. For the purpose of indicating the special significance of Jesus’ physical mother, that text seems singularly inappropriate.

*Para. 12* In the description of the catholicity of the Church, alongside mention of the dimension of time, a reference to the dimension of place in this concept should also be included. (This applies also to para. 55.) In paras 52-56, the *notae ecclesiae* are once again described in a different way. It should be sufficient to give a definitive description in only one place, with cross-references where necessary.

*Para. 13* In this paragraph the Trinity is quite suddenly introduced. A clearer explanation is needed of the sense in which the Trinity ‘is the source and focus of all communion’. In any case, this should be expanded to read: ‘source and focus of all communion *in Jesus Christ*.’ The question also arises how the Trinity is related to the Word and the Spirit as the origin of the Church (see 2 (b) above).

*Box after para.13 ‘The Institutional Dimension of the Church and the Work of the Holy Spirit’* Alternative (a), on whether preaching and sacraments are ‘means’ or ‘simply witnesses’ of the Word dwelling in the hearts of believers, is not helpful. Sacraments are, rather, signs in which the life of the Church is made manifest. Similarly unhelpful is Alternative (b) on whether the ‘ordained ministry’ is to be regarded as the ‘effective means’ or even ‘guarantee’ or as a fallible institutional structure for the ‘presence of truth’. The BEM text in any case states correctly that the episcopal succession can be at most regarded ‘as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church’ (BEM, III. 38). The same applies to Alternative (c) between ‘institutional continuity, particularly continuity in episcopacy’ and ‘continuity in apostolic faith’: historical continuity alone cannot guarantee continuity in faith. On the other hand, continuity in faith is not an abstract unhistorical fact. The divergences over ‘the given institutional structures’ of the



Church' would be better communicated in that way, although not completely reconciled. In any case attributing the positions described to the particular confessions holding them would in this box be particularly helpful.

*Para. 15* In order to make clear the basic significance of Holy Scripture in determining the nature and mission of the Church, the following sentence should be inserted at the end of this paragraph: 'Thus all doctrinal statements of the churches must be in accord with and based on the Gospel, as witnessed to in Holy Scripture.'

*Section I. A (ii) a-d, paras 17-33* The four approaches (para. 17) giving biblical insights into the nature and mission of the Church (People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, Koinonia/Communion) are placed side by side without developing their inter-relatedness. The image of the Church as Koinonia, however, permeates all the other three dimensions in which the Church 'in a particular way' is related to each of the Divine Persons (para. 14). There could here be a more detailed and better treatment of the dynamic mutual interdependence (perichoresis) of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, which also marks the nature of the Church. Biblical metaphors for the Church should, in any case, be brought together into one internally consistent whole, and not adduced simply as examples of diversity of approaches.

*Para. 18* At the end of the paragraph we read: 'Nevertheless, as "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6: 16), the Church remains related, in a mysterious way, to the Jewish people, even as a branch is grafted onto the rich root of an olive tree (cf. Rom. 11: 11-36).' What is the meaning of the wording 'even as'? [The German is 'auch wenn'] It indicates contrast or difference. But the grafting of the wild olive shoot into the olive tree in Romans 11 is precisely the way in which the Church is mysteriously linked to the Jewish people. It should be corrected to read: '... into which the Church has been grafted, like a shoot into the olive tree.'

*Para. 22* In the reference here to the New Testament description of the Church as 'Temple' and as 'house', the classic reference, 1 Corinthians 3: 10- 17, should also be quoted.

*Section I. A (ii) d, paras 24-33* 'The Church as Koinonia/Communion' It is noticeable that, compared with the previous document 'The Nature and Purpose of the Church', the Greek concept 'Koinonia' now appears only as a sub-heading under Section 1 A (ii) 'Biblical Insights'. In the previous document it appeared in the heading of the main Section III. In the present context, Koinonia is, as it were, ranked equally with the three biblical images 'People of God', 'Body of Christ' and 'Temple of the Holy Spirit' – and this despite its being presented as 'a key to understanding the nature and mission of the Church' (para. 24). This concept should, of course, not be overemphasized, but to place it here is, however, not satisfactory. Moreover, there is no reflection on the differing uses of koinonia in different traditions. A box needs to be inserted here making it clear that 'community', as used, for example, in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), is a different concept from 'communion' as understood in the Orthodox Church. The concept of 'communio' is invested with a different meaning in discussion within the Lutheran World Communion from its meaning in the Communio-ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church.

*Para. 28* This paragraph is noted as positive, because it biblically builds on the concept of Koinonia (in the sense of fellowship with Christ and sharing between believers) and because it does, in a way, spell out more comprehensibly its key function for understanding the other biblical images for the Church.

*Para. 33* The concept ‘communion with Christ, which is realized in the Church should embrace the whole creation’ needs to be further developed. In Orthodox theology, the Church is often included in the overall act of creation: the creation is conceived as Church in process of becoming, indeed as the primal Church (Athanasios the Great). This is also mentioned in the document, in which the service of the Church is interpreted as ‘stewardship of creation’ (para. 36). This element could be expanded still further, thereby giving the mission of the Church in the world a higher profile.

### **Section 1 B ‘The Mission of the Church’ paras 34-42**

In this section martyrdom and suffering for the sake of the Gospel (paras 39 and 40) are stressed. This emphasis indicates the high regard in which Christian witness, even to the point of suffering, has been held in the ecumenical movement in recent times. In addition, however, the cross as the basic form of discipleship and thus kenosis as the basic structure of the Church should also be presented. The existence of the Church cannot be triumphalistic, but is existence alongside the poor and oppressed.

*Para. 35* The last three sentences are an addition, not in the previous version and not readily understandable. What, for example, is the meaning of the grandiloquent words ‘the nature of God’s own being’? What right have we to link the Church’s attributes with the Divine Nature? How, too, is the Church’s mission compromised, if any of these attributes is impaired?

### **Section I C ‘Church as Sign and Instrument of God’s Intention and Plan for the World’ paras 43-47**

*Para. 46* In order to do more justice to the personal aspect rather than the impersonal lifeless aspect of the Church as God’s ‘instrument’, it would suffice simply to reformulate the first sentence. It would then read: ‘As the community of people called by God and sent as Christ’s disciples to proclaim the Good News in word and deed, that the world may believe, the Church is the instrument in God’s plan.’

*Box: ‘Church as “Sacrament”?’ after paragraph 47 (in the original English wrongly placed after para. 48)* The word ‘sacrament’ is not used univocally. A more precise definition is required to give the necessary clarity to the concept, and not simply hinting at the existence of ambiguities by placing the word in inverted commas.

The first sentence would be more logically formulated if the word ‘only’ were inserted, thus: ‘Although all churches agree that the Church is a sign and instrument, *only* some churches express their understanding of the reality of the Church in sacramental terms.’ Or the sentence could begin: ‘While...’ rather than ‘Although...’. The subordinate clause could also be made into a complete sentence. In fact, this duality between a sacramental view of the Church and its limited function as ‘sign and instrument’ of salvation is incomprehensible. Orthodox and Roman Catholic theology is able to maintain the sacramental nature of the Church in that they do not identify the whole fullness of the Church with its concrete (visible) structures. Here a reference would be useful to the biblically-based concept ‘mysterion’, which in Orthodox theology also includes the sacraments. In light of that interpretation of sacramentality, dissent over the ‘instrumentality of the Church with regard to salvation’ could perhaps be overcome.

It should also be noted that current post-conciliar Roman Catholic theology no longer sees a contradiction between the sacramentality of the Church and the sinfulness of its members. In Roman Catholic eyes the relevant passage in the Constitution on the Church of the Second

Vatican Council (Lumen Gentium 8) is to be understood as follows: 'The sacramentality of the Church consists in the social structure of the Church, which is none the less – differently from the analogy, adduced in the Council's text, of the sinless human nature of Jesus Christ – to be regarded as sinful on the basis of the sinfulness of the Church's members. Thus the Church, as the basis or root sacrament – in distinction to the proto-sacrament, Jesus Christ – is 'at once holy and always in need of purification' and 'follows constantly the path of penance and renewal', because she is 'clasping sinners to her bosom' (Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, 8).

The final sentence is very awkward and open to misunderstanding. It would be better to formulate it as follows: 'However, those who commonly regard the Church as "sacrament" make a distinction between baptism and the Lord's supper on the one hand and the Church on the other, according to the way and manner in which they are signs and instruments in God's plan. And those who do not use the phrase "Church as sacrament" still uphold that the Church is a holy instrument of God for the fulfilment of the divine plan of salvation.'

### **Section II A 'The Church *in via*', paras 48-56**

*Para. 53* It is here stated that 'The unfortunate divisions among the churches are due partly to sin, and partly to a sincere attempt of Christians to be faithful to the truth.' The second part of that sentence is open to misunderstanding in that it could give the impression that obedience to one's own conviction of the truth has caused division in the Church. It would be helpful instead to note that, alongside the concern for reform, it is not always easy to discern the simultaneous motivations of the leading actors in a complex historical context. Resulting division is not then the intention of those involved and they cannot be morally blamed for it, notwithstanding the truth that it is possible to have good intentions and yet be to blame. In any case, the formulation 'partly... partly...' should be avoided.

*Paras 53 and 54* Both paragraphs speak of 'fuller visible embodiment' of the oneness (para. 53) and holiness (para. 54) of the Church. It would be useful if a box could be inserted at this point dedicated to explaining what the respective churches understand by 'visible' oneness and holiness.

*Box after para. 56 'The Church and Sin'* The proposition on this delicate theme at the end of the box is not bad, but needs to be supplemented at the end, perhaps with a clause such as: '..., but, none the less, is to be found in the life and actions of the Church.'

### **Section II. B 'In Christ – but not yet in Full Communion' paras 57-59**

Compared with 'The Nature and Purpose of the Church', this section is completely new. It indicates the link between mission and the quest for unity and is thus important.

*Para. 59* The concluding sentence should not begin with the word 'Nonetheless...'. Its link with the previous sentence is not adversative, but consequential. It would thus be more correct to begin with 'Therefore...'.

### **Section II. C 'Communion and Diversity' paras 60-63**

*Paras 61-63* The various 'cultural expressions of the Gospel' (para. 61) are in fact an enrichment of the life of the Church. Not all expressions of the Gospel, however, fall into the category of contextual interpretation. Rather, the rich tradition of the Church has produced expressions that are not bound to particular cultures and thus can serve as yardsticks for our contemporary

witness to the Gospel. Such expressions, essential for the life of the Church, should be mentioned by name. Liturgical expressions, in which the life of the Church takes concrete form, would here particularly have priority. The question should also be asked to what extent the witness to the faith in the 'ecumenical creeds of the early Church' is to be regarded as binding.

*Box 'Limits of Diversity?' after para. 63* Unfortunately, two themes have here become confused: the limits to diversity between the confessions and the limits to diversity within a particular church. A complete reformulation of the box is necessary to remove this confusion. It should be noted in it that at present no church holds any longer to an ecclesiology that dismisses 'other communities or persons into an ecclesiastical void'. There, and in many other places, it would be necessary, where relevant, to give exact references to confessional doctrinal traditions.

## **Section II. D 'The Church as Communion of Local Churches', paras 64-66**

*Para. 66* The churches would certainly be decidedly nearer to 'the goal of the search for full communion', 'when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in all its fullness' (para. 66). Full communion cannot, however, be simply identified with such mutual recognition, for it is also a matter, as the following sentence in the paragraph notes, that this communion be expressed in concrete form 'through conciliar forms of life and action'. Mutual recognition thus cannot be the final destination of the way to full communion. In any case, there is as yet no ecumenical agreement on what the 'full communion' lying beyond mutual recognition would look like.

## **Section III. 'The Life of Communion in and for the World', paras 67-108**

It is very awkward that the wording 'In and for the World' appears in the heading both of Section III and of Section IV, since that obscures the difference between the two sections. 'In the World' has a different meaning in Section III from its meaning in Section IV. In Section III it is more a matter of ministries within the Church, how they are structured and the role they have, and that should be reflected in the heading.

## **Section III. B 'Baptism', paras 74-77**

*Para. 74* The second sentence reads: 'Through baptism with water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Christians are united with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place.' That could be understood as if the water and invocation of the Triune God by the officiating minister alone made the baptism effective without a confession of faith by the person being baptized. That statement would, of course, be deficient for all believer-baptist Free Churches, but is also inadequate for the other traditions, where, in the case of infants, the confession of faith is made by proxy on behalf of the infant by the parents and sponsors. According to Reformation understanding, the faith of recipients is essential for sacraments to be received with salvific effect. The sentence should be recast to read either 'Through baptism received *in faith* with water in the name of the Triune God ...', or 'Through baptism with water in the name of Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, *believers* are united with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place.'

*Box 'Baptism' after para. 77* The effectiveness of baptism is only mentioned here under (d), which is inadequate. The alternatives between 'effecting' or 'reflecting' 'the reality of new life in Christ' (d) does aptly describe existing differences in the theology of baptism, but they should not be accepted as final.

### **Section III. C ‘Eucharist’, paras 78-81**

*Box ‘Eucharist’, after para. 81* The second sentence could be misunderstood as if regarding the eucharist as a ‘meal’ or as a ‘service of thanksgiving’ were seen by some as two mutually exclusive alternatives. The distinction lies rather in that not all churches believe that Christians receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the eucharist, but some churches understand the eucharist exclusively as a service of thanksgiving in the sense of a public confession of faith.

### **Section III. D ‘Ministry of all the Faithful’, paras 82-85, and Section III. E ‘Ministry of the Ordained’, paras 86-89**

In sections III. D and III. E (paras 82-89) a distinction is made between the general ‘ministry of all the faithful’ and the special ‘ministry of the ordained’. That is helpful and takes up a criticism made of BEM according to which, while the priesthood of all believers was presented as the basis of the ordained ministry, it was not developed.

*Para. 86* This basic statement on the ministry of the ordained is not indicated as being commonly accepted by all churches, although that impression is given. Is it the case that all churches can say that? How is that compatible with the differences mentioned later?

*Para. 87* In the ‘various forms of the ordained ministry’ that have arisen in the course of history, it has not only been a matter of adapting ministries to ‘contextual needs’, but also of taking up different elements present in the New Testament. According to some churches, the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons could render valuable service for the unity of the Church. The document, however, makes no mention of other ministries and charisms in the Church, that, together with the ordained ministry, can make a contribution to the fullness of its life.

*Para. 89* The wording ‘In this context, succession in ministry is a means of serving the apostolic continuity of the Church’ is indeed normal for Orthodox, Old Catholic, Roman Catholic and Anglican thought, but is not immediately obvious to Protestant, and especially Free Church, Christians. For them, the ordained ministry as such would at most be one means of maintaining apostolicity, but not succession. According to that understanding, the preceding sentence would say all that needs to be said.

### **Section III. F ‘Oversight: Personal, Communal, Collegial’, paras 90-98**

No comments

### **Section III. G ‘Conciliarity and Primacy’, paras 99-104**

This section addresses the difficult issue of universal primacy. The study first speaks generally of the need for synods (of the universal Church) to have a president, and then links with the concept of ‘primacy’ the ministry of oversight of the patriarchs of the Ancient Church over their respective areas. The claim of the bishop of Rome to a primacy of ‘universal jurisdiction... over the whole Church’ is described as a problematic development in primacy thinking, but is linked with the observation that a universal primacy ‘in support of mission and unity’ could be seen as a ‘gift’ to other churches. No explanation is given as to how this primacy of universal jurisdiction by the bishop of Rome would relate to his doctrinal authority nor of how it is consistent with the concept of primacy in the Ancient Church. Ecumenically, primacy among ministries of leadership in the Church is only conceivable, if at all, as a primacy of honour. The determining of the role of

a universal primacy of honour presents a quite new challenge to future ecumenical dialogue. The communal and collegial orientation and exercise of such a primacy is an essential precondition for it to be recognized outside the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Section III. H 'Authority', paras 105-108**

This section needs to be expanded in light of the literature listed in footnote 8.

### **Section IV. 'In the World and for the World', paras 109-118**

There is no transition to the theme of Christian ethics and thus no basis given for it. The result is that it is inadequately treated.

The heading of this Section IV 'In the World and for the World' is not clear, since it has already appeared in the heading of Section III. However, quite apart from that, it is inaccurate. John 17: 16-18 places the Church 'in the world but not of the world'. Only the first part is taken up here. Neither in the heading nor in the text is there any adequate recognition that the Church is 'not of the world', that the world 'hates' the Church, because it is not 'of the world' (John 17: 19), that the Church is sent 'as sheep among wolves' (Matt. 10: 16) and that Christians here 'live as strangers' (1 Pet. 1: 17). When the difference and the ensuing tension between the Church and the world is ignored, hope for the future dies, and with that an essential element in primitive Christian self-understanding. For ecclesiology a mainly realized eschatology must be regarded as having a dangerous attraction.

### **Conclusion, paras 119-123**

*Para. 121* The description of Christian identity in the last sentence is inadequate. Drawing on paras 9 and 24ff it should be expanded by reference to the Trinity and the work of salvation. The Church thus needs to be described as the pilgrim people of the Triune God, who by the Holy Spirit in the reconciling act of Jesus Christ enables them to participate in the divine koinonia, and thus bestows salvation and healing on the community of the churches as, renewed through repentance, they continue on their way.

#### **d) The German translation**

In general it can be said that the German is often clumsy and sometimes open to misunderstanding. Thorough revision is necessary to produce a final version.

The English word 'Mission' in the title is translated as 'Auftrag', but in the body of the text variously as 'Mission' or 'Sendung'. A thorough revision consistently using either 'Mission' or 'Sendung' would be more faithful to the original. The title of the document in German should be 'Wesen und Sendung der Kirche'.

*Para. 11* Faith is 'brought about' by the action of the Holy Spirit, and therefore it should read 'hervorgebracht' and not simply 'ans Licht gebracht'.

*Box after para. 13* 'The Institutional Dimension of the Church and the Work of the Holy Spirit' 'Subject to error and sin' in (b) does not mean 'Gegenstand von Sünde und Irrtum', but 'Sünde und Irrtum unterworfen' [but that would mean 'subjected to error and sin'! What about 'anfällig', 'prone, susceptible to?']

Para. 17 'Various approaches' goes into German as 'unterschiedliche Zugänge' (not 'Ansätze')  
[really? translators note]

Para. 19 The quotation from 1 Peter 2:9 in German is 'ein ausgewähltes Geschlecht'. Nowadays, the word 'Rasse' has negative connotations in German.

Para 33 The English 'flourishing' is here translated as 'Erfolg'. There is however no reason not to translate it literally as 'Blühen'. [really?]

Para. 55 Instead of 'Die wesensmässige Katholizität der Kirche wird konfrontiert mit Spaltungen', it would be better to say 'sie steht in Widerspruch zu Spaltungen' or 'bildet einen Gegensatz zu Spaltungen.'

Para. 87 The first sentence would be correctly translated 'Es gibt im Neuen Testament nicht nur ein einziges Modell (instead of 'kein einziges Modell') dafür, wie das Amt übertragen wird'.

Para. 103 The wording 'Mit der Entstehung des Papstums..' raises the question when the papacy arose. The English reads '...as the papacy developed ...'. The translation is thus questionable. It is not the origin but the form taken by the papacy that led to polarization.

#### 4. Proposals to Faith and Order for further Reflection and Work

When we consider developments in the World Council of Churches and theological debate in the ecumenical movement in general, the question urgently arises in some places why certain discussions in the present document 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' have not already been taken up. This applies particularly to the following areas:

##### a) Basic types of ecclesiology

The Eighth WCC Assembly in Harare in 1998 appointed a Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, which posed important basic ecclesiological questions in its Final Report, in particular the 'question of how the Church relates to the churches'<sup>16</sup>. It further continues: 'The response to these questions is influenced by the existence of two basic ecclesiological self-understandings, namely of those churches (such as the Orthodox) which identify themselves with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and those which see themselves as parts of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. These two ecclesiological positions affect whether or not churches recognize each other's baptism as well as their ability or inability to recognize one another as churches...'<sup>17</sup>.

That basic difference between these two types of ecclesiology, which surfaced there for the first time in ecumenical debate in that form has been taken up in 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' in the box following para. 63. There in point (c) under the heading 'Limits of Diversity?' it is further elaborated into three types of church that are further differentiated from one another.

Here is a basic issue in ecumenical theological debate requiring in-depth study. How do these differing basic attitudes relate to the convergences presented in the document? What is the basis of these differing ecclesiologies? Is it possible to categorize them simply under the heading 'diversity'? Such basic questions cannot be dealt with in a sub-point in a box. It is precisely here

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<sup>16</sup> 'Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches', in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 55, 2003, pp. 4-38

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., para. 15, p.7.

that the further work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology must begin. In so doing, the questions must also be taken up which the Special Commission also addressed both to the Protestant and to the Orthodox side: “To the Orthodox: “Is there space for other churches in Orthodox ecclesiology?”... To the churches within the tradition of the Reformation: “How does your church understand, maintain, and express your belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church?””<sup>18</sup>.

## **b) Worship and Ecclesiology**

In the Final Report of the Special Commission a clear connection is made between worship and ecclesiology, which has hitherto not been taken up by Faith and Order in this connection. “The term “ecumenical worship” has caused confusion about the ecclesial character of such worship, the ecclesiological status of the WCC, and the degree of unity that has in fact been achieved”<sup>19</sup>. The usage of the concept ‘worship’ varies from one confessional community to another. The question of worship and also the question of the ecclesial nature of ecumenical institutions such as the WCC should be taken up by Faith and Order in the next stage of its work.

## **c) Hermeneutics**

Two areas of questioning provide suggestions for hermeneutical reflection on the whole document...

First, the issue of different ecclesiologies must not be examined in isolation from investigation and presentation of relevant historical and contextual developments. Ultimately underlying that concern is the issue of the different hermeneutical keys that have led to different conceptions. Such a hermeneutical examination would, of course, not provide a solution to the tensions between the differences, but it would provide a deeper understanding of what is in turn necessary to make some progress on the issue of legitimate diversity.

At the same time, the whole document ‘The Nature and Mission of the Church’ must ask itself a hermeneutical question, namely, what is the reason for the quest for convergence, or, to what extent is convergence necessary on the journey towards unity? Without such preliminary reflections the document is, as it were, left in mid air and runs the same risk as we have seen in discussion on BEM. BEM’s starting point was the unexamined assumption that there is ‘one faith of the Church through the centuries’, which, when the outer layers are peeled away (as it were), will appear as a common core in a convergence document. In official responses, this ‘faith of the Church through the centuries’ has almost universally been equated by the confessions with their respective statements of faith, with an end result that, instead of convergence, one’s own confessional identity has again come to the fore.

That does mean, however, that this study on ecclesiology must lead on to a study on what we understand by unity.

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Provisional Translation from the German, World Council of Churches Language Service

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., para. 16, p.7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Appendix A, para. 2, p.18.



Translator's note: It must be remembered that this is a response to the German version of 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' (Possibly even the preliminary German version). Because of quite legitimate variations in translation, the comments, when translated into English, do not always marry with the English text. That is particularly noticeable in discussion of koinonia/communion/community/fellowship, all of which are nearly always in German 'Gemeinschaft'.