

## The Nature and Mission of the Church (*Faith & Order*, 2005)

### History of the document and its reception

A thorough analysis of the 180 responses by the churches to the 1982 Lima document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*<sup>1</sup> made it clear to the WCC Commission on Faith & Order that the study of ecclesiology must come more and more into the centre of the ecumenical dialogue. The Faith & Order Commission of the World Council of Churches decided to undertake a study on ecclesiology at its Fifth World Conference in 1993 at Santiago de Compostela Spain.<sup>2</sup> From 1994 to 1998 a small drafting group put together a statement that would articulate the consensus of the churches on the nature and purpose of the Church on the basis of Faith and Order's previous work and the bilateral dialogues, and to indicate areas of continuing disagreement. The statement received as its title: *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*.<sup>3</sup> In 2005 a second draft appeared under the title *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*.<sup>4</sup> It is significant for the difficult process of reaching an agreement on ecclesiology at the multilateral level that the document has to admit "that the responses were not fully representative of all the churches". The change of the title, however, is the result of the repeated suggestion in different reactions to the first draft "to strengthen the text's emphasis on mission" (7).

In explicit distinction from the BEM document the document on ecclesiology sets itself very modest goals:

In the precedent *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* the process seems to evolve into what could be called a "convergence" text. The present text is to enable churches to begin the first steps towards the recognition of a convergence that has emerged in a multilateral context. (5)

The presence of texts in a different lay-out indicates that we are not fully dealing with a convergence text yet.

The main text represents common perspectives which can be claimed, largely, as a result of the work of the bilateral and multilateral discussions of the past fifty years and of the changed relationships between the churches in this period. The material inside the boxes explores areas where differences remain both within and between churches. Some of these differences may come to be seen by some as expressions of legitimate diversity, by others as church-dividing. While the main text invites the churches to discover, or rediscover, how much they in fact have in common in their understanding of the Church, the text in the boxes offers the opportunity for churches to reflect on the extent to which their divergences are church-dividing. In the perspective of growing convergences, the hope is

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<sup>1</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper, 111), Geneva, WCC, 1982. Most recently a volume appeared studying the reception of this document: T.F. BEST & T. GRZDELIZDE, *BEM at 25: Critical Insights into a Continuing Legacy* (Faith and Order Paper, II, 205), Geneva, WCC, 2007. For the initial reactions see M. Thurian (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry Text* (Faith and Order Paper, II, 132, 135, 137, 143), Geneva, WCC, 1986-1988. See also *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses* (Faith and Order Paper, II, 149), Geneva, WCC, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia* (Faith and Order Paper, II, 166), Geneva, WCC, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper, II, 181), Geneva, WCC, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper, II, 198), Geneva, WCC, 2005.

that churches will be helped to recognise in one another the Church of Jesus Christ and be encouraged to take steps on the way towards visible unity. (6)

### Structure of the document

A quick comparison with the 1998 draft makes it clear that the document on ecclesiology has now received a clearer structure.

The first draft consisted of six chapters the first three of which dealt with fundamental ecclesiological questions: I. *The Church of the Triune God* with subsections on ‘The Nature of the Church’ and ‘God’s Purpose for the Church’; II. *The Church in History* with subsections on ‘The Church *in via*’ and ‘Sign and Instrument of God’s Design’; III. *The Church as Koinonia/Communion* with subsections on ‘Communion real, but not fully realised’; ‘Communion and Diversity’; ‘The Church as Communion of Local Churches’. The 2005 version treats the same issues in two chapters: I. *The Church of the Triune God* with subsections on ‘The Nature of the Church’, ‘The Mission of the Church’ and ‘The Church as Sign and Instrument of God’s Intention and Plan for the World’ and II. *The Church in History* with subsections on ‘The Church *in via*’; ‘In Christ But Not Yet in Full Communion’; ‘Communion and Diversity’ and ‘The Church as Communion of Local Churches’.

In the first draft chapter IV dealt with *Life in Communion*. This section had the longest number of subsections: ‘Apostolic Faith’, ‘Baptism’, ‘Eucharist’, ‘Ministry’, ‘Oversight: Communal/Personal/Collegial’; ‘Conciliarity (Communality, Synodality) and Primacy’. Chapter V, a chapter without subsections, dealt with *Service in and for the World*. Chapter VI provided a kind of summary: *Following our Calling: From Converging Understandings to Mutual Recognition*. In the new draft chapter III received a similar title: *The Life of Communion in and for the World* and even more subdivisions: ‘Apostolic Faith’, ‘Baptism’, ‘Eucharist’, ‘Ministry of all the faithful’, ‘Ministry of the ordained’, ‘Oversight: Personal, Communal, Collegial’; ‘Conciliarity and Primacy’; ‘Authority’. I believe it is important that the section on ‘Ministry’ was dedoubled and now – in line with *Lumen Gentium* – treats the ‘Ministry of all the faithful’ before the ‘Ministry of the ordained’. One wonders why one found it necessary to return to the issue of ‘authority’ after having treated ‘oversight’. The new draft equally ends with a small additional chapter *In and For the World* and a conclusion which takes up elements of the previous chapter VI. In what follows I will highlight a few remarkable issues in the text.

### Analysis of some noteworthy aspects of the document

#### *A new metaphor for the Church: Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup>*

An ecumenical reflection on the nature of the Church can not limit itself to only treat those images which are only familiar to one tradition. Apart from reflections on the well-known Pauline metaphors of ‘people of God’, ‘body of Christ’ and ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’ *The Nature and Mission of the Church* constitutes one of the best examples of the willingness of Roman Catholic theologians – who fully participated in the drafting process – to receive a metaphor of the Church which is typical for the churches of the Reformation: the Church as ‘Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit’ (NMC 9-13). This is definitely not a way of reflecting on the nature of the Church, which is very much familiar to Roman Catholics. In fact it originates in the theology of Martin Luther. Of course many formulations in *Lumen Gentium* reveal that the Roman Catholic Church is also very much aware that its sacramental mission is completely dependent upon Christ. There are even a few statements in *Lumen Gentium* which seem to contain an

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<sup>5</sup> See also my ‘The Church as ‘Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit’ in Ecumenical Documents on the Church: An Exercise in Receptive Ecumenism,’ in M.A. FAHEY & P. COLLINS (eds.), *Receiving ‘The Nature and Mission of the Church’: Ecclesial Reality and Ecumenical Horizons for the Twenty-first Century*, New York, Continuum, 2008, 42-54.

implicit reference to the notion of the Church as creation of the Word and of the Spirit – e.g. the statement that the Spirit “rejuvenates the church through the power of the gospel” (LG 4) and the idea that the gospel which Jesus asked the apostles to proclaim everywhere, “is for all time the principle of all life for the church.” (LG 20)

The subsection on ‘The Nature of the Church’ (9-33) within the opening chapter on *The Church of the Triune God* first discusses ‘The Church as a Gift of God: Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit’ (9-13) and thereafter four ‘Biblical Insights’: (a) ‘The Church as People of God’; (b) ‘The Church as the Body of Christ’; (c) ‘The Church as Temple of the Holy Spirit’ and (d) ‘The Church as Koinonia/Communion’. It were most probably the representatives of the Protestant churches who insisted that the first image used to describe the nature of the Church would be the Church as “Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit (*creatura Verbi et creatura Spiritus*).” This subsection starts and ends with insisting that the Church has its origin not in human efforts but in God’s initiative.

The Church is called into being by the Father “who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16) and who sent the Holy Spirit to lead these believers into all truth, reminding them of all that Jesus taught (cf. Jn 14:26). The Church is thus the creature of God’s Word and of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to God, is God’s gift and cannot exist by and for itself. (9)

The Church is not merely the sum of individual believers in communion with God, nor primarily the mutual communion of individual believers among themselves. It is their common partaking in the life of God (2 Pet 1:4), who as Trinity, is the source and focus of all communion. Thus the Church is both a divine and human reality. (13)

In § 10 it is emphasized that “the Church is centred and grounded in the Word of God” and then the threefold nature of the Word is made clear.<sup>6</sup> Immediately thereafter, the second part of the title is explained: “Faith called forth by the Word of God is brought about by the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). According to the Scripture, the Word and the Spirit are inseparable.” (11) In a solemn way § 12 states that the *notae ecclesiae* are ascribed to this Church. “Being the creature of God’s own Word and Spirit, the Church of God is one, holy, catholic and apostolic.”

It seems interesting to explore further the Lutheran background of the image of the Church as *Creatura Verbi*, and also to highlight that it has been used – and received by the Catholic dialogue partners – in a number of bilateral dialogues as well.

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## EXCURSUS

### The Church as *Creatura Verbi* in Lutheran Ecclesiology

Stat fixa sententia, ecclesiam non nasci nec subsistere in natura sua, nisi verbo Dei. 'Genuit', inquit, 'nos verbo veritatis' (Jak 1,18).<sup>7</sup>

Ecclesia enim creatura est Euangelii, incomparabiliter minor ipso, sicut ait Iacobus: voluntarie genuit nos verbo veritatis suae, et Paulus: per Euangelium ego vos genui.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This is done by means of a citation of § 96 of the Agreed Statement *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* of the Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue. The citation reads as follows: “... it is the Word of God made flesh: Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen. Then it is the word as spoken in God’s history with God’s people and recorded in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as a testimony to Jesus Christ. Third, it is the word as heard and proclaimed in the preaching, witness and action of the Church.”

<sup>7</sup> M. LUTHER, *Sermo praescriptus praepositio in Litzka* (1512): WA 1,13,38-40.

Ecclesia enim nascitur verbo promissionis per fidem ... Verbum dei enim supra Ecclesiam est incomparabiliter, in quo nihil statuere, ordinare, facere, sed tantum statui ordinari, fieri habet, tanquam creatura.<sup>9</sup>

... cum per solum Euangelium concipiatur, formetur, alatur, generetur, educetur, pascatur, vestiatur, ornetur, roboretur, armetur, servetur, breviter, tota vita et substantia Ecclesiae est in verbo dei, sicut Christus dicit 'In omni verbo quod procedit de ore dei vivit homo'.<sup>10</sup>

Die Kirche macht nicht das Wort, sondern sie wird von dem Wort.<sup>11</sup>

Nam cum Ecclesia verbo dei nascatur, alatur, servetur et roboretur, palam est eam sine verbo esse non posse, aut si sine verbo sit, Ecclesiam esse desinere.<sup>12</sup>

A brief summary of the background of this notion in Lutheran ecclesiology<sup>13</sup> will help us better to understand why recent ecumenical dialogues have been able to appreciate its ecumenical potentiality.

First of all, it needs to be emphasized that Luther is only able to make statements like the above because for him the Word of God is a multifaceted reality. It may refer to God's creative and revelatory word, to Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, to the biblical text, and finally to God's word as preached or administered in the sacraments. The latter distinction helps Roman Catholics to understand that the sacraments are not disconnected from the Word of God. The preaching of the word is sometimes described by Luther as “verbum invisibile” and the administration of the sacraments as “verbum visibile.” Luther also distinguishes between the internal and external dimensions of the Word of God.

Furthermore, the creation of the Church through the Word is always mediated by the Spirit.<sup>14</sup> The Church does never receive the Word through its own efforts. It is the Spirit who makes it possible that human beings receive the Word of God by reading the Holy Scripture or by listening to the proclamation of the Word in the community – the external dimensions of the Word – and as a result the same Spirit speaks to them internally, within their hearts, and elicits their response of faith. Against the enthusiasts, however, Luther insists that the Spirit does not act apart from the Word, and, against the medieval Church, which derived its interest in hierarchical structures from its Christocentrism, he insists that they don't have access to the Word apart from the Spirit. Therefore, the Church is, in the first instance, a spiritual reality. The dependence of the community on the Word is also a continuous process, a *creatio continua*, so that the Church simply ceases to exist if it is disconnected from the Word (and the Spirit).

Lutheran ecclesiologists, however, seem to have a different view on the question whether Luther had only the invisible Church in mind when he spoke about the Church as *creatura Verbi*. Christoph Schwöbel insists that the notion of Church as *creatura Verbi* applies only to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and not to any of the Christian churches. He warns against

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<sup>8</sup> M. LUTHER, *Resolutiones Lutherianae super propositionibus suis Lipsiae disputatis* (1519): WA 2,430,6-8.

<sup>9</sup> M. LUTHER, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (1520): WA 6,560,33-561,1.

<sup>10</sup> M. LUTHER, *Ad librum eximii Magistri Nostri Ambrosii Catharini ... responsio* (1521): WA 7,721,10-14. This is partially a citation from Augustine who had stated that «Ecclesia verbo Dei generatur, alitur, nutritur, roboratur.»

<sup>11</sup> M. LUTHER, *Vom Missbrauch der Messen* (1521): WA 8,491.

<sup>12</sup> M. LUTHER, *De instituendis ministris Ecclesiae* (1523): WA 12,191.

<sup>13</sup> The following sources have been helpful in this regard: Gerhard Sauter's chapter on “Der Ursprung der Kirche aus Gottes Wort und Gottes Geist” in W. KERN, H.J. POTTMEYER & M. SECKLER (eds.), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie. 3. Traktat Kirche*, Freiburg, Herder, 1986, 198-211; B. GHERARDINI, *Creatura Verbi: La Chiesa nella teologia di Martin Lutero*, Rome, Vivere In, 1994; G. NEEBE, *Apostolische Kirche: Grundentscheidungen an Luthers Kirchenbegriff unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Lehre von den notae ecclesiae* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, 82), Berlin, de Gruyter, 1997; the chapter on “Das Geschöpf des Wortes Gottes: Grundeinsichten der reformatorischen Ekklesiologie” in C. SCHWÖBEL, *Gott in Beziehung. Studien zur Dogmatik*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2002, 345-77 and G.W. LOCHER, *Sign of the Advent: A Study in Protestant Ecclesiology*, Fribourg, Academic Press, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> This is well reflected in the title of the essay by Gerhard Sauter, referred to in the previous footnote, *Der Ursprung der Kirche aus Gottes Wort und Gottes Geist*, and in a subsection of the book by Locher entitled “The Spirit Creates the Church through the Word.”

the “heresy of orthodoxy” and the “heresy of orthopraxis,” by which human doctrines or ecclesial practices are identified as God's work. The churches, however, receive the mission to testify to God's revelation in Christ by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and sacraments.<sup>15</sup> Gudrun Neebe for her part believes that the notion is applicable to the visible Church as well, since Luther distinguishes between the internal and external operations of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue: Both Churches Hold onto the Images of the Church as “Creature of the Gospel” and “God’s Pilgrim People, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit”

In the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue we had to wait until its third phase before a systematic dialogue on the Church was undertaken. This process of reflection took nine years and concluded in 1993 with the publication of an extensive document on *Church and Justification* (1993).<sup>17</sup> The first three chapters of this document articulate the ecclesiological convictions which both churches hold in common. The first chapter serves only as an introduction. It clarifies the relation between Church and justification by saying that both have their foundation in the mystery of Christ and the Holy Trinity and are a gift of God (1-9). The second chapter reflects on ‘The abiding origin of the Church’ (10-47). With an appeal to 1 Cor 3:11 it is made clear that Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the Church. Of course, attention is also given to the relationship between the Church and Israel. It is emphasised that it is the whole of the Christ-event, consisting in Christ’s proclamation, cross and resurrection and the Pentecost event, which is the foundation of the Church. In the last section of the chapter, both dialogue partners consider the image of the Church as ‘creature of the gospel’ as a valid way to reflect together on the foundation of the Church. Earlier on, the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue had already used this model in 1972 in the so-called Malta Report on *The Gospel and the Church*: “As *creatura et ministra verbi*, the church stands under the gospel and has the gospel as its superordinate criterion.” In *Church and Justification* the Lutheran roots of this concept are clearly recognized. The image of the Church as *creatura evangelii* highlights the Church’s complete dependence on the gospel. The Church received the mission to proclaim the gospel in word and sacrament. This proclamation takes place in the power of the Holy Spirit and on the foundation of the apostles. Still, the document is also able to refer to two passages of the Second Vatican Council which highlight the link between Gospel and Church.

The conviction that the church lives out of the gospel also determines the Roman Catholic understanding of the church. In Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church we read, “... the gospel ... is for all time the source of all life for the church” (LG 20) and the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity says that the “chief means of the implantation of the church is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ (AG 6).

One would not do justice to the biblical testimony on the Church, however, if the common reflection on the Church would focus exclusively on the christological foundation of the Church

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<sup>15</sup> Compare the sections on “Was die Kirche nicht tun kann” and “Was die Kirche tun kann und muss,” in *Gott in Beziehung*, 372-77.

<sup>16</sup> G. NEEBE, *Apostolische Kirche*, 191: “Diese Rede Luthers vom äusserlichen und innerlichen Wirken des Heiligen Geistes und die Wendung ‘die Kirche’ scheinen mir ein Hinweis darauf zu sein, dass Luther die Kirche als Gesamtzusammenhang meint, wenn er sie als Geschöpf des Wortes Gottes bezeichnet. Gottes (inneres) Wort schafft den Glauben und verbindet damit die Glaubenden mit Gott und miteinander zur Kirche als geistlicher Gemeinschaft, während Gottes (äusseres) Wort gleichzeitig die Glaubenden als leibliche Gemeinschaft um Wort und Sakrament versammelt. In diesem Sinne beschreibt Luther die Kirche als geistliche und leibliche Gemeinschaft als Geschöpf des Wortes Gottes.”

<sup>17</sup> *Church and Justification*, in J. Gros, H. Meyer & W.G. RUSCH (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998* (Faith and Order Paper, 187), Geneva, WCC, 2000, 485-565.

and if the trinitarian dimension of the Church would be omitted.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the third chapter (48-106) focuses on “The Church of the Triune God.”

### Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue: The Images of Church as “Creatura Verbi” and “Sacramentum Gratiae” Are Complementary

The bilateral dialogue between representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church usually takes its time in publishing documents expressing a convergence between both churches. The first phase of the dialogue, which started in 1968, was concluded in 1977 with a final report on *The Presence of Christ in Church and World*.<sup>19</sup>

Before dealing with confessions of faith and the infallibility of the Church, the second section of this document first discussed the teaching authority of the Holy Scripture. The important insight that Scripture and Tradition are no longer seen by both denominations as “two different sources” is clarified in no. 26 with an appeal by both traditions to the image of Church as *Creatura Verbi*.

We are agreed that as *creatura Verbi* the Church together with its Tradition stands under the living Word of God.

The 1990 document *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* culminates the second phase of the Reformed-Catholic dialogue on ecclesiology.<sup>20</sup>

When it comes to a systematic reflection on the Church, in chapter three (89-144), the common discourse has become a complementary one, at least in the first part of the chapter, which focuses on the “more Reformed” concept of the Church as *creatura Verbi* (95-101) and the “more Catholic” concept of the Church as “sacrament of grace” (102-110). Areas of divergence continue to be the views of both churches on “continuity and discontinuity in church history” (114-124), and on “the church’s visibility and ministerial order” (125-137). In the last and shortest chapter of the document, “The way forward” (145-164) is being articulated.

In comparison with the previous document, in which “the dialogue partners used the term together in order to characterize the subordination of the Church to the living Word of God,” it is obvious that in chapter three “*creatura Verbi* has become *the* expression of the typical Reformed concept of the Church.” The document makes reference to the “threefold form” of the Word – “the word incarnate, the word written, the word preached” (96) – and holds that the Church is dependent upon this word in at least three ways: “the church is founded upon the word of God; the church is kept in being as the church by the word of God; the church continually depends upon the word of God for its inspiration, strength and renewal” (97). Within this model, however, no separation is made between the word and spirit of God, “for it is the power of the Spirit that enables the hearing of the word and the response of faith” (98). The “more Catholic” concept is defended with an appeal to a large number of scriptural texts and to almost all texts of Vatican II in which the model occurs. The Church can be called a visible sign and instrument of the unique mediation of God’s salvation which Christ brought about “in the mystery of his incarnation, life, death and resurrection” (108). The document insists, however,

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<sup>18</sup> This is also the view of Harding Meyer in his article on “Kirche und Rechtfertigung. Die dritte Phase des internationalen Dialogs 1986-1994,” reprinted in H. MEYER, *Versöhnte Verschiedenheit: Aufsätze zur ökumenischen Theologie II. Der katholisch/lutherische Dialog*, Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2000, 104-28, at 113: “Diese christologische Begründung von Kirche muss jedoch in ihrer ‘trinitarischen Dimension’ gesehen werden, wenn sie dem biblischen Zeugnis entsprechen und Missverständnisse vermeiden will.”

<sup>19</sup> *The Presence of Christ in Church and World. Final Report of the Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 1977*, in H. Meyer & L. Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (Faith and Order Paper, 108), Geneva, WCC, 1984, 434-63.

<sup>20</sup> *Toward a Common Understanding of the Church. Second Phase, 1984-1990*, in J. Gros, H. Meyer & W.G. RUSCH (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998* (Faith and Order Paper, 187), Geneva, WCC, 2000, 780-818.

that “the application of the category ‘sacrament’ to the church is doubly analogical” (104). One is aware that Christ is “the primordial sacrament of God” (104) and that “the church is called a sacrament by analogy to the liturgies of baptism and the eucharist” (106). It must be repeated once again, however, that these clarifications occur in a section of the paragraph which belongs to the converging part of the document, and that “more Reformed” and “more Catholic” is not the same as “exclusively Reformed” or “exclusively Catholic.” Therefore, after introducing the two different concepts of the Church, the document stresses the potential complementarity of the two images:

The two conceptions, “the creation of the word” and “sacrament of grace”, can in fact be seen as expressing the same instrumental reality under different aspects, as complementary to each other or as two sides of the same coin. They can also become the poles of a creative tension between our churches (113).

The third phase of the Reformed-Catholic dialogue on ecclesiology, which focused on the Church as community of common witness on the kingdom of God, has resulted in a new report, *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God. Report of the Third Phase of the International Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1998-2005)*. It is highly significant that the new document contains some kind of auto-criticism with regard to the reflections on the Church as creation of the Word and sacrament of Grace in *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1990). Section 5.1 of the new document is now entitled: “The Church as Creation of the Word and Sacrament of Grace in light of the Kingdom.” The discovery that patristic authors “do emphatically relate the church to the Word and to the grace of God” (192) leads the commission to conclude: “We can now affirm, in light of our investigation both of the kingdom and of the patristic literature, not only that these visions are mutually informative and complementary but also that neither is fully adequate without the other. A ‘sacramental’ church that does not give proper place to the Word of God would be essentially incomplete; a church that is truly a creation of the Word will celebrate that Word liturgically and sacramentally. If our churches differ according to these two visions, perhaps it is less because either church is convinced that the church is only *creatura verbi* or only *sacramentum gratiae* and more because each tradition has emphasized one aspect to the point of deemphasizing or neglecting the other.”

In the three mentioned dialogues, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church have been able to cooperate and subscribe to a rich ecumenical reflection on the Church as creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit. One of the major problems in the ecumenical dialogue, however, is that by now we dispose of a great number of ecumenical documents expressing different stages of convergence between the Christian churches. However, clear signs of reception of the results of the ecumenical dialogue, in the life of the believers as well as in declarations and decisions taken by the highest authority structures of the churches participating in these dialogues, are lacking. We are, for example, still waiting for a papal encyclical or a document on the Church by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in which the image of the Church as creation of the Word and of the Spirit would be used in a positive way.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, of course, a more

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<sup>21</sup> Even if much more can be said about this text, it can be deplored that the recent *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church* (June 29, 2007) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith refers only to Roman Catholic doctrinal sources and make no reference to texts resulting from the ecumenical dialogues in which the Roman Catholic Church has been involved for more than four decades. Still, however to my great surprise I was able to find out the address of Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 6, 2008) on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church* contains an explicit reference to the concept of *Creatura Verbi*: “All things come from the Word, they are products of the Word. “In the beginning was the Word”. In the beginning the heavens spoke. And thus reality was born of the Word, it is “*creatura Verbi*”. All is created from the Word and all is called to serve the Word.

positive account of the Church as sacrament of God's grace (*sacramentum gratiae*) in theological statements issued by the Lutheran or Reformed Church at national or world level, would contribute to a better reception of the achievements of the ecumenical dialogues as well. Nevertheless, it remains important that theologians contribute to the process of reception as well, by indicating which ideas in the dialogue texts need to be integrated in the self-understanding of their own Church.<sup>22</sup>

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In *The Nature and Mission of the Church* issues that do not form part of the consensus have been given a different lay-out. At the end of this first subsection a first area of divergence is being dealt with: 'The institutional dimension of the Church and the Work of the Holy Spirit'. Francis Sullivan, who commented on the remaining divergences in an article in *Ecumenical Trends* wonders whether this is the appropriate place to treat this difficulty, since the reflections of the document on the Church as creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit deliberately omitted any reference to the institutional dimension of the Church.<sup>23</sup>

Three problems are indicated in this part of the text. The first one relates to the question "whether the preaching and the Sacraments are the means of, or simply witnesses to, the activity of the Spirit through the divine Word, which comes about in an immediate internal action upon the hearts of the believers." Sullivan believes that the preceding reflections on the notions of the Church indicate the existence of a convergence. When speaking about the oneness of the Church the document states that God made the Church "a foretaste and instrument for the redemption of all created reality" (12). When speaking about the catholicity of the Church it is emphasised that God, "through Word and Spirit, makes his people the place and instrument of his saving, life-giving, fulfilling presence."

A second area of divergence pertains to the relationship between the ordained ministry, especially the episcopacy, and the Word and Spirit of God. The document is aware that for some churches the ordained ministry almost is "a guarantee of the presence of truth and power of the Word and Spirit of God in the Church". For other churches, however, the Word and Spirit of God remain the norm of all church structures.

A final point of divergence pertains to the apostolicity of the Church. Some churches believe that apostolic faith requires "institutional continuity" whereas other churches hold on that it was necessary to leave this continuity in order to safeguard the apostolic faith.

### *Church as Sacrament?*

Already in 1983 Reformed theologian Günther Gaßmann contributed to a symposium on *Die Sakramentalität der Kirche in der ökumenischen Diskussion* with a paper on the reception of this notion

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This means that all of creation, in the end, is conceived of to create the place of encounter between God and his creature, a place where the history of love between God and his creature can develop."

<sup>22</sup> A detailed study of the process of reception of the results of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue and a similar plea for a more profound reception can be read in H. GOERTZ, *Dialog und Rezeption: Die Rezeption evangelisch-lutherisch/römisch-katholischer Dialogdokumente in der VELKD und der römisch-katholischen Kirche. Eine Studie im Auftrag der VELKD*, Hannover, Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 2002. In another paper I have analyzed the way in which episcopal collegiality has been treated in a number of dialogue texts in which the Roman Catholic Church was involved. If the Catholic Church were to take seriously what their representatives have been able to say in common with representatives of other churches, then the distinction between "affective" and "effective" collegiality would become highly problematic. See, P. DE MEY, "Is 'Affective' Collegiality Sufficient? A Plea for a More 'Effective' Collegiality of Bishops in the Roman Catholic Church and Its Ecumenical Implications," in *Friendship as an Ecumenical Value: Proceedings of the International Conference Held on the Inauguration of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies (Lviv, 11-15 June 2005)*, Lviv, Ukrainian Catholic University Press, 2006, 132-53.

<sup>23</sup> F. SULLIVAN, "The Nature and Purpose of the Church. Comments on the material inside the boxes", in *Ecumenical Trends* 32 (2003) 145-153.



in the ecumenical discussion.<sup>24</sup> He remembered his audience that already the first world conference of Faith and Order held in Lausanne in 1927 described the church as “the divinely chosen instrument by means of which Christ in the Holy Spirit reconciles humankind with God through faith”. Partly receiving the definition of the church in LG 1, the World Council of Churches’s General Assembly in Uppsala (1968) “dares to speak” about the church “as sign of the future unity of humankind”. In his article Gaßmann makes mention of several signs of a positive reception of the idea of Church as sacrament, sign and instrument in both the multilateral and bilateral ecumenical dialogues. According to him this “remarkably broad” reception indicates that these concepts “apparently are a help to determine and describe the place and the vocation of the church and its unity in God’s salvific plan”. He emphasises, however, that this definition should not lead to a triumphalistic understanding of the church. The Church is only able to function as a sign, “because the living Christ is present and active in her”, through the Holy Spirit.

Notwithstanding his great sympathy for the way the Second Vatican Council described the nature of the church as sacrament of salvation, Wolfhart Pannenberg formulates similar warnings in the section dealing with ‘Die Kirche als Heilsmysterium in Christus’ in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*.<sup>25</sup> The Church is only sign of the future reconciliation of humankind in God’s Kingdom “in Christo”, as the body of Christ. As a Lutheran theologian he is only willing to affirm that the Church constitutes the mystery of divine salvation when it is at the same time allowed to emphasize that the historical form of the Church constitutes only a broken appearance of this mystery. The identification of the Church as sign and instrument of the coming Kingdom makes it clear, according to Pannenberg, that the Church is not the goal of its proper existence. One should not forget that the realisation of God’s Kingdom remains God’s work.

On 4 September 2000 an ecumenical commission of theologians, commissioned by the German episcopal conference and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, published a common document, entitled *Communio Sanctorum: The Church as Communion of Saints*.<sup>26</sup> Section 3 of chapter IV contains a reflection on ‘The Church as Sign and Instrument of Salvation’. Lutherans and Catholics are able to confess together that Jesus Christ is God’s sacrament par excellence (*Ur-Sakrament*). They also agree that God “desires to use the church to draw people of all times and places into communion with himself.” (86) Lutherans are aware that the Second Vatican Council has taken care to make it clear that the Church fulfils her role in the mediation of salvation only in and through Christ and in and through the Holy Spirit. By calling the Church the “fundamental sacrament” (*Grundsakrament*) of God’s salvation it is equally made clear that, even while being Christ’s body, the Church is not identical with Him. (87) Lutherans understand the Church to be “the community in which the God-ordained means of grace – word and sacrament – become effective for the people.” (88) Therefore they consider the Church to be – in a derived sense – an instrument of divine salvation. It is “the instrument through which the Holy Spirit makes people holy.” A strong distinction is made between the mediating function of the Church and Christ as the unique giver of salvation. Therefore Lutherans apply the notion of sacrament only to Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and to Christ himself. They are also afraid that, when the notion of sacrament is applied to the Church, it is easily forgotten that “the church is both holy and sinful at the same time.” (88)

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<sup>24</sup> G. GABMANN, *Kirche als Sakrament, Zeichen und Werkzeug. Die Rezeption dieser ekklesiologischen Perspektive in der ökumenischen Diskussion*, in *Die Sakramentalität der Kirche in der ökumenischen Diskussion. Referate und Diskussion eines Symposiums anlässlich des 25jährigen Bestehens des Johann-Adam-Möhler-Instituts* (Konfessionskundliche Schriften des Johann-Adam-Möhler-Instituts, 15), Paderborn, Bonifatius, 1983, 171-201.

<sup>25</sup> W. PANNENBERG, *Systematische Theologie*, vol. 3, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, 51-62. Pannenberg is definitely more sympathetic to the Catholic rediscovery of ‘Church as sacrament’ than Eberhard Jüngel in his famous 1983 article on *Die Kirche als Sakrament?* (ZThK 80 (1983) 432-457).

<sup>26</sup> DEUTSCHE BISCHÖFSKONFERENZ – VEREINIGTE EVANGELISCH-LUTHERISCHE KIRCHE DEUTSCHLANDS, *Communio Sanctorum: die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, Paderborn, Bonifatius, 2000. English translation: *Communio Sanctorum: The Church as the Communion of Saints*, Collegeville, MI, Liturgical Press, 2004.

The final paragraph deserves to be quoted in full:

Together we can state the following:

1. The church is a creation of the Word (*creatura verbi*) and at the same time servant of the word (*ministra verbi*), which it has received.
2. The church is in its entire existence a sign of the saving will of God, who desires “that all people be saved and come to see the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).
3. The church, as mediator of word and sacrament, is an instrument of grace.
4. The church is shaped in its very essence by the reception and the administration of word and sacrament.
5. The church remains constantly subject to the Lord, and salvation remains a gift of God, even in the work of the church. In this sense, the relationship of Christ and church is defined by the conjunction of unity and diversity.

When this is together taught, there is a material agreement, even if different judgments exist about the analogous use of the term “sacrament” in relationship to the church. (89)

In the last decades different Protestant Churches have allowed intercommunion and sometimes also the exchange of ministers among one another after a solemn declaration of their agreement on the essential aspects of the Christian faith. In other points there is still room for legitimate difference. Both the *Declaration of Meissen* between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Church of England (1988) and the *Porvoo Declaration* (1992) between the Anglican Churches on the British isles and most Lutheran Churches in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries reflect a sacramental understanding of the Church without using this term. Chapter one of the Meissen statements discusses the Church as ‘Sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God’. The summary of beliefs and practices that both churches have in common contains the following definition of the nature of the Church:

We believe that the Church is constituted and sustained by the Triune God through God’s saving action in word and sacraments, and is not the creation of individual believers. We believe that the Church is sent into the world as sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. But we also recognise that the Church stands in constant need of reform and renewal.

This text has been taken over in the Porvoo statement with the exception that there, a more direct affirmation is used, that the Church “is a sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God.”

In their ecumenical reflection on ‘The Church as Sign and Instrument of God’s Intention and Plan for the World’ the churches involved in the drafting of *The Nature and Mission of the Church* on the one hand point to the intimate relation between the Church and the Triune God while on the other hand indicating that Church and Kingdom are not the same reality. The Church is, however, a symbolic reality which points towards the Kingdom, even if doesn’t bring about the Kingdom. All this is carefully expressed as follows:

Already participating in the love and life of God, the Church is a prophetic sign which points beyond itself to the purpose of all creation, the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. (43)

It struck me that the 1998 draft tried to make the mediating role of the Church even more concrete, but apparently this sounded too “catholic” in some ears:

Being that part of humanity which already participates in the love and communion of God, at the same time the Church is the instrument through which God wants to bring about what is signified by it: the salvation of the whole world, the renewal of the human

community by the divine Word and the Holy Spirit, the communion of humanity with God and within itself. (45)

The dialogue partners had no difficulty of acknowledging “the nature of the Church as *mysterion*” because this qualification “indicates the transcendent character of its God-given reality as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The Church can never be fully and unequivocally grasped in its visible appearance. Therefore the visible organisational structures of the Church must always be seen and judged for good or ill in the light of God’s salvation in Christ, celebrated in Liturgy.”<sup>27</sup> (45)

The drafters of the document decided to explain the diverging opinions among the churches inside a box. This text clearly indicates why for many churches the application of the notion of sacrament to the Church is a bridge too far, even if historically it was the Latin translation of the biblical term *mysterion* and even if it has been explained in *Lumen Gentium*<sup>28</sup> by means of the terminology of sign and instrument. It seems important to me to quote the argumentation in full:

Church as “Sacrament”?

Although all churches agree that the church is a sign and instrument, some churches express their understanding of the reality of the church in Sacramental terms; some speak of the church as Sacrament; others do not normally use this language or reject it outright.

The churches who used the expression “Church as Sacrament” do so because they understand the Church as an effective sign of what God wishes for the world, namely the communion of all together and with the Triune God, the joy for which God created the world, notwithstanding the sinfulness of Christians.

The churches who do not use the concept of Sacrament for the Church do not do so for at least two reasons, namely (1) the need for a clear distinction between the Church and Sacraments. The Sacraments are the means of salvation through which Christ sustains the Church, and not actions by which the Church realises or actualises itself. And (2) the use of the word “Sacrament” for the Church obscures the fact that, for them, the Church is a sign and instrument of God’s intention and plan as a communion which while being holy is still subject to sin.

Behind this lack of agreement lie varying views about the instrumentality of the Church with regard to salvation. Yet those who have become accustomed to call the Church “Sacrament” would still distinguish between the ways, in which baptism and the Lord’s Supper on the one hand and the Church on the other are signs and instruments of God’s plan; and those who do not use the phrase “Church as Sacrament” would still uphold that the Church is God’s holy instrument for his divine purpose.

### *Holiness vs Sinfulness of the Church*

The Roman Catholic position is most probably hinted at in the following passage:

For some, it is impossible to say “the Church sins” because they see the Church as a gift of God, sharing in God’s holiness. The Church is the spotless bride of Christ; it is a communion in the Holy Spirit, the holy people of God, justified by grace through faith in Christ. As such, the Church cannot sin. The gift is lived out in fragile human beings who are liable to sin, but the sins of the members of the Church are not the sins of the Church.

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<sup>27</sup> The underlined parts of this paragraph have been added in the 2006 edition.

<sup>28</sup> See for an analysis of the notion of Church as sacrament in conciliar and post-conciliar Roman Catholic ecclesiology P. DE MEY, “Church as Sacrament. A Conciliar Concept and Its Reception in Contemporary Theology”, in L. BOEVE & J. RIES (ed.), *The Presence of Transcendence: Thinking ‘Sacrament’ in a Postmodern Age* (Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia, 42), Leuven, Peeters, 2001, 181-196.

The Church is rather the locus of salvation and healing. According to this perspective one can, and must, speak only of the sin of the members of the Church and of groups within the Church, a situation described by the parable of the wheat and the chaff, and by the Augustinian formula of *corpus permixtum*. (p. 33)

LG 8 is in many respects one of the most crucial paragraphs of Vatican II. It not only contains the famous *subsistit in*-passage but also reflects on the relationship between sinfulness and holiness in the Church as distinguished from Christ. “While Christ “holy, blameless, unstained” (Heb 7,26) knew no sin (see 2 Cor 5,21), and came only to expiate the sins of the people (see Heb 2,17), the church, containing sinners in its own bosom, is at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification (*sancta simul et semper purificanda*) and it pursues unceasingly penance and renewal.” (*penitentiam et renovationem continuo prosequitur*). Whereas a commentator like Philips calls it a logical mistake to call the Church sinful, because then one would understand her as the congregation of the faithful, and wants to hold on to the essential holiness of the Church which enables the believers to conquer sin, Peter Hünemann believes that, by stating that the Church “is at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification”, the Church is in a careful way “als eine zugleich heilige und sündhafte bezeichnet.”

Other texts in LG which reflect on the relationship between sinfulness and holiness in the Church, are, as highlighted by Becht<sup>29</sup>:

- LG 14, a passage recognising, on one hand, that it is in view of eternal salvation not sufficient to be baptized in the Catholic Church but, on the other hand, that sinners remain members of the Church;
- LG 39, the opening line of chapter 5 ‘The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church’: “The church, whose mystery is being set forth by this synod, is held to be indefectibly holy as a matter of faith.” (*Ecclesia .... indefectibiliter sancta creditur*);
- LG 48, the opening line of chapter 7 ‘The eschatological character of the pilgrim church’, which is this time indicating that the holiness of the Church will only become fully visible in the eschatological times: “The Church, to which we are called in Christ Jesus and in which through the grace of God we attain sanctity ... will be established perfectly in Christ.”
- LG 65, finally, makes a contrast between the Mother of God and the ordinary believers, in arguing that the former is “without spot or wrinkle”, whereas the faithful have to struggle to conquer sin and grow in holiness.

The use of the vocabulary of *renovare, purificare et reformare ecclesiam* in the documents of Vatican II may, a.o., have been influenced by ongoing discussions on the persistence of sinfulness and holiness in the Church. Many Council fathers might have become familiar with the reflections of Charles Journet on this issue, which he published first in articles as from 1934 and then also in the collective volume *L’Eglise du Verbe incarné*. He made a distinction between the material and formal appearance of the Church. When looked at from the latter aspect, the Church is “without spot or wrinkle”; when looked at from the former aspect, this is not the case. He also started to look differently at the question whether sinners can be considered members of the Church. In 1947 both Karl Rahner and Yves Congar contributed to the discussion. In an article which he published in *Stimmen der Zeit* – entitled: *Kirche der Sünder* – Rahner made a distinction between the sinfulness of the Church – an idea he could not subscribe to – and the sins of the people of the Church. In the same year Congar wrote an article on *Sainteté et péché dans l’église* for *Vie intellectuelle* which would be largely taken over in *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Eglise* but now in the mode of the need for reform in the Church. The solution of Congar consists in making a distinction between the Church as mediator of salvation “où il ne peut pas se trouver de faute”, the church as *congregatio fidelium* which is “full of sins because it is full of sinners”, the Church as hierarchical

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<sup>29</sup> M. BRECHT, “Ecclesia Semper Purificanda. Die Sündigkeit der Kirche als Thema des II. Vatikanischen Konzils”, in *Catholica* 49 (1995), 218-237, 239-260.

institution where he is also willing to find mistakes in members of the hierarchy and, finally, the Church as a divine-human reality of whom he says that she is at the same time holy and sinful.

The theme of the relationship of sinfulness and holiness in the Church has not been removed from the theological agenda since the time of the Council. Especially Pope John Paul II deserves to be mentioned here. The liturgical celebration in Saint Peter's basilica during the first Sunday of lent in the jubilee year 2000, during which the Pope asked for forgiveness for the sins of the children of the Church, had been theologically prepared in many speeches of the Pope. Already in the earliest one, *Reconciliatio et poenitentia*, which he prepared for the consistory of 1994, he states: "The Church is definitely holy, as we proclaim it to be in the Creed; nevertheless she is also sinful, not as the body of Christ, but as the community of sinful people." The Pope's conviction that in most cases persons and institutions appear to be at the same time holy and sinful, constitutes, according to Ralf Miggelbrink „eine katholische Lesart des *simul iustus et peccator*“.<sup>30</sup> The author doesn't criticise the fact that the Pope always refers to the guilt of individuals, because repentance is in his opinion always an individual and personal act.

In the current stage of the ecumenical dialogue at multilateral level, as reflected in the Faith & Order paper on *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, the page on "The Church and Sin" figures among the boxes representing matters of continuing dissensus among the Christian churches. Luckily this is not true for one important wisdom which this text produced: "The relationship between sin and holiness in the Church is not a relationship of two equal realities, because sin and holiness do not exist on the same level. Rather, holiness denotes the Church's nature and God's will for it, while sinfulness is contrary to both."

In the bilateral dialogues, already the 1994 *Church and Justification* text of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic international dialogue commission has found "a broad consensus" on 'Holy Church/sinful Church', "within which remaining differences are neither abolished nor denied." (§ 165) The text is able to say that "it is not in dispute between us that the church is "holy" and "sinful" at the same time, and that the imperative calling to holiness is always a concomitant of the indicative that holiness has been bestowed. Thus the church is in constant need of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, and of cleansing and renewal. Vatican II stated this repeatedly, even if it does not use the term "sinful" of the church. (...) Differences between our churches emerge in answering the question, where does the idea of the church's need for renewal or of its sinfulness find its necessary limit, by reason of the divine pledge that the church abides in the truth and that error and sin will not overcome it?"

### *Catholicity of the Church*

I find it important to pay special attention to the way our document repeatedly speaks about the catholicity of the Church. Differently from the 1998 draft, already the description of the plurality of biblical images for the Church is preceded by an appraisal of this diversity.:

It is essential to acknowledge the wide diversity of insights into the nature and mission of the Church which can be found in the various books of the New Testament and in their interpretation in later history. Diversity appears not as accidental to the life of the Christian community, but as an aspect of its catholicity, a quality that reflects the fact that it is part of the Father's design that the story of salvation in Christ be incarnational. Thus diversity is a gift of God to the Church. (§ 16)

The first time that the notion occurs in the chapter on "The Church in History" it looks as if a different view on catholicity had to be introduced as well. We are confronted with the classical understanding of catholicity, which considers catholicity almost as synonymous to the universality of the Church. Catholicity then pertains to the universal propagation of the Christian faith in

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<sup>30</sup> R. MIGGELBRINK, „Sündige Kirche? Das Schuldbekenntnis des Paptes und die ekklesiale dimension der Sünde“, in *Ökumenische Rundschau* 54 (2005) 462-478.

space and time. In the words of the document: “The essential catholicity of the Church ... transcends all barriers and proclaims God’s word to all peoples: where the whole mystery of Christ is present, there too is the Church catholic. However, the catholicity of the Church is challenged by the fact that the integrity of the Gospel is not adequately preached to all; the fullness of communion is not offered to all.” (§ 55) The subsection on ‘Communion and Diversity’ (§§ 60-63) is again in continuation with the first citation. Now, our document reflects in a very nuanced way on the relation between unity and diversity. “Diversity in unity and unity in diversity”, thus the document states, “are gifts of God to the Church.” (§ 60) “Authentic diversity in the life of communion must not be stifled: authentic unity must not be surrendered.” (§ 62) “Diversity is not the same as division.” These reflections are followed by the only box which has not become shorter in comparison to the previous version. One recognises that the different Christian communities define their identity in a distinctive way and that there is a relation between the way they appreciate diversity and the way they recognise the ecclesiality of other communities. Supra-local forms of ecclesial communion (§§ 64-66) can only be envisaged as a ‘communion of local churches’, which are characterised by unity and diversity. The collegial practice of authority aims at protecting the “authentic diversities” which can be found in these communities.<sup>31</sup>

The approach to catholicity is comparable to the one which can be found in the younger layers of *Lumen Gentium*. A good example is LG 13, the paragraph which forms the link between the paragraphs dealing with the participation of the people of God in the threefold ministry of Christ (LG 9-12) and those focusing on links of communion between the people of God and other churches/ecclesial communion (LG 14-16). This paragraph, entitled ‘De universalitate seu catholicitate unius Populi Dei’, has been added to the text in March 1964. This title reflects the widely spread opinion that catholicity and universality are synonymous terms. The Council however first treats the mission of the People of God to proclaim the Christian faith to the boundaries of the earth and uses the technical term *universalitas* for this.<sup>32</sup> Only thereafter the technical term *catholicitas* is introduced to describe the relationship between different parts within the Church as an exchange of gifts which is enriching for the entire Church. By way of example reference is made to the cooperation of ordained, religious and laity, to the relation between theology and context and to the existence of many rites within the one Catholic Church.<sup>33</sup> *Unitatis Redintegratio* made it clear that, according to the self-understanding of the Catholic Church, the relationship between the different churches and ecclesial communities is equally characterised by

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. § 97: “Sustaining collegiality involves preventing premature closure of debate, ensuring that different voices are heard, listening to expert opinion and drawing on appropriate sources of scholarship. (...) Speaking collegially can mean reflecting back to the community the legitimate diversity that exists within the life of the Church.” Apparently the churches involved in Faith & Order do not experience the need to make a distinction between ‘affective’ and ‘effective’ collegiality, as the magisterium of the Catholic Church does since Vatican II. Cf. P. DE MEY, “Is ‘Affective’ Collegiality Sufficient? A Plea for a More ‘Effective’ Collegiality of Bishops in the Roman Catholic Church and Its Ecumenical Implications”, in *Friendship as an Ecumenical Value: Proceedings of the International Conference Held on the Inauguration of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies (Lviv, 11-15 June 2005)*, Lviv, Ukrainian Catholic University Press, 2006, 132-153.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. LG 13: “This note of universality (*hic universalitatis character*), which adorns the people of God, is a gift of the Lord himself by which the catholic church effectively and continually tries to recapitulate the whole of humanity, with all its riches, under Christ the head in the unity of the Spirit.”

<sup>33</sup> LG 13: “By virtue of this catholicity (*vi huius catholicitatis*), the individual parts (*singulae partes*) bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole church, in such a way that the whole and individual parts grow greater through the mutual communication (*communicantibus*) of all and their united efforts towards fullness in unity. (*ad plenitudinem in unitate conspirantibus*).”

catholicity, understood as unity in diversity.<sup>34</sup> Also Pope Benedict XVI pays attention to both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of catholicity in his teaching.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Eucharist*

Before developing an understanding of the **Eucharist** the connection with baptism is emphasized. The common understanding on the Eucharist is explained as follows:

Holy Communion is the meal where, gathered around the Lord's table, Christians receive the body and blood of Christ. It is a thanksgiving to the Father for everything accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification; a memorial (*anamnesis*) of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus and what was accomplished once for all on the cross; the real presence of the crucified and risen Christ giving his life for all humanity; the communion of the faithful and an anticipation and foretaste of the Kingdom to come. (79)

In the box on 'Eucharist' among other things attention is paid to the divergent opinions concerning eucharistic hospitality. It is interesting to note that this paragraph ended in the 1998 version with a hopeful remark: "In spite of the range of understandings and practices there is a growing willingness to understand other positions and a shared longing to express baptismal communion in eucharistic communion as part of a life in communion." Perhaps the tone has become more realistic now:

Behind the variety of practices lie serious theological problems that are at present unresolved. While recent bilateral and multilateral theological dialogues have achieved much in overcoming some of these traditional disagreements, it is evident that there is a continuing need for growth in understanding concerning the actual faith and practice of the divided churches.

*A comparison of the 1982 'Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry' document by Faith and Order and 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' as regards describing the mission of the people of God and of the ordained by referring to the threefold office of Christ<sup>36</sup>*

The section on 'Ministry' of the BEM document starts with a subsection on 'The calling of the whole people of God'. The text implicitly reveals why the pattern of the *tria munera* hasn't been presented in a more explicit way. The first three paragraphs relate the mission of the people of God to all three persons of the Holy Trinity. When speaking about Christ, the emphasis is on the fact that Christ's work has been "accomplished once for all" (M 2). Therefore it didn't seem appropriate to present the calling of the whole people of God as a participation in the threefold office of Christ. Perhaps the drafters of BEM were of the opinion that an explicit mentioning of the figure of the *tria munera* would place an exaggerated emphasis on the relationship of the Church to Christ. Still, the *tria munera* are alluded to in the section on the Holy Spirit: "The spirit calls people to faith, sanctifies them through many gifts, gives them strength to witness to the Gospel, and empowers them to serve in hope and love." (M 3). Interestingly enough, in the

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<sup>34</sup> UR 4: "All in the church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received, maintain a proper freedom in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail. If they are true to this course of action, they will be giving ever better expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the church."

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the following citations from a sermon Pope Benedict gave during the Solemnity of the apostles Peter and Paul, 29 June 2005: "*Catholicity* does not only express a horizontal dimension, the gathering of many people in unity, but also a vertical dimension: it is only by raising our eyes to God, by opening ourselves to him, that we can truly become one." He even added to this: "*Catholicity* means *universality* – a multiplicity that becomes unity; a unity that nevertheless remains multiplicity."

<sup>36</sup> See for a broader discussion P. DE MEY, "The Bishops' Participation in the Threefold Munera: Comparing the Appeal to the *Tria Munera* at Vatican II and in the Ecumenical Dialogues," in *The Jurist* 69 (2009) 31-58.

second subsection on ‘The church and the ordained ministry’ it becomes clear that BEM has no fundamental difficulty with applying the terminology of the *tria munera* to the people of God. This becomes clear in a paragraph dealing with the relationship of the ordained ministers and the faithful: “But they may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments, through their prayers of intercession, and through their pastoral guidance of the community.” (M 17)

The structure of the *tria munera* is also followed, albeit much more implicitly, in the general description of the mission of the ordained ministry: “The chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry.” (M 13)

When speaking about ‘The forms of the ordained ministry’ the document makes two major claims, the second of which still deserves to be better received in the Roman Catholic Church. The first claim is that “the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.” (M 22) The second is that “the ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way.” (M 26) In this section the function of the bishop is described with a clear reference to the figure of the *tria munera*: “Bishops preach the Word, preside at the sacraments, and administer discipline in such a way as to be representative pastoral ministers of oversight, continuity and unity in the Church.” (M 29)

The subsection on ‘The Church as People of God’ in *The Nature and Mission of the Church* seemed a perfect occasion to quite explicitly reflect on the priestly, prophetic and royal characteristics of the people of God.

While acknowledging the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ, whose one sacrifice institutes the new covenant (cf. Heb 9:15), Christians are called to express by their lives the fact that they have been named a “royal priesthood” and “holy nation”. (...) Every member participates in the priesthood of the whole Church. No one exercises that priesthood apart from the unique priesthood of Christ, nor in isolation from the other members of the body. As a prophetic and royal people, Christians seek to witness to the will of God and to influence the course of events of the world. (§ 19)

When describing the ‘Mission of the Church’ (NMC 34-42) the three major areas of the Church’s mission are mentioned again: “Through its worship (*leitourgia*); service, which includes the stewardship of creation (*diakonia*); and proclamation (*kerygma*) the Church participates in and points to the reality of the Kingdom of God.” (§ 36)

The third chapter on ‘The life of communion in and for the world’ allows us to investigate whether the text also contains explicit or implicit allusions to the figure of the *tria munera* when it distinguishes the ‘Ministry of all the faithful’ (§§ 82-85) from the ‘Ministry of the Ordained’ (§§ 86-89). The subsection on the ‘Ministry of all the faithful’ actually repeats the insights previously offered in the subsection on ‘The Church as people of God’.

Not less than three times is it implicitly mentioned in the subsection on the ‘Ministry of the ordained’ that these ministers, in their own way, fulfil a prophetic, priestly, and royal office, faithful to the call of Jesus and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Ordained ministers serve in the building up of the community, in equipping the saints, and in strengthening the Church’s witness in the World (cf. Eph 4:12-13)

Ordained ministers have a special responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. They have a ministry of pastoral care, teaching and leadership in mission.

The chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the Body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating baptism and the



Eucharist and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its service.

Even the ministry of *episkopé* is introduced in the text with an explicit reference to “the commissioned functions of the ordained ministry, Word, Sacrament and discipline.” (§ 94). Apparently the churches involved in the dialogue within *Faith and Order* are willing to structure their reflections on the mission of the entire people of God, and of the ordained and those exercising *episkope*, by referring to the *tria munera*, but not exclusively to the threefold office of Christ.

#### *The ministry of episcopate or oversight*

The subsection on oversight has significantly been entitled ‘Oversight: Personal, Communal, Collegial’ (§§ 90-98). Even stronger than in the BEM document it is emphasized that “at every level of the Church’s life, the ministry must be exercised in personal, communal and collegial ways.” (§ 94).

Concerning the “ministry of *episkope* (oversight)” all churches agree that “every church needs this ministry of unity in some form.” (89) Attention is paid to the relationship between the **ministry of oversight** and the responsibility of the whole of God’s people:

The Church, as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God, is built up by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or ministries. This diversity calls for a ministry of co-ordination so that these gifts may enrich the whole Church, its unity and mission. (...) The responsibility of those called to exercise oversight cannot be fulfilled without the collaboration, support and assent of the whole community. At the same time, the effective and faithful life of the community is served by a ministry of leadership set apart to guide its mission, teaching and common life. (90)

Much attention goes to the description of the variety of expressions of *episkope* during the Reformation:

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, oversight came to be exercised in a variety of ways in the churches which took their identity through the continental Reformation. These Reformers, seeking to return to the apostolicity of the Church which they considered to have been corrupted, saw themselves faced with the alternative of either staying within the inherited church structures or remaining faithful to the apostolicity of the Church, and thus accepted a break with the overall structure of the Church, including the ministry of universal primacy.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, they continued to see the need for a ministry of *episkopé*, which the churches which went through the Reformation ordered in different ways. Some exercised episcopate in synodal forms. Others kept or developed ministries of personal episcopate, including, for some, the sign of historic episcopal succession. (93)

According to Catherine Clifford, the consequences of this should be taken seriously:

*The Nature and Purpose of the Church* invites us even more explicitly to recognize the exercise of a genuine ministry of *episkope*, and thus, a certain form of episcopal succession, in the existing structures of churches of the Reformation. If we take this seriously, then it may no longer be appropriate to refer to those communities that do not have a designated office of bishop as “non-episcopal”. The basic consensus on the necessity of *episkope* and its succession in service to the continuity of the apostolic faith in the structure of the Church

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<sup>37</sup> Mühling-Schlapkohl considers this passage as problematic because, historically speaking, the “overall structure of the Church” never existed. If “overall” has to be understood in the sense of “catholicity”, he states, it has to be denied that the churches of the Reformation abandoned the catholicity of the Church. (Markus Mühling-Schlapkohl, “Kritische Stellungnahme aus evangelischer Sicht”, in *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 2002/4-5, 73-75, p. 75)

represents a sign of important ecumenical progress. Receiving it will require that Catholic authorities consider a more positive evaluation of other churches and ecclesial communities and their ministries than we have seen in recent times.<sup>38</sup> (

In the original draft the observations in the box on *episkopé* went in the same direction:

Churches who exercise *episkope* primarily or even uniquely in synodal form and churches for whom the office of bishop is central for the exercise of *episkope* are asked to recognize that there is a ministry of *episkope* in both cases. Churches which have preserved episcopal succession are challenged to recognize both the faithful continuity with the apostolic faith as well as the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry of *episkope* in various forms. Churches without the episcopal succession, and living in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission, are asked to consider that the continuity with the Church of the apostles can find expression in the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that such a sign can serve that continuity itself.

Sullivan deems it useful to compare this text with BEM 53. Because of a number of critical responses from Reformation and Free churches, it is no longer repeated that churches without episcopal succession “may need to recover the sign of the episcopal succession.”<sup>39</sup> Also for an Anglican observer the twofold use of the verb “can” is ambiguous: “Which status does this invitation have? When Anglicans insist that episcopal ordination expresses the fullness of the Church (without denying the status of churches to non-episcopal churches), *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* remains vague on this point.<sup>40</sup> It is in my opinion quite significant that these invitations have been omitted in the revised version. Now the text clearly expresses the divergent issues but also positively formulates the amount of convergence.

One of the most difficult issues dividing Christian communities concerns this form of ministry and its relation to the apostolicity of the Church. To focus the question in a very precise way: churches remain divided about whether the historic episcopate – in the sense of bishops ordained in apostolic succession back to the earliest generations of the Church – is a necessary component of ecclesial order as intended by Christ for his community; or is merely one form of church structure which, because it is so traditional, is particularly advantageous for today’s community but is not essential. Still other communities see no special reason for privileging episcopal structure, or even believe it is better avoided, for they see it as prone to abuse.

Ecumenical reflection on the more general concept of a ministry of *episkopé*, as described in the preceding paragraphs, has helped to bring to light hitherto unrecognised parallels between episcopal and non-episcopal churches in the way oversight is exercised. Moreover, both types of churches have been able to acknowledge a degree of apostolicity in one another, even though disagreement about the need for bishops remains.

(i) communal (conciliar or synodal)

The document is first of all convinced that “all the baptized share a responsibility for the apostolic faith and witness of the whole Church. The communal dimension of the Church’s life refers to the involvement of the whole body of the faithful in common consultation, sometimes through representation and constitutional structures, over the wellbeing of the Church and their common involvement in the service of God’s mission in the world.” (98)

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<sup>38</sup> Catherine Clifford, “Reflections on The Nature and Purpose of the Church”, in *Ecumenical Trends* 32 (2003) 129-137, p. 135.

<sup>39</sup> Sullivan, “The Nature and Purpose of the Church,” p. 152.

<sup>40</sup> Jeremy N. Morris, “Das Wesen und die Bestimmung der Kirche: eine anglikanische Antwort,” *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 2002/4-5, 69-71, p. 70.

The document hopes that all Christian churches can agree on linking this communal responsibility with the notion of the *sensus fidei* or *sensus fidelium*.

The unity and communion of the Church require a ministry of discernment by the faithful. Discernment is served by the presence of the *sensus fidei* in every member of the community. The *sensus* – a kind of spiritual perception, sense, discernment (flair) – is the fruit of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which baptised believers are enabled to recognize what is, or is not, an authentic echo of the voice of Christ in the teaching of the community; what is, or is not, in harmony with the truth of the Gospel. The *sensus fidelium* – the expression of this *sensus fidei* by all the members – is an essential element in the discernment, reception and articulation of Christian faith. (99)

Finally it is mentioned that “the communal life of the Church involves the coming together in council to seek and voice the mind of Christ for the Church in changing circumstances and in the face of new challenges.” (100) Sullivan rightly observes that, contrary to a number of Protestant churches, in the Roman Catholic Church conciliarity is not a synonym of communality: “In Roman Catholic usage, the term “conciliar” and “synodal” refer primarily to the collegial exercise of oversight by bishops taking counsel together. Canon law mandates the participation of the faithful in diocesan synods, but leaves their participation in plenary councils to be decided by the bishops. In either case, the faithful have only consultative voice.”<sup>41</sup>

#### (ii) Personal

The personal dimension of oversight is confirmed, but not without some caveats: “Oversight is always to be exercised within and in relation to the whole Church.” (101) It is also a function of service.

#### (iii) Collegial

I will first pay attention to the multilateral dialogue in *Faith and Order* and compare the 1982 convergence text on *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* with the draft version of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. Without entering into much detail the BEM report contains the general statement that “the ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way.” (M 26) It is clear that the “college of ordained ministers” consists of priests in the Protestant churches and of bishops in the Catholic Church. The only further stipulation is that “the ordained ministry needs to be constitutionally or canonically ordered and exercised in the Church in such a way that each of these three dimensions can find adequate expression.” (M 27)<sup>42</sup>

In *The Nature and Mission of the Church* the churches equally are able to agree that oversight is to be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. The term collegiality particularly applies to “the gathering of those with oversight” (NMC 97): “Collegiality is at work wherever those entrusted with oversight gather, discern, speak and act as one on behalf of the whole Church.” The document does not make the distinction between affective and effective collegiality which is typical of Roman Catholic postconciliar teaching on this subject. The next paragraph contains the interesting idea that “speaking collegially can may mean reflecting back to the community the

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<sup>41</sup> Sullivan, “The Nature and Purpose of the Church,” p. 152.

<sup>42</sup> As appears from the response by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Roman Catholic Church agrees with this formulation. Compare M. THURIAN (ed.), *Churches respond to BEM. Official Responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Text. Vol. VI* (Faith and Order Paper, 144), Geneva, WCC, 1988, p. 31: “The description of guiding principles for the exercise of the ordained ministry (26-27), of the functions of the bishops, presbyters and deacons (28-31) and of the variety of charisms (32-33) bring together various elements that are retraceable in various developments and in the historical evolution of the church, in which one recognizes the practice of the church through the ages.”

legitimate diversity that exists within the life of the Church.”<sup>43</sup> Commenting on the 1998 draft Catherine Clifford paid attention to a deficit in this section: “One misses a clear statement to the effect that collegiality is an expression of the communion of the local churches. (...) From a Catholic perspective, each bishop or member of the apostolic college presides over a local church, and collegiality is expressed in the mutual relations among the bishops with other local churches and with the universal Church.”<sup>44</sup> It is clear from the new draft that this is not yet a matter of consensus among the Christian churches. An interesting plea for common collegial oversight, however, has been added in the 2005 draft.

Because of the separation of the churches, there has been relatively little collegial exercise of oversight or witness within society on the part of the ministers of our divided communities. The ecumenical movement can serve as a stimulus and invitation to church leaders to explore the possibility of working together in appropriate ways on behalf of their own communities and as an expression of their care for all the churches (cf. 2 Cor 11:28), and in common witness before society. (NMC2, 98)

The previous version of NMC contained a critical remark which was found in a box entitled ‘Communal, personal and collegial’ and which deplored the uneven balance between the personal, collegial and communal aspect of the exercise of oversight in different Christian churches.

These three aspects need to be kept together. In various churches, one or another has been overemphasized at the expense of the others. In some churches, the personal dimension of the ordained ministry tends to diminish the collegial and communal dimensions. In other churches, the collegial or communal dimension takes so much importance that the ordained ministry loses its personal dimension. Each church needs to ask itself in what way its exercise of the ordained ministry has suffered in the course of history.

The Catholic ecclesologist Francis Sullivan made the following self-critical observation in this respect: “One has to admit that the personal dimension, that of the diocesan bishop and of the Pope, is overemphasized at the expense of the collegial, and the communal is given a very minor role.”<sup>45</sup> One wonders why this remark had to disappear from the text even if the problem doesn’t seem to have disappeared.

### *Conciliarity and Primacy*

In comparison to the previous draft, which had only a modest input to make on this theme (103), the new version dedicates 6 paragraphs to this theme (99-104), before the last ‘box’ of the document indicates that there exists quite a lot of disagreement among the churches on this issue. The text pays much attention to the Orthodox view on the relation between primacy and conciliarity by referring to canon 34 of the so-called Apostolic Canons.

According to canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons, the First among the bishops would only make a decision in agreement with the other bishops and the latter would make no important decision without the agreement of the First. (102)

The decision by pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut unum sint* to invite “church leaders and their theologians to enter into patient and fraternal dialogue concerning a universal ministry of Christian unity” (104) is met with gratitude. The document even contains an implicit reference to

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<sup>43</sup> The first draft also had put it in the negative: “Speaking collegially does not necessarily mean agreement on every subject.”

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Clifford, “Reflections on The Nature and Purpose of the Church,” p. 135. In her article “Emerging Consensus on Collegiality and Catholic Ecumenical Responsibility,” *The Jurist* 64 (2004) 332-360, p. 352, however, the author praises the document for having provided “perhaps the most complete attempt to express a common understanding on collegiality.”

<sup>45</sup> Sullivan, “The Nature and Purpose of the Church,” p. 152.

the ARCIC document on *The Gift of Authority* when it is stated that “in recent years, both ecumenical rapprochement and globalisation have created a new climate in which a universal primacy can be seen as a gift rather than a threat to other churches and the distinctive features of their witness.” (103)

*An Ecumenical Reflection on the Mission of the Church*

Occasioned by the criticism on the first draft, our document pays more attention to the theme of mission. Of course, since this document has been written on behalf of Christians from each continent, it cannot discuss problems which are exclusively connected to one specific context, in great detail. Still, being a European reader Ook al kan het document, omdat het zich richt op christelijke lezers uit de hele wereld, niet afzonderlijk ingaan op de situatie in Europa, het is een feit dat de traditionele kerkelijke families in ons continent allemaal in meerdere of mindere mate worden geconfronteerd met het fenomeen van stilzwijgende kerkverlating. In tal van publicaties wordt aandacht besteed aan de uitdagingen die de gesecculariseerde context stelt voor de geloofsverkondiging vandaag.<sup>46</sup> De probleemstelling wordt in *The Nature and Mission of the Church* duidelijk beschreven: “One particularly striking experience of human weakness and failure that has afflicted the Christian community in via is the sometimes widespread discrepancy between membership in the church, on the one hand, and vibrant profession and practice of the Christian faith, on the other. Many of our communities face the challenge that some of their members seem to “belong without believing”, while other individuals opt out of Church membership, claiming that they can, with greater authenticity, “believe without belonging”. The challenge of living our faith as believing communities in such a way that all those who belong are seriously committed Christians, and all who sincerely believe want to belong, is a challenge that we share; it crosses the lines which divide us.” (§ 51) In het licht van dit probleem wordt een katholiek theoloog vandaag ongemakkelijk wanneer hij de formulering van de leer over de heilsnoodzakelijkheid van de kerk in *Lumen Gentium* herleest, die immers doet terugdenken aan de tijd van de anathema’s: “Geen mens wordt gered die, hoewel hij bij de Kerk is ingelijfd, in de liefde niet volhardt en in de schoot van de Kerk wel ‘met zijn lichaam’ maar niet ‘met zijn hart’ aanwezig blijft.” (LG 14) De leer is duidelijk, maar we slagen er blijkbaar niet in ze te communiceren. Het document van Faith & Order geeft er zich, met een impliciete verwijzing naar het werk van de Britse godsdienstsocioloog Grace Davie, wel rekenschap van dat de kerkgemeenschappen in Europa zowel kunnen geconfronteerd worden met het probleem van ‘believing without belonging’ als met dat van ‘belonging without believing’.<sup>47</sup>

De opdracht voor christenen is duidelijk: “They are to address those who have not heard, as well as those They are to address those who have not heard, as well as those who are no longer living according to the Gospel, the Good News of the Reign of God.” (§ 35) Voor Europese christenen is volgende aanbeveling misschien eerder een uitdaging dan een concrete werkelijkheid, ook al haken veel mensen precies af omdat ze een gebrek aan authenticiteit ervaren in de concrete christelijke geloofsgemeenschappen waartoe ze behoren: “Because the servanthood of Christ entails suffering it is evident (as expressed in the New Testament writings) that the witness (martyria) of the Church will entail – for both individuals and for the community – the way of the cross, even to the point of martyrdom.” (§ 39) Ook al ligt bij de bespreking van de eucharistie de nadruk vooral op de belangrijke theologische meningsverschillen die er nog steeds bestaan tussen de kerken, toch wordt als consensuspunt, onder verwijzing naar 1 Kor 10-

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<sup>46</sup> Vgl., weliswaar met uiteenlopende analyses de post-synodale exhortatie van Paus Johannes-Paulus II *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003) en het document *Evangelising: Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe* (2006) van de Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. Voor twee aanzienlijk onderscheiden Orthodoxe stemmen ten aanzien van dit fenomeen, zie Métropolitte Cyrille de Smolensk, *L'évangile et la liberté: Les valeurs de la tradition dans la société laïque*, Paris, Cerf, 2006 en Olivier Clément, “Témoigner dans une société sécularisée,” *Contacts* 40 (1988), 277-295. Zie voor een meer gedetailleerde bespreking P. De Mey

<sup>47</sup> Zie bv. Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000).

11, de aandacht voor “the moral implications of the celebration” (§ 80) vermeld, onder meer in volgende uitspraak: “Because the Lord’s Supper is the Sacrament which builds up community, all kinds of injustice, racism, estrangement, and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. (...) The Eucharist, therefore, obliges us also to participate actively in the ongoing restoration of the world’s situation and the human condition. God’s judgement demands that our behaviour be consistent with the reconciling presence of God in human history” (§ 81) In katholieke uiteenzettingen over de eucharistie wordt niet altijd evenzoveel aandacht geschonken aan dit aspect.<sup>48</sup> Op dezelfde manier is het een belangrijke aanvulling van ons katholieke spreken over de relatie tussen het algemene priesterschap en het gewijde ambt dat de oecumenische reflectie hieromtrent telkens insisteert op het niet louter verbale getuigenis dat beide groepen op grond van hun roeping en geestesgaven dienen af te leggen. In verband met ‘het ambt van alle gelovigen’ wordt gesproken over “the Church’s potentially costly witness to justice” (§ 84) en ook de sectie over ‘het ambt van de gewijde bedienaren’ bevat een waardevolle reflectie over het getuigeniskarakter van dit ambt: “Essential to its testimony are not merely its words, but the love of its members for one another, the quality of their service to those in need, a just and disciplined life and a fair exercise of power and authority.” (§ 88)

Net als vele andere oecumenische teksten onderstreept ook ons document dat de verdeeldheid van de christelijke kerken een krachtadig evangelisch getuigenis in de weg staat. “Effective mission is thwarted by the scandal of division.” (§ 57) “The integrity of the Church as God’s instrument is at stake in witness through proclamation, and concrete actions in Union with all people of goodwill, for the sake of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.” (§ 47) Dit laatste citaat klinkt best mooi, maar het is blijkbaar moeilijk in praktijk te brengen.

Gelukkig wordt het document van Faith & Order concreter in het slothoofdstuk ‘In en voor de wereld’. “Precies omwille van hun geloof mogen christelijke gemeenschappen niet werkloos toezien tegenover grote ellende die de menselijke gezondheid aantast, zoals hongersnood, hongerdood, natuurrampen en de hiv/aids-pandemie. (...) Iedere context zal zijn eigen aanwijzingen verschaffen om te onderscheiden wat het passende christelijke antwoord is in een gegeven omstandigheid. Zelfs nu kunnen verdeelde christelijke gemeenschappen deze onderscheiding samen doorvoeren, en hebben ze dat soms ook gedaan, en hebben ze samen gehandeld om verlichting te brengen aan lijdende mensen en om een maatschappij te helpen creëren die meer in overeenstemming is met hun waardigheid en met de wil van hun liefhebbende Vader in de hemel.” (§ 112)

Wil men werkelijk progressie maken in het ontwikkelen van een gezamenlijk getuigenis als kerken, dan veronderstelt dit tenslotte het uitbouwen van structuren van gemeenschappelijk uitgeoefend leiderschap en toezicht (*episcopè*).<sup>49</sup> Het is belangrijk dat dit in deze poging tot het ontwikkelen van een oecumenische visie op kerk wordt erkend door vertegenwoordigers van alle bij deze oefening betrokken kerken in het kader van hun gemeenschappelijke reflectie over collegialiteit: “Omwille van de scheiding van de kerken is er relatief weinig collegiale uitoefening van toezicht of getuigenis in de maatschappij geweest vanwege de bedienaren van onze verdeelde gemeenschappen. De oecumenische beweging kan dienen als een stimulus en uitnodiging aan de kerkleiders om de mogelijkheid te verkennen om op passende manieren samen te werken namens

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<sup>48</sup> De Amerikaanse katholieke theoloog William Cavanaugh houdt in zijn publicaties wel een sterk pleidooi opdat lokale gemeenschappen overall ter wereld de band tussen eucharistie en leven oprechter zouden beleven. Vlg. bijvoorbeeld zijn artikel “Dying for the Eucharist or Being Killed by It? Romero’s Challenge to First-World Christians”, in *Theology Today* 58 (2001) 177-189.

<sup>49</sup> Dit wordt overigens in § 98 toegegeven, met de belofte om het voortaan anders aan te pakken: “Omwille van de scheiding van de kerken is er relatief weinig collegiale uitoefening van toezicht of getuigenis in de maatschappij geweest vanwege de bedienaren van onze verdeelde gemeenschappen. De oecumenische beweging kan dienen als een stimulus en uitnodiging aan de kerkleiders om de mogelijkheid te verkennen om op passende manieren samen te werken namens hun eigen gemeenschappen en als uitdrukking van hun zorg voor alle kerken (cf. 2 Kor 11,28), en in gezamenlijk getuigenis voor de maatschappij.”

hun eigen gemeenschappen en als uitdrukking van hun zorg voor alle kerken (cf. 2 Kor 11,28), en in gezamenlijk getuigenis voor de maatschappij.” (§ 98) Enkel het reeds genoemde recente Anglicaans-Katholieke document *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (2007) lijkt mij hierin nog verder te gaan door in het slotdeel concrete doelstellingen te formuleren om de zendingsopdracht voortaan voor een groot stuk gemeenschappelijk aan te pakken, ofschoon ook hier de Engelse uitdrukking geldt: “the proof of the pudding lies in the eating.”

## Conclusion

I do not deny that it will remain rather difficult to elaborate a consensus text on the nature and mission of the Church within the multilateral dialogue of *Faith and Order*. Therefore it is important that the members of the churches involved in this dialogue and, why not, even students of a course on ecumenism, carefully reflect on the questions for discussion which have been mentioned at the end of the document’s introduction :

- Does this study document correctly identify our common ecclesiological convictions, as well as the issues which continue to divide us?
- Does this study document reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the Church?
- Are there significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed?
- Insofar as this study document provides a helpful framework for further ecclesiological discussions among the churches:
  - How can this study document help your church, together with others, take concrete steps towards unity?
  - What suggestions would you make for the future development of this text?