Ecclesiology

A Dialogue between the Finnish Ecumenical Council and the Council of Churches in Germany
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Foreword

On 29/30 October 2018 representatives of the Finnish Ecumenical Council came to Frankfurt to continue the theological discussions with the Board of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) which had started in Helsinki in 2015. At that time the talks had focused on baptism, whereby the Finnish representatives had shown particular interest in the experiences the Germans had made after the declaration of mutual recognition of baptism. (The declaration had been signed in 2007 by eleven of the then 16 member churches of the ACK.) The discussions in Helsinki showed that many of the questions connected with baptism and the recognition of baptism can ultimately only be answered on the basis of an understanding about ecclesiology. It was therefore logical that the understanding of the church was at the centre of the meeting in Frankfurt.

The consultation opened with an exchange on the ecumenical situation in Finland and in Germany. There are significant differences between the two countries; Finland, for example, has about 5.5 million inhabitants, while more than 82 million people live in Germany. In Finland the overwhelming majority of the population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is by far the largest church, while in Germany the Protestant and Catholic churches are about the same size, and roughly a third of the population does not belong to any church at all. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland maintains bilateral dialogues with several other churches; in Germany the ecumenical landscape is strongly marked by the relationship between the two major churches. Nonetheless, there are also similarities between the two countries. In both of them, a national council of churches was formed (the Finnish Ecumenical Council in 1917, the Council of Christian Churches in Germany in 1948) in order to create a reliable structure for multilateral ecumenical cooperation. The Charta Oecumenica plays an important role for the churches of both countries. In Germany it was solemnly signed by the leadership of the ACK member churches at the first Ecumenical Kirchentag in 2003. In Finland, the discussions on the Charta Oecumenica led to the publication of a short declaration entitled “Ekumenian Hyvät Tavat”. This declaration, which deals with “good manners” in ecumenism,
is to be translated into English in the near future for readers outside the Scandi-
navian language area. In the years following the first meeting in Helsinki, the
Finnish Ecumenical Council has continued to address the issue of recognition of
baptism. This process is expected to conclude with the declaration of a mutual
commitment.

The Finnish churches, in particular the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Fin-
land, have been involved for many years in ecumenical dialogues on ecclesiolo-
gy, which are particularly relevant for international ecumenism beyond Finland.
The most prominent example is the Porvoo Declaration, which declared church
communion between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the Nordic
and Baltic Lutheran churches. The participants of the consultation in Frankfurt
made reference to this declaration, and the Finnish partners explained how the
communion between the participating churches has evolved since it was signed
in 1992. The declaration itself contains a number of commitments indicating
the practical consequences of this theological agreement for the churches. The
signatory churches have followed the road that was mapped out there, and even
though they have not formed a common structure for their cooperation (com-
parable to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, for example), the
Finns were able to observe that the Porvoo Declaration has deepened the fel-
lowship between the churches concerned. They identified the problem that it
has not been possible so far to establish procedures for making joint decisions – a
challenge which ecumenism also faces in other contexts.

A recent contribution from Finland to the ecumenical discussion on the
church is the document “Communion in Growth. Declaration on the Church,
Eucharist, and Ministry”, produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Fin-
land and the Roman Catholic Church. Representatives of the Pontifical Coun-
cil for Promoting Christian Unity were also involved in this national dialogue,
and the results of the dialogue in Finland will be incorporated into the further
work of the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission. The
document contains pioneering common statements on the understanding of the
church, the Eucharist and the ministry, which, if received by both churches,
would mark a clear step forward in the relationship between the Roman Catholic
and Evangelical Lutheran churches. This document was presented during the
meeting in Frankfurt, and the ensuing discussion showed that it is likely to spark controversial debates in Germany. A Protestant theological tradition that regards the church and its unity as something that is enacted by the use of the Bible as Holy Scripture will find itself struggling with the agreement reached by Finnish Lutherans and their Catholic dialogue partners that the ordained ministry is “constitutive of the Church” (para. 330).

There was agreement at the meeting between the Finnish Ecumenical Council and the ACK that the dialogue on ecclesiology should on no account lose sight of the fact that the church is not an end in itself, but has a task in the world. But today’s world is in a state of rapid change, which the churches have to perceive and which confronts them with challenges they can better overcome jointly. Topics mentioned in this context were secularisation and religious pluralisation, as well as the challenges of climate change and new separatist tendencies both within and between societies. The churches have already begun to deal with these matters. Likewise the churches are trying to work together in view of the social problems. For example, the ACK has proclaimed the Ecumenical Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation to make a common contribution to the protection of creation, and it supports the project “Do you know who I am?”, the aim of which is to promote meetings and dialogue between people of different religions, thus overcoming separation and contributing to the reduction of prejudices.

After their intensive and fruitful discussion as well as a preview on unresolved challenges of the future, the participants were encouraged to consider a continuation of the common work. For example, the third Ecumenical Kirchentag 2021 in Frankfurt would offer an opportunity to make the discussion between the Finnish Ecumenical Council and the ACK better known to a wider public. It is to be hoped that this project can be realised.

This documentation contains the lectures held during the meeting in Frankfurt. The ACK would like to express its sincere gratitude to all the authors.

Frankfurt, December 2019
Dr. Elisabeth Dieckmann, General Secretary of the ACK 2009-2019
Dr. Verena Hammes, General Secretary of the ACK since 2019
Ecumenism in Finland

Matti Repo

The Finnish Ecumenical Council

The Finnish Ecumenical Council was established in 1917. It celebrated its centenary a year ago – coincidentally, with that of Finland’s independence. The Council consists of eleven member churches or religious communities, five observer churches or communities, and twenty-six partner organisations. They represent the Christian faith in all its diversity, from Catholicism to Adventism and from Orthodoxy to Pentecostalism. All comply with the purpose and aims of the Ecumenical Council, that is, “according to the Bible [they] confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour and strive together to fulfil their common calling for the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”.

Finland is a country with a Lutheran majority. Approximately seventy percent of the population, some four million people, are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Orthodox Church, with 60,000 members, is the second largest. It is estimated that the Pentecostal movement is the third largest, followed by the Evangelical Free Church. The Catholic Church occupies fifth place in church membership. It seems there are slightly more Jehovah’s Witnesses than Catholics in Finland, and the number of Muslims is probably higher than the number of Orthodox Christians, but in general, Finland can be considered a Christian country, not only because of the Evangelical Lutheran Church’s majority position but because of the far-reaching influence of Christianity through the centuries, which still prevails and is experienced in the public sphere.

As a predominantly Lutheran country, ecumenism in Finland largely takes place between the Lutheran majority and the different minority churches. The various free churches have a joint organisation of their own for dialogue and cooperation, but for the most part they participate with the other churches in
all the Ecumenical Council’s activities. Despite its majority position, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is very openly involved in the ecumenical movement and is also the main source of the Ecumenical Council’s funding. Given its financial and personnel resources, the majority church has a special responsibility for the work of unity. However, not all members of the Lutheran Church – not even among the clergy – share a passion for ecumenism. Unfortunately, being in a majority position sometimes blinds people to the fact that there are other Christians, too, and that Christ calls his followers to be one so that the world may believe.

When the Charta Oecumenica was approved some fifteen years ago, it was received in Finland with an annex designed for the local situation. A short document called “Good Manners in Ecumenism” was published. It recommended mutual respect and trust, common dialogue, and joint witness, as well as the giving of an honest and truthful witness in speaking about others. It committed the churches to proclaiming the Gospel, while rejecting any form of proselytism among them. Today the Ecumenical Council’s churches and communities enjoy very warm relations with each other. A common perspective is taken for granted: others are also Christian. You are not to doubt your sisters and brothers, even if you do not always agree with them.

**Lutheran-Pentecostal act of reconciliation**

The latest sign of ecumenical good manners was the act of reconciliation the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Pentecostal Church celebrated less than a month ago, on 4 October. There was a time when members of the other church or community were not regarded as true Christians but were deemed either misguided sectarians or secularised pseudo-believers, not knowing or living out the real faith. There were also many traumatic experiences of inequity, especially in relation to the structures of organised society. Many of these problems required dealing with in a theological dialogue between Lutherans and Pentecostals, which began in 1987. When the dialogue concluded, it was agreed to establish a joint group of representatives for regular consultations
and to address certain pastoral challenges, such as the issue of dual membership. The group has met twice a year to discuss theological problems to some extent, but primarily to share information and learn from one another.

Although difficult theological questions still divide us, especially concerning the sacraments, this autumn our church bodies were able to publicly apologise for all the bad things we had done to or said about each other. This act of reconciliation did not create a *communion in sacris* between us: it did not result in mutual recognition of baptism or sharing in the eucharist, but it contributed to the development of a new sense of mutual spiritual belonging, which in turn will help us to witness jointly to our faith.

**The Evangelical Free Church and the Baptist Churches**

Other dialogues with communities in the free church tradition are those with the Evangelical Free Church and the Baptists. The dialogue with the Evangelical Free Church started in 1983. It has also resulted in the creation of a representative consultative group. As with the Pentecostals, no formal agreement has been reached, and no mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist, or ministry has been approved. Instead, many practical issues have been discussed, and a report has recently been published offering advice concerning joint efforts in evangelism and diaconia, as well as occasional sacramental hospitality.

There are two Baptist Churches in Finland, one Finnish speaking and the other Swedish speaking. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has had a dialogue with both since 1997. We meet every three years, and the next session will take place only two weeks from now. We will discuss two topics: peace and reconciliation in society; and baptism, eucharist, and common witness. An interesting feature of this dialogue is that it brings together two Baptist Churches whose work in different languages also involves some differences in theology and praxis.
Dialogue with the Russian Orthodox helps Lutherans know themselves

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has had a longstanding dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church. It was initiated in 1970, originally as a means of establishing links with Lutherans in Estonia and the remaining Finnish speakers in Ingria and Karelia. In the Soviet period such relations were only possible via the authorities in Moscow. Nevertheless, the dialogue was taken very seriously and conducted with theological thoroughness. The churches appointed university professors and bishops to their delegations, which were led by senior figures from the respective hierarchies. This dialogue did not result in any formal agreement between Lutherans and Orthodox, but it helped us become acquainted and, more importantly, to know ourselves better. It prompted us to conduct research that opened new insights into Lutheranism and made us better aware of our own tradition.

The Helsinki “Luther School” was born out of this dialogue, as scholars started to realise that Martin Luther’s theology was more deeply rooted in the theology of the Early Church than many prominent nineteenth-century Protestant theologians had assumed. Through the Middle Ages the patristic content of the Christian faith had been faithfully transmitted to the Reformers. The Lutheran Reformation did not result in a break in the tradition but witnessed to a continuity which could be traced from the writings of the Church Fathers to Martin Luther. A point of reference was found in the doctrines of justification and deification. It became evident that Luther saw justification through faith as being united with the Christ present in faith, who dwells in the believer and who is thus himself our justification. In later years this emphasis influenced the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, first approved by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) in 1999, but subsequently also by the Methodist World Council in 2006, the Anglican Communion (AC) in 2016, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2017, thus making it one of the most widely approved ecumenical documents.
The dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church has lasted nearly fifty years, but its more recent work has not produced results as remarkable as those of the late 1970s. Unfortunately, the dialogue was discontinued four years ago at the ecclesial-hierarchical level because of differing emphases on sexual ethics, but it continued at the academic level. Preparations are now underway to resume the dialogue shortly at the same official level as was previously the case. The Patriarch of Moscow has already agreed to the continuation.

Common pastoral interests with the Finnish Orthodox Church

Following the dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church another dialogue with our closer neighbour, the Finnish Orthodox Church, was initiated in 1989. This dialogue between two different churches sharing the same linguistic and cultural context in Finland has focused on both theological and social-ethical questions, but it has not been undertaken with such extensive preparation and evaluation as the one with the Russians. Perhaps the most important issues have been those concerning pastoral questions, such as ecumenical marriages or questions concerning religion at school, or issues related to the minority position of the Orthodox. A number of members from each church have attended the occasional services of the other.

The Finnish Orthodox Church belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Some Russian Orthodox congregations in Finland belong to the Patriarchate of Moscow. However, many Russians belong to the Finnish Orthodox Church, and it also offers services for people with a Serbian or Romanian background. The currently tense situation between Moscow and Constantinople may have a bearing on relations between the Russian and Finnish Orthodox Churches, but the bishops of the Finnish church have underlined that Russian believers continue to be fully welcome to participate in its liturgy and services. The bishops see the severing of ties as lamentable but stress that it was a unilateral decision.

A separate introduction to the new report from the Finnish Lutheran-Catholic dialogue will be presented by others later at this conference. Let me now
say something about the agreement between Lutherans and Methodists, before I introduce the Porvoo Agreement and its significance.

**Lutherans agree with Methodists**

There are two Methodist Churches in Finland which both belong to the same annual conference of the United Methodist Church, one Finnish, the other Swedish speaking. A seven-year dialogue with them resulted in 2010 in the signing of an agreement called “Partakers in Christ”. The dialogue clarified traditional topics of particularly Lutheran interest, including the doctrines of justification, baptism, eucharist, and ministry. As very small minorities, the Methodist Churches in Finland possess limited theological and personnel resources, but the dialogue made much use of international material. The approval of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the World Methodist Council in 2006 proved very fruitful, as did the recent documents on baptism and eucharist published by the United Methodist Church in America.

The agreement itself is based on the pattern of the Porvoo Declaration, although it was unable to extend as far. For the moment we recognise each other’s episcopally ordained ministries of deacon, priest, and bishop and invite each other’s members to take part in our sacramental worship. What is missing, however, is the mutual recognition of each other’s members as our own. There are still differences to be reconciled, for example, concerning membership. Both churches appear to practise membership at two levels, depending on confession of faith or confirmation. It is unclear whether we share a similar understanding of the church membership of children or the significance of the laying on of hands at confirmation. In some places Methodist young people wish to take part in Lutheran confirmation preparation and be confirmed with their schoolfriends while remaining faithful to their Methodist family. This creates an anomaly: we can communicate in the sacrament of the altar with Methodist young people at a confirmation service but we cannot confirm them. Further dialogue is planned.
The Porvoo Common Statement is based on common faith

Representatives of the Lutheran Churches in the Nordic and Baltic region and the Anglican Churches in Britain and Ireland agreed on the text of a common statement in 1992 in Järvenpää, Finland, and joined in celebrating a closing service in Porvoo. Järvenpää was considered too difficult a name for the statement, and Porvoo was chosen instead. The text itself was the result of a long international Lutheran-Anglican dialogue initiated by the LWF and the AC in 1967. The Church of England had already made agreements with the Church of Sweden in the 1920s, the Churches of Finland, Estonia, and Latvia in the 1930s, and the Churches of Norway, Denmark, and Iceland in the 1950s. These agreements had made it possible for eucharistic fellowship or intercommunion, as it was called in those days, between Anglicans and Lutherans in their respective churches. Bishops from the Church of England had also begun to take part in the laying on of hands at episcopal consecrations in at least some of these churches, thus making their unity in faith and witness visible.

In the early 1990s the LWF-AC dialogue resulted in three agreements, one in Northern Europe and two in North America. They all follow the same logic concerning the understanding of the church’s apostolic succession and the continuity of episcopal ministry in its service. According to these agreements the laying on of hands in the historical succession is a “sign, not a guarantee” of the church remaining faithful to the apostolic mission given by Christ. It is also a sign of faith in God, who is steadfast in his promise to remain always with the church. The apostolicity of a regional church is supported and carried forward to new generations by more than merely historical continuity in the laying on of hands. It is also ensured by the Scriptures, the Creeds, sacramental liturgy, the confessional writings, and tradition. Episcopal sees, even when long vacant, also testify to the history of the church and thus to God’s faithfulness.

The Porvoo Common Statement does not focus solely on the question of continuity in episcopal ministry. It collates and repeats the common faith of Lutherans and Anglicans and the common task they share in witnessing to it, and only then discusses the ecclesiology the apostolic mission of the church requires. In this sense the statement is based on a solid theological foundation:
it does not attempt to address only those questions on which the traditions may differ but rather gives maximum expression to the shared and necessary content of faith.

The Porvoo Agreement has brought us into very close communion with Anglicans in Britain and Ireland. Two minority Anglican churches on the Iberian Peninsula have also joined the Communion. Furthermore, although they have shared a common history and lived in fellowship for centuries, Lutherans in the Nordic and Baltic region have drawn closer to each other.

Today Porvoo means much more than bishops taking part in episcopal consecrations. The laying on of hands is a visible sign of unity, but it is also an effective sign because it is combined with a common prayer to the Holy Spirit. It points to the pneumatological or charismatic dimension of the installation of a regional church’s leaders and binds the dioceses not only to their immediate neighbours but also to those living far away.

**The Porvoo Declaration brings the churches into growing communion**

The agreement makes it possible to share resources and arrange services together. For example, in my city of Tampere a local English-speaking congregation has integrated itself as a congregation of the Church of England’s Diocese in Europe. It worships according to the Church of England’s “Common Worship”, but in a Lutheran church and with Lutheran presiding ministers who have been granted permission by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Several links between dioceses and local parishes have been established since the agreement was signed. For example, my diocese is linked with the Diocese of Manchester, and we have developed good cooperation in the fields of confirmation preparation and youth ministry.

Every summer a group of Finnish young people travels with a priest and a youth minister to Manchester to share in a camp and confirmation preparation with young people from Manchester, while one of Manchester’s suffragan bishops comes with a team and a group of young people for a joint confirmation
camp with young people in Tampere. Of course, the actual confirmation rite follows separately, but this is as far as we can get now. Nevertheless, this brings our churches closer together, which is even more important now that the UK is preparing to leave the EU. We have also recently started to run an exchange programme for youth ministers.

However, the Porvoo Communion needs to develop closer ties, just as other church communions do, including the LWF and the CPCE. No church imposes obligations on another. According to the dialogue reports that led to Porvoo, visible unity is to be so understood that the churches remain autonomous while becoming interdependent. They are independent but are committed to each other. In the ecumenical movement this is sometimes expressed by the notion of accountability: churches are accountable to each other in their decision making.

In the Porvoo Agreement the churches commit themselves to consult each other before they make decisions in important matters of faith and order. Some mechanisms have been developed for this. The Porvoo Communion has no “general assembly” like the CPCE, but it arranges theological consultations and regular leadership meetings. A contact group meets every year, and the presiding bishops meet every two years. However, none of these meetings can make binding decisions for all the member churches. It is for the churches to receive the recommendations from these consultations for their further study and to take them into account.

I see this as a common problem for ecumenism today. We have reached a lot of theological agreement, and the unity we share at the spiritual level has been made visible in many ways, especially in shared worship, witness, and service. However, whereas visible unity means neither uniformity nor organic unity, we perhaps need to develop at least some mechanisms for joint decision making. Although I do not believe any church in the Communion would be interested in establishing a common “synod” for Porvoo, some stronger conciliar structures than those charged only with consultation may be needed to support and enhance the common mission on which the churches have already embarked.
Communion in Growth: Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry – The main results and their ecumenical potential: a Lutheran perspective

Tomi Karttunen

The Position of the Catholic-Lutheran Theological Dialogue after the JDDJ

The Official Common Statement on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) concluded: “Based on the consensus reached, continued dialogue is required specifically on the issues mentioned especially in the Joint Declaration itself (JD 43) as requiring further clarification in order to reach full church communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be ‘reconciled’ and no longer have a divisive force.”

The issues requiring continued dialogue, among other topics, were especially “the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, authority in the church, ministry, the sacraments, and the relation between justification and social ethics” (JD 43).

The international Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue dealt quite thoroughly with some of these questions in the document The Apostolicity of the Church. However, From Conflict to Communion also stated: “218. Although the documents Church and Justification and Apostolicity of the Church made significant contributions to a number of unresolved issues between Catholics and Lutherans, further ecumenical conversation is still needed on: the relation between the visibility and invisibility of the church, the relation between the universal and local church, the church as sacrament, the necessity of sacramental ordination in the life of the church, and the sacramental character of epis-

copal consecration. Future discussion must take into account the significant work already done in these and other important documents. This task is so urgent since Catholics and Lutherans have never ceased to confess together the faith in the ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.’” (FCC 218).

A Joint Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry – Analogous to the JDDJ?

The Church’s sacramental nature seemed the key issue in all these burning open questions.

Neither the Eucharist nor the ministry can be adequately understood in abstract terms outside the decisive context in which they are concretely instituted, exist, and function – the Church. Correspondingly, it is not enough to understand one possible meaning of a word if the whole sentence in which it is used is unfamiliar and if the meaning of the whole paragraph is not understood in the same way. It is also important to know the “Sitz im Leben”. There is a difference between a sacramental understanding of the Church and a purely functional and institutional understanding.

The development of the discussion of ecumenical ecclesiology has increased our ability to build bridges between different ecclesiological and confessional traditions. Koinonia/communion ecclesiology has the potential to bridge the understanding of the Church as a local Church built around the word and sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and the sacramentally effective presence of Christ in his Church as the universal communion of communions. Accordingly, the Church of Christ is both a communion of saints (communio sanctorum) and a creation of the Word (creatura verbi) in word and sacraments in which Christ himself is present. He is present in his body as a sacrament of the salvation of the world (sacramentum salutis mundi). The Church is sent into the world to witness to our Lord and Saviour.

Cardinal Kasper describes communion ecclesiology’s potential as follows: “Focusing on the notion of the Church as koinonia/communion not only highlights the richness of the nature of the Church, but also helps in dealing
with significant issues of historical conflict. Such a focus also gives rise to fruitful and promising approaches to overcoming old problems within a larger context, such as participation in the Word of God and in the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) and the exercise of a universal ministry of unity. Issues such as the relationship between the individual and the community, between church ministry and lay people, men and women, are now set within a common framework, rather than seen as exclusive positions.”

The Faith and Order document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013) adopts a very similar approach. It suggests: “The dynamic history of God’s restoration of *koinonia* found its irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world. Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.”

Moreover, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* asks whether there is a real and divisive difference between understanding “the Church as sacrament” and “as an effective sign of God’s presence and action”. Might this rather be “a question where legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable”? However, it seems clear, for example, that Luther maintained that the union of the believer with Christ (*unio*) and the community of the Church (*communio*) were interconnected. In the light of this the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer offered his famous formulation: “The Church is the presence of Christ” (*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*).

It is therefore no surprise that the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland could respond to this Faith and Order document as follows: “The Lutheran Confessions emphasise that the Church stands forever. In essence it is a spiritual people, the righteousness of the heart. In this world

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3 TCTCV 1.
this spiritual reality cannot, however, be separated from the external church (CA VI & VIII; Apol. VII & VIII). The Lutheran Church is also comfortable with the New Testament’s language of the Church as a mystery (Eph. 5.32). In a spiritual sense it extends to the other side of this visible reality. Our Church therefore sees it as legitimate to speak about the Church as an instrument of God and as a sacrament. … The invisible reality of God is present in both the Church itself and in the individual sacraments. Speaking about the Church as a sacrament should not, however, obscure the fact that the Church is at one and the same time a community of the justified and the sinful.”

The Swedish-Finnish Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue document *Justification in the Life of the Church* (2010) had already formulated this as follows: “The church is the community in which the crucified and risen Christ is present and continues his work on earth. Justification is about growing as a member of this body. Just as the Christ is called the original sacrament, so the church may be called the fundamental sacrament. This has been expounded thus: ‘The church is not one more sacrament, but that sacramental framework, within which the other sacraments exist. Christ himself is present and active in the church. The church is therefore, both according to Roman-Catholic and Lutheran-Melanchthonian tradition, in a mysterious way an effective sign, something which by grace effects what it signifies.’” Accordingly, much common ground was already found on the basis of the earlier dialogue.

In this light we felt Cardinal Kurt Koch’s initiative regarding a possible future joint declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry which would be analogous to the JDDJ offered great potential. It even seems an inevitable step on the way towards Eucharistic communion. In principle the term “communion ecclesiology” already suggests that eucharistic and ecclesial communion belong together. From the early Church perspective, which saw the bishop as the leader of a eucharistic community, it is therefore understandable that those ordained to proclaim the apostolic Gospel and preside at the Eucharist should be ordained by bishops who are themselves ordained by bishops who represent

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5 JLC 144, quoting *Kyrkan som sakrament* (The Church as Sacrament), p. 12.
the apostolic communion of the Church. In understanding the apostolicity of the Church it is essential to see the interplay of tradition, communion, and succession. The apostolicity of the Church means that the whole Church is apostolic. There are various instances of witness which safeguard the apostolic Tradition.

In interpreting Luther’s intentions Dietrich Bonhoeffer underlined that the Triune God was not free from us, but free for us. Christ is therefore really present in word and sacraments, and through them in the faithful and in the Church. The Church is an image of God because it is the body of Christ, and the Triune God himself is present in the faithful. This means that communion and sacramentality are important and that the ordained ministry is instituted within this framework to serve the core functions of the Church as part of and with the people of God. This is already a good premise for working towards a differentiated Catholic-Lutheran agreement on the basic truths of faith in this respect.

The Nordic and Finnish Context

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland was part of the Church of Sweden during and after the Lutheran Reformation in the sixteenth century. Yet the Finnish section of the Church was always a little more conservative, and Catholic practices were maintained longer than in the motherland of the kingdom. This tendency is also partly visible today, although the influence of the twentieth-century liturgical movement came first and more extensively to Sweden.

The Swedes and Finns essentially share a mutual history in the 1571 Church Order of Laurentius Petri concerning the understanding of the ordination of bishops and their traditional position in the Church. This generally referred to ecclesial tradition wherever it was theologically possible. Much of the medieval liturgy remained in place.6 The Church Order also stated that the office of bishop stemmed from the Holy Spirit, the giver of all good gifts. It was seen

6 JLC 73.
as “useful” and approved always and everywhere in Christendom. In the Swedish and Finnish tradition it is also held that the apostolic succession in the Lutheran era has also been maintained in episcopal ordinations if prayer and the laying on of hands by at least three validly ordained bishops who represent the communion of Churches is seen as essential.

In Finland the development of the current ecumenical policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church began with the ecumenical impulses given by the Second Vatican Council and the theological dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church. Professor Seppo A. Teinonen and his students, for example, Bishop Eero Huovinen and the Revd Dr Risto Cantell, and Professor, later Bishop, Kalevi Toiviainen studied contemporary Roman Catholic theology and the ecumenical significance of the Second Vatican Council and introduced them to Finnish Lutheran theologians.

As early as 1974 the dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church stated: “From the point of view of the problem concerning the sacramental character of the ministry and in the light of the entire doctrine of the sacraments an examination should be made of the consequences to our dialogue of certain parts of the confessional books of the Lutheran Church, according to which ordination taking place through the laying on of hands can be called a sacrament.”

In the 1977 and 1980 theological dialogue the paradigmatic idea of the parallel between the Lutheran understanding of justification as both imputative and effective, through the presence of Christ in the faith in union with the faithful, and the Orthodox understanding of deification or theosis as a process of healing the image and likeness of God in the faithful was presented. This understanding implies a sacramental or realistic interpretation of Luther’s theology. This resulted in a sacramental understanding of the Church which was expressed, for example, in the 1992 dialogue on the apostolic faith. It was formulated in a thesis as follows: “Salvation is not only an event of the past but also present reality in the Church and in the lives of the faithful. The saving

8 For a discussion of what happened in Finland when all the bishops died within a short period in the 1880s see the report Communion in Growth, footnote 265.
presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit is realized in proclaiming the gospel, in administering the sacraments and in worship. It is in and through them that God unites us with himself and gives us his gifts. He creates in us the true apostolic faith, in which we participate in the Triune God and the salvation that is in him. This faith is effective as love (Gal. 5:6, 1 John 4:19).”

This harvest, the idea of the effective presence of Christ in the faithful, was also present when Eero Huovinen and Simo Peura participated in the drafting and finalising of the Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and in the discussions leading to the Porvoo Common Statement, which represents a sacramental communion ecclesiology. All this was in the background when the report of the Swedish-Finnish Catholic-Lutheran dialogue report Justification in the Life of the Church (2010) was produced. Cardinal Koch’s 2011 initiative calling for international discussion about a possible joint declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry made it natural for us to make our own contribution to the shared global project. As the annual ecumenical pilgrimage of St Henry on 19 January to Rome, which includes a private audience with the Pope, indicates, we enjoy a close relationship with the Catholic Church. We therefore thought we might make a contribution which might pave the way for further progress. It was also encouraging that American Lutherans and Catholics began to work towards the same end in their Declaration on the Way (2015). Naturally, the ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation at the event in Lund also had a significant impact.

The Method and Achievements of the Finnish Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue:

A Differentiated Consensus

Unlike the American report Declaration on the Way, which largely collects consensus statements and the points of divergence in the international Roman

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Catholic-Lutheran dialogue but goes little further, we deliberately applied a “differentiated consensus” as our method. It had already proved a constructive catalyst in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Moreover, the *Official Common Statement* urged that “…continued dialogue is required specifically on the issues mentioned … requiring further clarification in order to reach full church communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be ‘reconciled’ and no longer have a divisive force”.

The document describes the method as follows:

The unity in faith we seek is not uniformity; in some respects it is a diversity in which any remaining differences beyond our common agreement are not regarded as church-dividing. Accordingly, the goal is not doctrinal consensus in the form of congruence, but a differentiated consensus consisting of two distinct components:

- A clear statement on the consensus reached in the fundamental and essential content of a previously controversial doctrine.
- An explanation of the remaining doctrinal differences, which are also to be clearly named, and a declaration that they can be considered admissible and thus do not call into question the consensus on the fundamentals and essentials.\(^{10}\)

The differentiated consensus method, which found its mature form in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue leading to the JD (1999), therefore entails a two-fold process:

1. A consensus in basic truths is elaborated and stated. The aim is to formulate the common understanding of Church, Eucharist, and Ministry together. In this case the classical method of convergence and consensus is applied. A common statement in uniformly accepted language is made. Further descriptions of the special confessional emphasis are added as explication. The focus of the joint formulations is on the fundamental aspects of the doctrines and the dimensions which have traditionally been areas of disagreement. The aim is not to say ever-

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ything, but to formulate the basic truths extensively and sufficiently thoroughly.

2. Now the doctrinal statements traditionally seen as in conflict are examined to establish if they still exclude each other or if they are simply different expressions of the same basic truth. Here a uniform or common language is not sought; it still remains necessary to translate from one confessional language to the other. If it is stated that doctrinal statements traditionally held to be in conflict no longer entail any church-dividing effects, these statements can be understood and interpreted as different explications of the agreed common understanding. It follows that the differing confessional positions are freed from the constraint of reaching a consensus in form and language on every imaginable doctrinal question. The Joint Declaration presses towards such an authentic consensus on the basic truths of faith regarding the issues in focus. The remaining differing positions as formed by origin and tradition are neither denied nor forgotten, but in the light of the consensus achieved they are not seen as church-dividing.”

Sacramental Communion Ecclesiology

In practice the report first explicates a common understanding of the Church using communion ecclesiology as the joint framework in paragraphs 25-49. The essential points from these paragraphs are summarised in paragraphs 307-310. In the light of current ecumenical dialogue it is stated that there is no dichotomy between the Church as a creation of the Word and as a sacrament of the world. The Church is the community of the faithful and the communion of saints for both Lutherans and Catholics. Both can understand the Church broadly as a sacrament. Both agree that as instruments of God’s salvific grace the “principal visible elements of the Church are the Holy Scriptures, the

teaching of the apostles, the sacraments and the divinely instituted ministry” (para. 309).

The fundamental expressions of the Church in the world are witness, worship, and service. Their focus is on the proclamation of the Gospel and in the celebration of the Eucharist. “In each local Church the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of the creed through participation in the life and salvation opened by the Triune God is present, as is the unity and communion with the other local Churches which this implies. This unity and communion is manifested in an ultimately universal communion of communions of local Churches (communio communionum ecclesiarum)” (para. 310).

The concluding remarks state: “356. Consensus on the basic truths of faith has been established here concerning the understanding of the Church as a sacramental sign and instrument of the missio Dei in the world (cf. 25-49).”

Sacraments in General

Before considering the topic of the Eucharist the dialogue partners agreed that there should be a more general discussion of the concept of sacrament. A differentiated consensus was also formulated regarding this in paragraphs 63-69 and summarised in paragraphs 311-312. It was agreed: “On the basis of our differentiated understanding of the sacraments in general (cf. 63-69), and in the light of the distinction between the sacramenta maior (Baptism, Eucharist) and the sacramenta minora as divinely instituted sacred services and effective sacramental instruments in the work of the kingdom of God, we can conclude that the condemnations of the sixteenth century regarding the number of the sacraments no longer apply. We share the same sacramental intention to undertake the Church’s mission, and we agree that Baptism and Eucharist are the principal sacraments and the others are related to them” (para. 311).
The Consensus on the Eucharist and the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations

If eucharistic communion between Catholics and Lutherans is to be achieved, an essential step will be to reconcile the still-existing doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century regarding the Eucharist. Concerning the common affirmations in paragraphs 2.2-2.8, The Eucharist as a Sacrifice Grounded in the Presence of the Unique and Sufficient Sacrifice of Christ (2.2.2) is especially important. The key point is in paragraph 107: “In the light of this consensus on the basic truths of the Eucharist as sacrifice, grounded in the formulation of the living presence of the unique sacrifice of Christ in the Mass, we can say that the condemnations in the Lutheran confessional writings (Epit. 7.22; SD 7.107), as well as those in Trent (DS 1751–1759), are not applicable. This explicates further the differentiated consensus expressed in the JD and the implication of justification in the context of the Eucharist. In the wider sense the Mass as a whole can be seen as a sacrifice, in which Christ first gives himself and his forgiveness to us and we respond by giving ourselves in thanksgiving to him.”

When the dialogue started, we Lutherans thought that after many years of doctrinal discussion and common affirmations “transubstantiation” would be a somewhat easy issue to discuss. However, this was not the case. We discussed this theme in depth. Paragraphs 112 and 113 state, with additions to the agreement in the document From Conflict to Communion and with the support of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “We agree on the true, real, and substantial presence of Jesus Christ in the Lord’s Supper. … The different forms of expression that Catholics and Lutherans use with regard to the Eucharist spring from the same conviction of faith. These are not, therefore, issues that divide the Church. Both traditions wish to stress that the body and blood of Christ in a true, real, and substantial (vere, realiter et substantialiter) way is present in, with, and under the outward signs of bread and wine. The criticism of the Reformation era (DS 1651-1652; Epit. 7.22; SD 7.107) is thus not applicable today. … [W]e agree that the bread and wine change (mutatio, conversio) into the body and blood of Christ through the consecration at the
Eucharist. Therefore, at the consecration in the Eucharist it is said: ‘This is my body’; ‘This is my blood.’ Furthermore, although the Lutheran side wishes to avoid philosophical terminology in theological explanations of the Eucharist, they “…wish to emphasise the true and substantial character of the eucharistic presence” (para. 114).

Having formulated this differentiated consensus, the condemnations of the Lutheran confessional writings and the Council of Trent are discussed in Chapter 2.3. The conclusion argues that in the light of the substantial elements required for the recognition of the fullness of the eucharistic mystery, “…there seems good reason to hope that a differentiated consensus on the basis of the scope of our agreements in the basic truths of faith regarding the Eucharist may be reached” (para. 166). However, this also presupposes the recognition of the validity and sacramental character of the ministry.

**A Differentiated Consensus on Sacramental Ordination and “defectus ordinis”?**

To assist us and the readers of the report to understand the biblical and historical discussion of the theology of ordained ministry, its structural development, and historical controversies in their context, an analytical overview of the biblical and historical background of the ministry is given. An essential point is the understanding of the connection between communion, tradition, and succession, which was already a reality during the patristic time. This provides the background both for the Reformation and the contemporary understandings of the communion ecclesiological framework in ecumenical theology.

Where the relationship between the common priesthood and the ordained ministry was concerned, it was relatively easy to formulate a common affirmation on the basis of the faithful’s participation in Christ: “*We agree* that though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ordained ministry should be exercised personally, collegially, and communally” (para. 197). Because the interrelation
between common priesthood and the ordained ministry did not seem to be a problem for us we did not discuss it extensively in the report. However, we referred with appreciation to the conclusion of Pope Francis: “The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (para 268).

In the context of the Church’s sacramentality based on the presence of Christ in the Church through word and sacraments, we agree that the “…ordained ministry is instituted by God in service to the word and sacraments as a lifelong vocation. Ordination cannot be repeated” (para. 200). “We agree that ordination to the sacred ministry is sacramental. It is an instrumental act in which the gift of the Holy Spirit is prayed for and transmitted through the promises in God’s word and the laying on of hands” (para. 201). “We agree that the ordained ministry is constitutive and necessary for the Church” (para. 204).

Moreover: “We agree that the word ‘ordination’ in our Churches is reserved for the sacramental act which integrates a person into the order of bishops, presbyters, ordeacons, and goes beyond a simple election, designation, delegation, or institution by the community, for it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit which can come only from Christ himself through his Church. Ordination can be performed only by validly ordained bishops representing the communion of the Church” (para. 205). From the practical perspective it is also especially noteworthy that as Lutherans and Catholics we found ourselves able to recognise the key elements of a valid ordination in our respective traditions. The Lutherans write: “In both the Catholic and Lutheran rites the transmission of the gift of the Holy Spirit through word, prayer, and the laying on of hands in episcopally administered ordination [is] clearly central” (para. 209). The Catholics write: “In the ELCF ordination rites many elements are present that are common to both of us. … The formulations used can be read and understood in a Catholic sense” (para. 210).

Concerning the ordination of a deacon, presbyter, or bishop, it is thus jointly stated: “We agree that ordination is carried out by a bishop through word, prayer, and the laying on of hands. Ordination is not understood as merely
a demonstrative public confirmation of the call, but as an instrumental and sacramentally effective act, in which the ministry is concretely given. The ordination is based on the self-giving love of the Triune God. It is an expression of the mission of God in the world” (para. 220). We jointly underline the apostolic succession as a sign of fidelity to the divine apostolic mission. Paragraph 231 states: “We agree that episcopal ministry in apostolic succession is received through collegial succession, which incorporates the bishops into the episcopal college. The college of bishops is the successor of the college of the apostles...”

From the perspective of the Lutheran confessions it is especially important that together we underline that the “authority of the bishop is founded on the authority of the word of God. When the bishops proclaim the Gospel, they act in the name of Christ and with his authority. The bishops carry a special responsibility for the apostolic mission of the Church by providing spiritual leadership in their dioceses, a leadership that is exercised in community with the entire people of God (sensus fidelium)” (para. 238). This is confirmed by the quotation from Lumen Gentium 25 in paragraph 241: “[A]mong the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies a pre-eminent place.” In paragraph 245 the focus of the episcopal ministry in the service of the Church’s apostolic mission is further underlined; and paragraph 250 states: “We agree that the foundation for apostolic continuity is the steady focus of the Church on the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and on the apostolic witness to this Gospel.”

There is also an ecumenically important formulation in paragraph 251: “We agree that apostolicity is continuity in faith in the life of the Church and in the structures and ministry of the Church.” In other words, if it is our view that the ordained ministry, which serves the apostolic mission of the Church through word and sacraments, is constitutive for the Church, this applies to all ordained ministry. Ordination is not merely an empty rite but is based on the promises of God in his word and on the promised gifts of the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of Hands. Thus, ordination is constitutive because it is the special task of the ordained ministry to serve the proclamation of the apostolic Gospel in word and sacraments, and in word and deed.
From the Lutheran perspective this does not imply a denial of the validity of the ordained ministry in a church in which there are no deacons or bishops, but only pastors. Continuity in the ordained ministry which serves the apostolic mission and Gospel is essential. However, it might be said that the sign is richer in the threefold ministry of deacon, priest, and bishop than it is in a onefold ministry. The conclusion concerning the differentiated consensus on the ordained ministry follows: “The sixteenth-century condemnations seem not to apply when they are seen in the light of this broad consensus on the basic truths of the Church, the Eucharist, and the ministry. It seems that the Second Vatican Council’s understanding of the ordained ministry [in the Lutheran tradition in general] as lacking the fullness of a sacramental sign (defectus sacramenti ordinis) can also be questioned on the basis of the differentiated consensus we have attained. It therefore seems plausible to suggest that the Catholic Church might eventually re-evaluate her understanding of the Lutheran ministry in the light of the results of this dialogue” (para. 305).

It should also be underlined that there is a difference in the Catholic-Lutheran understandings regarding the recognition of the ordination of women. Accordingly, the report asks “whether the basic consensus on the sacramentality of the ordained ministry endures, although there are different views concerning who can be ordained” (para. 333).

The Petrine Ministry

We were unable to offer an overall solution to the problem of the understanding of the Petrine Ministry, but we formulated some essential points of consensus and convergence. We hoped to encourage the formulation of something in conclusion through further discussion and elaboration. Paragraph 361 states: “There is a growing common understanding on the Petrine Ministry (cf. 260-275). It refers to the following themes: 1) its biblical background; 2) the divine mission of St Peter and the Petrine Ministry today; 3) the ministry of unity; 4) the Petrine Ministry within the apostolicity of the whole Church; 5) the episcopal ministry of the Bishop of Rome; 6) his role in protecting the freedom of the Gospel’s proclamation and safeguarding the fundamental
truths of the Christian faith”. We encourage further discussion and conclude: “Our already emerging consensus suggests that the doctrine of the primacy of the pope does not need to be a Church-dividing difference if the pope is not thereby dissociated from the structure of communion” (para. 354).

**Future Visions**

This report is a product of the Finnish Catholic-Lutheran theological dialogue. We also received support from Catholic experts in ecumenical theology from the Johann-Adam-Möhler institute and from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This document is not yet a joint declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry. However, it is hoped that it may serve as a possible model and resource towards that end in international Catholic-Lutheran relationships. The concluding remarks therefore summarise this:

367. *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), the milestone of Lutheran-Catholic ecumenism, harvested the fruits of local theological dialogues. The Declaration assured that ‘[t]he Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church will continue to strive together to deepen this common understanding of justification’. Questions needing further clarification that were mentioned, among others, were ecclesiology, ministry, and sacraments. In the Swedish-Finnish Lutheran-Catholic dialogue report *Justification in the Life of the Church* (2010) and in this Finnish dialogue report on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry we have deepened our common understanding concerning these issues. It seems that a joint declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry is needed as the next step, as Cardinal Kurt Koch’s initiative indicates.

368. This document uses the method of differentiated consensus, formulating agreements and explications of them. This is an agreement on “communion in growth”. The dialogue wishes to serve as encouragement, because it has been able to say more than previous dialogues. The outcome is intended as a gift and a possible model for future work towards growth in communion in and through international theological dialogue.”
The Finnish Experience: Communion in Growth. Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry

Toan Tri Nguyen

1. Introduction

It is a great joy for me to share some experience on the new Finnish dialogue report *Communion in Growth* (CiG) from the Catholic perspective. When I was in Rome writing my doctoral thesis on the apostolicity of the Church and apostolic succession in the Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue, my bishop Teemu Sippo SCJ called me to be a member of the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland among other Catholic participants. Due to the final work on the dissertation, I myself could participate in this dialogue only from the second meeting onwards. I have realized that our dialogue group worked in a very good atmosphere, praying several times a day with the Divine Office and celebrating the Holy Mass in turn, either Catholic or Lutheran rite.

In this prayerful and theological conversation, we have received many positive results. Of course, our Commission harvested first the central fruits of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogues on the international and local level, then took into account also the common heritage we share in Finland; for example, the continuity in the episcopal ministry and in the sacramental worship are crucial.


in Finnish Lutheranism. Actually, the Catholic Church in Finland and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland are historically, as well as in their contemporary life, closer to one another than many people would believe. This historical relatedness suggests that the theological conceptions are more parallel than might be expected. Therefore, a higher level of understanding can be expected from this Finnish dialogue.

Furthermore, we cannot forget the first “ecumenical imperative” between Catholics and Lutherans for the future common way proposed by the joint report *From Conflict to Communion* (FCTC, 2013): to begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division (cf. FCTC 239). So, we have come to acknowledge that more unites than divides us: “above all, common faith in the Triune God and the revelation in Jesus Christ, as well as recognition of the basic truths of the doctrine of justification” (FCTC 1). In fact, as Pope John XXIII encouraged, “the things that unite us are greater than those that divide us.” With this encouragement and optimism, the new Finnish dialogue has been inspired, and after three years of working, both partners can describe their “communion in growth”, although the goal of this way is not yet fully reached. For us, the doctrinal dialogue is particularly necessary, in seeking the truth in love. “We do this on the basis and in the light of our common Christian faith, praying for Christ’s guidance through God’s Holy Spirit” (CiG, p. 10).

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4 This famous phrase is recently referred, remembered and quoted by the L-RC Commission on Unity in its newest joint report, *From Conflict to Communion* (Leipzig: EVA / Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013) 8.
2. Positive fruits from the Report

2.1 Sacramental communion ecclesiology

Nowadays, communion ecclesiology is understood as a basis for ecumenical ecclesiological convergence. However, according to Tomi Karttunen, there are some differences in the ways in which communion ecclesiology is understood: the crux is whether it can be understood sacramentally. This is not a problem in the Finnish Lutheran context. The Anglican-Lutheran Porvoo Common Statement (1992) understands communion ecclesiology sacramentally. Finnish Luther research has contributed to the rediscovery of the sacramental character of Martin Luther’s theology and his understanding of the word and presence of Christ in faith. *Unio* and *communio*, word and sacrament, belong together in Luther’s thinking.

In our Finnish report we have thus harvested the fruits of this development in ecumenical ecclesiology, using communion ecclesiology as a common framework and starting point. We have the intention to give more content to the understanding of the sacramentality of the Church, baptism and Eucharist as main sacraments, and to the sacramentality of the ordained ministry. The aim is to make a contribution to “a differentiated consensus on the Church’s concrete sacramental structures, especially concerning the Eucharist and ministry within the Church’s sacramental framework” (CiG p. 9). The aim is to reach and give expression to consensus on questions where agreement is indispensable for unity.

For better understanding of the concrete sacramental structures of the Church, the dialogue report sets out our common vision on the Church in considerable detail. We begin with the understanding of the Church as an instrument and sign of divine salvation (CiG 25-26). Then we show how we un-

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derstand the connection between justification and the sacramental life of the Church (CiG 27). From this vision, communion and mission are intertwined (CiG 28) and the Church is in Christ “like a sacrament” (LG 1; CiG 29-31). The two models of the Church – *creatura verbi* and *sacramentum gratiae* – often seen in the past as in conflict or tension, are not only complementary but are both necessary for an adequate understanding of the Church. Surely, it is only based on the reality of incarnation within its Trinitarian framework that the sacramentality of the Church as communion in Christ can be understood. The ability of formulating such an ecclesiological consensus is an important step on the way towards full, visible unity between Catholics and Lutherans.

For Cardinal Walter Kasper, the question of where the Church of Christ is to be concretely found and encountered, and in her full sense exists (that is, where she subsists), has today become a central question in ecumenism. Actually, we seek to respond to his observation in his book “Harvesting the Fruits” that “there stands the fundamental ecumenical problem of the very meaning of the sacramental reality of the Church”. The diverse views on the Church’s sacramentality imply the question: does the Church have a visible and binding shape? According to the Catholic sacramental view, the Church of Christ and her whole mystery, without overlooking her charismatic dimension, subsists in a concrete and permanent institutional structure, in communion with the bishop of Rome and the bishops in communion with him (LG 8). The Finnish Lutheran view approaches this institutional aspect. In particular, the vision of sacramental communion ecclesiology “gives rise to fruitful and promising approaches to overcoming old problems within a larger context, such as participation in the Word of God and in the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist) and the exercise of a universal ministry of unity.”

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8 *Ibidem*, 154.
9 *Ibidem*, 150.
2.2 Petrine ministry

Actually, within the specific historic context of the Nordic Lutheran Churches, it is easier for Finnish Lutherans to take on issues of ordained ministry, episcopacy and the Petrine ministry. Today many Lutheran Christians welcome the fact that in the Catholic Church the Petrine office is seen and lived as a ministry for the unity of the Church (CiG 263). The Lutheran Churches are also asking themselves about such a “service to the unity of the church at the universal level” (Ministry 73). Following the JDDJ there is no substantial obstacle to understanding the Petrine Ministry as a pastoral ministry willed by God. (CiG 262)

The Finnish report says: “We agree that a special ministry for the universal Church (communio ecclesiarum) as a visible sign and instrument of her unity and apostolic continuity in the service of the proclamation of the apostolic Gospel promotes the purposes of the Triune God for his Church. [...] The renewed ministry of primate of the communion of Churches (primatus communis ecclesiarum) can serve the unity of the Church. The original and renewed Petrine office is to be seen in the context of unity in diversity, protecting both the unity of the Church and faith and legitimate diversity in her life in the episcopally and synodally led local Churches. This gives expression to the apostolicity and catholicity of the Church of Christ, to the fullness and universality of the Christian faith.” (CiG 265) In this sense, the true goal of ecumenism must remain “the transformation of the plural of confessional Churches separated from one another into the plural of local Churches that are in their diversity really one Church,” as Joseph Ratzinger asserts.10

Moreover, the Second Vatican Council anchored the papal ministry into a communion ecclesiological framework. The understanding of the communion of the Church (communio ecclesiae) as a communion of Churches (communio ecclesiarum) affords new possibilities for ecumenical dialogue and rapprochement on the understanding of the Petrine Ministry (CiG 275). Vatican II rediscovered the sacramental vision of the Early Church that understands “the

10 J. Ratzinger, “Luther and the Unity of the Churches,” in Id., Church, Ecumenism and Politics (Slough: St Paul, 1988) 99-122, at 120.
unity of the Eucharist and the unity of the Episcopate *with Peter and under Peter* not to be “independent roots of the unity of the Church, since Christ instituted the Eucharist and the Episcopate as essentially interlinked realities” (CN 14). Therefore, the Petrine Ministry as something interior to each particular Church is a necessary expression of the fundamental mutual interiority between the universal and local Church in Catholic teaching (cf. CN 11, LG 26). It follows that from a Catholic perspective there should be a consensus that being in communion with the Bishop of Rome is a precondition for the full visible unity of the Church (CiG 299; UUS 97).

Following this fact, the Finnish dialogue members say together: “We see today that the Bishop of Rome is *de facto* a pastor/shepherd not only for Catholics but also for the leaders and members of other Churches” (CiG 355). “We agree that the purpose of the doctrines of infallibility and primacy of jurisdiction can be understood as: 1) to help to ensure the unity of the Church is secured in the fundamental questions of Christian faith whenever they are threatened; and 2) to protect the freedom of the Gospel’s proclamation. Where Catholics speak of infallibility, Lutherans speak of the *status confessionis* as an expression of the firm commitment to reject new unchristian doctrines which are against the Scripture and the apostolic and Catholic faith, as already expressed in the Conclusion of the Augsburg Confession.” (CiG 272) Therefore, “the possibility of an office to serve Christian unity at the level of the universal Church was never excluded as a matter of principle by the Reformation. Lutherans now regret that Luther used the expression “Antichrist” of the papal office, and the resulting history of mutual abuse.” (CiG 267)

These affirmations on the Petrine Ministry are very significant. They are really an expression of our growth in communion. Although further reflection on the Petrine Ministry has been presented here and the consensus seems to be growing (CiG 297), the following statement in the previous Finnish-Swedish document *Justification in the Life of the Church* remains pertinent: “Further discussion is needed on the specific form that this universal ministry, which should protect the primacy of the gospel, should take.” (JLC 366) Moreover, the visible unity of Lutherans and Catholics today is impossible without a common differentiated understanding of the Petrine Ministry and its joint
canonical framework (CiG 302). How can we jointly express the meaning and implications of this for our concrete ecclesial realities and structures? The question of the primacy of jurisdiction is especially difficult and sensitive. (CiG 298)

2.3 Seven sacraments

Another positive fruit harvested from the Finnish Dialogue Commission regards the common understanding of sacraments in general (CiG 63-71). We have reached an important conclusion based on the differentiated consensus as follows: “On the basis of our differentiated understanding of the sacraments in general (cf. 63–69), and in the light of the distinction between the major sacraments (sacramenta maiora) (Baptism, Eucharist) and the minor sacraments (sacramenta minora) as divinely instituted sacred services and effective sacramental instruments in the work of the kingdom of God, we can conclude that the condemnations of the sixteenth century regarding the number of the sacraments no longer apply. We share the same sacramental intention to undertake the Church’s mission, and we agree that Baptism and Eucharist are the principal sacraments and the others are related to them.” (CiG 311).

2.4 Eucharistic communion

We have also reached a significant agreement on the Eucharist, particularly regarding the real presence of Christ under the Eucharistic species and the sacrificial character of the Mass.

We share our joint understanding in accordance with the previous international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue documents: “In the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper Jesus Christ true God and true man, is present wholly and entirely, in his Body and Blood, under the signs of bread and wine.” (Eucharist 16, FCTC 154) Despite the different forms of expression Catholics and Lutherans “seek to stress that the body and blood of Christ are truly, really, and substantially (vere, realiter et substantialiter) present in, with, and under the outward signs of
bread and wine. The bread and wine change *(mutari, conversio)* into the body and blood of Christ at the consecration at the Eucharist.” (CiG 318)

Furthermore, we affirm that the unique sacrifice of Christ is made sacramentally present in the Mass. “*We agree* that the sacrificial character of the Eucharist can be expressed in many ways. In the context of the eucharistic celebration 1) bread and wine are brought to the altar at the beginning of the celebration as an offering and sign of thanksgiving for creation; 2) Christ is present as the sacrificed and crucified Lord; 3) the Eucharist is in word and deed a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ’s passion (*memoria passionis*); 4) the sacrifice of Christ’s passion is present here and now in the Eucharist (*repræsentatio passionis*); 5) the fruits, effects, and gift of the cross are given personally to the faithful who receive the sacrament (*applicatio sacramentis*); 6) we bring a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God when we confess our sins, give thanks, pray, and celebrate Holy Communion in accordance with the institution of Christ and the encouragement of the apostle (Rom. 12:1); 7) The Eucharist obliges us to sacrifice ourselves in mutual love and service to one another.” (CiG 317)

There is, therefore, a constitutive connection between the sacrifice of Christ, of the Eucharist, and of the Church (CiG 322). Thus we can say that the mutual condemnations of the sixteenth century on the Eucharist are no longer applicable (CiG 326), and “there seems good reason to hope that a differentiated consensus on the basis of the scope of our agreements in the basic truths of faith regarding the Eucharist may be reached” (CiG 166). Nevertheless, the issue of the validity and sacramentality of the ordained ministry must be discussed further.

### 3. Challenges in the future, issues for further study

#### 3.1 Women priests and bishops

Our dialogue has reflected on the sacramental character of the Church, and as a result, the report presents our consensus on the sacramentality of the
ordained ministry, but this consensus is also overshadowed by disagreement over women’s ordination. The ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy is a complicating factor in ecumenism.

Although there is wide agreement on the nature of the ordained ministry, the consensus does not acknowledge who can or cannot be ordained (CiG 295). As there remain differences about the concrete structures of the Church – namely, the episcopacy in apostolic succession, primacy and the teaching authority of the episcopacy in communion with the bishop of Rome – we have not been able to come to full agreement on the precise meaning of such a sacramental structure.11 For the full mutual recognition of ordained ministry, the relationship between Scripture, tradition, and teaching authority needs to be clear. There is also a need to agree on the relationship between the foundation and form of the apostolic office. The question of the object of the ministry (function) cannot push the question of the person of the minister into the background, since both are related. The binomial of “ordination” (esse) and “mission” (agere), as well as the three elements of matter, form and intention,12 are actually inseparable in sacramental theology.

This issue also leads us to a critical observation of the methodology used by our dialogue report.

3.2 The method of “differentiated consensus”

It is significant that Communion in Growth, in reaching its areas of agreement between Catholics and Lutherans on Church, Eucharist and Ministry, utilized the method of “differentiated consensus.” The JDDJ and its method of “differentiated consensus” have indeed given fresh impulse and encouragement to our dialogue group. Actually, the drafting of a future Joint Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry analogous to the JDDJ required the same ecumenical method as was used in the JDDJ. Imitating the three aspects of

12 In fact, the intention “to do what the Church does” (regarding Eucharist, Orders, sacrificial nature of the priesthood), not just imposing hands, is necessary to ensure apostolic succession. Cf. Leo XIII, Apostolic Letter Apostolicae curae et caritatis (13.9.1896), in DH 3315-3319.
this method, first, we aimed to express our common understanding of Church, Eucharist, and Ministry; second, we elaborated our remaining differences to discern if they are still church-dividing; and finally, we identified the themes needing further elaboration in our shared ecumenical journey towards full communion. The method includes elaborating the fundamental truths with a common understanding but not by omitting confessional accents.

This use of “differentiated consensus” in *Communion in Growth* is a further example in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue of the validity and acceptance of the methodology and concept. It offers evidence that ecumenical reception between Catholics and Lutherans will be possible by means of differentiated consensus, by unity in reconciled diversity. However, this famous ecumenical method has its own limit. Is there a differentiated consensus on ministerial structure and which differences should be accepted without threatening its common view? “Which differences in the structure of ministry could we accept without threatening the differentiated common view of the ordained ministry?” (JLC 312) It is true that unity is not uniformity, but the tension should not be missed between the rejection of strict uniformity as a condition for unity and the necessary quest for forms of unity. The Leuven University professor, Pieter De Witte, criticizes the method of the differentiated consensus applied to the mutual recognition of ministries, namely a quick move from the “differentiated consensus in doctrine” to the “differentiated participation in the same ministry” without clarifying their connection first, in the perspective of the principle of “non-uniformity.” He writes:

“As long as the new view on consensus remains focused on the negative side (‘unity is not uniformity’), a discernment of which structures of unity are necessary is almost impossible. The concept of non-uniformity is itself too vague to say anything about such structures. The statement that there is non-uniformity between x and y can literally mean any relationship between them, except for their strict ‘formal’ identity. Moreover, the guiding principle of ‘non-uniformity’ may foster an attitude of suspicion towards endeavors

to determine the necessary visible features of, for instance, ministry in the Church, because any such attempt can always be seen as the ‘totalitarian’ imposition of uniform rules. Therefore, the claim of a differentiated participation in the same ministry requires a positive criteriology concerning the concrete shape of Christian ministries. This is in fact strictly analogous to a feature of the differentiated consensus that has remained somewhat underdeveloped in ecumenical theorizing, namely the fact that even such a consensus presupposes some degree of uniformity (e.g. in the form of the common paragraphs in the JDDJ). The transition from differentiated consensus to differentiated participation only makes the need to overcome a one-sided rhetoric of non-uniformity more urgent.”

*Communion in Growth* seems to move beyond the “differentiated consensus” of the JDDJ as it aims at some form of “differentiated participation” of Catholic and Lutheran ministers in the same apostolic ministry, because it raises this following question: “As with the Anglican-Lutheran Porvoo Communion of Churches, might one way of building a bridge towards mutually recognized ordained ministry be that a Catholic bishop would participate in the laying on of hands at the ordination of Lutheran bishops as a sign of the unity and continuity of the Church?” (CiG 293) In the conclusion of the report there is also a following recommendation: “Although there are remaining issues to be discussed, we may be hopeful that eventually the Eucharist and ministry of the member Churches of the Lutheran communion can be recognised by the Catholic Church, and that Lutherans can likewise recognise the Eucharist and ministry of the Catholic Church.” (CiG 363) This suggestion is very encouraging, but we cannot ignore the challenges of women’s ordination and the Petrine primacy.

The fact, that these topics, namely the foundation and the shape of the Church, the foundation and the form of ecclesial office, remain unaddressed in the dialogue, may hinder the very attempt to determine the content of the proposed “differentiated participation.” If “differentiated participation” implies a more embodied kind of unity than “mutual recognition,” then the question has to be addressed as to which embodiment is needed in order

15 *Ibidem*, at 322-323, italics original.
for the Churches to be one in their ministries. Therefore, according to both Cardinal Walter Kasper\textsuperscript{16} and the Lutheran ecumenist Theodor Dieter,\textsuperscript{17} the far-reaching concept of “differentiated consensus,” now applied to ministry, still requires further elaboration, careful study of respective problems and the capacity for judgment.

3.3 Interrelationships of Church, Eucharist and Ministry

The specific historical situation in the Nordic countries provides a fruitful but also challenging background to its work. Even though there has been some special historical closeness and theological parallelism between the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the dialogue in the end did not go further into detail, but limited its task to give only a contribution to the international discussion regarding a joint declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry. However, it should be remembered that, behind these three themes, the Catholic view intimately links ecclesial apostolicity, apostolic tradition, succession, communion, and sacrament together. The sacramental aspect cannot be ignored, while at the same time it should not be considered as the only relevant dimension. (CiG 285)

Actually, Church, Eucharist, and ministry are not items on a list of characteristics considered as extrinsically related to each other. Instead, they mutually influence one another. Therefore, we must first agree about what the Church is, and what Church unity or ecclesial communion requires, before reaching a satisfactory solution in the recognition of each other’s Eucharist and ministries. (CiG 286) The unity of the Church reaches its highest expression in the Eucharist. This communion is also necessarily based on the unity of the episcopate. Therefore, every celebration of the Eucharist is performed in union not only with the proper bishop, but also with the pope, with the episcopal


order, with all the clergy, and with the entire people of God. (Cf. CN 14, CiG 274, note 323) Accordingly, the Petrine service reaches all the local Churches and all the faithful directly and immediately.

As we know, all the ecclesiological themes are connected to each other (the *nexus mysteriorum*). On the one hand, the right understanding of the Eucharist-ministry relationship helps us to better understand the relationship between God’s salvific action and the mediation of the Church. On the other hand, the right perception of the nature of the Church illumines this relationship. The issue of the apostolicity of the Church and apostolic succession remains however a key one, for it ultimately goes back to the divine plan of redemption. Not only does it shed light on the whole, but it also brings to the deposit of faith a unifying clarity for understanding the Revelation of Christ, Church, and salvation.

It is clear that important work remains to be done. The report itself mentions these issues for further study: “the relationship between the universal and local Church in particular needs more concrete explication in future discussions, although there is an agreement on the necessity of the interplay between the local, regional, and universal levels in the Church as an expression of her catholicity.” (CiG 294) “In this respect questions of varying importance still need further clarification. These include the minor sacraments (*sacramenta minora*), the relationship of the word of God as expressed in Holy Scripture to the Church’s doctrinal teaching, the ordination of women, moral discernment, joint ordination and ministry in practice, and canonical questions.” (CiG 366)

### 3.4 Teaching office and authority

All these issues relate to the authoritative teaching in the Church. How can we overcome the differences with regard to the exercise of authority in the Church? Catholics and Lutherans diverge in their views of where the authority to speak for the whole Church in matters of faith lies, and on how that authority should be shared between the different institutions of the Church (cf. JLC 170). Among Lutherans there are various views and opinions on the teaching office and authority (cf. ApC 287). So, in the end, with whom the Catholic
Church makes a dialogue? With a single or united Lutheran Churches, or with some individual Lutheran theologians? In all dialogue documents, the authority of magisterial statements is taken as determinative from the Catholic standpoint. Inversely, the exercise of the magisterial office in the Lutheran tradition is not as cut-and-dried (cf. GC 11; CJ 210f).

Therefore, the future challenges regard the discussions about teaching that remains in the truth, which include issues of doctrinal development, Scripture and Tradition, Magisterium and sensus fidelium, conciliar decision-making and papal infallibility, ethical and anthropological questions. The social and ethical ecumenism will always need the theological and spiritual ecumenism in order to maintain a Christian identity.\(^{18}\)

### 4. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, *Communion in Growth* presents a Finnish Lutheran-Catholic differentiated consensus on the basic truths of the faith regarding the Church, Eucharist, and ministry within the context of sacramental communion ecclesiology. We can say that we are on the path towards growing communion. The report itself is not yet the joint declaration, even though the word declaration is mentioned in the document’s subtitle. Nevertheless, we hope that the “reformed” method and the results can further encourage the future work of the Catholic-Lutheran Unity Commission towards the Joint Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry. The drafting of this future joint declaration really gives us a precious possibility to go back to the sources of both traditions, to deepen our common apostolic faith, to discover an “ecclesial” Luther,\(^{19}\) to retrieve the entire tradition of the Church, of which 1500 years are shared by Catholics and Lutherans alike, to rediscover again the things that unite us.


\(^{19}\) Not in the sense of the “authentic” or hidden Luther, but in the sense of an ecclesial sifting and sorting of his doctrines, a highlighting of some, a refocussing of others. Cf. P. O’Callaghan, “The Mediation of Justification and the Justification of Mediation,” in *Annales Theologici* 10 (1996) 147-211, at 155.
“The things that unite us are greater than those that divide us.” The challenge of formulating the joint declaration will be also an important step on the way towards full, visible unity between Catholics and Lutherans.
The Finnish Experience:
Recognition of Baptism

Tuomas Mäkipää

The Board of the Finnish Ecumenical Council commissioned one of the sub-committees – Faith and Order Committee – to explore the possibility for a reciprocal recognition of baptism between the members of the Finnish Ecumenical Council. This was a fascinating task for a committee which is made up of relatively young people – there are no bishops. It might interest you to know that the chair of the committee was given to an Anglican priest – representative of the smallest of the member churches.

Another aspect of the work is that the Finnish Ecumenical Council has a rather unique group of Christian denominations as full members: Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, Orthodox Church of Finland, Evangelical Free Church of Finland, Catholic Church in Finland, Swedish Speaking Baptist Union of Finland, Salvation Army in Finland, United Methodist Church in Finland (Swedish speaking), United Methodist Church in Finland (Finnish speaking), Mission Covenant Church (Swedish speaking), Anglican Church in Finland, International Evangelical Church in Finland.

From the very first meeting it was clear that the committee wished to produce a paper which could be agreed and signed by every member church. But not only this – it was hoped that those churches, communities and congregation, which were not yet members, might find it possible to take part in the work of the committee. Thus, for example, the Seventh Day Adventists were invited to participate in the work. The representative of the Salvation Army has been an active member of the group.
To whom?

One of the first tasks was to find an answer to the question about to whom we were addressing this document. The history of the BEM-document was clearly in our mind as we prepared to work.

Though confident in ourselves, we did agree that we perhaps do not have the time to reach a full agreement. On the other hand, anything less sounded not enough. This in mind, there was no point in writing a paper for churches. We already knew our position well.

The recent events and experience of many was that the function of baptism was no longer so positively recognized in society. This had become very apparent in the public debate on conversion of asylum seekers to Christianity.

So we wished to write to the public.

The form

Writing to the public is quite a different challenge than writing to the church leaders. The first thing is that the text must be short. If you have to turn a page, the text is already too long. So we hoped to condense the text on to one page (using visible font size!). Another aspect is the language. We wished to use language which would be easy to read without explanation.

The churches are constantly trying to make sure the language they use is contemporary enough to resonate with those they attempt to reach. Ecumenical documents are not like that but are weighty theological text, loaded with nuances and carefully set phrases. Even worse, ecumenical texts are full of sub-notes and references. Imagine if two big companies were to merge and then announce the merger by publishing the agreements prepared by their legal departments!
All are invited

It was agreed that the text should be missional, focusing on what we can agree and rejoice over together – though we decided not to use words like ‘rejoice’ as these kind of words are likely to put people off! It was further agreed that there would be no point in underlining the differences in our theologies.

The fact that the working group included denominations which do not practice baptism, or where baptism is received only after the personal profession of faith, made the work hard. How to word a document about baptism when there are congregations involved which do not baptise? This was especially challenging as we did not wish to say anything about ecclesiology. So in the end we decided to break the rules we had set ourselves by adding one sub-note, saying that the view taken in the document was not to state anything new on ecclesiology.

What is the significance of baptism?

The foundation of our approach was the WCC document ‘One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition’. The Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen’s presentation to group gave us much food for thought. Some of the ideas were easier to handle after a visit from the Professor of Ecumenics, Dr Risto Saarinen, who encouraged us to focus on areas of unity and to try say to less about what separates us.

The first four points in our proposed mutual recognition of baptism:

The first speaks about Christ as the Redeemer who has reconciled the world with the Father.

The second point states that we are called to proclaim Christ’s Gospel with our words and deeds in all places at all times. It states further that the deposition of faith has been interpreted in different ways in the course of history. All Christian communities (ekklesia) are to follow Christ, to have him as the pattern of life and to call people into his presence. Baptism joins us with the church.
The third point refers to Jesus’ command to baptise and teach. It states that baptism is administered by using water in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Rather than explaining the various traditions, the document briefly states that the forms and manners of baptism are determined separately by each denomination. To set the context, this point recognised immersion and pouring as the most commonly used methods of baptism.

The fourth point functions as a bridge between what has been said earlier and what is about to be said in the following (the last) point: that as churches and Christian communities we acknowledge our responsibility to teach about Christ and nourish the faith and Christian life. It makes clear that we have the responsibility to take care not only of those who are our members but of all who come to us seeking the truth. This point ends with an expression we said we would avoid: together we rejoice in the salvific work of God.

The fifth (and final) point starts by rejoicing (there’s that word again) at the gift of baptism. However, the grace of God is not limited by baptism. We worship the Triune God together with those among our brothers and sisters whose communities do not practice baptism. This last point makes reference to the letter to the Galatians ‘So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ (Gal. 3: 26–28.)

Final words

A credible testimony on baptism is important in our time as the societies at large do not care about nuances and little theological details. There has been debate in Finland over the genuineness of conversion and baptism of some asylum seekers. At the same time, many Finnish parents question (or even worse: do not even bother to question) the purpose of baptism. At the same time the wider society seems to recognize the place of Christianity in society and value church membership.
It seems to me that, perhaps more than ever, we as Christian churches need to give a common testimony that even though our practice and tradition might differ, we do recognize each other as followers of Christ.

All our churches do welcome new persons to join to seek the truth of Christ. It seems apparent that while not all Christian communities baptise, not even after a personal confession of faith, all Christian communities do use a certain form of initiation – a rite which marks the welcome and entering in to the life of a church or community.

One aim of the mutual witness of baptism is to testify that we take our task to teach and support seriously. Baptism or reception into the fellowship creates a bond uniting us with Christ, which we should be able to recognize and to which we should give common witness.
Recognition of the Baptism and Communion in Growth - Response from a German Free Church Perspective

Rosemarie Wenner

1. Free Churches in Germany – a colorful bouquet and a communion in growth

There are six Free Churches amongst the 17 full members of the Council of Churches in Germany and in addition seven associate members that belong to the category of the Free Churches. The members are Baptists, Mennonites, Methodists, Moravians, Salvation Army and an association of Free Churches in the Pentecostal tradition called: “Mühlheim Association” (Mühlheim is the city where the renewal movement started). The Free Churches are very different in their theology including their ecclesiology and their understanding of baptism as well as in their history. The Mennonites for example go back to the Anabaptist movement in the Reformation era. Others like the Pentecostal churches are quite young; their work in Germany began in the early 20th century. All the Free Churches who belong to the German Council of Churches also belong to the “Association of Protestant Free Churches in Germany”. The Association was founded in 1926 and is today composed of 12 member churches and 3 associate members. The free churches themselves are like a colorful bouquet, and the number of those who apply for membership in the German Council of Churches is growing, which is sometimes challenging for the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. I as a United Methodist am part of one of the founding member churches of the ACK and I am pleased that several other Free Churches are joining the ecumenical movement. There are many other free churches in our country which are not formally connected with the Ecumenical movement - some of them are big independent congre-
gations, some migrant churches. In total those independent free churches may have more members than all the Free Churches in the ACK together.

Although the Free Churches differ in many aspects, they also have a lot in common. Here is a brief summary of the theological foundation as it is expressed on the website of the Association of Protestant Free Churches in Germany:

- **The one Lord** – Jesus Christ is head of the church and of each congregation, he is our redeemer and the one in whom alone we are saved through faith.
- **The one Word** – The bible is understood as the Word of God, it is authority and guiding principle in all questions related to doctrine and life.
- **The Faith** – personally received, confessed and expressed in genuine discipleship (some call it even “holiness”) – discipleship does not only mean personal piety, but also a commitment to serve the world (with an emphasis on religious freedom)
- **The Congregation** is the Community of Believers. In order to become a member in a Free Church, one has to confess the faith in person. Several free churches only baptize believers; others (like Methodists) have two membership categories; in order to become a full member, one has to confess the faith in a personal affirmation of the baptism vows.
- **The Call to Mission**: Free Churches see mission and evangelism as their core calling.
- **The hope in Jesus who will come again**. The eschatological hope is motivation to do good in the world.

In addition to these theological convictions there are several sociological aspects, e.g.:

- **A clear separation of Church and State**.
- **In Europe**, the Free Churches are minority churches because of the fact that there were State Churches with certain privileges in all the countries when free churches started.
- **For many of us** our international relationships are important – for example, we as United Methodists belong to one Church serving in four continents. Any kind of “coalition” of church and nationality is strange to all of us.

1 See: www.vef.de.
2. Affirmations towards “Community in Growth” and the Recognition of the Baptism

Free Churches are longing for growth in communion – for the sake of mission

Free Churches pray and work for unity. However many Free Churches would not primarily aim for more theological dialogues. They rather have a spiritual approach and understanding: For Free Churches the main calling is to invite people to believe in Christ and to live as a community of disciples of Christ. They are convinced that coming closer to Christ means coming closer to one another. The bible is the source where we learn more about God’s saving action in Christ. “Unity” is seen as a gift from God – we are called to discover the gift more and more in order to share our faith “so that the world may believe”. United in Christ – although divided by different theological convictions - we are called to witness Christ in a secularized world.

Free Churches agree that the consensus described in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is a core belief that has to lead to consequences in our communal life in the ecumenical movement.

The World Methodist Council was the first entity to sign an agreement in affirmation of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 2006. Although the other Free Churches and their World Communions did not formally sign such an agreement, they are grateful for the achievement of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. 2002 a Symposium of Roman Catholic and Free Church theologians took place under the theme: “Justification in the Free Churches and Roman Catholic Perspective”. Summarizing

2 All the lectures are published in: Walter Klaiber; Wolfgang Thönissen (Hg.): Rechtfertigung in freikirchlicher und römisch-katholischer Sicht, Bonifatius Verlag Paderborn, Edition Anker Stuttgart, 2003
the conversations, the Roman Catholic theologian Burkhard Neumann said: “We meet one another in the essence of what the Doctrine of Justification is affirming, namely in the conviction that ‘that as sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way.’”3 Free Churches wish to make this message known. In a declaration of the Association of Protestant Free Churches in Germany in 2017 we expressed our belief as such: “A believer is not saved by his or her own works, but only by God’s grace and justified by faith alone. Christ, the Son of God, is the foundation of our faith. In all of this the Holy Scripture is our guiding principle. In the tradition of the Reformation we are convinced, that the delivering grace-filled offer of faith is meant for all. The personal decision to believe changes human beings.”4 The consensus marked in JCCJ is shared in the Free Churches. We are committed to proclaim the gospel and we wish to do it with our sisters and brothers in other churches.

_There is progress in a uniting understanding of baptism as an initiating process._

Speaking of the Free Churches, only Moravians and Methodists signed the document of the Recognition of the Baptism in Magdeburg in 2007. All the Free Churches, however, took part in the deliberations that led to the recognition, and in the conversations following afterwards on how to live with the document. In addition, there are ongoing conversations, e.g. between the Association of Protestant Free Churches and the Evangelical Church in Germany and also with the Roman Catholic Church. Those conversations help to bridge gaps. We learn from one another and we overcome prejudices. Although some continue to ask questions with regard to baptizing children without paying attention to the connection of baptism and personal faith or with regard to “re-baptizing” those who were already baptized as a child, we come closer to one another. This is, for example, marked in a declaration of the Union of Free Churches (Baptist Union) in Germany at the 10th anniversary

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3 See above, p. 182 (Translation R. Wenner), and JDDJ 17.
of the Magdeburg Declaration\(^5\). In essence the Baptists say that the confession to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is sufficient for recognizing one another as Christians and as Christian churches. Nevertheless they say: “The question of the recognition of the baptism as well as the topics eucharist and ministry are important questions in ecumenical conversations. In recent years several theological dialogues helped to gain a better understanding for one another and to build bridges. We wish to continue to clarify questions where we have different insights, yet from our perspective those different insights do not hinder us from living in church fellowship even today.”\(^6\) Let me briefly describe in substance the achievements in a common understanding: most of the churches agree that baptism is a process, not just a liturgical act. In addition we all together believe that baptism and faith are like two sides of a coin.

Let me share one example. Recently the World Communions of Methodists and Baptists finished a dialogue. In Germany both communions identify themselves as “Free Churches” but they have different theological convictions on baptism. In the dialogue Methodists and Baptists marked the progress in the ecumenical discussions as such:

“Recent ecumenical dialogues have begun to speak of baptism within a process of initiation or a journey of Christian beginnings in order to recognize the operation of grace prior to the reception of faith. They recognize that in order to recover the full meaning and significance of baptism it is necessary to see baptism as a process and more than a single event. As Baptists and Methodists we both also consider that the process of baptism and Christian initiation involves repentance, faith and conversion/new birth followed by holy living. In our conversations we have found it helpful to understand that the ‘one baptism’ (Eph 4:5) Christians are called to manifest is not merely a single act, but part of an extended process. Such an approach moves beyond comparison of the ways baptism is differently practiced as a single event and moves toward thinking about the varying ways of understanding the whole journey of Christian initiation. ... Our patterns of initiation differ, and we both


\(^6\) See above (Translation R. Wenner).
believe that our own patterns protect important and precious gospel truths. Yet, in the spirit of receptive ecumenism we also rejoice that we may participate in an exchange of gifts between our churches, recognizing in one another an element of faith and practice which historically we may have lost or rejected, but which would enrich us if reclaimed; and those who have such gifts rejoice to share them. Baptists may receive the Methodist emphasis on prevenient grace, whereas Methodists may receive the Baptist emphasis on the drama of Christian conversion.”

Between those who belong to the Association of Protestant Free Churches in Germany our disagreement in the understanding of baptism does not hinder us from recognizing one another as churches and from celebrating Holy Communion together. In an internal document of the Association of Free Churches (Evangelisch sein – Stellungnahme der VEF anhand der Leuenberger Konkordie) we express it as such: “Nevertheless the Free Churches are able to recognize one another as a part of the one Church of Jesus Christ, (see the Constitution of the Association of Protestant Free Churches in Germany), because due to their understanding the church is not primarily community of the baptized, but community of the believers”.

3. Questions

Are there new approaches to express unity – beyond achieving a deeper doctrinal consensus in the understanding of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry?

One of the Free Churches (Salvation Army) does not even have sacraments. The members of the Salvation Army constantly remind us that progress in a common understanding of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry does not include them. In addition several of the Free Churches do not feel comfortable with

the approaches towards visible unity that many “mainline churches” or “historical churches” prefer. Scholars engage in sophisticated discussions on details searching for a deeper “differentiated consensus” with the aim of signing formal agreements or of creating better structures for conciliar work. Free Churches tend to lean on the “Life and Work” side of the Ecumenical Journey. Acting together is as important as scholarly research. The Salvation Army which I mentioned earlier is a role model in “being church for others”. In addition Free Churches are committed to the spiritual journey in Ecumenism, as it is expressed in the Charta Oecumenica: “The ecumenical movement lives from our hearing God’s word and letting the Holy Spirit work in us and through us.”8. Are we open to expand our imagination on how to grow in community?

Is there awareness for the ecclesiological understanding of many of the Free Churches, which refers mainly to the local congregation as expression of “communio”?

The majority of the Free Churches has a congregational approach: The local congregation is the most important entity in the church, even though in most of them there are regulations on ordination and pastoral services for the whole denomination. Congregationalists are convinced that the local church composed of committed believers, where the gospel is preached and the sacraments (baptism and holy communion) are truly administered, is a full expression of the body of Christ. They also see the need for broader fellowship and communion, but discipleship is to be expressed in a local congregation. The priesthood of all believers is also a strong conviction in the Free Churches. There are only two Free Churches with an episcopal office of oversight, the Moravian Church (the bishop is seen as the pastor of the pastors) and The United Methodist Church. Methodist bishops belong to the order of the presbyters, though; Methodists do not ordain bishops, they consecrate them. The Free Churches see themselves in apostolic succession, because the community of the believers guards and proclaims the apostolic faith. In the Free Churches we

believe that anyone has the same “access” to Christ, no matter whether someone is ordained or not, not to speak of any ecclesiastical hierarchy.

How important is “Mission” for the Ecumenical Movement?

As mission minded churches Free Churches focus on the question of how to witness Christ in a secularistic world – unity in proclamation and service is needed. We would like to see more energy put into being church together in service and witness to the world, inspiring one another to lively discipleship, sharing the means of grace together, emphasizing “Missional Ecumenism” and the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace”, including theological reflections on how to witness Christ in the current age.
Recognition of Baptism: Response from a German Anglican Perspective

Christopher Easthill

Introduction

I was not part of the last consultation in 2015. At that time, I gather you were interested in learning from our experience. But we too have continued to learn and review and reflect on our own experience with the – still incomplete – mutual recognition of baptism in Germany. We can now look back on just over 11 years of practice, 2015 the ACK held a study day to discuss what we can share and learn from one another in our baptismal practice, despite differences in understanding, and last year we used the 10th anniversary to listen to two reflections, one from a Catholic and one from a Free Church perspective.

It is a little difficult for me to give a “German Anglican” perspective, as there is no specific German Anglican theology of Baptism! Our Anglican churches in Germany cover the full range: we have Evangelical parishes and ones with a more catholic style of worship, and we have both Church of England and (US) Episcopal churches. But of course, as we live and worship and minister in Germany, the local circumstances and relationships play a role. Full disclosure, although I grew up in the Church of England, my perspective is particularly informed by Episcopal Baptismal Theology, that branch of Anglicanism into which I was ordained deacon, and then priest.

Anglican Baptismal Theology

One criticism made of those churches that practice infant Baptism is that we don’t take Baptism seriously enough. Nothing could be further from the
truth. We take it very seriously indeed! Baptism is central to Anglican/Episcopal theology and always has been. Article 27 of the 16th century 39 Articles of Religion\(^1\), the nearest thing we have to a denominational confession, says: “Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.”

[Our foremost 16th century theologian, Richard Hooker, wrote that Baptism “both declareth and maketh us Christians. In which respect, we justly hold it to be the door of our actual entrance into God’s House, the first apparent beginning of life, a seal perhaps to the grace of election before received; but to our sanctification here, a step that hath not any before it.”\(^2\)]

The definition of our current Episcopal catechism echoes much of article 27: “Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. … The inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God’s family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.”\(^3\)

In the Episcopal Church we refer not only to the three traditional orders of ministry: deacon, priest, bishop, but to four – the first order being the lay order conferred by baptism. One commentator calls the promises we make at our Baptism “the ordination vows of the priesthood of all believers.”\(^4\)

What are these vows? The candidates for Baptism, or their parents and godparents, renounce Satan, repent of their sins, and accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. All those present – candidates, sponsors and the whole congregation - recite the Apostles’ Creed as a statement of faith. “Five questions follow the

\(^1\) http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html.


\(^3\) *Book of Common Prayer*, (New York, The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 858.

traditional recitation of the creed. (They) are intended to spell out the most important implications of living the baptismal life in our time and place.”

Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers? (cf. Acts 2:43)

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Our Canadian sister Church has added a sixth question: “Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the earth?” I expect this to be added to our liturgy during the next revision.

While these questions are specifically Episcopal, though the Church of England has a shorter, optional form in their liturgy, they are nevertheless shared by all Anglicans in the form of our Five Marks of Mission.

We call these vows our “Baptismal Covenant.” It reflects our belief that Baptism gives expression to both divine grace and human responsibility. Baptism sets a person in a community with a mission. It makes each baptized person a sharer in that mission: the mission of God. As I said, we take Baptism very seriously indeed!

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5 Ibid, 101.

6 http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx: 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; 3. To respond to human need by loving service; 4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.
Critiquing the Mutual Recognition of Baptism

In one sense, the 2007 agreement recognising Baptism was not necessary, as according to our canons, my Church – the Episcopal Church – has for a long time recognised the baptisms of other Christian churches “with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” both as a requirement for membership or lay offices, and to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. But it is not just about us. This is a mutual agreement and as Anglicans in Germany are very few in number, we have benefited enormously in our pastoral practice. It has become much easier for our baptised members to become godparents or to get married in other churches, or to work for church employers. Anything that requires a Baptism is facilitated.

The 2007 agreement is also attractive in its simplicity, as it has just a few simple conditions:

“Accordingly, we recognize every baptism which has been carried out according to the commission of Jesus in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit through the symbolic act of immersion in water or through the pouring of water over the person to be baptized.”

Of course, it is now our responsibility to make sure that they are adhered to. Liturgical revision is a slow process in my Church, our current “new” prayer book dates from 1979. However, at our last general Convention in July of this year, we agreed to begin a process of revision and mindful of this agreement I authored an amendment to the resolution ensuring that any revision is “in accordance with our existing ecumenical commitments.” So, for example, the traditional Trinitarian formula must be maintained.

And as my final point on the positive side, I think there was a risk that the 2007 agreement could cement divisions between those churches that signed, and those who felt that it was a step too far. That this did not happen, is a result of the care that was taken, before my time, when the agreement was being prepared. Whenever we have discussed Baptism since, at the 2015 study day, when marking the 10th anniversary, or at many local and regional symposia, signatory churches, churches practicing only believers’ Baptisms, and churches

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without Baptism, have been invited to speak and present to ensure that it remains a genuinely ecumenical endeavour.

There are disappointing aspects too. On the one hand, the agreement is a huge step. In recognising any Baptism carried out in accordance with the agreement by whoever one of the other signatory churches authorises, whether ordained minister or lay person, we have accepted that all the benefits our own tradition associates with this Sacrament are granted by that other tradition. On the other hand, it was and is an incomplete step. Incomplete, because it not does not include all the members of the Council of Churches in Germany, not even only those churches that baptise. And it is also incomplete, and is if we stopped mid step, as it does not include the invitation to partake in the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, in every Church that is a signatory.

Let me finish by taking a brief, but closer look at these two criticisms.

I am not always certain that the non-participating churches realise what a huge step those churches that with a high sacramental view of Baptism took in their willingness to recognise the others’ Baptism. I also think that the difference between “infant Baptism,” which while still the most common form in my Church is not actually normative, and believers’ Baptism is exaggerated. When we baptise infants, we expect and require their sponsors to support them by prayer and example in their Christian life. Our Prayer Book requires that “parents and godparents are to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of his Church.”8 And the author Leonel Mitchell writes that “Christian initiation is more than simply a single event …. It is a process which includes both the liturgical rites and oral instruction of which the celebration of the sacraments is the focus.”9 It is our intention to form those who are baptised as infants into believers. The road to hell is paved, according to the proverb, with good intentions. This does not always happen. The families of some of the children I have baptised have never returned. But some have. And even those who did not come back, or not yet,

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were still instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of his Church. And not every person who was baptised as an adult or young believer stays with their community either. I continue to hope and pray that the principle, ‘you do it your way, and I do it mine,’ to use a very untheological formulation, will one day apply more widely.

And that leads me to my second criticism. The recognition of Baptism is not complete until it includes the invitation to participate in the Eucharist, an invitation we already extend to all baptised Christians. These two “Gospel Sacraments” are just too closely connected to be separated for ever. To quote Mitchell again, “The participation by the newly baptised in the celebration of the eucharist is historically and theologically the climax and completion of the rite baptism.” Baptism is an ecclesial event. In my tradition, it takes place during the principal Eucharist of a Sunday, when a congregation is present because “the initiation of new members is the concern of the entire assembly.” We baptise into the one Church, into the one body, not just into whatever denomination happens to be responsible for the ritual.

“Once for all in Baptism and week by week in the Eucharist, the Christian is united with Christ.” In this case, my hope and my prayer is that I will experience the day when both Sacraments become outward signs of unity, or in the words of the Lima Document, that we hear the “call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship.”

11 Ibid, 99.
12 Ibid, 104.
Social Change as Challenge and Chance for Ecumenism

Karl-Heinz Wiesemann

From “prophets of doom” to positive-critical contemporaneity

“It often happens, as we have learned in the daily exercise of the apostolic ministry, that, not without offence to our ears, the voices of people are brought to us who, although burning with religious fervour, nevertheless do not think things through with enough discretion and prudence of judgement. These people see only ruin and calamity in the present conditions of human society. … We believe we must quite disagree with these prophets of doom who are always forecasting disaster, as if the end of the world were at hand. …”

It was indeed true up to the mid-twentieth century that the loudest voices in the Catholic Church belonged to those whom the “Papa buono” characterized as “prophets of doom”. Those who emphasized the contrast between an unholy world and the Church which alone promised salvation. Those who defined the Church as “societas perfecta”: a self-contained community operating independently of the world. Those who only recognized the negative aspects of the manifold developments of modern times.

In the pastoral constitution “Gaudium et Spes” the Council Fathers rejected the ideas of the prophets of doom with the well-known words: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (GS 1). This Council text confronts us with a tangibly new relationship between the Church and the world. The

world – all that people experience and influence in politics, society, economics and other areas and relationships in life – is no longer placed under the general suspicion of being remote from God or even godless. Reality is trusted as a “locus theologicus”: a place marked by God’s action; a place where God can be experienced and encountered. In this context the Council speaks of the “signs of the times” which are to be scrutinized and interpreted in the light of the Gospel (GS 4). The doom prophecy of yesteryear was replaced by a critical-positive contemporaneity of the church towards the world. This is based on the insight and trust that world history and the history of salvation are intimately interwoven and intertwined – despite remaining differences – because they have their common origin in God, and because God has inscribed himself once and for all in world and human history by the Incarnation of Jesus.

This new worldview corresponds to the Church’s renewed understanding of itself through the Council. As the Body of Christ, it shares deeply in the koinos of its head. Just as the essence of the incarnate Son of God is profoundly shaped by his pro-existence for others, so the essence of the church also consists in being “church for others” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Like the salt that gives flavour to everything (cf. Mt 5:13), the Church is called to do service to, and in the midst of, the world. The more it sheds all self-centredness and distance from the world, the more it will follow its purpose. The more outgoing it becomes, getting involved in the world and striving to transform it from the inside into “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), the more it will fulfil its task as a sacramental sign and instrument, working for the unity of the whole (!) human race with God and one another (cf. LG 1 and others).

What I have just sketchily described concerning the perspective change in the relationship of my Catholic Church to the world or to society also applies (more or less) to all other churches and church communities. Together, we are facing the challenge of constantly rediscovering and maintaining the necessary tension between alliance with the world and negation of the world. More than a few Christians – from all denominations – repeatedly fall back into the perspective of the prophets of doom. They stay rooted in a “Platonic” theology or in other-worldly piety, and continue to judge social developments exclusively as a consequence of an increasing alienation from faith and from God – in-
stead of asking where God’s Spirit is at work, wanting to reveal something to us about the mystery of God and his commission to us. Again, there are others who succumb to the opposite temptation and abandon the ever-critical distance to the world. They do not seek for the “signs of the times” in an effort to discern the spirits, but rather follow the zeitgeist, allowing the church to be merged with it. They forget that the world is not only a place where God meets us here and now, but is at the same time a place still waiting to be redeemed through God’s final revelation.

In what follows I want to avoid both dangers by taking a sober and realistic look at four current developments in society which appear to me to be especially relevant and trying to interpret them theologically. The aim of it all is to derive from them some impulses for our ecumenical coexistence.

Secularization: Religious indifference and loss of significance of the churches

“O God, you are my God, I seek you” (Ps 63:1)

A first perception: here in Germany, as in the whole of Europe, secularization is progressing further and faster. There is a steady increase in the number of people who – unlike the author of the psalm I just quoted – no longer find it natural and meaningful to believe in God, especially in a personal God who is at work in history and in the life of each individual. They have become quite indifferent to God, either because they have never known him or because they gradually lost touch with him on their way to adulthood.

Apart from these, there are also those people who consciously reject God, partly because they encountered profoundly questionable images of God in their lives – in rigid church morals, for example, or in forms of violent religious fundamentalism. Therefore, when examining progressive secularization, it is

2 Cf. on this and what follows the study by the Deutscher Ökumenischer Studienausschuss (DÖSTA): Ulrike Link-Wieczorek, Uwe Swarat (editors), Die Frage nach Gott heute. Ökumenische Impulse zum Gespräch mit dem „Neuen Atheismus“ (Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau 111), Leipzig 2017.
inevitable that we exercise self-criticism and acknowledge that Christians and the churches altogether often failed, and still fail, in passing on the mystery of God.

This is especially true when there is a discrepancy between our life and our message. A particularly blatant example of this is given by the absolutely shocking results of a recent study on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Germany, which, incidentally – and this also belongs to any observation of society today – has been associated by many people not just with one denomination, but by generalization to all the churches. The data collected and the victim surveys have revealed the extent to which the message of a God who takes special care of those who are small and weak\(^3\) has been eclipsed, indeed perverted into the opposite – by individual office-bearers, but also abetted by ecclesiastical structures which served to protect the perpetrators, but not the concern for the victims.

Religion’s loss of significance in the lives of individuals is having an increasing effect on social interaction, since the social influence of the churches is clearly dwindling. For example, when religious symbols disappear more and more from public areas. When the outcome of democratic legislative processes on controversial ethical issues – I am referring, for example, to debates on preimplantation genetic diagnosis or same-sex marriages – leads to regulations that do not comply with Christian morality or are at least at odds with it. Or when politicians in Germany demand that the churches refrain from interfering in day-to-day politics and just concentrate on their own business: pastoral care, religious instruction and charitable work. There is no longer a natural social and political consensus on essential elements of the Christian image of humanity.

How does secularization manifest itself in practice? About two years ago, for example, in Ludwigshafen – the largest city in my diocese, with about 170,000 inhabitants – the number of people belonging to one of the two major churches fell to less than 50% of the total population. This means that this large town on the Rhine lies slightly below the statistical value for the whole of Germany, amounting to 54% (Catholics 28%, Protestants 26%). At present the

\(^3\) Cf. e.g. Mk 10:13-16; Mt 18:6; Mt 25:31-46.
proportion of people in Germany with no denominational affiliation is 36%, and in eastern Germany it is higher than 75%.

A great many of those who do not feel that they belong to any church or religion are described by religious sociologists as “religiously indifferent”. This means that they consider a search for meaning in religion superfluous, and they do not feel that there is anything lacking in their lives. They appear to be “godlessly happy.” Therefore studies of both major churches are rather sceptical about the chances of winning (back) the religiously indifferent for the church. At the same time, it should be noted that religious indifference is by no means associated with a lack of social engagement – nothing of the kind. Many of those who do not belong, or no longer belong, to a church are admirably active either professionally, in some cases even in charitable church-run institutions, and/or voluntarily, for example in hospice work or refugee assistance.

It is precisely because of this first perception that the churches are all too easily in danger of succumbing to the prophecy of doom described above: in danger of seeing only the decline and no longer asking which “signs of the times” lie behind it. Instead of lamenting our loss of influence and power in society, we have to face up to the question of whether our loss of significance should not (or must not) justify us in laying aside the excessive “worldliness” and power which had crept into our image of the church and into our structures in the past. Instead of simply complaining that the age of the established church is coming to an end (or has already come to an end) and that the familiar methods of proclaiming and passing on the faith are obviously no longer effective, it is necessary to strengthen our view of the church as a community in which people make a free and conscious decision to believe. Instead of suspecting all those who belong to no denomination of being godless, we should listen attentively to their religious needs, finding out where and in what way they are seeking meaning, fellowship and support, and why they no longer trust the churches to give answers to their yearnings. Instead of retreating into the niche of an elitist and continually diminishing “holy remnant”, it is important to remain a “church for all”, holding fast to the claim of permeating and changing society like leaven.
In the face of increasing secularization, all churches are called to keep the God-question alive or to reawaken it; to commend to people the justifying, loving, healing, reconciling God of Jesus Christ as an offer for a meaningful life. For the future, it depends on whether we succeed in making contacts possible: contact between the concrete biography of individual people, in which, according to our conviction, God is always at work, and the great history of God’s covenant with humankind as recorded in Scripture. It is a question of seeking and finding – both in intellectual comprehension and in existential experience.

Our churches will be all the more successful in fulfilling this task the more we approach it in ecumenical collaboration. In our denominations we have such a great and rich treasure of theological and spiritual approaches to the Scriptures, of sacramental and liturgical practices, prayer traditions, songs and imagery, with which we can bring people into contact with the mystery of God. This treasure should be made ecumenically fruitful by sharing it in the sense of a “receptive ecumenism”, learning from each other and enriching and correcting one another mutually.

Let us recall that the mission movement was the spark, over 100 years ago, that ignited the modern ecumenical movement. Recognizing their commission to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, the churches sensed that the divisions in Christendom caused a negative testimony. As in those days, the common missionary testimony to today’s increasingly secular society can and should bring the churches closer together, strengthen their bonds and deepen their unity.

Religious pluralization

“All always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15).

Closely related to the first social perception is a second one, namely that there has been an increase in religious pluralism in our society in the last decades.
Immigration in particular has led to the growing number of people in our country who are of the Jewish or Muslim faith or adherents of other religions. According to recent surveys, there are currently about 200,000 Jews living in Germany (with and without affiliation to a community), about 4.5 million Muslims and about 270,000 followers of Buddhism.

The associated challenges are obvious. Socially, it is a question of forming peaceful coexistence of people from different cultures and religions, searching for a common basis of values and a responsible integration policy. The church’s main concern is to maintain the tension between our mandate for Christian witness and the equally necessary interreligious dialogue.

An important foundation for this in the context of multilateral ecumenism is the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”, which was adopted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance on 28 June 2011. This begins with the verse from the First Epistle to Peter just quoted, and emphasizes that “for Christians it is a privilege and a joy to give an accounting of the hope that is in them” and that this witness also includes “engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and cultures”. At the same time, it is stated that any form of abuse of power and any violation of the human right to religious freedom is contrary to the Christian testimony.

This missionary understanding is also the guiding principle for the member churches of the ACK in Germany. On the one hand, it is important for us to confess our faith with one voice in public and to introduce the Christian perspective in social debates. At the same time, there are several churches in the ranks of the ACK whose freedom to practice the faith is massively threatened in their home countries by state repression and/or religious fundamentalism. I am thinking, for example, of the Syrian Orthodox Church or the Coptic Orthodox Church; their members in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and elsewhere are not only prevented from living their faith publicly, but are also in some cases in fear of their lives, because the governments do not (or are unable or unwilling

4 See some considerations on this in the following section (Social exclusion and international demarcations).
to) uphold human rights and/or they are threatened by violent fundamentalist Islam. Many of these Christians came to Germany in the course of the large migratory movements of the past years in order to live here in safety and to exercise their faith freely as long as the persecution continues in their home countries. The Christian witness of the churches in this country is therefore inseparable from our commitment to our persecuted and oppressed sisters and brothers in the Middle East, North Africa and other parts of the world.

In addition, the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World” encourages Christians to “build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good”. They are therefore “called upon to work with others towards a common vision and practice of interfaith relationships”.

The ACK has taken on this task in Germany. As early as 2004, it launched the project “Weißt du, wer ich bin? – Do you know who I am?” With this project, the churches affiliated to the ACK, the Central Council of Jews in Germany and four Muslim associations want to encourage and deepen the peaceful coexistence of the people in our country. In several phases (2004-2007, 2008-2011, 2016 with a special focus on refugee work and 2017-2019), more than 100 concrete local initiatives were funded thanks to the generous financial support of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the European Integration Fund. These included cafés as intercultural meeting places, intercultural educational trips, interreligious concerts, cultural events, festivals and much more. These and other activities, organized and carried out in many places in Germany through the great commitment and creativity of people from all three religions involved, have done much to reduce prejudice, promote mutual understanding and thus strengthen social cohesion.

6 For information and material see https://www.weisstduwerichbin.de.
7 These are the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, the Turkish Islamic Union [DITIB], the Islamic Council for the Federal Republic of Germany and the Association of Islamic Cultural Centres.
Social exclusion and international demarcations

“In days to come the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it” (Is 2:2).

Much of the history of humanity is a long story of social exclusion and of demarcation between states. This is also and particularly true for the twentieth century. Countless deaths in two world wars, six million Jews persecuted and murdered, all the other victims of discrimination because of skin colour, ethnicity, or religion – this all shows where excessive nationalism and blind racial hatred can lead.

Nonetheless, the experience of mass cremations, trenches, and ghettos in the last century roused longings for a different, better world. The fruits of such longings are numerous: the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the reconciliation of formerly hostile states; the fall of the Iron Curtain; the end of racial segregation in the US and South Africa, and a great deal more.\(^8\)

Convinced Christians were often the driving forces behind these and other movements, people who struggled against the experiences of suffering and injustice that they shared, and at the same time overcame denominational boundaries that had existed for hundreds of years. They were guided by the dignity imparted to all human beings by their creation in the image of God. Likewise, they were inspired by the vision of the prophet Isaiah quoted above, the pilgrimage of all nations to the mountain of God, which expresses the universal character of God’s offer of salvation, running counter to all that results from exclusion, narrow-minded nationalism and personal interests.

However, the visionary power of these women and men seems to have declined in recent times. After decades in which states on our continent that were formerly enemies found reconciliation, created a united Europe and gave

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\(^8\) The founding of the Council of Churches in Germany in 1948, shortly after the Second World War, is also one of these events. Cf. Karl Heinz Voigt, Ökumene in Deutschland. Von der Gründung der ACK bis zur Charta Oecumenica (1948-2001), Göttingen 2015.
themselves a common basis of values for their coexistence, we can now observe alarming movements in the opposite direction. The idea of a common European house is once again subordinated to national interests, even reaching to one country’s intention to withdraw from the European Union. Nearly 30 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, border fences are once again being erected through the middle of our continent. With questionable political decisions, especially in some Eastern European countries, the common conviction that we want to live in free and democratic constitutional states is being fundamentally called into question.

In Germany, too, the social divisions have become significantly deeper in recent years, especially since the sharp rise in the number of people arriving from the Middle East and Africa as refugees in order to make use of their inalienable human right to asylum. Divisions between Muslims living in our midst and people who claim to be the saviours of the Christian Occident, yet do not realize how deeply their slogans contradict the ideals which they are supposedly defending. Divisions between those who see themselves as victims of globalization, afflicted or at least threatened by social decline, and the refugees and migrants to whom they give the blame for their material hardship and their insecurity.

This analysis demands that we honestly acknowledge that the rift in our society also goes through our churches and congregations. Out of uncertainty and fear, Christians are also not immune to giving credit to populist slogans or even to propagating them themselves. Among those who see people of a different nationality, skin colour or religion as a threat there are also Christians.

As church(es), it is our task to confront the many centrifugal forces and anxieties, together with the attendant tendencies to retreat into what is familiar, with our greater vision of a unified human family. By nipping the social exclusion of minorities in the bud, denouncing it openly and publicly in the name of our God, who loves all people boundlessly. By giving this promise of courage and hope to those who are plagued by fears – fear of all that is foreign, of being personally disadvantaged or of an uncertain future –, the promise which encompasses Jesus’ entire life, from his Birth to the Ascension: “Do
not be afraid ... I am with you always, to the end of the age” (cf. Lk 2:10, Mt 28:20).

Above all, our ecumenical coexistence can serve here in a special way as a model and motor. From our history, we know that even wounds that were inflicted centuries ago and led to gruesome conflicts between nations, towns, villages, and even within families, can be healed. We have experienced this above all in the year of the Reformation Jubilee, in which we faced up to the injuries of the past in many different ways, laying them under the cross as the sign of the reconciling love of God, in order to “heal the memories”\(^9\) of them.

I look back in deep gratitude to an ecumenical service of Penance and Reconciliation on the second Sunday in Lent 2017 in the Palatinate. During the service the leader of the Protestant Church of the Palatinate, President Christian Schad, and I, each representing our churches, confessed before God and one another our guilt in the past. Many of the 1,000 people in the congregation were deeply touched by this sign of our firm commitment to continue along the path of reconciliation. They could sense that we were serious when we said that in future we want to seek and find our identity only in cooperation, not in conflict. We are serious about our commitment to make our unity ever more visible: not a unity in which the traditions of our churches, accumulated and inspired through the Spirit, are levelled down; but one in which the matters that separate us are dealt with in theological responsibility and spiritual reconciliation and cleared of their divisive character.

500 years after the legendary theses of Martin Luther, these signals from the churches were received positively both by politicians and in the media. They

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\(^9\) Cf. Joint statement “Erinnerung heilen – Jesus Christus bezeugen” by the Evangelical Church in German (EKD) and the German Bishops’ Conference, 16 September 2016; “Reconciled with one another” – An Ecumenical Statement by the General Assembly of the Council of Churches in Germany on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, 26 September 2016.
were taken up consciously and appreciated as a model for the successful coexistence of all people in our country.10

Climate change and global justice

“Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).

A fourth and final perception with regard to our society has to do with the way we treat creation. Scientists meanwhile assert that we are entering a new epoch in Earth’s history: the Anthropocene, meaning an age in which man has become one of the most important factors influencing the biological, geological and atmospheric processes on earth.

The integrity of creation is not just one issue, it is the central issue for the survival of humanity. Nevertheless, we churches have also ignored this aspect of reality far too long: we were more concerned about questions of ecclesiastical structure than with the question of those sinful structures threatening our fellow creatures. We focused our attention almost exclusively on church life in our own country, rather than on the living conditions of our sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. When reading the story of Creation in the Bible, we were mostly interested in the question of whether and how it is compatible with scientific findings, rather than considering the much more important question of what it means to subdue and have dominion over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28).

10 As one of many examples one may quote here the former President of the German Bundestag, Wolfgang Thierse, who spoke at the Reformation Jubilee celebration of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate on October 31, 2017, in the Trinity Church in Speyer: “In order for plurality to be alive and peacefully liveable, examples are necessary, models of convincingly functioning commonalities – commonalities that do not stifle or suppress diversity. The ecumenically minded churches, which are on the road towards unity, can and should be such convincing, infectious examples. This is in my opinion the mission of the Reformation Anniversary: to show that coexistence can succeed in diversity. To show that one not only remains with one's own kind, looking after one's own interests, but rather opens up to others, not giving first priority to differentiation, but getting involved with the question of what we have in common – far beyond the churches, and beyond the religions.”
Only little by little did we recognize (and are still recognizing) that caring for the house of life we share is not a non-essential within Christian theology but belongs to the innermost core of our message. This becomes especially clear in Jesus’ commission to the disciples as found in St. Mark’s Gospel: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). Our commission is to witness not only to humankind, but to the whole of created reality – in words¹¹, if necessary, but above all through a life which should somehow throw light on the deep interconnectedness of all creatures with one another and with God, the origin of all things. The same is true of the passage from the Epistle to the Romans which says, “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). As Christians, we are sent to help fulfil the promise of the liberation of all creatures from the bonds of evil – not just in the hereafter, but at least tentatively in the here and now.

At an early stage, the ecumenical movement reached the conclusion that ecumenism and ecology, the search for the visible unity of the church and the search for a life in harmony with the whole of creation, are intimately connected. As the common prefix “eco-” or “ecu-” (Greek: ὠἶκος) indicates, they are both aimed towards the community of all people, of the entire inhabited earth. Both of them look beyond the horizon towards a reconciled co-existence of all creatures in a common house.

A crucial milestone on this path was the beginning of the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation at the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983. In 2010, during the second Ecumenical Kirchentag in Munich, the Council of Churches in Germany (ACK), adopted a suggestion by the Orthodox churches and proclaimed an ecumenical Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which has since been celebrated every year on the first Friday in September. Finally, the collective struggle of all churches for a more peaceful and equitable world became clear.

in the documents of the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan (2013)\textsuperscript{12} together with the encyclical “Laudato si’” (2015)\textsuperscript{13}, which Pope Francis consciously did not only address to his own church, but to all people of goodwill.

These last-named texts are unanimous in their opinion that in order to solve the major challenges it is necessary to realign human economies and lifestyles in a fundamental way, transcending the limited horizon of political decisions, scientific findings and technological innovation. The necessary “ecological conversion” or “great transformation” can only succeed if the social, economic, cultural, political and ecological dimensions of human existence are closely linked to each other and to the spiritual dimension. It demands a profound rethinking on the part of individuals as well as for global processes and structures, derived from sources which only religions can offer.

In this regard, Pope Francis speaks of an all-embracing “ecological spirituality”, the practice of which is an ecumenical task and challenge. To name one example from this year, the Diocese of Speyer, the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate and the ACK-Southwest have initiated two closely linked ecumenical projects on the theme of Responsibility for Creation. On the one hand there are home retreats entitled “Earth-bound”\textsuperscript{14}, which contain passages from “Laudato si” and from the texts of the WCC Assembly in Busan to be studied by the participants. On the other hand, there is a more practically orientated campaign called “Trendsetter – Weltretter” (Trend setters – world rescuers)\textsuperscript{15}. Small tasks for each day, a proposal for weekly actions and a series of larger events aim to stimulate criticism of one’s own behaviour as a consumer and suggest alternative ways of acting.


\textsuperscript{13} Vgl. Laudato sí. Encyclical letter of Pope Francis on Care for our Common Home, 24 May 2015.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. erd-verbunden. Ökumenischgeistlicher Weg zur Schöpfungsverantwortung im Anthropozän, published by Institut für kirchliche Fortbildung der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz (Heft 1: Übungsheft; Heft 2: Hintergrundmaterial).

\textsuperscript{15} More under https://www.trendsetter-weltretter.de.
These two projects, with their different objectives, demonstrate what ultimately matters: that prayer and action enrich and reinforce each other; the double commandment of love, whereby a deep relationship to God inevitably leads to an equally deep bond with all creatures, and vice versa; and a radical inner conversion of humanity, which is automatically put into practice in a responsible and sustainable lifestyle.

For a deepening of the ecumenical coexistence

One might name many other social developments, subject them to critical evaluation and investigate their ecumenical consequences: the current demographic shifts, which in particular present great challenges to our social systems; the increasing tendency towards individualization in our society; the breathtaking pace of digitization, with its impact on the world of employment and interpersonal communication, and so on. But our four in-depth-analyses have been sufficient to bring this identical insight to light, namely that in the face of today’s challenges, the future of our churches can only be ecumenical.\footnote{Cf. Preface by Church President Christian Schad and Bishop Dr. Karl-Heinz Wiesemann in: Ein Herr. Ein Glaube. Eine Taufe (Eph 4,5). Leitfaden für das ökumenische Miteinander im Bistum Speyer und in der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz (Protestantische Landeskirche), Speyer 2015.}

The more our churches seek common ways to make Christ shine as the light of the world, the stronger are the rays emanating from our missionary testimony. The more we succeed in denouncing social ills with one voice, the more audible and convincing is our commitment to a more peaceful and righteous world. The more we understand ourselves as “church for others”, as a sign and instrument for the unity of the whole human family with God and each other, the more recognizable is that which connects us, and the closer we come to the goal of making our church unity more and more visible.

The task of deepening our common witness at all levels and continuing to search with passion and power for visible unity in reconciled diversity represents for me one of the most important insights that today’s world can teach us as “locus theologicus”.

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Ecumenism after 2017: Ecclesiology and the Visible Unity of the Church

Martin Hein

1. First thoughts: Family resemblances

Let me start with a quotation from a truly competent source that defines the problems connected with the task that has been delegated to me:

“The expression ‘visible unity’ itself is […] less clearly defined than it may seem at first sight. It is also used in different functions; the spectrum ranges from the use as a descriptive ecclesiological concept to the normative ecumenical objective.”

This means that the clarification of the term “unity” will only be possible if one also clarifies the way it is used. Only then can we succeed in understanding what we are talking about. The science of linguistics has long known that “essential definitions” are quite unsuitable for defining terminology. Instead, Wittgenstein states:

“The meaning of a word is its use in language.”

And language is a system of rules constructed in a similar way to a game: the rules are stable and clear, but it is not possible to predict individual moves on

the basis of the rules. That’s why Wittgenstein speaks of the “language game”. The meanings of words change with every move and every player, not just from a historical perspective, but even now, as I am speaking to you.

Any verbal utterance already implies an interpretation of the rules. But this does not mean arbitrariness and complete disintegration, because these language games are embedded in a “form of life”, within which one can recognize the meaning of a word through its use. To be sure, only with a certain indefiniteness, which Wittgenstein calls “family resemblance”.

Applied to our theme, this means that after centuries of fruitless usage of essential concepts, we should be serious about the fact that in the language game of the Roman Catholic “life form” the expression “unity” has a different meaning than, for example, in the language game of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. There is no single concept of unity; one can only agree on a uniform, but somewhat indefinite use. Modernity means that one must tolerate the existence of diversity, because it is inherent in language itself.

But this diversity is by no means relativistic, as is always feared. The aforementioned “family resemblances” between concepts make it possible to place them in relation to one another and to see whether they have something in common deep down that can be recognized by means of their typical use. Communication would otherwise be impossible: it can only succeed on the basis of the perception of such indefiniteness.

2. The procedure

In the further course of my remarks, I would like to examine whether the concept of “visible unity”, which is obviously not used univocally in the individual churches and theologies, can nevertheless be usefully employed if the question is changed a little.

In contrast to the usual procedure, I am not looking into the concept of unity “top down” from theological terminology, but I am moved by this simple question: what do people see when they see the “church”? I am adopting an outside perspective: “What is so visible about the church that it is unequivocal-
ly recognizable as a church? What makes it visible as such even when someone is culturally far removed from their church or from others?” And: “Does this unity also have to mean organizational unity?”

These are questions which we do not simply pose to one another as churches. They are increasingly and urgently being presented to us from outside as well.

3. **What is church?**

3.1 **Confessio Augustana Art. 7: A practice**

The Protestant description of the church in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is the one with the fewest properties of all known definitions; it is the simplest and most elementary and is – as we shall see – highly modern in its approach.

I speak deliberately of a “description”. For it is indeed the case that it does not provide a definition, an essential description in the classical sense, consisting of a generic term and individual features!

*Article VII: Of the Church.*

*Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments according to the Gospel. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph. 4:4-5).”*

The church’s being thus depends on three elements: the assembled congregation, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments according to the Gospel. That is the critical minimum – and the maximum
at the same time. CA 7 is in no way describing the “invisible church“, but the visible one! This is explicitly emphasized by the fact that *practice* is described, whilst at the same time it is stated that uniformity of ceremonies – which includes organizational forms – is not necessary for the visibility of church unity.

In this very reduction, church unity is not described on the basis of exclusions, but rather in an inclusive way, because there is no *essential definition* of *immutable properties*, but rather the description of a *practice* which can clearly be empirically identified.

It follows that the church is recognized by what it *does*, not what it *is*. It becomes visible by its action – which everyone can see, whether believers or not! Because the “invisible church” – we should better speak of the “hidden church”! – is nothing other than the believed church, which is recognizable to the eyes of faith within the visible church, just as the body and blood of Christ are recognized in the form of bread and wine. For the faithful, the church is the body of Christ and people of God. But even those who only see the “visible” church from the outside see the church, because they see its practice.

The description of the church in the CA goes one step further. In stating what the church does, it says at the same time that the church itself is not the actual subject of this action. It is rather God himself who continuously recreates the church in the process of preaching. That is the real meaning of the formula: “ecclesia creatura verbi”\(^3\). The “verbum externum” forms the church by transforming the assembly of hearers into an assembly of believers, thus making them visible. This is a pneumatological determination - and there can be no ecclesiology without pneumatology, because in that case ecclesiology would become an empirical, scientific study of the church which did not comprehend the true nature of the church.

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\(^3\) This expression is not used by Luther in such a shortened form. The idea already comes up in his early writings, e.g. De captivitate babylonica, WA 6, 560, 33ff: “ecclesia enim nascitur verbo promissionis per fidem.”

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Therefore, in the CA the preaching ministry takes precedence before the church as the only real church ministry:

\textit{Article V: Of the Ministry.}

“That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith where and when it pleases God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.”

Thus the church realizes itself anew each time the Word of God is preached, and this Word of God is not just any religious message, but the Gospel of justification by faith alone. But “justification” is not a rigid doctrine, but rather a process in its turn: a process that is experienced by the people affected as an event. The church “comes into being” when faith in the gracious God is awakened in people. Church does not “exist”, church “happens”!

If we assume that justification is always about the justification of the godless, then it suddenly becomes obvious: our perspective on the church is always external, and an internal perspective is only revealed through faith, enabling the recognition of this secular, fragmentary, historical, imperfect church as the church which is called, sanctified and intended by God. This is the “simul iustus et peccator” – applied to the church itself!

This means that no church is the perfect fulfilment of the church of God, and no church falls completely short – as long as the Gospel is in the centre. From the perspective of the Word of God, all churches have the “family resemblance” as long as the communication of the Gospel takes place within them.

It’s interesting how this word taken from philosophical debate begins to resonate in the ecclesiological perspective: the churches as the family of God!
This connects well with the corresponding ecclesiological provisions in the Roman Catholic Church in the wake of the Second Vatican Council\textsuperscript{4}. However, note the plural: I am speaking about \textit{churches} as the family of God. And, of course, we have to follow a modern model of the family, based on partnership.

But what makes the churches a “family”, and how do you recognize their “family resemblance”?  

3.2 \textit{The “notae ecclesiae”}

This dynamic understanding of “church” as a constant process, in which its significance increases and changes according to the context, seems to be in contradiction to the traditional statements about the nature of the church.

I am referring to the so-called “notae ecclesiae”, which for centuries gave impetus to a static understanding of the church and prove to be particularly obstructive in ecumenical dialogue for all attempts at visible unity.

For the question was not how the various religious communities practised and understood these “notae”; it was always the question, posed on the basis of their own tradition, of what the others were lacking in comparison.

The most traditional form of the “notae ecclesiae” are the four specifications of the Nicaenum: “We confess the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church”.

But the fact that these “notae ecclesiae” are a confession already makes it clear that here “visible unity” is not described in the sense of an external perspective, but only in the sense of the inner perspective: faith interprets itself and describes what it sees in the visible churches – despite all appearances!

If one takes these specifications as empirical descriptions of truly existing churches, then it is clear that the “notae ecclesiae” serve as “particula exclusiva”, with which one can deny that another church is completely valid as church. We as Protestants experience this when the Orthodox and Roman

\textsuperscript{4} E.g. Vaticanum II, Dogmatic constitution on the Church “Lumen Gentium”, solemnly promulgated by his holiness Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (last accessed 18.9.2018). To be sure, the same constitution states that the one church of Jesus Christ “subsists” in the visible Roman Catholic Church. (LG I,8).
Catholic Churches deny our apostolicity, without even posing the question as to whether our use of the word “apostolic” might not also be scriptural.

If one understands the “notae ecclesiae” as eschatological descriptions of the perspective of faith and as the goal of God’s actions, then they have a quite different effect. They lead us to respect all other communities in which the Gospel is also communicated.

This means that static descriptions do not really do justice to the phenomenon “church”. In the 19th century it became more and more obvious that all attempts to organize visibility by way of uniformity only led to even more fragmentation, so that the search for new “notae ecclesiae” began. These consisted increasingly of practice descriptions, and no longer essential definitions.

Above all, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was very sensitive to this after his experiences in the USA. He formulated a description of the church that understands it completely from the perspective of its action: church is “church for others”, strictly outward-looking. In this way he adopted the external perspective.

This calls for a radical paradigm shift in the understanding of the church. It is recognized by what it does, and this action constitutes its visible unity from the outside.

These same insights have been widely adopted in the ecumenical process and are reflected in the four guiding principles of the ecumenical movement: leiturgia, martyria, diakonia, koinonia, which are also the “principles of church practice” emphasized by the Catholic Church. They describe the consistent visibility of the church through action rather than by structures and doctrines.

It is just no longer sufficient, for example, to deny that Protestant churches are churches in the proper sense of the word, without even asking about our practice.

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5 “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.” in D. Bonhoeffer, Widerstand und Ergebung, DBW 8 (WE), 560

6 Interestingly, this combination of terms goes back to Oskar Planck, one of the co-founders of the Evangelical Brotherhood of St. Michael. Cf. Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, Martyria – Leiturgia – Diakonia, in: Quatember 1981, 160-172, http://www.quatember.de/J1981/q81160.htm. Koinonia was added to this formula, which was then included in the papers of the Commission for Faith and Order and also plays a significant role in the Catholic Church as a description of the “principles of church practice” since the Second Vaticanum.
On the other hand, on the practical level of Christianity as it is lived in the churches, this “ecumenism on foot” works very well. For here it is joint action which counts, together with the common reference to that which is most clearly visible in the church for most people: the Bible. According to Protestant insight, however, the proof of biblical truth does not come through the authoritative definition of its understanding by a magisterium, but rather through the interpretive practice of the church and its members.

The “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” in 1999 expressed an understanding of the Gospel that is shared by the Protestant and the Roman Catholic Church. According to our understanding, that is quite sufficient for church fellowship, because the connecting link is simply the Bible! Seen from the outside, it has its own particular visibility, to which we have hitherto not paid enough attention.

4. Holy Scripture as a sign of visible unity

According to CA 7, it is the proclamation of the Gospel which is the decisive action constituting the church. In recent times this is more appropriately described as “Gospel communication”.

But how does the communication of the Gospel take place? It is a message about a message, for it is the exegesis of the Bible. For only in the Bible – and there is complete ecumenical agreement on this point – are we confronted with the original Word of God as the Word of the living Christ.

This may seem trivial at first, should one ignore one important distinction: the difference between the Bible as a “book” – and “Holy Scripture” as its
usage. For some time now, Ingolf U. Dalferth has repeatedly been making a plea for this by adopting the term “communication of the Gospel”  

Holy Scripture is the Bible in the process of Gospel communication. This book as such does not turn into the church’s Holy Scripture. The Bible becomes Scripture when, after reading, hearing and interpreting it, I experience an encounter with the voice of Christ, that is to say, the voice of God, so that the Gospel speaks to me directly in this book. This encounter with the Bible as Holy Scripture – when the Bible “becomes” Holy Scripture to me – is recognizable because it gives me a new perspective on the world and on my life, leading me to praise and confession of the Creator. It is therefore true here once again: practice comes before doctrine. The so-called “doctrine” is a consequence of religious practice! And the central practice of faith is response in prayer. We know this from linguistics, too: communication is considered successful when appropriate action is subsequently taken.

It is this use of the Bible that turns it into Scripture and turns the community that uses it into the church. Listening to Scripture and answering in prayer is elementary practice in every church.

The diversity of the biblical canon in the churches reflects the diversity of the churches that laid it down in each case. However, the diversity of the churches is the product of diversity in the canon itself, as Ernst Käsemann put it in the

7 Ingolf U. Dalferth, Wirkendes Wort. Bibel, Schrift und Evangelium im Leben der Kirche und im Denken der Theologie, Leipzig 2018. He introduces some very fundamental distinctions which should in my opinion be taken into account for future discussions on Scripture. “Church can exist without the Bible, but not without Scripture. Conversely, the Bible can exist without the Church, but not Scripture. For the Bible is not Scripture, and neither Scripture nor the Bible is the Word of God” (119). Here too, the key lies in a pragmatic understanding of the concepts. “Scripture” is the “Bible” in use by the Church: the Bible is a collection of texts (compiled in various canons). “Scripture, on the other hand, does not designate a collection of texts, but a normative use of text ... Scripture is what is used in the Church as scripture in order to define, interpret, and communicate the Gospel” (189). That the Bible becomes “Scripture”, is an eschatological event: it is God himself who, as the Holy Spirit, opens up the Bible as scripture when the hearer experiences it as the Word of God, as a personal message in the presence of God. That is why “Scripture” is not simply the Word of God, much less is it “Bible” (299 passim).
middle of the last century. There is no “original” visible unity of the church that had been lost in the course of history and should be restored. There is also no ecclesiological entitlement to anciennity. All churches have at all times the same original relationship to the Scriptures.

No established canon can claim to be the exclusive, true Holy Scripture. The canon becomes Holy Scripture, when I hear in it the liberating message of the grace of God and meet Jesus Christ through it. The existing Bibles derive their “family resemblance” from the perspective of their use as Holy Scripture. And yet Holy Scripture does create a visible unity, because it is also literally visible as a book. This is particularly evident in the Orthodox liturgy, for example, when it solemnly “enters” the church in the hands of the deacon. But this meaning is also evident in the fact that in most churches there is a Bible lying open on the altar or on the communion table.

Everybody can – at least potentially – read the Bible as a book. But only the church uses it as Holy Scripture. This is how one can recognize the church first and foremost: by the use of the Bible as Holy Scripture.

Maybe we really should return to this insight in order to determine what constitutes the unity of the visible church: the church is visible as a unity wherever and whenever the Bible is used in its various canonical forms as Holy Scripture for the communication of the Gospel. Whereby its use is twofold: it is used by God in order to enable his Spirit to work, and it is used by people in order to hear God’s voice.

From the outside, people recognize the church in exactly this way, and they are well able to make the distinction between a worship service, a devotion or some other faith situation on the one hand and a literary event on the other, because the congregation responds to the first kind of usage with prayer. People outside the church consider it of secondary importance to ask about respective denominational forms and peculiarities – if they ask at all.

In any case, in our secular environment, we must strive for the representation of the visible unity of the church by making our common practice

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8 Ernst Käsemann, Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche? ("Is the New Testament canon the foundation of church unity?"); in: Id., Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen, Vol. 1, Göttingen 1960, 214-223. His answer is that the diversity of canons is the foundation of church diversity.
recognizable as that which makes our churches into churches – apart from all the diversity of our concrete form. We are the fellowship of those who hear and interpret the Bible as Scripture.

On the other hand, if we understand “visible unity” as the harmonization of forms of organization, we will fail. The communion of churches as an interpretive community is not compatible with a centralized organization.

But if we understand “unity” as a dynamic process of Gospel communication based on the Bible as Holy Scripture, we can be perceived and identified as the church. Every Bible reminds us that it has the potential to become Holy Scripture and thus to form us into a church together. Indeed, the Reformation “sola scriptura” gains a new and unexpected ecclesiological significance!

5. **Prayer as an act creating unity**

The central religious act which may successfully follow-upon the encounter with the Bible as Holy Scripture is prayer – at least seen from the external perspective.

I know of no church in which the Psalms and the Lord’s Prayer are not prayed. Maybe we should also take a closer look here and take more seriously the visibility of this action for people who see us from the outside.

On the occasion of his “birthday visit” to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Pope Francis formulated it in his typical figurative language as follows:

> **Prayer is the oxygen of ecumenism. Without prayer, communion becomes stifling and makes no progress, because we prevent the wind of the Spirit from driving us forward. Let us ask ourselves: How much do we pray for one another? The Lord prayed that we would be one: do we imitate him in this regard?**

6. Conclusion

Let me sum up. As the churches of Jesus Christ, we form one family, in which unity does not have to mean uniformity. Family resemblance is quite sufficient. It is particularly the concept of family which describes, at least in modern understanding, diversity and individuality in the community. We should bid farewell to all dreams of organizational unity derived from a static concept of church and focus more strongly on common practice. The concept of practice, however, means more than just the visible action of the church in leiturgia, diakonia, martyrria and koinonia. Above all, it is hearing and interpreting Scripture, which as the Bible is both a sign of visible unity and at the same time the symbol of diversity. This is precisely a feature of the visible church in the “fallen” creation of which it is still a part. Its unity is attributed to it by God and believed by the faithful, and this common faith, which comes from listening to the Scriptures, can make that unity manifest which is visible. This does not require a uniform organization, but rather places and times for consultation and conciliar coexistence. At this point, the churches are no different from the pluralistic civil societies, which will only be stable if they think inclusively and develop forms of consultation.

As a church we received Holy Scripture as a gift. It is a visible sign of the visible unity of the church in visible common use. We should not belittle that. For outsiders, the Bible and its specific use is a particularly strong feature of the Church. We should make it a more central theme – in the legitimate expectation that the Spirit of God will make it Holy Scripture for us. I am convinced that this perspective, which is both dynamic and elementary, will give Christianity a great opportunity to move closer together and be perceived from the outside as a common visible witness.

And let me add one small postscript. If we apply this fluidified understanding of “meaning” to the Eucharist, then we can comprehend it as a process in which God can be experienced, offering us a new use of bread and wine with a significance extending beyond that of everyday life. But this can only be revealed through usage, and this usage is described in Scripture. If we continue to understand the Eucharist as the enactment of a dogmatic definition of church
and ministry, a common practice will not be possible. So here, too, we must ask: what do people see when they experience the Eucharist? A special use of bread and wine. But this is the next step in the direction of a “fluid ecclesiology” that allows us to understand the diversity of visible churches in the world from an intercultural point of view as the form of the one Church of Jesus Christ: seeing what makes them undoubtedly and visibly “Christian”.
Shifting Paradigms – Future Ecumenical Challenges

Johanna Rahner

1. The Hermeneutical Shift

1.1 From Unity to Diversity

Two trends apply to the ecumenical question in the future. The first is the process of secularization, that is, the segmentation within society that demands that churches redefine their place – faith being just one option among many. The second is a growing awareness of the global dimension of church and the political challenges that come with it.

Both trends mean that the classic paradigm of the ecumenical movement and its crucial elements are stretched to their limits. Konrad Raiser describes these elements as a “Christocentric orientation,” “a concentration on the church” (that is, ecclesiology as the central topic), and a kind of “universal outlook.” He also states that “this approach cannot work in societies that are very differentiated functionally, and it becomes an illusion in societies without one normative tradition, where the faith of individuals is increasingly a matter of individual choice.” That means that the classic paradigm has no relevance, because developing a strategy for dealing with plurality and diversity becomes the litmus test of ecumenism.

1 Translation by Christian Henkel on 29.10.2018.
3 Cf. ibid., 417.
4 Cf. Konrad Raiser, Ökumene im Übergang. Paradigmenwechsel in der ökumenischen Bewegung, München 1989, 69; for a detailed analysis of the different aspects see ibid. 69-76.
Two things become increasingly important. First, a paradigm with universal aspirations cannot be conceived of without being accused of a hidden agenda of domination. How do we deal with this reality? Second, from where does a "global model" even derive its criteria when everyone is talking about inculturation, diversity, and so on? A fundamental theological problem seems to be unsolvable: how does the underlying strict Christocentrism of the classic paradigm relate to the plurality of religions – the new paradigm that has emerged in the last few decades?

Given this perspective, the limits of the classic ecumenical paradigm, and therefore the need to supplement it, become more and more urgent. This problem particularly concerns what Raiser calls the “centerpiece” of ecumenism, ecclesiology.

One observation is crucial. Ecumenical hermeneutics has changed from eliminating differences – by searching for a growing consensus in different ecclesiological issues – to an explicit recognition and appreciation of differences. “Although the previous paradigm was blatantly vertical when it talked about the church [that is, only one true church, one true tradition, one true whatever exists], we now find a horizontal understanding of unity in the sense of mediation between different traditions and positions.” Plurality now is to be understood not an acceptable evil, but as a good that needs to be preserved. This approach fits well with the late-modern zeitgeist and its “praise for diversity.” The consequences are obvious. “Reconciling or balancing the differences between various church traditions becomes the highest form of ecumenical unity that

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6 Cf. Aargaard, Ecclesiology, ibid.; cf. also Raiser, Übergang, 91: „Aber kann ein dogmatisches Urteil über den Ort der Religionen im Heilshandeln Gottes mit der Welt als die innere Konsequenz einer exklusiv oder inklusiv verstandenen christozentrischen Grundentscheidung in der Situation der religiösen Pluralität festgehalten werden?“

7 Cf. Raiser, Übergang, 112.

8 Raiser, Übergang, 119f.
realistically can be achieved.” Consequently, “this shift in focus means that talking about the unity of the church has become questionable in itself.” No wonder everyone now prefers unity in reconciled diversity as the promising future model. But a closer look reveals that the model of a unity in reconciled diversity also dulls every critical denominational characteristic. Because, as Bruce D. Marshall reminds his fellow ecumenists, the strategy of reconciled diversity “apparently allows only limited possibilities for ecclesial repentance.” Amicable relations between churches seem to assume the integrity of each community’s doctrines, which in turn means that they assume the absence of any qualitative defects in the doctrines and sees them as adequate for Christian communal life. No changes needed? Business as usual for every denomination? What about the idea that conversion is at the heart of ecumenism?

At this point, even ecumenical experts start to feel uncomfortable. Thou shalt not dismiss the question of truth! That’s the eleventh commandment, but what then is the truth? Does distinguishing between true plurality and a false pluralism help? Upon closer examination, a closer look at distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate diversity to define the degree of reconciliation leads nowhere. Such a distinction would “at best become trivial – in light of the tensions and contradictions in the life of the churches. In the worst case, it would turn into an instrument of power to suppress diversity.” But what’s the alternative?

Even if it is a necessary feature of a modern church to allow for the coexistence and plurality of churches, and even if every denomination is obliged to reflect upon that reality – what does it mean to be only one of many churches? This question cannot simply stop with the plurality of churches. Plurality and

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9 Ibid.; but also: ibid., 120: „Immer wie er sind im Verlauf der Geschichte der Kirche Andersdenkende unter Berufung auf die ‚Einheit der Kirche‘ ausgeschlossen oder gewaltsätig verfolgt worden. Ja, man kann die These vertreten, daß die meisten Spaltungen in der Geschichte der Kirche die Folgen eines überzogenen Einheitsdenkens waren; jedenfalls wird die Vielfalt zum Problem erst wenn sie an einer normativen Gestalt der Einheit gemessen wird. So muß die Frage gestellt werden, ob die ökumenische Diskussion nicht auf die Vorstellung von der ‚Einheit‘ der Kirche wegen des mißverständlichen und statisch-abstrakten Charakters dieses Begriffs verzichten sollte“.

10 Cf. Raiser, Übergang, 120.


12 Cf. Raiser, Übergang, 117.
differences make sense only if we can deal with them. Talking about the plurality of the churches requires an answer to the question about our acceptance of diversity, because we can only talk about differences where the other is seen as and is taken as seriously as the other. But how do we deal with this question properly?

Although the internal differentiation in every denomination today has, through a process of centuries of learning, become a nonnegotiable characteristic of their identity, it still seems to be a challenging question for the ecumenical journey. Interestingly, both issues are deeply intertwined. In other words, the more you can accept differences within your own denomination, the better prepared you are to accept them as an ecumenical necessity. Accepting plurality in your own community gives you a kind of a master plan for dealing with interdenominational differences constructively. If you think about your denomination as a monolith, you cannot accept a different way of thinking outside of it.

Is there a useful technique for a successful future diversity management? An observation made by Ottmar Fuchs gives us some direction. He notes that ecumenism or interreligious dialogue cannot work unless it dares to engage in the controversy “whether one’s own tradition (solution or way of thinking) is, in part or overall, more truthful or better”\(^\text{13}\) than the other. Only the idea of a wholesome contradiction, which starts the struggle for better solutions, makes sense of diversity. I can change my mind only when I truly care how you see the world. Only an open exchange of arguments, challenging one another, and discussing the potential rivalries of truth produce positive momentum. Thus, a culture of controversy and debate must be developed, taking the claims to be better seriously and integrating them into ecumenical work productively. Only those fundamentally willing to question their own approach and argue about the truth can ultimately understand themselves as reconciled in differences. Then we can get down to the brass tacks.

\(^{13}\) Ottmar Fuchs, Dialog im ‚Martyrium’ der Wahrheit, in: HThKVatII Bd. 5. Die Dokumente des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils: theologische Zusammenschau und Perspektiven, Freiburg 2006, 357-371, 357f.
Yet, what’s the reality in our ecumenical committees and dialogues? Some time ago the Swiss ecumenical theologian Eva-Maria Faber rightly asked if anyone engaged in ecumenical committees and dialogues reckons with new insights and new propositions that leave the well-trodden paths of ecumenical dialog and sets out on the adventure of new ways. Are we not simply reading the results, already sure that we will not hear anything fundamentally new?\(^{14}\) That is a shame! And it is far from the reality that in ecumenical dialogue we must struggle with one another to learn from each other. Because without struggling about the truth, we will not advance the question of what reconciliation really means when we’re talking about the unity of the churches as a unity in \textit{reconciled} diversity.

\subsection*{1.2 From Doctrine to Ethics}

A second shift in ecumenical hermeneutics has become apparent in the last decade, confronting the ecumenical movement with the experience of a new kind of insoluble problem. The dominant perspective in the ecumenical dialogue has changed from structural and doctrinal questions about the nature and essence of the church (a kind of ontology of the Church) to a new different perspective. Here one looks at the identity of the church that is tied to its function in the ethical and political realms.\(^{15}\) A new paradigm of a functional ecclesiology has become apparent. It understands acting in the world as a process of the church coming into its own. The world is being renewed, but the church is also renewing itself through its acting.\(^{16}\) With the idea of church as developed in the 1970s and 1980s, it is now possible to build bridges to Orthodox ecclesiology and to a Roman Catholic church that renewed itself in the Second Vatican Council by moving from a self-definition as the Church of Christ to being

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\item Eva Maria Faber, Umkehr und Veränderungsbereitschaft als konstitutive Elemente des ökumenischen Weges, in: SdZ 230 (2012) 723-734.
\item And thus the dichotomy of essential and functional ecclesiology is subverted. “Den Anstoß dazu vermittelten einerseits die zunehmende Verschärfung und Ausweitung des ethischen Problemhorizonts angesichts der wachsenden Globalisierung der Lebenszusammenhänge und andererseits die drängender werdenden kritischen Anfragen an die Glaubwürdigkeit der christlichen Kirchen im Zug der Säkularisierung” (Raiser, Ethik, 415).
\item Cf. Raiser, Übergang, 130.
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church in the modern world. This development made the 1970s a golden era of the ecumenical movement and made ecumenism, with its political and ethical questions, an attractive issue in many parts of the world. The primary image of any ecclesiology was the church in action. But the halcyon days of ecumenism have come to an end. This “political approach to social ethics, as it has been developed within the WCC, is a project of modern Western thinking. But the shared assumptions of the good life on which this approach was based disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s into the particular agendas of different cultures, subcultures, and ethnic groups, and there has been increasing conflict between the many participants with their differing scenarios about what changes are needed.”

As a result, the increasing awareness of the fundamentally ethical dimension of ecclesiology, and thus of the relevance of ethical questions for ecclesiology, leads to a fundamental shift in the ecumenical agenda. Ethical questions ultimately can divide churches. Two problem areas now appear. First, how do we escape the temptation to short-circuit the question ethically about what it truly means to be a church? If we fail, we’ll find ourselves between the Scylla of ecclesial Donatism (church as community of the pure, the true believers) and the Charybdis of ethical institutionalism (the sacred magisterium that tells what true Christian behavior is). Here we would need a reassurance of those ecclesiological core beliefs that help prevent such a short circuit. The second problem is that we must realistically assume that traditional ecumenical hermeneutics is not really prepared for new challenges and the cultural and political shifts in late modern times. How do we solve this problem?

We must recognize that ethical questions about the highly controversial relationship between individual and community cannot be answered solely on the basis of a common theological anthropology. If we link them to anthropology only, the focus immediately shifts toward problems of individual ethics, but that narrows our perspective. The question of how communities, individuals, and ethics come together must be open to an appropriate definition of the

17 Cf. ibid., 85.
18 Aargaard, Ecclesiology, 160.
relationship between individual and community. At the same time, questions about the possibility of pluralization in ethical questions within denominations become apparent along with the problem of how ethical dissent within a faith community – understood as faithful and loyal dissenting opinion – is possible. How can an individual think and act differently and yet remain a full member of one community of believers?

In particular, churches are not seen as solely moral communities – institutions representing a set of ethical and moral orientations – and provide resources of meaning and learning. Rather, the ecclesiological wish list of each denominational ecclesiology comes to the fore. No wonder. We can easily find all the classic problems of ecclesiology: questions about authority in the church, representative structures, organization and management, participation, the hermeneutics of scripture and tradition, and so on. Furthermore, in the light of connected aspects like individualization, pluralization, and credibility, we can also talk about the ability of the respective ecclesial concepts to adapt to modernity and democracy.

2. The Sociological Shift: Being Catholic or Protestant in the Age of Authenticity

We are living in an “age of authenticity” (Charles Taylor). “The faith of the individuals is increasingly a matter of individual choice.” Even denominational priorities seem to have shifted fundamentally: My own lifestyle is not de-

22 Aargaard, Ecclesiology, 161.
terminated by my religious or denominational orientation. Instead, I search for a form of spirituality that fits my lifestyle. I measure my faith practices by how much I benefit from them. “The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this. But if the focus is going now to be on my spiritual path . . . my placing in the broader ‘church’ may not be that relevant for me.”23 In this observation, we find another limiting factor for the classic paradigm of the ecumenical movement.

Belonging to a church or a denomination today says more about one’s individual preferences than about a denominational identity or system of belief and its idea of God, church, redemption, and so on. What matters is that I “discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual, and on his/her experience. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The basic mode of spiritual life is thus the quest,”24 and religious existence is a kind of pilgrimage through the whole of life. Churches react to this changing demand with a pluralization and flexibilization of their offers. “Churches have gone along with this global tendency of pluralization and individualization by deconstructing to some degree their all-embracing traditions and adapting them to the preferences and shopping habits of contemporary individuals. The monolithic religious institutions and traditions have lost ground as standards and landmarks of religiosity, and the ideals of authenticity and self-spirituality have taken their place.25

“For many people today, to set aside their own path in order to conform to some external authority just doesn’t seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual

23 Taylor, A Secular Age, 486f.
24 Ibid., 507f. “Moreover, the seekers in this case are the heirs of the expressive revolution, with its roots in the reactions of the Romantic period against the disciplined, instrumental self connected to the modern moral order. This means […] also that they are seeking a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the inferior and often guilt-ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity. The stress is on unity, integrity, holism, individuality; their language often invokes ‘harmony, balance, flow, integrations, being at one, centred’”.
life. The injunction is, in the words of a speaker at a New Age festival: ‘Only accept what rings true to your own inner Self’.” 26 It is only logical that this “kind of search is often called by its practitioners ‘spirituality,’ and is opposed to ‘religion.’ This contrast reflects the rejection of ‘institutional religion,’ that is, the authority claims made by churches which see it as their mandate to pre-empt the search, or to maintain it within certain definite limits, and above all to dictate a certain code of behavior.” 27

What does this fundamental shift mean for our own religious environment here in Europe? Therefore, the actual question about the “future of the North Atlantic religions” is if there be a connection “between modes of quest and centers of traditional religious authority, between what Wuthnow calls dwellers and seekers?” 28

But the future in the crucial territory of Latin Christianity remains unclear: “The fading contact of many with the traditional languages of faith seems to presage a declining future. But the very intensity of the search for adequate forms of spiritual life that this loss occasions may be full of promise.” 29

To describe this future, Charles Taylor refers to Mikhail Epstein’s term “minimal religion,” 30 which Epstein introduced for “postatheistic” Russia and whose premises, for good reason, bear resemblance to Karl Rahner’s concept of a “third confession,” which he introduced in the 1970s. Taylor talks about a spirituality of people that grew up amidst a militant atheistic regime that kept all confessional options (which were equally unknown) at an equal distance. “‘Minimal religion’ is a spirituality lived in one’s immediate circle, with family and friends, rather than in churches, one especially aware of the particular, both in individual human beings, and in the places and things which surround us. But because this religion was born outside of any confessional structures, it has its own kind of universalism, a sort of spontaneous and unreflective ecumenism, in which the coexistence of plural forms of spirituality and worship is taken for granted. Even when people who start with this kind of spirituality

26 Taylor, A Secular Age, 489.
27 Ibid., 508.
28 Ibid., 532f.
29 Ibid., 533.
30 Cf. ibid., 533-535.
end up joining a church, as many of them do, they retain something of their original outlook.”

Karl Rahner summed up the phenomenon of a third confession in the 1970s. “Above and beyond a mere human relatedness and tolerance, it allows for and demands everything that already happens today in ecumenical closeness and common ecumenical acting. What unifies the third confession . . . is what God gave all Christian churches in Jesus Christ and which all accepted, from which they all lived, and which became the living seed from which a full unity can eventually blossom.” However, we still have to find criteria for the description of what is shared by all and for the quest for common answers to the questions of the time, which Karl Rahner – in light of a change in the talking and preaching to a secular, pluralistic, and atheistic world – saw as the yardstick for a future ecumenical confession.

But frankly, I’m doubtful that all of these fundamental changes will end in an enlightened, religiously and culturally pluralistic humanism as a core belief or future mainstream Christianity. The abandonment of tradition in our time (particularly characteristic of Christianity in the secularized and highly developed societies of the North) and pluralism (that for sociopolitical reasons alone has become irreversible) mean that postdenominational religious identities are now constructed from a mélange of sociological, political, and cultural convictions, but not from theological criteria. This situation creates two additional risks. First, post- or transdenominational identities simply mirror the fractured mentalities and non-simultaneities of their surrounding societies and stabilize them instead of critically challenging them. Such differences, resting on sociological grounds, are much more difficult to handle than the traditional differences in theological teaching. How and on what basis can we legitimize the criteria on which we judge others? Second, we find that post- or transdenominational identities define their beliefs almost through exclusion, by interpreting the differences they experience not with a view toward unity, but toward dissociation. They feel the need to declare the differences to be

31 Ibid., 534.
the crucial marks of distinction. Every attempt at relativizing such differences attacks the root of their identity and is therefore excluded from the start. Every different view of how things are necessarily stands outside the common foundation. The boundary between right and wrong threatens to become more and more apodictic. A crucial tendency thus becomes obvious: a shift toward fundamentalism. “For the foreseeable future . . . the dominant theological tone of emerging world Christianity is traditionalist, orthodox, and supernatural. This would be an ironic reversal of most Western perceptions about the future of religion.”

3. The Global Shift: ‘It’s the Economy, Stupid!’ and Pentecostalization as a Marketing Strategy

From the perspective of a religious customer, the plurality of churches is undoubtedly much more sensible as a successful marketing strategy of Christianity than the ecumenical project of a unity of the churches or the idea of only One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church. Because only “competing churches can offer all Christian products”\(^{34}\), the denominational variety can cater much better to the needs of an economized and globalized late modernity with its specific rationalities of supply orientation, competition, sales opportunities, trademark marketing, value of brand recognition, and acceptance by the customer. But one thing should make us a little skeptical. The market always prefers a monopoly of products that have been designed with only consumption in mind. Moreover, to be recognized in the market one needs to be unambiguous. Therefore, the range of different denominations is reduced to the significant and unambiguous ones. Simultaneously, the market meets the very needs that it itself produced.

From this perspective, the ecclesial productivity of the Christian communities of the South and their charismatic–Pentecostal self-staging is unsettling. Here, very different types of Christian denominations act like selling companies in an unlimited, free-floating religious market. For all churches in this market, only one rational counter strategy often exists, namely sharpening the profile of their “brand” on the basis of local demand. They are designed for maximum recognition, and their placement in the market is a mirror of a commercialized, consumer-oriented profile marketing. Religious identity trusts in exclusivity and, with that, in the mechanisms of exclusion. Authenticity means being different, and what is true is what sells. “Questions of religious truth are being interpreted as mere questions of identity and questions of identity are being interpreted as questions about a market profile.”

A “culturally hegemonic capitalism” is on its way to becoming the dominant religious culture in the Global South. This “culturally hegemonic capitalism ... takes control over our hopes and desires, our fears and needs. He already designs the joys and the hopes, the grievances, and the anxieties of people today only to satisfy them tomorrow. He provides languages and pictures for this and he provides fulfillment: Concrete and palpable.”

Looking at the churches of the South, we can see that competition in the religious market is powerful and that the pressure to succeed is enormous. We cannot underestimate the dangers.

First, in the market of possibilities, whoever practices denominational identity by successful branding has an advantage. This approach, however, strengthens those practices within the denominations that do not bear the label of religious enlightenment or even enlightened Christianity. Forced competition in

35 In Germany, the EKD tried to label itself the “church of freedom,” which stylizes our longing for freedom and individuality as the late-modern signature of being a Protestant. In this understanding, Roman Catholicism is left with the strategy of pretentious piety, which might be attractive for the media but is nothing more than a colorfully masked event-culture behind which lurk heteronomy and clericalism.


the market of denominations, which in the end produces only consumer-oriented and thus increasingly theologically haphazard ecclesial products, can be won only by adjusting the product portfolio. Who then cares if the longing for a supernatural experience, for a miracle (springing either from social misery, pre-enlightened mentality, or a rediscovery of the emotionality and wholeness or bodylines of the religious\textsuperscript{38}) is satisfied by the Holy Spirit (for Pentecostals) or by the Virgin Mary (for Catholics)? In both cases, we use a theology of revelation that creates an immediate, eventful, and spectacular shortcut between the experience of God and God’s reality.\textsuperscript{39}

Second, the societal context also leads to an extensively cultivated and powerful mixture of religious community-building and politico-economic lobbyism or tribalism. It leads to a Gospel of Prosperity designed according to the principles of economic liberalism that, with its health-and-wealth message, mistakes relationships of dependence and utility based on tribe and bribe, which are strengthened by the religious communities themselves, as divine predestination. “Global South Christians retain a very strong supernatural orientation and are by and large more interested in personal salvation than in radical politics.”\textsuperscript{40}

Consequently, one becomes immune to the need for change in the global economic system, which, and not just according to Pope Francis, presents one of the greatest challenges for all churches today for theological and socio-ethical reasons. A Gospel of Prosperity is not just counter-indicative, it also stabilizes the system. Such immunization is also dangerous on an economic level. In an almost paradoxically concrete application of Max Weber’s thesis on Calvinism, Evangelical Pentecostals do not see striving for riches and coming into money through one’s own accomplishments as a structural sin that needs to be criticized, but as something worth striving for. In the Pentecostal communities, even the common people can rise in status, become pastors, and

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Jenkins, The Next Christendom, 8.
thus make money. Pentecostal churches are for people who want to climb the social ladder.

One can justly doubt whether the true future of Christianity can be found here. The churches might be packed and the communities might be vibrant, but the question remains: under what conditions? Thus, the triumph of the pentecostalization of the denominations raises the questions if the decisive difference in the future will be between an enlightened and a fundamentalist version of Christianity. This situation would, in my opinion, shipwreck the project of ecumenism.

4. The European Ecumenical Heritage in a Changing World

Despite all the cries of naysayers, no shortage of theological challenges for ecumenism will exist. In the last few years, the political and societal relevance of religion and faith has re-entered the public consciousness even in societies that define themselves as secular. At a time when homeland becomes plural and cultures meet in an unfamiliarity that seems to be unreconcilable at first glance, the shaping of a peaceful coexistence is one of, if not the most decisive challenges. “Deep, true, and lasting peace between humans, that is not built on the sacrifice of others and exists without a polarization towards enemies, is hard to obtain. It even goes beyond human powers. But when it becomes reality then it is a true sign that God (the Holy Spirit) is at work in humans.”

Only where we are able to testify to that sign in bringing together the other, the foreign, and our own in a struggle for truth as a unity in difference can we develop a new hermeneutical model that establishes the idea coming together, not only coexisting but also accepting each other, learning from each other, inspiring each other, and yet remaining different. Such a model would not solely be a viable option for the future coexistence of the denominations. For that model, the denominational history of Europe is a paradigmatic place where we

can learn about the other and from the other. This approach been shown in analyses of the Reformation jubilee of 2017.

After all the historical conflicts (2018 marks the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the Thirty Years’ War) there can be little doubt that, first of all, only the coexistence of a plurality of confessions and denominations that is guaranteed by the constitutional law of a secular state marks the beginning of modern Europe. However, in the same root we also find the values of tolerance and of freedom of religion, faith and conscience –which religious minorities fought for in the wake of the Reformation. The various denominations did not simply remain in a state of confessional opposition. First of all, they opposed – from the midst of their religious convictions – the political instrumentalization of their religious differences. Step by step they then learned to leave their defensive apologetic positions and began to encounter one another, not in a derogatory, but in an appreciative way. They learned to respect other positions, started a dialogue, and began to change themselves. This work led them to understand that they can enrich each other, an understanding that in itself promotes peace and tolerance. But such an insight could only come about as the result of a religious learning process unparalleled in human history. In this learning process, a method was developed that deals productively with different claims about the truth. It not only respects the point of departure of the other but also understands the position of each partner in dialog as mutually enriched by a joint witnessing. It is this constructive cooperation, and not an unconnected plurality of denominations, that is the legacy of the Reformation, which to this day fundamentally shapes European, and in all likelihood German, identity. Thus, whoever talks about tolerance, freedom of faith, and freedom of conscience stands on a foundation that would not exist were it not for the unique and ecumenical impact history of the Reformation. This history is both a common gift and a common obligation. And it’s the inviolable heritage of good old Europe for the rest of the world.
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On 29/30 October 2018 representatives of the Finnish Ecumenical Council came to Frankfurt to continue the theological discussions with the Board of the Council of Churches in Germany (ACK) which had started in Helsinki in 2015. The discussions in Helsinki had shown that many of the questions connected with baptism can ultimately only be answered on the basis of an understanding about ecclesiology. So, the understanding of the church became the centre of the discussions in Frankfurt. The Finnish churches, in particular the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, have been involved for many years in ecumenical dialogues on ecclesiology which are particularly relevant for international ecumenism beyond Finland. A recent contribution to the ecumenical discussion on the church is the document “Communion in Growth. Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry”, produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Roman Catholic Church in Finland. During the consultation in Frankfurt there was agreement between the Finnish Ecumenical Council and the ACK that the dialogue on ecclesiology should on no account lose sight of the fact that the church is not an end in itself but has a task in and for the world. This documentation contains all talks or presentations given during the meeting in Frankfurt and provides an overview of the present ecumenical discussions on ecclesiology in Finland and in Germany.