

## **What Would an Ecumenically Constructive Lutheran Consensus regarding Church, Eucharist and Ministry Presuppose? An Evaluation of the German Responses to the Finnish Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue Report *Communion in Growth***

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The Catholic–Lutheran dialogue document *Communion in Growth: Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry* (CiG 2017) and the US *Declaration on the Way* (2015) are the two official international ecclesial Lutheran–Catholic dialogue documents that aim to promote the formulation of a joint declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry. Local and regional dialogues can contribute to international dialogue, but they cannot make crucial breakthroughs without the international coordination of joint efforts at the level of world communions. One way to receive feedback is to ask for statements regarding the work already done.

Written feedback was therefore sought concerning CiG from the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Churches in Germany and from the Catholic and Lutheran churches in the USA. Due to the retirement of the responsible person and the Covid pandemic, the response from America was never finalised, although the preparatory process was begun. The analysis here is therefore of the positive Catholic and more critical Lutheran German responses.

### **The Response of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference**

The German Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) sent a somewhat positive response to the dialogue document on 17 March 2019, accompanied by a friendly letter from Bishop Gerhard Feige. The evaluation summarises the feedback as follows:

This document of the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue commission for Finland has now set the ecclesiological question on the agenda of ecumenical discussions. Although this new document returns to the many Lutheran–Catholic dialogues of recent decades and combines their results for individual controversial theological questions, an innovative ecumenical document is presented here.<sup>1</sup>

The statement acknowledges that the report uses the method of differentiated consensus, which is also familiar from the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ 1999). The purpose is therefore to formulate agreed fundamental truths regarding the church, eucharist, and ministry. They are jointly formulated so that the result corresponds to the churches' current doctrine. The second phase sees the traditional doctrinal controversies on this basis. The question therefore concerns whether the controversies remain mutually exclusive, or if they can be understood as different expressions of the same basic truth. The confessional language of each therefore requires translation here. Similarly, there must be a reflection on whether the doctrinal condemnations are still necessary today.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> GCBC statement, 1. The statements by the German Catholics and Lutherans are written in German, and only those parts quoted in this article have been translated to English.

<sup>2</sup> GCBC statement, 2.

The statement assesses how individual doctrinal questions are addressed as ‘very thorough’. These themes are the question of the church’s sacramentality, eucharistic communion, and in relation to ecclesial communion the question of ministry, especially the ministry of bishop and ordination. The Petrine Ministry is also evaluated in the context of the church’s unity. The document shows a common understanding of these questions.<sup>3</sup>

The GCBC’s response is convinced by the document’s argumentation. It states that the argumentation is

clear, profound, and presents the state of dialogue. Fundamental consensus statements are achieved with the aid of the chosen method, differentiated consensus. An impressive spectrum of common understanding emerges in the questions of the church’s sacramentality, the real and actual presence of the eucharist, and the ordained ministry, especially the ordination to the ministry of bishop. In addition to the more than 40 jointly stated agreements, the theologically important controversial questions are not confused. In essence these are the question of the church’s tangible sacramental structure and the questions of sacramental ordination from the perspective of ordination praxis. Eventually, the question of the status and meaning of the Petrine Ministry is also discussed. The commonality in the question regarding the three-stranded ministry in its definition in the ordinances of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is convincing. No objectives are described here; the premise is the realised reality of praxis.<sup>4</sup>

The German Catholic Bishops’ Conference regards the Finnish Lutheran preservation of the reformed Catholic Wittenberg tradition and the corresponding praxis of ministry, in contrast with the Lutheran churches of Central Europe, since the sixteenth century as a critical benefit. The statement also points to the special relevance of Finnish Luther research as an ecumenical resource. Taken together, from their perspective this heritage affords opportunities of more commonalities with the Catholic Church than between Catholics and Central European Protestants in general.<sup>5</sup>

The statement also asks an important question about the influence this Finnish Lutheran–Catholic document has on the global Lutheran–Catholic dialogue. The response sees a precedent in the document. From the Catholic perspective a way forward in the quest for unity in faith is impossible without addressing the question of the ministry of bishop in ecumenical dialogue. This is ‘clear and distinct’. The reason is that from the Catholic perspective the sacramental ministry of bishop belongs to the church’s *esse*. According to the GCBC the existence of this prerequisite is evident in the ELCF’s church order. From this perspective a forward direction is already given. It must be asked, however, if this document can lead to a deeper international dialogue. It may well be that in a different national context the question regarding the office of the bishop will be seen quite differently than in the ELCF. This seems to imply that a way forward in Catholic–Lutheran dialogue becomes more

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<sup>3</sup> GCBC statement, 2.

<sup>4</sup> GCBC statement, 2.

<sup>5</sup> GCBC statement, 2–3.

difficult if other Lutherans are unready to discuss the position taken in this Finnish dialogue as a possibility.<sup>6</sup>

As a partial response to this question from a Lutheran perspective, some encouraging tendencies can be observed in the international discussion regarding episcopal ministry within the Lutheran World Federation. According to the results of the thesis of Heidi Zitting *The Episcopal Office in Transition: Finnish Lutheranism and the Lutheran World Federation Discussions on Episkopé, 1945–2015* (2020), there are some ecumenically noteworthy developments regarding episcopal ministry:

The findings of this study thus demonstrate that pan-Protestantism... was not the direction that either the LWF documents or the ELCF took during the period studied... [T]he episcopal structures needed to be accepted as necessary and even as God-given structures of the church so long as they served the gospel. Episcopal succession was also to be understood as valuable and serving apostolic succession and hence the gospel... [T]he findings of this dissertation indicate a correlation in the development of these two, admittedly diverse, members of the Lutheran family, a development towards a ‘Nordic-,’ or ‘Porvoo style’ position in episcopacy. Neither body of work is completely uniform... [T]here is nevertheless an eventual embrace of the episcopal ministry.<sup>7</sup>

If the result that the ‘Porvoo’ understanding of ordained ministry is increasingly acceptable within the LWF member churches is valid, there seems to be some hope that there is a way forward in Catholic–Lutheran doctrinal dialogue regarding ordained ministry. One sign in this direction is the ‘Augsburg Agreement’<sup>8</sup> between The Episcopal Church and the Bavarian Lutheran church, which goes further in convergence and consensus concerning the episcopal ministry and ordination than the Anglican–Protestant Meissen Agreement. Zitting concludes:

Discussions on the nature of the episcopal office, albeit a divisive topic, have both fostered unity among church denominations and allowed the LWF and ELCF to preserve their confessional theologies. While both have clearly been engaged in accommodating the Anglican tradition, the changes in the two institutions have nevertheless been consistent with what 21st-century scholars and church historians have found about Luther’s insights on ministry. Moreover, it seems that Lutherans have been able to reintegrate themselves with the development of the early church while still upholding the values characteristic to their confession: the demand for the equality of all Christians, oneness of ministerium and the fundamental priority of the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

From the perspective of the Catholic Church the German Catholic statement mentions the ordination of women as priests and bishops as a challenge. It should be clarified if the

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<sup>6</sup> GCBC statement, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Zitting 2020, 63–64. Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 402: ‘...in no way did the Reformation reject the idea of apostolic succession or its implications for ordination practice.’

<sup>8</sup> <http://lutheran-episcopal.org/documents/bavaria2022.pdf> (read 5.12.2023)

<sup>9</sup> Zitting 2020, 64.

ordination of women really questions the tripartite ordo of the church. From the perspective of the ELCF the change is not doctrinal but practical. For the Catholic church the ordination of women is permitted neither in doctrine nor praxis. The relationship between the Bible, tradition, and ordination should be clarified regarding the mutual recognition of the ordained ministry. The future form of the Petrine Ministry that Lutherans could accept is also still under discussion. The document does not unfold these questions further. Yet according to the response these questions are increasingly crucial for future Lutheran–Catholic dialogue.<sup>10</sup> The statement therefore also challenges the Finnish dialogue partners to continue their dialogue regarding these themes: 1) the ordination of women from the perspective of mutual recognition; and 2) the ecumenically acceptable renewed Petrine Ministry.

### **The Response by the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation**

The ecumenical section of the LWF German National Committee (GNC) likewise prepared a statement, which was published on 4 December 2019 as a statement approved by the LWF German National Committee.<sup>11</sup> We are grateful for the time both Catholics and Lutherans have taken to evaluate our dialogue document.

The response takes as its starting point the analysis that there is a far-reaching ‘consensus in the basic truths’ between Catholics and Lutherans regarding the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist, so that a ‘differentiated consensus’ appears within reach. However, the main obstacles to this are in the ecclesiological anchoring of the Lord’s Supper, which also affects eucharistic praxis. The particular question here mostly concerns the understanding of the ordained ministry. A theological dialogue which is based on the JDDJ therefore cannot focus solely on the Lord’s Supper but on the connection between the church, the Lord’s Supper, and ministry.<sup>12</sup> The basic approach of the CiG, which also includes the ecclesiological context and the relationship to the Eucharist and ordained ministry, is therefore accepted by the GNC response.

The statement describes the methodological approach of CiG, in which the ‘differentiated consensus’ which had already been used in the JDDJ, and according to the German statement content-wise in the Leuenberg concord, as principally positive.<sup>13</sup>

The statement is not, however, satisfied with how the method is used in CiG (Communion in Growth). The statement claims:

What is common is as a rule drawn from the formulations of the Roman Catholic Second Vatican Council and Lutheran–Catholic dialogue documents. The Lutheran confessional tradition is largely referred to only as a supplement to show that it agrees or is at least compatible with it. The hermeneutical reference is always therefore Roman Catholic doctrine. This is also apparent in the literature that accompanies the council and dialogue texts. Primarily

<sup>10</sup> GCBC statement, 3.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dnk-lwb.de/de/content/stellungnahme-des-okumenischen-studienausschusses-zu-dem-finnischen-dialogdokument-communion> (read 17.12.2023).

<sup>12</sup> GNC statement, 1.

<sup>13</sup> GNC statement, 1–2.

Catholic authors are quoted (and especially Cardinals Walter Kasper and Gerhard Ludwig Müller). This applies even to Luther research. This one-sided direction is unfortunate. It results in the processing of the three individual themes and a failure to include many important individual discoveries which convincingly show the overcoming of traditional controversies, frequently of interpretations of the Lutheran confessional tradition and currently valid Lutheran doctrine, which seems problematic and gives cause for critical questions.<sup>14</sup>

It is true that the results of the international Roman Catholic–Lutheran theological dialogue thus far, which, for example, are summarised in *From Conflict to Communion* (2013), are taken as a starting point in many cases.<sup>15</sup> The teachings of the Second Vatican Council are also raised because in the Finnish context it is well known that at the Second Vatican Council many of the things which Martin Luther critically claimed are now a reality in Catholic teaching. Examples are the importance of the Bible as the ‘soul of theology’, the use of the vernacular, the possibility of communion in both kinds, communion ecclesiology, and the apostolate of the laity.

There is also a factual imbalance concerning the official and globally shared Lutheran confessional and the Roman Catholic magisterial teaching because of the time difference of more than 400 years. The Lutheran confessional writings are from the sixteenth century, and the updated Roman Catholic position from the 1960s. Some have suggested that Lutherans need a ‘Second Vatican Council of their own’. For example, the 1963 LWF Assembly could not agree a joint statement in the crucial question regarding the Lutheran understanding of justification. The JDDJ of 1999 meant ecumenical dialogue was needed to find a way to express the Lutheran position in a way with which most Lutherans could agree. The reception of this achievement has taken time, but seems to be strengthening – including ecumenically, although there also appear to be countertendencies. There was therefore no other sensible way to start the dialogue after the JDDJ than to employ the results of the ecumenical dialogue regarding this and other controversial themes.

Concerning the psychological dynamic in the Finnish context in which the Lutheran Church is a majority church, and the Roman Catholic church only a small minority church, there was also a practical need to convince the Catholic partner that it would be possible to reach an ecumenical agreement that had already been convincingly reached in international and regional (Finnish–Swedish) Lutheran–Catholic dialogues, that the result was based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Councils and beyond, and that major Catholic theologians, in spite of their differing views (Kasper, Müller), could support these ecumenical achievements. With their background in ecumenical theology and Luther research the Lutheran delegates generally needed less convincing. The Lutheran confessional argument was therefore introduced to the discussion only after the ecumenical process had shown that a joint understanding was possible. This is not to say that Catholic doctrine guided the interpretation

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<sup>14</sup> GNC statement, 2.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf>

of the Lutheran confessional writings unjustifiably based on their factual theological intentions.

An interpretation of the confessional writings in the contemporary ecclesial and ecumenical context is needed because of the contextual difference between the sixteenth century and our ecumenical situation. For us and our German friends it is also obvious and well known that our different contextual historical and doctrinal factors in the Finnish tradition, which we share historically with the Church of Sweden, means that we sometimes depart from German Lutherans in our interpretation of the Lutheran confessions, especially since the Leuenberg Agreement (1973). The German discussion of Finnish Luther research in the 1980s and 1990s aptly demonstrates this. We had the privilege to have the late Fr Jan Aarts from the Catholic Church as one of the members of our dialogue. His doctoral thesis about Luther also inspired Lutheran Luther researchers in Finland.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Church*

The statement is critical of the fact that in the first article of CiG a paragraph of *Lumen Gentium* regarding the church is taken as a starting point without an immediate balancing Lutheran reference, although the response agrees that the ‘understanding of the church as *communio* as such certainly does not mark a church-dividing difference’.<sup>17</sup>

It is widely known that the Second Vatican Council specifically highlighted the biblical and patristic understanding of the church as a communion, and that communion ecclesiology is the *novum* which the Council brought to the Roman Catholic understanding of the church. This stimulated ecumenical ecclesiological discussion with an orthodox emphasis on eucharistic ecclesiology. This development has been greeted with satisfaction in the discussion regarding ecumenical ecclesiology, although there are different interpretations of communion ecclesiology. An indication of its relevance is that the Faith and Order convergence document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2012) takes communion ecclesiology as its starting point, and even the Community of the Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is now officially a ‘communion’ of churches.

The statement seems to presuppose that in every possible context both the Lutheran and Catholic understandings must be expressed so that both traditions are quoted at equal length, or that it does not represent a specific confessional tradition and its language. The response fails to pay attention to the fact that articles 4–6 of CiG refer to the main points of Luther’s, Lutheran, and ecumenical understanding of communion ecclesiology as the crucial background. Paying attention to formulating the introductory paragraphs with the aid of *Lumen gentium* (LG) seems to receive a disproportionate position in the evaluation. Incidentally, the preparatory dialogue of the Pontifical Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity with the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), though implicit, refers

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the FS of Tuomo Mannermaa *Caritas Dei* (1997) and *Union with Christ* (1998 Braaten & Jenson ed.).

<sup>17</sup> GNC statement, 2.

positively in its background paper of the Leuenberg document *The Church of Jesus Christ*, though implicit, to LG.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the criticism is also understandable given that the dynamics of the Finnish dialogue group are unfamiliar. It may therefore be wise to revise the introduction in the future to make it more explicit from the outset about the perspective of the Lutheran understanding of communion if CiG's materials are to be used in future dialogue as a point of orientation.

Concerning the church's sacramentality (CiG § 19), the German Lutheran response generally agrees that the 'hidden reality of God is present in the visible forms of proclamation and sacraments'. From their perspective the Lutheran understanding of the nature of the church also includes a visibility that is not merely superficial, but whose form has been instituted by God, who is present in that form in accordance with God's promise. However, the statement points out that what follows from the church's general sacramentality regarding the individual ecclesial elements must be carefully discerned. The response emphasises the significance of the distinction between the church's constitutive ontological elements and human traditions (*traditiones humanae*). Those traditions may be helpful, but they are not necessary for the church's *esse* (CA 7).

Accordingly, the German Lutherans claim that the study does not pay attention to this fundamental distinction between the 'constitutive' and 'human' traditions in Lutheran ecclesiology. Yet the study clearly makes this distinction, although it is not seen as a rigid ahistorical confessional starting point that is beyond discussion. For example, in accordance with Luther, the distinction is seen from the perspective of Chalcedonian Christology in CiG subchapter 3.5, 'Divine and Human Aspects of the Church'. It argues that '...the divine and the human aspects of the Church ... belong closely together. They can be expressed analogously to the Chalcedonian Christological understanding of the divine and human nature.'<sup>19</sup>

CiG § 248 also refers directly to the traditional Lutheran distinction between the 'divine' (or constitutive) and 'human': 'The Lutheran Confessions are critical towards some "human traditions" in the light of the judgement of their understanding of Holy Scripture. This can be understood in the light of the emphasis on the priority of the apostolic Gospel. All enactments "which are not contrary to the Holy Gospel" may be retained.'<sup>20</sup> Moreover, to avoid a simplistic or even deistic distinction between God's divine institution (*iure divino*) and human arrangement (*iure humano*), which is on the other hand properly made from the perspective of the 'pure gospel', the report also makes a distinction between the direct institution by Christ (*iure divino*) and divine guidance in accordance with the will of God in history (*divina ordinatione*). Moreover, in Lutheran theology God and God's Holy Spirit also guide the church in and through history.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Päpstlicher Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen und GEKE Vorbereitungsdokument *On Church and Church Communion*, S. 3.

<sup>19</sup> CiG, art. 32.

<sup>20</sup> CiG, art. 248.

<sup>21</sup> CiG, art. 193. Dulles/Lindbeck (1980, 140–168) also argue for a more flexible understanding of the distinction between the 'divine' and 'human'.

A sharp distinction between the ‘constitutive’ and ‘human’ is therefore necessary when the doctrine of justification through Christ and his grace is emphasised. Some traditions can be ‘human’ and not ‘divine’ from the perspective of justification, although they can be useful from the perspective of the church’s mission. Some are a gift of God, though not constitutive of general ecclesiological elements. This implies an interplay between the Christological and pneumatological, or act and being, which is typical of Lutheran theology.<sup>22</sup>

### *Sacraments in General*

The German response approves the differentiated consensus regarding the concept and function of the sacraments. The different number of sacraments does not need to be church-dividing because Baptism and the Eucharist are the central sacraments for the Roman Catholic Church. Yet the statement regards it as disturbing because it suggests that the Roman Catholic sacraments can be interpreted from a Lutheran perspective as somehow sacramental, that is transmitting grace.<sup>23</sup> However, the response does not pay attention to the fact that the ‘concept’ of grace is interpreted here more broadly than in the usual Lutheran understanding of the instruments of grace.<sup>24</sup>

The German statement seems to defend a narrow understanding of sacramentality and the sacraments. It is critical of the use of Melanchthon’s arguments for an understanding of the phenomenon of the sacraments that may refer more widely than to the major sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, which are the special instruments of saving grace. It thus appears to downplay the idea that the concept of ‘sacramentality’ might also refer to the action of God through word, prayer, and forgiveness in the context of eucharistic life in other occasional offices – for example, in private confession when the forgiveness of sins is declared (*absolutio*), although the Apologia understands it as a sacrament *in expressis verbis*.<sup>25</sup>

The national committee’s response tends to secularise other services as ‘institutions of good earthly life’, although the connection with Christian life is clear in the confessional writings: ‘...no prudent man will strive greatly concerning the number or the term [sacrament], if only those objects still be retained which have God’s command and promises.’” Melanchthon states that marriage might broadly be understood as a sacrament. He writes:

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<sup>22</sup> For the dialectic between act and being in Lutheran and ecumenical Roman Catholic theology see CiG, page 25, footnote 48.

<sup>23</sup> GNC response, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 396 explains the preconditions for the broadening of the understanding of the term ‘sacrament’ (as an instrument of grace): ‘This judgment assumes, of course, that the term “sacrament” is not restricted to actions that mediate the grace of justification to the recipients ... to define the concept in terms of participation in the mystery of Christ and hence to leave room for various modes of relationship to the mystery’.

<sup>25</sup> GNC response, 3. Cf. Apologia § 13: ‘Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution, which is the Sacrament of Repentance, are truly Sacraments. For these rites have God’s command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament.’ <https://lutheranconfessions.org/boc/apology/the-apology/> (read 20.11.2023). Cf. also Pannenberg 1998, 396: ‘Thus the Lutheran confessional writings did not in principle reject the application of the concept of a sacrament to the ministry’, and 361: ‘Faced with the biblical usage in Eph. 5:32 theology ought not to insist on a narrow understanding of the term “sacrament” in such a way as to rule out what this passage has in view’.



Wherefore, if anyone should wish to call it a sacrament, he ought still to distinguish it from those preceding ones [the two former ones], which are properly signs of the New Testament, and testimonies of grace and the remission of sins.<sup>26</sup>

Following this, from the Lutheran perspective the CiG report distinguishes the ‘sacramentality’ of marriage from the major sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist as ‘testimonies of grace and the remission of sins’, although it also sees the presence and (sacramental) help of God through word, prayer, and the communion of saints in other services that are rooted in the Christian tradition as occasional offices.<sup>27</sup>

It seems that the internal Lutheran discussion should address the narrow and broad understandings of ‘grace’ and ‘sacramentality/sacraments’, as well as the distinction between ‘divinely instituted’ and ‘human arrangements’, and perhaps the distinction between being (*esse*) and wellbeing (*bene esse*), although very clear-cut distinctions seem sometimes confusing and to overshadow the issue they aim to clarify. It is hardly constructive to speak of something as either completely divine or completely human when speaking of church structures. A more flexible understanding is more realistic here.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Lord’s Supper/Eucharist*

The response agrees with CiG that the Lutheran and Roman Catholic positions regarding the Lord’s Supper are well grounded and convincingly share far-reaching convergences. Yet attention is paid to the use of the term ‘convergence’ rather than ‘consensus’. In some ‘important points’ the statement sees a need to ask further (critical) questions.

First, the response agrees that the doctrine regarding the eucharistic sacrifice does not need to be seen as church-dividing because both agree that the sacrifice of Christ cannot be repeated but only represented. Yet it sees a ‘tendency’ for the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord’s Supper to ‘focus’ on the idea of sacrifice. Yet there is no ‘tendency’ here: rather, the doctrinal condemnation of ‘sacrifice’ and its understanding are discussed. Naturally, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is at the centre of Christian faith and is therefore also essential for the understanding of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>29</sup>

Second, the response underlines that receiving the Lord’s Supper in only one kind is a ‘grave lack’. The response takes a strict line and criticises CiG for not (explicitly) mentioning the biblical basis of the institution of the Eucharist. However, this basis is explicitly quoted in CiG § 89.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Apologia § 13 <https://lutheranconfessions.org/boc/apology/the-apology/> (read 20.11.2023)

<sup>27</sup> CiG, art. 60: ‘In the Lutheran understanding confirmation, absolution, ordination, and marriage are sacred services in the context of the living out of our Holy Baptism, nourished by the Holy Eucharist in the communion of the Church’. Apology, § 13: <https://lutheranconfessions.org/boc/apology/the-apology/> (read 20.11.2023).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Dulles/Lindbeck 1980, 165: “Im Licht unseres gewachsenen historischen Bewußtseins ist uns klar, daß keine saubere und durchgängige Linie zwischen *ius divinum* und *ius humanum* eingezogen werden kann.” Cf. also Wenz 1997, 429–430.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. GNC response, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. GNC response, 3 and CiG, art. 89.

Third, the German statement sees it as a surprise that the Lutheran tradition ‘abandons’ the ‘widely documented temporal bond’ between the presence of Christ and the eucharistic celebration. The response interprets this as acting after the celebration of the Eucharist in the sense of *extra usum*, when the consecrated elements are separately reserved after the celebration and used later without new consecration when visiting the sick.<sup>31</sup> This implies that the German tradition interprets the celebration of the Eucharist actualistically – as a consequence of Kant’s critique of classical metaphysics – which implies that the celebration of the Eucharist cannot be continued after a narrowly defined temporal celebration. This opposes the ancient practice of bringing the Eucharistic elements to the sick without new consecration. It may be asked where this argument finds the authority to decide that the consecrated elements are no longer consecrated (and thus ready for use). The *extra usum* doctrine was intended to safeguard against the wrong use of the eucharistic elements – outside of use – and using them for the communion of the sick should certainly not be considered an abuse.<sup>32</sup>

## Ministry

### *In General*

The German response seeks further clarification concerning how the ordained ministry can be understood as a ‘sacramental ministry’ from a Lutheran perspective. The statement would have preferred the other leadership organs to have been highlighted more extensively in CiG, and not only the leading role of Peter among the disciples in the New Testament. It critically

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. the recommendation in BEM Eucharist III 32: ‘Given the diversity in practice among the churches and at the same time taking note of the present situation in the convergence process, it is worthwhile to suggest: - that, on the one hand, it be remembered, especially in sermons and instruction, that the primary intention of reserving the elements in their distribution among the sick and those who are absent, and - on the other hand, it be recognized that the best way of showing respect for the elements served in the eucharistic celebration is by their consumption, without excluding their use for communion of the sick.’

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Lehmann & Pannenberg, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era 1990*, 102-104, already rightly challenges the German Protestant practice: ‘...Lutheran doctrine defines “use” in such a way that Christ’s sacramental presence is not restricted to the moment of reception but embraces the whole celebration of the feast, which in its inner intention is directed towards the “communion”, because this “communion” in the meal is the meaning and essence of the eucharistic act (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16 f.)... Protestants should find it possible to recognize once more the legitimacy of this early church form of house communion and the communion of the sick, the more so since it is not explicitly condemned in the relevant passages in the Confessions. For the fundamental intention of Protestant eucharistic theology, where the duration of the sacramental presence is concerned, proves to be reconcilable with the practice used in the church since early times. This has always, among other things, had the purpose of including the sick in the worshipping koinonia in the eucharistic feast, even though at a distance in space and time. The stipulation here is that the institutional character of the Lord’s Supper, including the indissoluble connection between Word and Sacrament, should be taken into account in an appropriate way in the liturgical form given to the feast.’ Cf. also Leuenberg Texts 2 Sacraments, Ministry, Ordination, p. 22, para 6 regarding the Lord’s Supper: ‘6. Although according to protestant understanding the elements at the Lord’s Supper undergo no transformation, yet attention is demanded for the special use of created gifts of bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper as well as the ecumenical consideration of an appropriate dealing with the left-over elements.’ It can be asked if the partaking Lutherans adapt their understanding here of ‘real presence’ to the general ‘Protestant’ understanding, and why the GNC response fails to mention the ‘attention demanded for special use’ and ‘an appropriate dealing with the left-over elements’, although the pan-Protestant view underlines this in the Leuenberg text. How is this ‘appropriate dealing’ explained ontologically here?

evaluates how the study underlines the willingness of the reformers to maintain the continuity of the structures of ministry. The response admits that the reformers considered the ordination-bound ministry necessary and recognised the claim of the ‘regular call’ (‘ordnungsgemäßen Berufung’ CA 14). However, the German statement underlines the understanding of this in the context of a fundamental theological revision of the understanding of ministry. The weight of this revision and the post-reformation development in CiG is ‘ill-defined’ from the German perspective.<sup>33</sup>

There is no single argument in the statement, however, that explains what this ‘revision’ means. It is taken as a given, without any proper foundation or ecumenical enquiry. What is certain, however, is that the signatories of CA intended the text to keep the catholic substance of faith and thus of the ordained ministry: being sent by Christ in the service of the apostolic gospel in proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments.<sup>34</sup>

The response also criticises the use of the formulations of LG 10 in the understanding of ministry without underlining the ‘Lutheran’ idea of deducing the ministry from the priesthood of all believers (*das allgemeine Priestertum*). It is even stated that the formulated position is against the Lutheran understanding of the equal status of Christians based on Baptism. There are good grounds for questioning this criticism. Famous German Lutheran theologians have also questioned the view that the ordained ministry is derived from the priesthood of all believers.<sup>35</sup> LG 10 states:

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

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<sup>33</sup> GNC response, 4. Cf. otherwise, for example, Pannenberg 1998, 397: ‘...the call to participate in the apostolic mission, in special service to the unity of the church, also takes place by a sign-act, namely, ordination. Inasmuch as this act, too, is a concretion of the one mystery of salvation that unites Christ and his church, we may describe it as a sacrament even if, unlike baptism, it does not impart justifying grace to the recipients or their institution as children of God, but presupposes already the relationship to Christ and his church that has its basis in baptism.’

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Dulles/Lindbeck 1980, 154: „Was vor allem zählt, sind die ausdrücklichen Intentionen der Verfasser bzw. unterzeichner der CA, wie sie deutlich in dem Dokument hervortreten... Der Hauptanspruch der CA war, wie wiederholt in jüngster Zeit in Erinnerung gerufen wurde, derjenige auf Katholizität: Von der vorgetragenen Lehre wird behauptet, „daß nichts darin vorhanden ist, was abweicht von der Heiligen Schrift und von der allgemeinen und von der römischen Kirche“ (Schluß des ersten Teils). Wenn man solche im Text geäußerte Ansicht ernst nimmt, sollte dieser Anspruch ein Prüfstein für die Interpretation jedes Artikels und für das Ausfüllen von Lücken sein. Der Interpretierende ist also nicht einfach widerstreitenden historischen und systematischen Ansichten ausgeliefert, vielmehr stellt der hermeneutisch normative Anspruch auf Katholizität ein Prinzip der Auswahl zur Verfügung. Die Reformation will die katholische Substanz des Amtes beibehalten, und dieser Anspruch ist grundlegend für die Feststellung, was die Confessio über das gesagt hätte, wozu sie schweigt. Sie wäre darin – um es einfach auszudrücken – möglichst katholisch gewesen.“

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Wenz 1997, 335: „...das kirchliche Amt, eben weil es dem der ganzen Kirche aufgetragenen ministerium docendi evangelium et porrigendi sacramenta zu dienen hat, etwas anderes ist als die sekundäre Folge einer Gemeindedelagation. Einheit und Einheitsdienst des ordinationsgebundenen Amtes sind – wie dieses Amt und die ihm eigene Ordnung und geregelte Dauer selbst – nicht abgeleitete Form des der ganzen Kirche gegebenen Dienstauftrags, sondern in diesem ursprüngliche Weise und daher iure divino mitgesetzt... Das öffentliche Predigtamt... hat an sich selbst als eine Einrichtung göttlichen Rechts zu gelten und kann nicht als eine bloße Funktion des allen Gläubigen eigenen Priestertums begriffen werden...“ Cf. also Pannenberg 1998, 402: ‘...the Lutheran Reformation never even referred to a derivation of church ministry from the priesthood of all believers’.

are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.<sup>36</sup>

This formulation in LG 10 takes the common priesthood based on Baptism as the basis of ecclesial ministry – that is, the equal status of all Christians. From this perspective there is no ontological difference, but from the perspective of God-given calling there is a difference, which is based on the act of the Triune God at ordination.<sup>37</sup> However, ‘[t]hrough Baptism all Christians participate in Christ’s priesthood, and together they are a single priestly people (*Ministry 13*)’ (CiG 196). Yet there is a special public calling to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments in the service of the divine mission in and for the church. This complementary unity should be quite clear in CiG article 194:

Ministry in the Church means, firstly, the special ordained ministry in the service of the salvific ministry of Christ, and secondly, the actualisation of the salvific ministry of Christ on the basis of Baptism and confirmation that is the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6). The existence of a special ministry is constitutive of the Church. Ministry in the Church as a whole is subordinated to the one ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup>

A comparison is that no one would deduce that someone was a medical doctor because of their interest in people’s health. This may be a good precondition, but one is an authorised doctor because one has a required university degree and is registered as a licensed doctor. Furthermore, a priest receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit for a specific lifelong ministry.<sup>39</sup> How is this deduced from the ministry of all believers?<sup>40</sup> Ordination does not entail a change in a person’s salvific status,<sup>41</sup> nor is there a sacred hierarchy that cannot be questioned based on the common understanding of revealed faith (*sensus fidelium*) in the light of the common priesthood and its mandate.<sup>42</sup> Yet it is true that there are differences in the understanding of

<sup>36</sup> LG 10.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 403: ‘At ordination, Jesus Christ himself... sends his Holy Spirit into the hearts of those who pray. Ordination is primarily the work of the exalted Lord, who motivates, strengthens and blesses the ordained by the Holy Spirit.’

<sup>38</sup> CiG, ar. 194.t

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 397: ‘...2 Tim. 1:6, where indeed, as in 1 Tim. 4:14, we read of a charism that is imparted by the laying on of hands. Even in 1522 Luther did not contest the imparting of such a gift, which Trent used as an argument for calling *ordo* a sacrament (DS, 1766). In Luther’s 1535 Ordinal the ordination prayer that accompanies the laying on of hands is precisely that the gift of the Spirit might be granted to the candidates. In a sermon in 1529 Luther said: “we may have the Holy Spirit in two ways, for our person and for our ministry. For our person the Holy Spirit is not always with us .... But for our office, if we preach the gospel, baptize, absolve, and administer the sacrament according to his institution and order, the Holy Spirit is always with us”’ WA, 28, 468, 28–36.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 402–3: ‘...in no way did the Reformation reject the idea of apostolic succession or its implications for ordination practice... The church’s ordained ministry is a continuation of the leadership function of the apostles... Luther rightly called it the ministry of the apostles and the ministry of Christ... ordination by the church still calls them into the ministry that God instituted and that has the task of ruling a congregation with preaching and the sacraments.’

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 398: ‘Vatican II... plainly related the imparting of grace and abiding character (*sacrum characterum*) to the empowering of ordained ministers to act in Christ’s person as teachers, pastors, and priests (LG 21). Thus the gift conferred on ministers by their ordination relates to their function, not to their personal standing in grace. This is the crucial point in the controversy.’

<sup>42</sup> Cf., for example, Lehmann/Pannenberg 1990, 151: ‘The Lutheran Reformation later thought it possible to recognize as sacrament an ordination carried out through prayer and the laying on of hands...’ Cf. Wenz 1997,

the term and meaning of ‘hierarchy’ in the Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologies of ministry. There is an obvious need for further dialogue regarding this.

It even seems that the expressed German Lutheran position’s interpretation here represents at least to some extent the ‘handing-over’ theory formulated by Johann W.F. Höfling (1850), which is no longer generally favoured in theological research, though with some exceptions. Höfling’s theory contradicted Julius Stahl’s institutional theory (1840), according to which God had instituted a special office in the church (*status ecclesiasticus*). A third version in the discussion was the historical interpretation of A.W. Dieckhoff (1865), according to which Luther adopted a ‘handing-out’ theory in his early period and abandoned the divine institution of ordained ministry. However, during this early period he already also occasionally considered that the ordained ministry was a divine institution. Luther later rejected the ‘handing-over’ theory and distinguished between the priesthood of all believers and the spiritual ministry. The church calls, but the office is given by God through the church.<sup>43</sup>

Most Luther studies after 1930 agree that Luther did not adopt Höfling’s ‘handing-out’ theory. It is usually emphasised that Luther understood the spiritual ministry as *iure divino*, and that at no stage did he deduce the priesthood of all believers from it.<sup>44</sup> It is therefore scarcely ‘the Lutheran view’ that the ordained ministry is deduced from the priesthood of all believers, although such a understanding also exists. For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

The offices of the Church are ‘ministries’ (*diakoniai*, I Cor. 12.5). They are appointed in the Church of God (I Cor. 12.28), by Christ (Eph. 4.11) and by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20.28). They are not appointed by the Church. Even where the Church makes itself responsible for distributing offices, it does so only under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13.2 etc.). Both ministry and Church spring from the triune God. The offices exist to serve the Church, and their spiritual rights only originate from this service.<sup>45</sup>

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328–329, who also understands the ordained ministry as instituted by God: ‘...das ordinationsgebundene Amt gerade um der Allgemeinheit des allgemeinen Priestertums willen gesetzt und zwar göttlich gesetzt ist’. Cf. Pope Francis’s criticism of clericalism: ‘...those who slip into clericalism: they lose the spirit of praise because they have lost the sense of grace, the wonder at the gratuitousness with which God loves them, that trustful simplicity of the heart that makes us reach out our hands towards the Lord, awaiting food from Him at the right time (cf. Ps 104:27), aware that without Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:5). Only when we live in this gratuitousness, can we live the ministry and pastoral relations in the spirit of service, in accordance with Jesus’ words: “You received without pay, give without pay” (Mt 10:8) ... This is the priestly spirit: making ourselves servants of the People of God and not masters, washing the feet of our brethren and not trampling them underfoot. Let us therefore remain vigilant against clericalism.”’

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2023/documents/20230805-lettera-sacerdoti.html>

<sup>43</sup> Mannermaa 1977, 146–147.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. the summary of the teaching of CA concerning the spiritual office Dulles/Lindbeck 1980, 166: “1. Es gibt ein kirchliches Amt, das von Gott eingesetzt und somit de iure divino und im vollen Sinne wesensnotwendig für die Kirche ist (vgl. CA 5)... 4. Auch wenn es sich bei der strukturellen Stufung des Amtes in Pfarr-(Presbyter-)Amt und Bischofsamt um eine geschichtlich gewordene Form handelt, die in Apol 14,2 als ‘auctoritate humana’ gekennzeichnet wird, kann in ihrer Herausbildung die Führung durch den Geist Gottes gesehen werden.”

<sup>45</sup> Bonhoeffer: *The Cost of Discipleship*, 227. Cf. also DBW 14, 313: “Amt befindet sich *im* allgemeinen Priestertum, aber unabhängig vom allgemeinen Priestertum. Amtshandlungen von Ordinierten aus der Kirche.“ Cf. also Voigt 1991, 173-174: “Wir sprachen vom Priestertum aller Gläubigen. Von vielen wird dies mißverstanden, als gebe es das besondere Amt der Kirche gar nicht, oder wenn es das doch gebe, dann sei sein

The German response correctly pays attention to the open question regarding the ordination of women, which clearly needs more dialogue in and between the churches to find a solution that would enable living in a relationship of communion.

### *Ministry of Bishop and Episkopé*

The GNC response agrees in principle with the understanding of the role of the ‘action of the Spirit’ in the development of local and regional offices of supervision (episkopé). Yet it overinterprets the statement in CiG § 233 that the development of the ministry of bishop and succession is ‘theologically necessary’ from a Lutheran perspective. Indeed, it is formulated more cautiously. The ministry of bishop is a sign of fidelity to the apostolic mission, ‘more than the result of purely historical and human developments, or a matter of sociological necessity’, a penultimate necessity.<sup>46</sup> In CiG § 237 this is further explicated in the light of CA 28:

The succession as sign, indicated in the historic episcopal succession, is therefore a penultimate necessity and does not by itself guarantee the fidelity of a Church to every aspect of the apostolic faith, life and mission. The Augsburg Confession stresses that the Churches ‘are bound by divine law to be obedient to the bishops’ (CA 28.21: BC 84), in respect of their commission to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments, forgive sins, condemn doctrine contrary to the Gospel, and exclude notorious sinners from the community (CA 28.21: BC 84).<sup>47</sup>

There is no doubt that in the context of global Lutheranism the dimension of personal episkopé without the terminology and ordination of bishop is emphasised more than in the Finnish report: not all Lutheran churches have a classical episcopal structure. It is clear that a common Lutheran view is that the formulation of episkopé is a human tradition (*traditiones humanae*). This does not, however, exclude the activity of the Spirit involved in the process, so it is not merely an arbitrary choice. This is why the gifts of the Holy Spirit are invoked in the election and ordination of a bishop. From this perspective the ministry of bishop is not

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Träger nur der beratende Sachverständige oder der Trainer der Gemeinde (Fehldeutung von Eph 4,12a) oder der Sprecher oder Repräsentant der Vielen... Luther hat mit Recht dem Irrtum widersprochen, das Amtsträger sei ein Christ höherer Ordnung und besonderer geistlicher Qualifikation. Es gibt kein höheres Christsein als das, was die Taufe bewirkt... Luther hat die Ordination, also die Bestellung und Segnung zum Amt, nicht nur nicht abgelehnt, sondern sogar neu geordnet. „Diese mittelbare (nach der Apostelzeit durch Menschen geschehende) Berufung soll man nicht ändern, sondern großmachen wegen unserer Sektierer, die sie verachten und eine andere Berufung rühmen, nach der sie sich vom Geist zum Lehren getrieben fühlen...“... So heißt es im Augsburgischen Bekenntnis: „Gott hat das Predigtamt eingesetzt“ (Art. 5), und es „wird gelehrt, daß niemand in der Kirche öffentlich lehren oder predigen oder Sakrament reichen soll ohne ordentlichen Beruf“ (lateinische Fassung: nisi rite vocatus; Art. 14); und „die Bischöfe bzw. Pastoren“ haben „Gewalt und Befehl Gottes, das Evangelium zu predigen, die Sünden zu vergeben und zu behalten, und die Sakramente zu reichen und zu handeln“ (Art. 28).“

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Dulles/Lindbeck 1980, 165: “...trotz allem, was manche Lutheraner gedacht haben – nicht länger anzunehmen, daß der Widerstand gegenüber den Bischöfen, zu dem die CA autorisiert, auch einschließe, daß die historische bischöfliche Verfassung der Kirche rein menschlichen Ursprungs ist. Er kann sich unter der Führung göttlicher Vorsehung entwickelt haben und kann in seinem normalen und eigentlichen Wirken ein von Gott gewolltes Mittel sein zur Hilfe und zur Bewahrung der Kirche im Apostolischen Glauben.“

<sup>47</sup> CiG, art. 237.

necessary in the communion of Lutheran churches, although many Lutheran churches see it as a gift and will of God for them, as a sign of and support in keeping the right direction in Christian discipleship.<sup>48</sup>

The CiG's formulation for the understanding of episcopal ordination is based on the Swedish–Finnish tradition and influenced by the formulations of the Porvoo Common Statement (1992), for example. There are various models in the Lutheran world at present. This does not mean there are no elements in CiG that might also be used in the global Lutheran–Catholic dialogue and multilaterally (cf. BEM Ministry). CiG shows that a convergence and differentiated consensus are possible in the most essential questions based on an ecumenically open Lutheran theology.<sup>49</sup> For the Lutheran fathers the tradition of the early church in these questions was also important, although the Bible and the priority of the Gospel were the most important foundation.<sup>50</sup> For example, the Lutheran–Episcopal document *Sharing the Gifts of Communion* (2022) promisingly states from the perspective of Bavarian Lutherans: “TEC and the ELKB agree that the historic episcopate ‘can be locally adapted and reformed in the service of the gospel’“(SGC, § 18). In the past the LWF has also recommended ecumenically minded actions such as the reintroduction of episcopal succession and the use of the title of ‘bishop’.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Petrine Ministry*

Surprisingly, the German Lutheran response appears to want to dispute the Western ecclesial tradition of the primacy of the pope in the first millennium. For example, the Catholic–Orthodox dialogue document *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium* (2016) affirms:

16. In the West, the primacy of the see of Rome was understood, particularly from the fourth century onwards, with reference to Peter's role among the

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<sup>48</sup> GNC response, 4. Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 401: ‘Luther thus affirmed the rule of apostolic succession by way of the bishops as bearers of an office that came down from the apostles, and he even regarded this rule as unchangeable’.

<sup>49</sup> A good example of ecumenical vitality and courage from the perspective of the Lutheran understanding of ordained ministry is the statement by the internationally famous German Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg: ‘If in the doctrines that are contested today an understanding can be sought that robs the remaining differences of their divisive significance, then the Reformation churches may expect that the Roman Catholic Church will recognize the emergency that existed for the Reformers and hence the legitimacy of their ministries. Such a solution is conceivable only if the Protestant churches view their practice of ordination along the lines of the Lutheran confessional writings, i.e., as the expression of an emergency rule, and do not trace it back to the priesthood of all believers as the source of an authority by delegation... Ordination may not be replaced by a bureaucratic act of commissioning by church leaders and seminary presidents’ (Pannenberg 1998, 404).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Zitting 2020, 64: ‘Discussions on the nature of the episcopal office, albeit a divisive topic, have both fostered unity among church denominations and allowed the LWF and ECLF to preserve their confessional theologies. While both have clearly been engaged in accommodating the Anglican tradition, the changes in the two institutions have nevertheless been consistent with what 21st-century scholars and church historians have found about Luther's insights on ministry. Moreover, it seems that Lutherans have been able to reintegrate themselves with the development of the early church while still upholding the values characteristic to their confession: the demand for the equality of all Christians, oneness of ministerium and the fundamental priority of the gospel.’

<sup>51</sup> SGC, art. 18 <http://lutheran-episcopal.org/documents/bavaria2022.pdf> (read 21.11.2023); Zitting 2020, 62–63.

Apostles. The primacy of the bishop of Rome among the bishops was gradually interpreted as a prerogative that was his because he was successor of Peter, the first of the apostles. This understanding was not adopted in the East, which had a different interpretation of the Scriptures and the Fathers on this point.<sup>52</sup>

The Lutheran tradition grew within the Western Catholic tradition, starting as a reformed catholic movement. Lutherans were therefore part of the heritage in which the pope had a certain primacy, although there were different interpretations of this. Even in the ecumenical conciliar tradition the bishop of Rome's seat came first in order as the seat of Peter and Paul. Accordingly, the second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) stated in canon 3: "Because it is new Rome, the bishop of Constantinople is to enjoy the privileges of honour after the bishop of Rome".<sup>53</sup> In many cases the Eastern bishops also appealed to the bishop of Rome in disciplinary matters such as the deposition of a bishop.<sup>54</sup> The Eastern churches concede a primacy of honour to the church of Rome and its bishop, although they reject the larger claims formulated at Vatican II.<sup>55</sup>

Although the National Committee's response wishes to emphasise the importance of the distinction between the 'divine institution' or 'fundamental structure' and 'human traditions', it now neglects the possibility of examining the Petrine Ministry both from the perspective of the divinely instituted ministry to proclaim the gospel and from the human perspective in which it evaluates which arrangement is missionally the most beneficial solution.<sup>56</sup> If the pope were to have promoted the gospel and the doctrine of justification, it is difficult to imagine that Martin Luther would not have applauded his actions. After all, he seemed ready to give the primacy of honour to the pope.<sup>57</sup> Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* § 111:

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.christianity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.html> (read 21.11.2023)

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum02.htm> (read 21.11.2023)

<sup>54</sup> Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium, art. 19.

<http://www.christianity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.html> (read 21.11.2023) Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 420–421: 'If any Christian bishop can speak for the whole church in situations when this may be needed, it will be primarily the bishop of Rome. In spite of all the bitter controversies resulting from chronic misuse of the authority of Rome in power politics, there is here no realistic alternative.'

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Pannenberg 1998, 421.

<sup>56</sup> GNC response, 5. Cf. CiG, art. 262: 'The Reformers understood the concept of "divine institution" (*iure divino*) as encompassing all that was explicitly instituted by Christ in Holy Scripture, and all other institutions as "human institutions" (*iure humano*). However, they understood the institution of the apostolic ministry, and thus the ministry of the Church, as divinely instituted (*iure divino*) in the light of the Scripture. The Reformers' criticism was directed against those practices which they understood as contrary to the right teaching of the Gospel, and especially against the right understanding of the doctrine of justification. They would have accepted the office of the pope if he had supported their understanding of the proclamation of the Gospel.'

<sup>57</sup> Wenz 1997, 413 refers to the acceptance of the doctrine of justification as a precondition for positive evaluations about the pope by Luther. Cf. also Wenz 1997, 413: '...der episkopale Ehre vorrang des Bischofs von Rom, den anzuerkennen für Luther keine prinzipielle theologische Unmöglichkeit darstellt, als eine lediglich *iure humano* und nicht *iure divino* geltende Einrichtung zu betrachten sei.' Cf. also Pannenberg 1998, 421: 'The Lutheran Reformation never rules out in principle a ministry to protect Christian unity on the universal level of Christianity as a whole', and 429–431: 'The deeper reasons for the emergence of a Roman primacy ... may perhaps be seen already in the need, expressed in primitive Christianity's view of Peter, for an



The Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God. She is certainly a mystery rooted in the Trinity, yet she exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending any institutional expression, however necessary.<sup>58</sup>

Given that the pope clearly prioritises here the proclamation of the gospel and not the institutional expressions of the church, it is difficult to understand why in its response the German National Committee connects the support for the Petrine Ministry in the promotion of the proclamation of the gospel in word and deed with ontological ecclesiological questions regarding structures. Should not the priority here lie in the shared proclamation of the good news? It is possible on good grounds, especially after the JDDJ.

The statement agrees that Luther's sharp polemic against the papacy cannot be repeated today. Even Lutherans can today gratefully appreciate the popes' efforts in the ecumenical witness to the Christian faith. However, the German Lutherans see the core of the reformatory critique as still relevant: the pope's formal authority as the ultimately binding instance of decision making in articulating the authentic meaning of the biblical witness to the revelation in questions of faith and morality. The dogmas of the infallibility and jurisdiction of the pope in the First Vatican Council are cited as exemplifying this development. The GNC agrees that the Lutheran Churches also cannot ignore the task of doctrinal discernment. They seem to imply, however, that CiG uncritically accepts all the Roman Catholic Church's teaching concerning these questions.<sup>59</sup>

The answer to this is quite the contrary: no final answers are given in CiG regarding the Petrine Ministry, but the possibilities that have emerged in ecumenical discussions are highlighted for further discussion, even if initially in the light of the Lutheran hermeneutical tradition the situation seems mostly to provide only contradictions. There are at least converging outcomes in the light of doctrinal discussions so far, but the process needs to be continued.

### *The GNC summary*

The GNC statement acknowledges that 'Communion in Growth' is an expression of high ecumenical engagement. However, the response sees its possibilities as a stimulus for international dialogue as 'very limited'. It suggests that among its deficiencies is that the possibilities concerning the understanding of the 'apostolicity of the church' are insufficiently developed, and the theology of ministry and partly also the doctrine of the sacraments is 'problematic' and in any case 'not ready for a consensus in the Lutheran global communion' from the German perspective. If the CiG approach were the leading one, in the German

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authority that would be normative throughout the church and that would serve its unity. An office linked to such authority might indeed be beneficial as regards the unity of Christianity as a whole... as a representation of the unity of the whole church, it is not just an expression of human arbitrariness but a special instance of all church ministry as a ministry to the church's unity at every level of its life. ... [T]he public utterances and actions of the bishop of Rome command attention far beyond the confines of the Roman Catholic Church.'

<sup>58</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, art. 111.

<sup>59</sup> GNC response, 6.

context at least it would be feared that the JDDJ would also be brought into question afresh. The obvious differences in the interpretation of the Lutheran doctrinal heritage make it clear that an internal Lutheran clarification concerning these issues and questions is necessary. The Germans understand the Finnish document as a call to such a discussion. The German Lutherans affirm the use of ‘differentiated consensus’ as the fundamental method. Yet from the German perspective the consensus should not be formulated ‘one-sidedly’ based on the normative traditions, concepts, and linguistic worlds of the Catholic confession. They would like to see a ‘common language found which is just to both traditions’.<sup>60</sup>

### *Conclusions*

Many of the perceptions of the German national committee seem to follow a certain tendency which makes their conclusions misleading in the light of the actual formulations in *Communion in Growth*. In the background lies a certain tradition of interpretation which guides the conclusions without solid argumentation. There are also, however, positive and forward-looking perceptions and arguments. The ultimate wish to formulate the conclusions using a more inclusive language from the perspective of global Lutheranism is worth reflecting on, as is further dialogue in both the internal Lutheran and interconfessional contexts. The common goal is ultimately to find a joint path to a common declaration regarding the church, the Eucharist, and ministry.<sup>61</sup>

It is encouraging that the LWF German National Committee’s statement concerning the American Catholic–Lutheran *Declaration on the Way* (2015) supports the aim of such a declaration. They say that they

[e]ncourage the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Unity Council together to evaluate and test the possibilities and difficulties for a binding reception of the ecumenical knowledge regarding the themes ‘church’, ‘ministry’, and ‘Eucharist’ and to see if in the medium term a ‘Joint Declaration on the Church, Ministry, and Holy Supper’ can be worked out. Because of the inner connection of these three themes, it is already clear that they cannot be dealt with separately.<sup>62</sup>

The new ecumenical spirit that has been a reality since the 1960s ought to be more to the fore than appears to be the case in the German Lutheran response. After fifty years of theological dialogue the need to strengthen common missional efforts to proclaim the gospel in word and deed in Europe and globally is more urgent than ever. It is necessary to be together in witness and service in different contexts (cf. ecumenical imperatives, the Notre Dame statement 2019). Our Lord’s prayer for our unity and the reality of our missional task call us to take at least the following steps in future dialogue and cooperation:

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<sup>60</sup> GNC response, 6.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Wenz 2005, 198 sees it as a threat to Lutheran–Catholic relations if internal Lutheran positions are cemented and fixed so that the ‘Leuenberg’ and ‘Porvoo’ camps are seen as polarised fractions within global Lutheranism, although the Roman Catholic partners are more positive towards ‘Porvoo-style’ ecumenism and are more critical of the Leuenberg model. From this perspective the CPCE–PCPCU dialogue document on the Church and Church Communion is a valuable bridgebuilder.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.dnk-lwb.de/de/content/stellungnahme-zu-dem-us-amerikanischen-dokument-declaration-way-church-ministry-and> (read 1.3.2024)

- 1) To seek and find, if possible, expressions which balance the Catholic and Lutheran language worlds as they are used in consensus affirmations better from the perspective of global Lutheranism. The role of the already agreed international dialogue statements in addition to the JDDJ in the publication *From Conflict to Communion* (2013), for example, should also be clarified;
- 2) To clarify the question of how the sacramentality of the Church of the Triune God and its concrete elements are interrelated from the Lutheran perspective;
- 3) To clarify how the relationship between the ministry of bishop and the episkopé in general are connected;
- 4) To seek deliberately to overcome the sixteenth-century controversies and condemnations and the later developments so that a differentiated consensus regarding the Eucharist and ministry can be formulated using biblical, historical, and doctrinal arguments;
- 5) To tackle the questions regarding the ordination of women and the ecumenical understanding of the Petrine Ministry;
- 6) To bring the voices of the global south into the discussion;
- 7) To contribute tangibly to the process which asks what a joint declaration on the church, Eucharist, and ministry in 2030 as the next ecumenical step would look like, and what its realistic practical implications would be.