

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Church:
Towards a Common Vision
Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (2013)

A CATHOLIC RESPONSE

The Church: Towards a Common Vision

Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (2013)

A CATHOLIC RESPONSE

Introductory Appreciation

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has presented a convergence document addressing one of the most divisive issues that has led Christian communities to separate from one another over the course of history: their differing understandings of the nature and mission of the Church. The overcoming of such division and the restoration of unity was a principal concern of the Second Vatican Council. Its Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*[UR], expressed the Catholic conviction that division “openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel” (§1). For this reason, Pope John Paul II was able to state in one of the opening paragraphs of his ecumenical encyclical *Ut unum sint* (UUS): “At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself *irrevocably* to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the Spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the ‘signs of the times’” (UUS 3).

The official Vatican response to the Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* [BEM] (1987), stated “It is our conviction that the study of ecclesiology must come more and more into the centre of ecumenical dialogue. [...] We believe that without serious attention to the broader questions of ecclesiology there are disadvantages not only for the study and understanding of the content of BEM, but for our ecumenical progress as well” (*Catholic Response to BEM*, I. Introduction). Quotations such as the three just given are but a small sample of many official statements which suggest that the Catholic Church welcomes the results of the rather intense work of giving “serious attention to the broader questions of ecclesiology” which *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* [TCTCV] seeks to express.

A preliminary word should be said about the preparation of the Response that is to follow. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity consulted with both episcopal conferences and with theologians, and gave attention also to responses prepared by lay persons, academic study groups and ecclesial movements. These reports were gathered and analyzed by a small drafting team whose work was then submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for its observations and approval. This type of process, which can sometimes be rather lengthy, expresses an important aspect of the self-understanding of the Catholic Church. The voice of the laity, the special competence of theologians, and the guidance of those who have been called to exercise a unique doctrinal authority imparted to them through episcopal ordination, all collaborate in the discernment of the authentic interpretation of revealed truth. The following Response will reflect this self-understanding, as will be clear not only from its having drawn upon the voice of the people and of Catholic scholars but also from the various citations of and references to official Catholic teaching. Our response thus reflects the initial reception process of *TCTCV* that has been taking place in Catholic communities throughout the world, the continuance of which we intend to promote. Such an approach to reception and discernment seems to have been endorsed also by *TCTCV*§39.

Status and Importance of the Document

TCTCV is significant for several reasons. The first is the nature of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, which is of special importance because it involves theologians from virtually all theological traditions, Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Protestant (of many types) and Pentecostal. Although the Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, Catholic theologians appointed by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have participated fully, as voting members, in the Faith and Order Commission since 1968, working on all of its texts since then, including *TCTCV*. Popes have continually given their support to Faith and Order, and commented favourably on its work, as Pope John Paul II did on *BEM* in a number of addresses during the 1980s, and in his 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint* (§§42, 71, 45, 76). He opened his remarkable description of the Petrine ministry in that encyclical with a quotation from Faith and Order's Fifth World Conference, held in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, at which the process leading to *TCTCV* began in earnest (cf. *UUS* 89, note 148). While sometimes more tangible results are achieved, and perhaps can only be made, in bilateral dialogue, such as the 1999 Lutheran and Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, a multilateral dialogue can make progress on questions which might present initial difficulties to churches on different sides of a particular issue in a bilateral dialogue. Convergences discovered in multilateral dialogue, such as that made by *BEM* in 1982, and now by *TCTCV* in 2013, might be useful for communions in bilateral dialogue on those issues, since those same

communions are aware of the wide participation of representatives from various churches in the work of Faith and Order and some are even represented in the commission.

From a multilateral perspective, *TCTCV* deals with what is perhaps the central ecumenical question, the nature and mission of the Church. Many bilateral dialogues have dealt with ecclesiological questions. A multilateral approach, involving theologians from a broad range of Christian traditions, is able to give an indication of how widely the convergences it has uncovered are acknowledged across the Christian world. *TCTCV* is also ecumenically important because it stems from, and is in continuity with, the previous landmark text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, which it often cites, and with the official responses to *BEM* which identified key areas on ecclesiology for further study (cf. *TCTCV*, Preface). Its ecumenical importance stems, too, from the fact that *TCTCV* draws upon the progress of many bilateral dialogues regarding the Church, including a number involving the Catholic Church, thus giving some indication of progress being made in the broader ecumenical movement.

Faith and Order affirms that, like *BEM* before it, *TCTCV* is a “convergence” text, “that is, a text which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues considered, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study. Rather [it expresses] how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the Church, showing the progress that has been made and indicating work that still needs to be done” (*TCTCV*, Introduction). This description not only indicates how the Faith and Order Commission considers *TCTCV* to be a significant achievement, but also immediately suggests its limitations. While it presents a remarkable degree of common thinking on a wide range of important issues, it does not claim to have reached full consensus, the full agreement on all issues which is necessary in order to achieve full visible unity among the churches. Nevertheless, if the churches agree to the convergences presented in *TCTCV*, a very significant step forward in a continuing process toward visible unity will have been taken.

TCTCV takes up some of the major suggestions for future work by Faith and Order relating to ecclesiology made by the 1987 Catholic Response to *BEM*. These include the call for further clarity on sacrament and sacramentality, on apostolic tradition, and on the nature of authority in the Church (*Catholic Response to BEM*, pp.6–9). Developing a response to this new convergence text provides the Catholic Church with another opportunity to contribute to that degree of further convergence and agreement on doctrinal issues required for full visible unity. At the same time, it calls us to further reflection about what *TCTCV*§30, calls “a fundamental principle governing unity and diversity” – the statement appearing in the letter sent after the gathering of the disciples and their leaders in Jerusalem to resolve potential tensions within the primitive Christian community concerning whether Gentile Christians need observe Jewish legal prescriptions. The result

of that communal discernment was expressed in the following words: “For it has seemed to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials” (Acts 15:28). To what extent must this biblical injunction be part of the journey toward visible unity today?

Hopes and Objectives of the Text

The Faith and Order Commission expresses hope that this result of many years of dialogue will serve the churches “(1) by providing a synthesis of the results of ecumenical dialogue about important ecclesiological themes in recent decades, (2) by inviting them to appraise the results of this dialogue – confirming positive achievements, pointing out deficiencies and/or indicating areas that have not received sufficient attention; and (3) by providing an occasion for the churches to reflect upon their own understanding of the Lord’s will so as to grow towards greater unity” (*TCTCV*, Introduction).

Two distinct but deeply interrelated objectives are given as the rationale for requesting study and official responses to the material contained in *TCTCV*. “The first is renewal. As a multilateral ecumenical text, *The Church* cannot be identified exclusively with any one ecclesiological tradition. [...] the theological expressions and ecclesial experiences of many churches have been brought together in such a way that the churches reading this text may find themselves challenged to live more fully the ecclesial life. [...] The second objective is theological agreement on the Church” (*TCTCV*, Preface). These hopes and objectives offer Catholics the opportunity to entertain the proposal of an approach to ecumenical progress which has been designated with the name ‘receptive ecumenism’.

Receptive ecumenism is a process whereby churches to reflect, first of all, on what they may be able to learn and be enriched by from the thinking, life, and experience of communities from which they are currently divided. Without in any way calling into question the teaching of *Lumen gentium* [LG] 8, often reaffirmed in official documents, that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, can the “many elements of sanctification and of truth” to be found outside her confines offer insight and enrichment in the area of ecclesial reflection and practice to Catholics and, moreover, concerning what constitutes that unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17? *Ut unum sint* 10 not only quotes the text of *Lumen gentium* 8, to which we have just referred, but also cites another conciliar text concerning the fact that, “though we believe that [separated Churches and Communities], suffer from defects, they have by no means been deprived of significance and value in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church” (*UR* 3). Pope John Paul II related this fact to another teaching of *Unitatis redintegratio*: “The Second Vatican Council made it clear that

elements present among other Christians can contribute to the edification of Catholics: ‘Nor should we forget that whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brothers and sisters can contribute to our own edification’ (UR 4)” (UUS 48).

Uncovering Ecclesial Foundations Commonly Held

One of the values of *TCTCV* concerns the insistence by Popes John Paul II (UUS 22), Benedict XVI (General Audience, 18 January 2012), and Francis (*Evangelii gaudium [EG]* 246) that what unites Christians living in communities so long divided from one another is much more than what divides them. In particular, by the action of the Holy Spirit we are united in our faith in Jesus Christ, sent by the Father to reconcile us in him. *TCTCV* intends to show that common agreement can also be uncovered in the area of significant ecclesiological doctrines. In the formation processes that occur in every one of our churches, when comparing ourselves to others, is not the emphasis most often placed upon points of difference and disagreement? This new convergence text provides an opportunity to begin our ecclesiological assessment of one another with the many convictions, based on Scripture and Tradition and confirmed in ecumenical dialogue, that are held in common. These could then offer a positive and charitable foundation for addressing the questions about which we do not yet agree. The thirteen italicized paragraphs are presented in *TCTCV* as invitations to discover if and to what extent the convergence on or even agreement about a significant number of broad ecclesiological convictions might provide a new framework for viewing and, perhaps, resolving at least some of the issues that have proven so difficult to agree upon in the past.

One method employed in recent decades within the ecumenical movement might be described as the hermeneutical approach of seeking differentiating consensus. Just as Catholics have achieved a fundamental consensus on the core of the doctrine of justification by faith with Lutherans and, subsequently, with other Christian communities, by identifying what might be called the hierarchy of truths about justification by faith, to which diverse explanations of the central truths can be seen as compatible, there is no inherent reason why such an approach could not also be applied to ecclesiological doctrines. This need not endanger the Catholic conviction which Pope John Paul II expressed when he taught: “The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence to all the content of revealed faith in its entirety. [...] A ‘being together’ which betrayed the truth would thus be opposed both to the nature of God who offers his communion and to the need for truth found in the depths of the human heart” (UUS 18). But adherence to revealed faith in its entirety does not preclude a certain degree of diversity, even in the expression of that faith, as the Holy Father clarified: “Indeed, the element which

determines communion in truth is *the meaning of truth*. The expression of truth can take different forms” (*UUS* 19).

In *Ut unum sint* 38, Pope John Paul II wrote: “In this regard, ecumenical dialogue, which prompts the parties involved to question each other, to understand each other and to explain their positions to each other, makes surprising discoveries possible. Intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality. Nowadays we need to find the formula which, by capturing the reality in its entirety, will enable us to move beyond partial readings and eliminate false interpretations.” It seems that *TCTCV* has sought to achieve something similar to what Pope John Paul II has called for, on issues such as the relation of the need to struggle against sin, on the one hand, and the effect of grace producing holiness in the midst of the Church, on the other. No community denies the New Testament teachings about the need for ongoing conversion and, at the same time, the call to live and the possibility of living holy lives. Other examples could be mentioned, such as *TCTCV*'s rejection of placing the royal priesthood of the whole people of God conferred at baptism in contrast to a special ordained ministry. The convergence text claims that these simply cannot and must not be considered as mutually exclusive alternatives (§20).

General Aspects in Harmony with Catholic Thought

- Concerning the overall structure and content of *TCTCV*, it can be said that in many points one can see harmony with Catholic doctrine about the Church. In general, there seem to be few points in which it diverges from Catholic doctrine in such a way as to close the door to future dialogue. The major points of divergence fall into the category of the “invitational paragraphs.” There are no glaring divergences in the main body of the text. This point is itself highly noteworthy and lends credence to the very notion of a “convergence text.” Obviously, the structure of the Faith and Order text is the fruit of an astonishingly patient, dialogical, and arduous process. As a result, the division into four central chapters on “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church,” “The Church of the Triune God,” “The Church: Growing in Communion,” and “The Church: In and For the World” has an underlying logic. This structure makes for an easy and highly fruitful comparison with the ecclesiological teachings of the Second Vatican Council.
- In general, the Commission on Faith and Order in *TCTCV* focuses upon the fact that Christ’s prayer for unity implies that Christians have a responsibility to work for unity if they are to be true to an expression in the prayer that all of them frequently pray, having been so taught by Jesus himself: “Thy will be done.” This can be seen as reflecting an important principle of Catholic ecclesiological doctrine, that is, that

certain aspects of Church life are to be considered as determined by God's will. This was conveyed in Catholic theology by the traditional Latin expression *iure divino*. Of course, *TCTCV* was not able, at this stage of multilateral dialogue, to apply this principle to issues such as the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, or to the ordination of women. But ultimately, once it is agreed that God has a design for the nature and mission of the Church as *TCTCV* proposes, further reflection on how God's will applies to such issues needs to guide our dialogue about them.

- The focus not only on God's plan but also on the contemporary world stimulates all churches to become more attentive to the urgency of the visible unity of Christians. The underlying theological perspective that puts the accent on the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus for the salvific transformation of the world, presents the Church as a sign and instrument at the service of the great plan of God (*oikonomia*), the divine mission that aims at reaching every person and every expression of social life.
- *TCTCV* recognizes that communion derives ultimately from the salvific activity of the Holy Trinity, which makes possible the communion of human persons in the Church (Chapter II). This is brought about unsurpassably by the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As is well known, the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 for the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, identified the ecclesiology of communion as one of the Council's dominant themes. The theme of communion is profoundly related to the Council's understanding of unity, as expressed in a special way in *Unitatis redintegratio 2*, which states: "It is thus, under the action of the Holy Spirit, that Christ wills His people to increase, and He perfects His people's fellowship in unity (*communione perficit in unitate*): in their confessing the one faith, celebrating divine worship in common, and keeping the fraternal harmony of the family of God." The 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* places the ecclesiology of communion at the heart of the Catholic understanding and practice of ecumenism. Moreover, the seemingly unhesitating acceptance by *TCTCV* of the view that the three essential elements of communion concern faith, worship, and ministry or service is especially welcome. If many churches, through their processes of reception, can accept this way of describing the fundamental elements of communion, a major step forward will have been taken.
- The understanding of the Church as communion which finds its source and its supreme model in the mystery of the Holy Trinity also has an immediate and strong anthropological relevance. As *TCTCV* §1 states: "According to the Bible, man and woman were created in God's image (cf. Gen 1:26–27), so bearing an inherent capacity for communion (in Greek *koinonia*) with God and with one another." Thanks to this, it is easier to see how the Church is placed at the service of the person, of the whole of humanity and of the entire creation.

- The text emphasizes the essentially missionary nature of the Church, in its plea for Christian unity (Chapter II), in its dynamism as “the pilgrim people moving towards the kingdom of God (Chapter III),” and in its insistence on the Church as an agent of God’s love, expressed in evangelization, in interreligious encounter, and in a more vigorous engagement with social realities (Chapter IV). This ecclesiological theme has been at the heart of Catholic doctrine in texts such as *Lumen gentium*, *Ad gentes*, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris missio*, and *Evangelii gaudium*. For decades the theme of a “new evangelization” has been encouraged in official teaching and has guided pastoral activity in the Catholic Church.
- Using as its point of departure both Scripture and Tradition, *TCTCV* aims at elaborating an ecclesiological vision that could be widely shared, coherent but not uniform, respecting legitimate diversity, but at the same time, attentive to acknowledging the divergent points that require further study.
- The accent placed on the co-responsibility of all the baptized and on the common priesthood, together with the attention dedicated to the specific role of ministry, conceived (in line with *BEM*) in its triple dimensions – personal, collegial, communitarian – is significant and may be considered as in harmony with recent initiatives of Pope Francis in his promotion of needed reforms within the Catholic Church.
- The underlining of the *kenosis* of Christ, as a paradigm for ecclesial life and for the ecumenical journey in particular, is an indispensable reference point for an authentic exercise of ministry (cf. §49). The explicit treatment of authority, including the exercise of authority at the universal level by ecumenical synods and by a ministry of primacy, are helpful passages which hopefully will open a path for more substantial agreement about these themes in the future.
- The invitation extended to the churches to live as a people on a journey implies constant conversion and renewal (*Ecclesia semper reformanda*), a theme underlined by Vatican II in *Unitatis redintegratio* 7 and by Pope John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* 16: “In the teaching of the Second Vatican Council there is a clear connection between renewal, conversion and reform.”
- We appreciate the insistence that unity is above all a gift of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit and therefore the choice of emphasizing that the Church of Christ is one, rather than acquiescing in the multiplicity of churches. Catholic ecclesiology fully shares the conviction that the goal of the ecumenical movement is full visible unity, which is affirmed several times in the text, but which needs to be explored in a much more complete and adequate way.

A Resource to Assist the Church *in via*, in her Ongoing Journey Towards Unity

Obviously the above given points of complementarity with Catholic doctrine do not exhaust Catholic teaching about the Church. The reader should be advised that the Catholic appraisal of *TCTCV* which we offer here intends to respond to the specific nature of that convergence text, which makes no claim to deal with all relevant aspects of ecclesiology but rather to build upon some fundamental ecclesiological convergences which have emerged in the churches' responses to *BEM* and in subsequent ecumenical dialogues about the nature and mission of the Church. Thus, if our Response does not take up some quite specific themes, such as, for example, the teaching about the ministry of the successor to Peter as expressed in Vatican I and II, in *Ut unum sint*, and in the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith's reflection on the ministry of the successor of Peter (1998), it should not be presumed that these topics are not of great importance, some even considered essential by the Catholic Church for the reestablishment of visible unity. But *TCTCV* does offer, in its harvesting of Scripture, Tradition, and the results of multi- and bilateral dialogues on ecclesiological themes, a valuable compendium of the progress that has been made in uncovering greater common ground in ecclesiology. Such common ground may hopefully serve as a platform for further agreement during our present intermediate state in which the churches are "on the road" (*in via*) toward that full visible unity which constitutes the aim of the WCC and of the Faith and Order Commission, and which we believe must remain the essential goal of the ecumenical movement. Our hope is that the further knowledge and reception of this text and its use in theological faculties and in the formation programs of all of our communities, not only involved in the preparation for ordained ministry and other forms of pastoral service but also in the widest possible scope of the membership of our communities, will enliven, in the years ahead, the aspiration and commitment of all Christians to act in promoting the more complete realization of Christ's prayer that all his followers be one.

CHAPTER I: God's Mission and the Unity of the Church

In the context of the entire document, which can be considered by the Catholic Church as a “convergence” document, the first chapter stands for the remarkable level of convergence, which can be regarded as reaching almost a ‘consensus’.¹ Such a substantial accord is particularly meaningful as the chapter provides a strong framework for the content of the whole document.

The focus of the chapter – highlighting the Trinitarian foundation of the Church, its missionary nature rooted in the *missio Dei*, the ministry of Jesus Christ who manifests the Kingdom of God, the work of the Holy Spirit who nurtures communion within the Church, the vocation of the Church to spread the Gospel and be an instrument of God’s love for the world, and the call to unity – reflects Catholic teaching about the Church as it has been expressed in documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly in *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et spes*, and *Ad gentes*, as well as in some more recent Encyclicals such as *Dominum et vivificantem* and *Redemptoris missio* by Pope John Paul II and *Evangelii gaudium* by Pope Francis.

Many statements affirmed by *TCTCV* – both in their content and formulation – can be fully endorsed by the Catholic Church; in light of the principle of the “hierarchy of truths” it can be affirmed that the more substantial aspects of the life and mission of the Church present a significant deep convergence, even sometimes consensus, with Catholic theology.

Some statements of this chapter, however, need further clarification or reflection in order to affirm such convergence; most of them, however, refer to less foundational aspects and therefore do not affect significantly the general positive evaluation about the level of convergence of Chapter I.

A. The Church in the Design of God

The first part of the chapter presents such a strong convergence on the most fundamental theological truths about the Church that the first statements of *TCTCV* can be read in parallel with the main affirmations of the Second Vatican Council regarding the nature and mission of the Church.

1. Responses sent to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity from Episcopal Conferences, ecumenical bodies and theologians highlighted the strong substantial convergence, describing it in very positive terms.

The most fundamental convergence is the Trinitarian origin of the Church: the Church exists by the grace of God as part of His design for all creation and plays a decisive role in the economy of salvation; its mission is rooted in and flourishes from the *missio Dei*.

TCTCV affirms that: “[...] the Church and its mission is rooted in the vision of God’s great design (or ‘economy’) for all creation: the ‘kingdom’ which was both promised by and manifested in Jesus Christ”. Even after the fall, which damaged our relationship with God, He continued to offer to human beings His *koinonia* which “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 its life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry” (*TCTCV*§1).

The statement expresses the same understanding of the Church as affirmed in the Conciliar Dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*: “The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men [and women] to a participation of the divine life. Fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave men [and women] to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation, in view of Christ, the Redeemer [...]. He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ” (*LG* 2).

The Decree *Ad gentes* (*AG*) on the missionary activity of the Church reaffirms the same teaching, framing it more explicitly within the missionary dimension of the Church rooted in the Trinity stating that: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. [...] it pleased God to call men [and women] to share His life, not just singly, apart from any mutual bond, but rather to mold them into a people in which His sons, once scattered abroad, might be gathered together (cf. John 11:52)” (*AG* 2).

The affirmation that the Church is rooted in the Trinitarian Mystery, brings it to the very heart of the mystery of the *koinonia* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *Koinonia* is the source of the life and mission of the Church, it impels Christians to be a sign of such *koinonia* for the world. The Catholic Church recognizes a deep convergence on the understanding of the Church as communion. The document *TCTCV* affirms: “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” (*TCTCV*§1). The truth that the *koinonia* of the Trinity is the source and, in an analogous way, the model of the *koinonia* that human beings can manifest among themselves is not only strongly emphasized by Catholic documents, but also clearly linked with the need to foster unity among Christians (cf. also comments on *TCTCV*§8); in the words of Pope John Paul II:

“The faithful are *one* because, in the Spirit, they are in *communion* with the Son and, in him, share in his *communion* with the Father: “Our *fellowship* is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3). [...] To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father’s plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ’s prayer: ‘*Ut unum sint*’” (UUS 9).

There is also an important convergence in the affirmation that the ministry of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, manifests the Kingdom of God. The document *TCTCV* provides (cf. §§2 and 4) a sound biblical description of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and the way he called his disciples to be a “community of witness,” a “community of worship”, a “community of discipleship” proclaiming the Gospel to the world (*TCTCV*§2). The same emphasis on the “word”, “works” and “presence” of Christ to make the Kingdom manifest on earth is found in *Lumen gentium* (3 and 5), as is the recognition of the key elements of the Christian community, which are intertwined and could, in fact, also be listed in a different order: discipleship, worship and witness.

Following the teaching and the example of Jesus, the proclamation of the Kingdom and evangelization is the primary vocation and mission of the Church (cf. *TCTCV*§4 with *LG* 3 and 5, and also *AG* 6 and 9). The proclamation of the Word and evangelization, the liturgy and Eucharistic worship, prayers, charity and solidarity with the poor, commitment to justice and peace and a lifestyle shaped by the Gospel are elements through which the Church fulfils its mission (cf. *TCTCV*§4; *LG* 5 and 17; *AG* 6–9). This shared vision of some of the fundamental dimensions of the mission of the Church is a further significant convergence.

The Holy Spirit as a vital reality of the Church, and the experience of Pentecost at the heart of the Church is a fundamental truth affirmed both by the Faith and Order document and by Vatican II documents: “The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the morning of Pentecost for the purpose of equipping them to begin the mission entrusted to them” (*TCTCV*§3). The Conciliar Dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* affirms: “When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father” (*LG* 4), then offering a profound description of the work of the Spirit who descends upon the disciples empowering them for their mission.

The Trinitarian approach – as well as the biblical foundation – are very much appreciated and constitute the unifying principle of Chapter I; at the same time a deeper reflection on the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom, as well as a wider

consideration of the presence and role of the Holy Spirit in the community of the faithful would have been welcome in the *TCTCV* text. It is the Holy Spirit, in fact, who guides the faithful to the whole truth, nurtures in them unity in diversity, dwells in them and adorns them with His fruits and gifts (cf. *LG* 4 and 12).

B. The Mission of the Church in History

The second part of the chapter also presents many similarities and convergences with the Catholic perspective on this issue, especially in presenting history as the place where the Church is called to fulfil its mission by virtue of the incarnational aspect of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes [GS]* affirms regarding Christians: “United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man [and woman]. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds” (*GS* 1).

The document *TCTCV* affirms that the Church, in its task of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and making disciples in every corner of the earth, has sometimes encountered difficulties (hindrances or even resistance and betrayals) and challenges, especially in bringing the Gospel to different contexts and cultures (cf. *TCTCV*§5); at times we Christians, as messengers, have been faithful up to martyrdom, at times we have failed to bring the good news with due respect (cf. *TCTCV*§6). Catholics appreciate that the document recognizes so many Christian martyrs. We also appreciate that the document recognizes that Christians were not always prompt or even able to bear due witness to the Gospel; Vatican II documents acknowledge as well the difficulties and possible failures that the Church can meet in this task (cf. *AG* 6 and 13).

In a world that is increasingly and dramatically in need of healing and reconciliation, faithfulness to the Gospel and attentiveness to the ways in which it is announced must be a constant concern for all Christians. Catholics encourage one another to recognize failures that they were responsible for, as well as expectations and challenges they were not able to meet. This has been the inspiration for the Catholic Church asking forgiveness. Various Popes have addressed different categories of people, in many different ways and contexts, to ask forgiveness on behalf of the whole Catholic Church.² In a more

2. It is worth remembering Pope Paul VI asking for forgiveness during the Second Vatican Council and during the solemn celebration of the Abolition of the excommunication with the Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras I; as well, Pope John Paul II, who asked forgiveness more than 100 times in public speeches in various circumstances; and Pope Benedict XVI, who more than once made his own the words of Pope John Paul II; and finally Pope Francis who has asked forgiveness in a very personal way from the communities he has visited.

specific way, the celebration of the Great Jubilee of 2000, precisely because of the meaning of the Jubilee, has been the occasion for the Catholic Church to reflect more deeply on the significance and the implications of forgiveness and mercy, purification and reconciliation, and which also led to the publication of the document *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* by the International Theological Commission in 1999. During the Great Jubilee a privileged moment to make a solemn plea for forgiveness was the Day of Pardon on 12 March 2000, when Pope John Paul II invited: “*Let us forgive and ask forgiveness!* While we praise God who, in his merciful love, has produced in the Church a wonderful harvest of holiness, missionary zeal, total dedication to Christ and neighbour, we cannot fail to recognize *the infidelities to the Gospel committed by some of our brethren*, especially during the second millennium. Let us ask pardon for the divisions which have occurred among Christians, for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken towards the followers of other religions. Let us confess, even more, *our responsibilities as Christians for the evils of today*. We must ask ourselves what our responsibilities are regarding atheism, religious indifference, secularism, ethical relativism, the violations of the right to life, disregard for the poor in many countries. We humbly ask forgiveness for the part which each of us has had in these evils by our own actions, thus helping to disfigure the face of the Church” (Pope John Paul II, *Homily. Day of Pardon*. 12 March 2000).

TCTCV continues its reflection by singling out some challenges that the Church today – in a world that is in constant evolution and change – is still facing, such as: religious pluralism, secular culture, the development of means of communication, as well as the appearance of the “emerging churches” and the need of re-evangelization (cf. *TCTCV*§7). The careful and attentive listening to the world and to the “signs of the times” has always been a concern for the Catholic Church, particularly after the Second Vatican Council. A common reflection on these issues is always welcome and should be encouraged. As a specific Catholic contribution to the issue, some perspectives are offered to address areas (not developed in *TCTCV*) which deserve deeper consideration.

TCTCV§7 could have been a little more nuanced when affirming that “the Church faces the challenge of a radical decline in membership”: while it is true that the global secular culture affects Church membership in many countries, this cannot be considered a worldwide trend as in many parts of the world the Church is very vital.

The word “church” is sometimes used in the document in a theologically imprecise way and raises some terminological questions: a) the expression “new way of being the Church” – used to describe the “emerging Churches” (*TCTCV*§7) – does not seem appropriate as it is vague and gives the impression that we can make the Church, whereas we receive the Church as a gift from God; b) the expressions “Church/Churches”,

“Church/church”, “forming/establishing Christian Communities” (*TCVTC* §§5, 6 and 7) need to be further explained in their different meanings.

From a Catholic perspective, the term “church” applies to the Catholic Church in communion with the Bishop of Rome. It also applies to Churches which are not in visible communion with the Catholic Church but have preserved the apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, remaining true particular Churches. Other Christian communities which have not preserved the valid episcopacy and Eucharist are called “Ecclesial communities”.³

On a deeper level, a theological reflection on the transformative power of the Gospel could have been included. Because of its rootedness in the Trinity, the Church is transcendent, but its mission is to be the “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (cf. Mt 5:13–16) so as to transform the world from within. The Church must constantly be vigilant, even self-critical, about its effectiveness in spreading the everlasting freshness and the transformative power of the Gospel to every context, bringing the hope of Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI affirmed: “Again, we find ourselves facing the question: what may we hope? A self-critique of modernity is needed in dialogue with Christianity and its concept of hope. In this dialogue Christians too, in the context of their knowledge and experience, must learn anew in what their hope truly consists, what they have to offer to the world and what they cannot offer. Flowing into this self-critique of the modern age there also has to be a self-critique of modern Christianity, which must constantly renew its self-understanding setting out from its roots” (*Spe salvi* 22)

A further area to be considered is the need – particularly in contemporary times – for a proclamation of the Gospel that will be, first and foremost, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. To evangelize is to shape a personal, intimate discipleship with the Lord. Encountering Christ, and being transformed by His love, will enable his disciples to authentically encounter their neighbours in their hopes and needs, and to offer a credible witness to the world in justice, solidarity and charity, thus being accountable both to the Gospel and to the world. In the words of Pope Francis: “The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? [...] What then happens is that ‘we speak of what we have seen and heard’ (1 Jn 1:3). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the

3. Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (6 August 2000), §17.

heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us.” (EG 264).⁴

As a concluding remark on this part of the chapter, it is important to note that Christians have always affirmed the strong conviction that, despite all difficulties, the Glory of God will be manifested. The affirmation of *TCTCV* that: “[...] God’s grace, more powerful than human sinfulness, was able to raise up true disciples and friends of Christ in many lands and establish the Church within the rich variety of many cultures” (*TCTCV*§6) echoes the words of *Lumen gentium* that the Church: “By the power of the risen Lord ... is given strength that it might, in patience and in love, overcome its sorrows and its challenges, both within itself and from without, and that it might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light” (*LG* 8).

C. The Importance of Unity

The last part of this chapter constitutes a very important section as it makes the vital connection between unity and mission, rooted in the biblical vision, and oriented towards the need to bear witness to Jesus Christ before the world. The concluding paragraphs also raise the fundamental question about the vision and the criteria for unity.

The most fundamental convergence is found in the affirmation that unity among Christians is vital for fulfilling the Church’s mission of proclaiming the good news of reconciliation in the Lord, and that this is a biblical mandate (cf. *TCTCV*8). Unity is a gift from God which calls upon human responsibility to preserve it.

The Catholic Church, since the Second Vatican Council, and increasingly in its recent documents, has emphasized the importance of unity and the link between the unity of the Church and the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel of salvation, as clearly stated by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* [*EN*]: “As evangelizers, we must offer Christ’s faithful not the image of people divided and separated by unedifying quarrels, but the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and

4. Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, focuses this personal dimension of encountering Christ in the experience of the pilgrims during the Jubilee year and describes the legacy of the Jubilee in terms of “the *contemplation of the face of Christ*. [...] ‘We wish to see Jesus’ (*Jn* 12:21) [...] Like those pilgrims of two thousand years ago, the men and women of our own day – often perhaps unconsciously – ask believers not only to ‘speak’ of Christ, but in a certain sense to ‘show’ him to them. And is it not the Church’s task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium?” (*NMI* 15–16).

disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church [...]. The division among Christians is a serious reality which impedes the very work of Christ” (EN77).

Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical on the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church *Ut unum sint* fervently calls all Christians to be one, reminding us of the scandal of divisions among us, not only from the perspective of evangelization, but also from the more fundamental perspective of doxology: “In the verse of John’s Gospel which is ecumenism’s inspiration and guiding motif – ‘that they may all be one [...] so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (Jn 17:21) – the phrase *that the world may believe* has been so strongly emphasized that at times we run the risk of forgetting that, in the mind of the Evangelist, unity is above all for the glory of the Father” (UUS 98).

The Catholic Church appreciates the clear and honest way in which §§9 and 10 raise the question of visible unity and point to the difficulties that ecumenical reflection still has to face in order to reach a convergence in this area. *TCTCV* affirms: “Visible unity requires the churches to be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed (381) calls the ‘one, holy, catholic, apostolic church.’ This recognition, in turn, may in some instances depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry within any given community. This represents a significant challenge for churches in their journey towards unity” (*TCTCV*§9). The document then presents the major ecclesiological positions held by the various Christian traditions (*TCTCV*§10).

From a Catholic perspective, mutual recognition is not sufficient to achieve full visible unity. This is why the affirmation that the mutual recognition of the churches may “depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry” (*TCTCV*§9) needs to be clarified (“developments” would have been a more appropriate word). Catholics appreciate that churches have been called to change; however, from a Catholic perspective some things can be subject to change, while others cannot. Discernment here is extremely necessary so as to reflect on what change really is and to what extent it can take place. The Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* explicitly urges us “to undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform” (*UR* 4) in order to be faithful to Christ’s will and to be meaningful for the world. This was, in fact, the major concern for the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, as expressed by Pope John XXIII in his opening speech to the Council, *Gaudet mater ecclesia*. He reminded the Conciliar Fathers that the Council had “not to be concerned only with antiquity” because “the Christian, catholic and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciences in the faithful” in “perfect conformity to the ancient doctrine”, but also “measured in the forms and proportions of a Magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character”. It must be affirmed that the unchangeable deposit of faith should never be excluded from its historical

formulation and expression. Similarly, in different local contexts there can exist different liturgical rites, disciplines, and forms of spirituality and Christian life that do not diminish the unity of the Church but rather reveal its complex beauty. Pope John XXIII, addressing the issue of Christian unity in his Encyclical *Ad Petri cathedram* strongly affirmed: “the common saying, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors, must be recalled with approval: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity” (*Ad Petri cathedram* 72). The Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* further specifies that: “All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth” (*UR* 4).

Regarding the different ecclesiological positions delineated in the document (*TCTCV* §10), the Catholic Church’s understanding is clearly expressed in the Conciliar Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure” (*LG* 8). Although the Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* reaffirms the Catholic conviction that only the Catholic Church is the “all-embracing means of salvation” (*UR* 3) – meaning that none of the essential ecclesial elements is missing in the Catholic Church⁵ – it better qualifies the ecclesial value of the elements of truth and sanctification that can be found outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: “Some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church [...]. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ” (*UR* 3).

Pope John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* significantly reaffirmed these teachings, emphasizing that those elements “constitute the objective basis of the communion, albeit imperfect, which exists between them and the Catholic Church. To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them” (*UUS* 11). “[...] It is not that beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community there is an ecclesial vacuum. Many elements of great value (*eximia*), which in the Catholic Church are part of the fullness of the means of salvation and of the gifts of grace which make up the Church, are also found in the other Christian Communities” (*UUS* 13). These statements show that the Magisterium of the Catholic Church clearly recognizes that the visible boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church are not coterminous

5. This is the sense of the expression “fullness of the elements of sanctification and truth” (*UR* 3) that, according to Catholic teaching, is found in the Catholic Church.

with the boundaries of the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’ Church as professed in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed.

At the conclusion of Chapter I, the Faith and Order Commission addresses key questions: “How can we identify the Church which the Creed calls one, holy, catholic and apostolic? What is God’s will for the unity of this Church?” (*TCTCV* §10, Italics).

These are fundamental questions that deserve ongoing reflection and discussion. *TCTCV* represents a great deal of shared insights about the Church, as expressed with such concepts as *missio Dei* and *koinonia*, which provide some important criteria for mutual recognition. On the other hand, however, *TCTCV* does not claim to give all the criteria for full visible unity; it calls us and invites us, building on the common shared elements, to move to more specific criteria that are necessary for full visible unity. Reaching agreement on the criteria for the mutual recognition of ‘full ecclesiality’ would significantly advance our journey together towards visible unity. The Catholic Church strongly encourages the Faith and Order Commission to continue the discussion, in the conviction that the Responses from the other Christian traditions to *TCTCV* will offer a valid help in fostering the necessary reflection.

Chapter I has shown that there is a great deal of agreement on the topic of God’s mission and the unity of the Church.

CHAPTER II

The Church and the Triune God

A. Discerning God's Will for the Church

Certain important ecclesiological convictions on which many churches today are united are identified and highlighted in this section. These are based upon Scripture, although some pertinent testimony from witnesses such as patristic writers or ecumenical councils is also cited. This is necessary and opportune in order to describe adequately the mystery of the Church as a plurality of ecclesiological perspectives that are compatible with unity, without denying the bounds of legitimate diversity.

The Church, as a reflection of the communion of the triune God, is called to manifest in this world the salvation and mercy of God made present in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Its mission is to make Christ known. Some New Testament texts use the term *mysterion* to designate both the salvific plan of Christ (Eph 1:9; 3: 4–6) and the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:32; Col 1:24–28). This section on “the mystery of the Church” has many parallels with *Lumen gentium* and other ecclesiological texts of Vatican II.

Welcome is the significant convergence here with *Dei verbum [DV]* on the acknowledgement of the normative status of Scripture and the “great importance” of the “living Tradition” of the Church. The Conciliar text states: “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God, as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit” (*DV*9). Magisterial teaching on tradition offers something that is not offered in *TCTCV*: “Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.” This opening section of *TCTCV* also recalls Pope John Paul II’s widely appreciated formulation of the need to study together “the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God” (*UUS* 79).

The following four sections, namely “The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*”, “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World”, “Communion in Unity and Diversity” and “Communion of Local Churches” emphasize that the Church is an effective means of communion with God and among human beings. This dovetails with *Lumen gentium*’s famous description of the Church as “a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people” (*LG* 1).

B. The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*

The Initiative of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The first of these subdivisions affirms the initiative of God, the Father and the Word and the Holy Spirit, who generates the Church. The biblical notion of *koinonia* becomes central to the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the Church, although it would have been of more assistance had it been developed in a more extensive manner in the document. It reiterates *Lumen gentium*'s stress on the people of God as well as the vocation of the whole people of God to share the offices of Christ. The definition of the Church as "a community that hears and proclaims the word of God" (TCTCV§14) echoes the description given by the Second Vatican Council in the opening words of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei verbum*, "Hearing the word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently."

Mary is seen as a model for all believers in her reception of the Word in faith and her openness to the work of the Spirit in her life (TCTCV§15). Such a consideration of Mary within the framework of God's initiative in establishing the Church resonates well with the Second Vatican Council's decision to include its Marian doctrine within an ecclesiological setting. Mary as a symbol and model for the Church and the individual Christian connects well with *Lumen gentium*, which presents Catholic Marian doctrine in Chapter VIII as a conclusion to its account of ecclesiology (cf. LG 63–64; ARCIC report on Mary; Groupe des Dombes). Furthermore, this reference to Mary recalls the 1990 study document of Faith and Order, entitled *Church and World: Unity and the Life of the Church in the World*, that highlights her role as recipient of the Word of God, as a contemplative and faithful disciple, a witness at the foot of the cross and a companion of the disciples at Pentecost. All of these themes remain important to contemporary Catholic teaching about Mary. Pope John Paul II writes: "If the mystery of the Word made flesh enables us to glimpse the mystery of the divine motherhood and if, in turn, contemplation of the Mother of God brings us to a more profound understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation, then the same must be said for the mystery of the Church and Mary's role in the work of salvation" (*Redemptoris Mater* 30).

Reference to the Holy Spirit is a key factor for the journey together toward a common goal of visible unity. If all the churches are faithful to the promptings of the Holy Spirit within their own communities, then those promptings will draw all Christians into unity in the fullness of time. At the Second Vatican Council, it was affirmed "under the action of the Holy Spirit, that Christ wills His people to increase, and He perfects His people's fellowship in unity: in their confessing the one faith, celebrating divine worship in common, and keeping the fraternal harmony of the family of God" (UR 2). This

pneumatological aspect is central because the Holy Spirit guides the whole unfolding of salvation history to its final recapitulation where God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28), an indivisible unity.

The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God

The threefold characterization of God's people as prophetic, priestly, and royal is briefly stated and it is asserted that all members of the Church share in the corresponding functions. Vatican II also used this classic threefold distinction to describe the life and activities of all Christians as well as the functions of the ordained ministry. This triple function of the ministry is essential for the life and mission of the Church in the world. These three functions correspond to what Chapter III will later identify as the essential elements of communion, that is faith, worship and service. Vatican II made this threefold account familiar to Catholics when it applied it to the activities of the people of God as a whole (*LG* 10–12), the hierarchy (*LG* 25–27), the laity (*LG* 34–36), and the presbyterate (*Presbyterorum ordinis* 4–6).

This section starts with a brief treatment of the relationship of the Church to Israel (§17), stating both the genuine newness of the new covenant, but also the decisive importance in God's plan of salvation of the covenant with the people of Israel, to whom he will always remain faithful (cf. Rom 11:11–36). This is fundamental. It is impossible to understand fully the nature of the Church without understanding her relationship to Israel, because this relationship is part of her very identity. *Nostra aetate* [NA] asserts that Christians discover their links to the “stock of Abraham” when they “[search] the mystery of the Church” (NA 4; see also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 839). As Pope John Paul II expressed it, Judaism “is not ‘extrinsic’ to us but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion”.⁶

However, for this reason this relationship should have been explained more fully and more precisely. Indeed, Israel is the first to be called “assembly (*qahal-ekklesia*)” (Num 20:4; Deut 23:1ff; Neh 13:1; see also *LG* 9), “community” (Ex 12:3.6; Lv 4:13; 9:5) and, of course, “people of God” (Judg 20:2; 2 Sam 14:13). Israel is the first royal priesthood (Ex 19:5–6). The Church is not the “messianic” or “new people of God” (*LG* 9) by replacing Israel, but by bringing together Jews and Gentiles, that is by being both *ecclesia ex circumcissione* and *ecclesia ex gentibus*. More specifically, the Church is the people in whom the Gentiles are made co-heirs (sun-klèronoma) to the promises of Israel (Eph 3:6). The Church “draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree” (NA 4) onto

6. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Address in the Roman Synagogue, 13 April 1986.

which the Gentiles have been grafted (Rom 11:16–21). In this movement, the first people of God maintains a specific status, since, according to the prophecies, the nations come to Zion (Is 2:2–3; Jr 16:19–21; Mi 4:1–4) and not vice-versa. This is why we do not simply pray for mankind to discover Christ but, as the Catholic Church expresses it during the Easter Vigil: “We pray that the whole world may become children of Abraham and inherit the dignity of Israel’s birthright.”⁷

For this reason, the Church is called to be, still now and not only at its origin, in a living relationship with the Jewish people. Since it touches a dimension that is interior to the identity of the Church, this relationship is not to be considered strictly speaking as “inter-religious” but as “intra-familiar”.⁸ One of the issues at stake is the full integrity of the unity of the people of God. The parting of the ways in the first centuries within the chosen people between the majority of Jews who did not believe in Jesus as Messiah and those who did, and then between Judaism and Christianity, is often considered to be the first wound to this unity and the source of all following divisions in the Church.⁹ If this is the case, in a mysterious way, the full unity of the Church will not come about without healing the original wound, without reconciliation with the people of the old covenant.

A fuller vision of the people of God would give even more substance to what follows (§18): an emphasis on the responsibility of all believers, of all members of the people, to participate in the life and mission of the community, a description of the interrelation between those who are ordained and the other faithful and a reference to BEM’s explanation of the essential tasks of the ordained as “a ministry of word, sacrament and oversight”. This resonates well with Vatican II, where the triad prophet–priest–king is a fundamental structuring principle of chapters III and IV of *Lumen gentium*.

The growing ecumenical agreement on the ministry is summarized with a welcome insistence that “the royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet 2:9) and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the Church, and not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives.” This was also emphasized in *Lumen gentium* (§10), which, while noting a difference in kind not in degree, in the two ways of sharing in Christ’s priesthood, also insisted on their complementarity. In the instruction *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests* in reference to *Lumen gentium* 10, we find the following: “The common priesthood of the

7. *Daily Roman Missal*, 486 ; see also CCC 528.

8. See Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews (PCPCU), “*The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable*” (Rom 11:29), §20.

9. The idea originated in the writings of Nicholas Oehmen (« Le schisme dans le cadre de l’économie divine », *Irenikon* 21 [1948], 6–31), Emmanuel Lanne (« Le schisme en Israël », *Irenikon* 26 [1953], 227–237) and Paul Démann (« Israël et l’unité de l’Eglise », *Cahiers sioniens* n° 1 [03/1953], 1–24).

faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood ‘though they differ essentially and not only in degree [...] are none the less ordered one to another; (since) each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ’. Between both there is an effective unity since the Holy Spirit makes the Church one in communion, in service and in the outpouring of the diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts.”

Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit

Two biblical images of the Church as Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit are here well integrated. We appreciate how Sacred Scripture helps us to understand the Church and how this became a common heritage for Christians in the ancient Church. There is a strict relationship between Church and Eucharist: “Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 23). Taken together, §§13–22 lead to the conclusion that the Church is not simply the sum of believers but is, as the fruit of divine initiative, “both a divine and a human reality” (*TCTCV*§23).

We also appreciate how well this expression in *TCTCV* harmonizes with Vatican II’s *Lumen gentium* 8 on the church as a “complex reality”. This explains why it is suitable to think of the Church in sacramental terms (cf. *LG* 1). A similar rationale can be found in *Lumen gentium* 8: “As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (Eph 4:16).”

The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church

The following section, commenting on the four *notae ecclesiae* of the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed (one, holy, catholic and apostolic), sees them not only as gifts originating in God’s initiative, but also as tasks that believers have not always faithfully brought to realization. In faith, these are recognized as both the work of the Holy Trinity who makes the Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic and as qualities which Christ calls the Church to maintain and further realize in history.

In the apologetic appeal to reason, these characteristics can be presented as signs or “notes” showing the Church to have a divine origin and mission (cf. *CCC* 811–812). This paragraph ends with reference to “features” of the churches’ lives, which in fact are the shared “elements” of truth and sanctification that ground real but imperfect communion between the still divided churches.

We appreciate that “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” is an expression from the tradition from the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed that is embraced by all the churches. It has been part of the unfortunate story of Catholic theology, that these marks have at times been used in an exclusive manner, as if pertaining to the Catholic Church alone. Conciliar teaching (cf. *LG* 15) as well as the post-conciliar Magisterium clearly recognize that these “notes” are present also in other churches. While *Dominus Iesus [DI]* was received with some tension, its fundamental idea was that these ecclesial notes are not entirely absent from other churches, but that they are fully present in the Catholic Church. It states: “in connection with the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the unicity of the Church founded by him must be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith. Just as there is one Christ, so there exists a single body of Christ, a single Bride of Christ” (*DI* 16). We are grateful that *TCTCV* sees the essential marks of the Church as our common heritage.

The oneness of the Church comes from the will of Jesus (cf. *UR* 1) as expressed in the Gospel (Jn 17:21). Current divisions within and between the churches stand in contrast to this oneness. This reminds us of the eschatological dimension so much present in our common ecumenical quest.

The holiness of the Church is said to proceed from God the Trinity’s holy gifts to it (Eph 5:26–27). One sentence attributes sin to the lives of believers, thus seemingly suggesting that the Church itself is sinless. This recalls the Council which stated that it is “at once holy and always in need of being purified” (*LG* 8), needing “perennial reformation” (*UR* 6); its being without spot or wrinkle is to be seen as a goal rather than an already achieved reality (*UR* 4).

That the Church is catholic is described first in terms of the fullness of God’s gifts to it and to its destination to the whole world. A later statement that “catholicity... refers not simply to geographic extension but also to the manifold variety of local churches and their participation in the fullness of faith and life that unites them in one *koinonia*” (§31) might usefully have been anticipated in §22. The latter description is very similar to the description of catholicity in *Lumen gentium* 13.

The Church is apostolic (§22) because its ground is the mission of the Son and his sending of those who preached the Apostolic Gospel that enkindles faith. This Gospel needs specification as a definite message centred on Christ’s death and resurrection (Gal 1:1–9, 3:1–5; 1 Cor 15:1–8; kerygmatic proclamations in Acts), by which the Church is founded, unified as the *congregatio fidelium*, and built up as apostolic. The Church’s ministry does not cause faith and holiness, but does bring the message and its sacramental enactments to bear on believers’ lives. Ministers with the responsibility of oversight, to be treated below especially regarding their succession from the Apostles (see analysis of

TCTCV §§24 and 52), apply criteria found in Scripture and Tradition to protect the authenticity of word and sacraments and so to serve continuity in the characteristic of apostolicity.¹⁰

The last part of this section (§23) draws valuable conclusions from §§13 through 22 on the Church grounded in the Triune God who endows the Church with the grace of salvation in which believers have communion. This corrects the model of the Church as a voluntary society built up by believers making their faith commitments. When §23 states, “Thus the Church is both a divine and a human reality,” this last sentence is similar to the statement in *Lumen gentium* 8 that “the Church is a single complex reality that combines both human and divine elements.”

We also share the thought on continuity and change and the need to examine criteria for evaluating how change takes place. On the one hand, we hold and respect the unchanging nature of the deposit of faith. On the other hand, we believe that some things must change. It is through the *sensus fidelium*, the contribution of theologians and the decisive voice of the successors of the Apostles who offer guidance and leadership that the Church succeeds in maintaining identity in the midst of change. The special contribution of theologians is “to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another” (*GS* 62). This reminds us of what Vincent of Lerins explained on Development of Doctrine: “We must believe that which has been believed in the Church always, everywhere and by all” (*Commonitorium*, 2, 6). This leads us to differentiate between change that happens in a diachronic and in a synchronic manner: Catholics know what can change and what cannot.

Catholics are not afraid of change, as this is part of the life of the Church. They are aware too of the limits. They are open to the signs of the times; to the promptings of the Holy Spirit; to the guidance of the Petrine ministry in continuity as an office established in time and to discernment regarding “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:29). The Gospel invites us to open our hearts to the Lord. “We know that God is the Lord of novelty and always comes to meet us with something new, there is no repetition, he is original in himself” (Pope Francis, Homily at Santa Marta, 24 April 2018).

Faith itself is subject to interpretation in the context of changing times and places. However, as *TCTCV* correctly states: “[T]hese interpretations must remain in continuity with the original witness and with its faithful explication throughout the ages” (§39). To

10. Cf. THE LUTHERAN–ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMISSION ON UNITY (1995–2006), “The Apostolicity of the Church,” §78 and J. Ratzinger, “The Ministerial Office and the Unity of the Church,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (1964), 42–57.

preserve this unaltered continuity of the apostolic faith through history, the Catholic Church sometimes expresses it in defined dogmatic formulas. “Finally, even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions. In view of the above, it must be stated that the dogmatic formulas of the Church's Magisterium were from the beginning suitable for communicating revealed truth, and that as they are they remain forever suitable for communicating this truth to those who interpret them correctly” (*Mysterium Ecclesiae* 5). The magisterial teaching of the Church is not created *ex nihilo*, but relies on the written Word of God along with sacred Tradition as on a permanent foundation. There is an inherent and indissoluble interaction between the Magisterium on the one hand and Tradition on the other. While the Magisterium has the responsibility to discern what is the authentic Tradition, it is also bound by Tradition in which the common faith of the People of God has been set forth. The doctrinal development in the Church must always be homogenous and congruent with respect to Tradition.

Here emerges an important theme for further dialogue: Christian communities differ in their understanding of how the divine initiative by the Holy Spirit relates to the human institutional structures and ministerial order of the Church (cf. §24).

C. The Church as Sign and Servant of God's Design for the World

Three questions related to the nature of the Church as a communion are here taken up: may the Church be called a ‘sacrament’ of such communion (§§25–27), how can legitimate diversity be differentiated from that diversity which damages communion (§§28–30), and how does the local church maintain communion with other local churches throughout the whole world (§§31–32)?

Each of these sections registers some significant convergence. Most seem to agree that the Church is a means and servant in the hands of God to bring about communion and that God is the one and only author of salvation. The Church is not for herself, but subordinate to her Lord. Similarly, most churches would acknowledge that Scripture itself countenances and even supports a certain degree of diversity among local churches. Finally, most Christians, even those of communities which give primacy to the local congregation would believe that part of the authenticity of the local community is to maintain communion with other local churches.

There are surprising parallels with the ecclesiological doctrine of Vatican II. For example, §25, reflecting on the fact that the Church is sign and servant of God's plan,

acknowledges that God wills the salvation of all people and, therefore, that God's grace can touch the hearts of people who are not Christian in ways known to God alone. The Church rejects nothing of truth and goodness in other religions, yet "the mission of the Church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come to know and love Christ Jesus". These statements are practically identical to similar ones found in *Lumen gentium*, *Ad gentes* and *Nostra aetate*. Nevertheless it is very helpful that this ecumenical statement identifies these disputed issues and invites further dialogue about them.

§26 returns to this theme when it notes that some New Testament texts speak of the Church in terms of "mystery," which reflects "a spiritual, transcendent quality which cannot be grasped simply by looking at the visible appearances. The earthly and spiritual dimensions of the Church cannot be separated."

For Catholic tradition, the use of the word sacrament for Church is related to the fact that the Latin *sacramentum* translates the word *mysterion* and Catholics want to emphasise the Church as mystery. In calling the church a "mystery", Catholics treat it not as an eighth sacrament, but simply want to emphasize its effectiveness for salvation through the Church. *Lumen gentium* 1 does not say that the Church is the sacrament, but rather that the Church is like a sacrament (*veluti sacramentum*); however, they do not need to imply that the Church is a sacrament. Rather, they would suggest that the Church as a whole has a sacramental nature. The sacramental dimension could help in opening doors towards a sacramentality in rites that we Catholics call sacrament.

D. Communion in Unity and Diversity

It is helpful that the convergence text considers "legitimate diversity" in the life of communion as "a gift from the Lord". This is clear in the emphasis that "unity must not be surrendered" (*TCTCV*§29). The discussion of "Communion in Unity and Diversity" in §§28 to 30 can easily be set in parallel with similar statements of Vatican II and post-conciliar Magisterium. It is helpful to recall the words of the same Council: "Far from being an obstacle to the Church's unity, a certain diversity of customs and observances only adds to her splendour and is of great help in carrying out her mission, as has already been stated" (*UR* 16). We refer to an attitude of fostering a unity that does not obstruct diversity, and acknowledging and fostering a diversification that does not obstruct unity but rather enriches it: "legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission" (*UUS* 50). This legitimate diversity includes such aspects of the Church's life as discipline, liturgical practices, theological exposition, and spiritual heritage (cf. *LG* 23d). The Catholic Church acknowledges that "the vision of the full communion to be sought is that of unity

in legitimate diversity” (*UUS* 54), and that “our declared purpose is to re-establish together full unity in legitimate diversity” (*UUS* 57). This vision coincides with the convergence reached in *TCTCV*.

The text also helpfully repeats a point from the earlier draft in this regard: “A pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity is one of the important means given to the Church in aiding those with different gifts and perspectives to remain mutually accountable to each other” (*TCTCV*§29). Though the document does not identify the holders of such an office, it may safely be presumed that is an essential part of the task of those who exercise *episkopé* in the Christian community (cf. *TCTCV*§54). Such an office is surely needed at the universal level of the Church’s life also, and it is worth noting that that is precisely how Catholics would understand the role of the Pope as universal primate. *Lumen gentium* shows how the bishop of Rome, while serving unity, also serves diversity: “within the Church particular churches hold a rightful place; these churches retain their own traditions, without in any way opposing the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly in charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity, but rather contribute toward it” (*LG* 13).

The italicized paragraph that precedes §31 is more precise than others, particularly when noting the lack of common criteria among the many various Christian bodies for distinguishing legitimate and illegitimate diversity as well as the lack of “mutually recognized structures” that are needed to use those criteria. This remains true and it probably holds true within those bodies as well as among them.

E. Communion of Local Churches

We very much appreciate that in the text the ecclesiology of communion is intimately bound to local churches. Their communion is “not an optional extra”. The text speaks of the “universal Church” as “the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world” (*TCTCV*§31). It is worth noting that that is clearly not the ultimate, eschatological meaning of the term, “universal Church”, as when the term is used at the end of *Lumen gentium* 2 to refer to the final gathering that will be established in heaven at the end of time.

Pope Francis offers an engaging explanation of the Church as *communio*: “Everyone can say: the Catholic Church is present in my parish, because the latter is part of the universal Church, it is also the fullness of the gifts of Christ, faith, the Sacraments, the ministry. It is in communion with the bishop, with the Pope and is open to all, without distinctions. The Church isn’t only the shadow of our bell tower, but embraces a vastness

of people, of peoples who profess the same faith, who are nourished by the same Eucharist, who are served by the same Pastors. We feel in communion with all the Churches, with all the small and large Catholic communities of the world!” (*Catechesis on the Creed*, General Audience, 9 October 2013).

The Church is a communion of wholes. In this sense, the whole Church of Jesus Christ is in the local Church that celebrates the Eucharist, proclaims the Word, confesses the apostolic faith, exercises the Episcopal ministry, etc. The local Church is the realization of the universal Church in a specific place (cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1). There exists a special relationship of ‘mutual interiority’ between the local Church and the universal Church because in every particular Church the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative” (*Christus Dominus*, 11). “For this reason, the universal Church cannot be conceived as the sum of the particular Churches, or as a federation of particular Churches. It is not the result of the communion of the Churches, but, in its essential mystery, it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular Church”.¹¹ The text accurately notes that the various Christian traditions vary widely in how they interpret the term ‘local church’, which for some specifically means the community led by a bishop, ‘as a successor of the apostles’, whereas for others it is either more local than that, or alternatively more regional. The all-important questions highlighted at the end of the chapter urge us to reflect again on the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations.

Catholics would present in this discussion the conviction that a single congregation or parish, while of major importance for Christian formation, worship, and further sacramental life, must be seen in a wider context, such as was set forth by Vatican II: “A diocese is a section (*portio*) of God’s people entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active” (*Christus Dominus* 11).

The key value of this understanding is that the bishop is sacramentally incorporated into the worldwide episcopal college headed by the Bishop of Rome. Pope John Paul II’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores gregis [PG]* holds that “this is the source of the Bishop’s role of representing the Church entrusted to him and of governing it by the power needed for the exercise of the pastoral ministry sacramentally received (*munus pastorale*) as a sharing in the consecration and mission of Christ himself” (*PG* 43).

11. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Communio nis notio*. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion (28 May 1992), §9.

By a personal link, a particular church has a living connection with other churches in the entire Church. *TCTCV* avoids the two opposed mistakes commonly warned against in this discussion, that is, conceiving the local Church as a mere administrative subdivision of the universal Church or conceiving the “universal Church” as the result of a confederation of already existing local Churches. Vatican II avoided these errors by stating that, on the one hand, individual Churches are formed on the model of the entire Church and, on the other, that the universal Church exists in and out of the local Churches (cf. *LG 23*).

CHAPTER III: The Church: Growing in Communion

A. Already but Not Yet

The “already but not yet” nature of the Church is the topic of this introduction. Catholic teaching finds an echo in this concept because the Church is perceived as an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom. The Church on earth, however, is not yet the full visible realization of the kingdom (*LG* 5, 8, 48).

Though the Church experiences “the already eschatological community that God wills,” nonetheless the historical context is that of ever-changing conditions in the world. Our Catholic faith, too, has recognized the profound and rapid changes in today’s world that have impacted even down to “the traditional local communities such as families, clans, tribes, villages, various groups and associations stemming from social contacts” (*GS* 6). These changing conditions have an effect on religion. Therefore, the great challenge, as Benedict XVI states, is that “the same faith might continue to be lived in the present day, that it might remain a living faith in a world of change.”¹²

§§35 and 36 address the issue that some churches view the “Church as sinning,” while others see the Church as sinless. The Catholic Church teaches:

The Church...is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as “uniquely holy,” loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her. (*LG* 39)

Because Christ is sinless, his Body, the Church is also sinless. Yet, individually, all are sinners. Christ came to expiate the sins of people. Thus, the Church, embracing “in its bosom sinners, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified; it always follows the way of penance and renewal”. (*LG* 8)

B. Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry

The Church growing in communion has three essential elements: “communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in sacramental life; and in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry” (*TCTCV* §37). As a primary concern of restoring unity among all Christians, the Catholic Church expresses a similar vision:

12. BENEDICT XVI, Homily, St Peter’s Square, 11 October 2012.

The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by *the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government* and who, combining together into various groups which are held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites. Between these there exists an admirable bond of union, such that the variety within the Church in no way harms its unity; rather it manifests it, for it is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or Rite should retain its traditions whole and entire and likewise that it should adapt its way of life to the different needs of time and place. (*UR 2*, emphasis added)¹³

For the Catholic Church, “full visible communion of all Christians is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement” (*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* §20), and she can confirm that great progress has been made toward realizing this goal, thanks to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Faith

The first element of communion, faith, “is evoked by the Word of God, inspired by the grace of the Holy Spirit, attested in Scripture and transmitted through the living tradition of the Church” (*TCTCV* §38). The Catholic Church nuances this dynamic relationship of faith with Scripture and tradition this way:

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church’s full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them. (*DV 8*)¹⁴

As more churches are professing the Nicene Creed in their liturgies, the topic of tradition is increasingly being discussed amongst churches. The Catholic Church is encouraged by this development. In this regard, it is essential to point out the Catholic teaching in how tradition works: “It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others” (*DV 10*). This threefold process safeguards the deposit of faith with a reliable interpretation of the word of

13. Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Ut unum sint*, 9.

14. See also the good ecumenical work done in *Confessing One Faith, A Treasure in Earthen Vessels, Harvesting the Fruits*, and the bilateral reports. On the Scripture/Tradition relationship, the quote from Pope John Paul II cited earlier is a helpful formulation (*UUS 79*, 1).

God. The Church also promotes a collaborative effort in examining and explaining Scripture by scholars and teachers to nourish the minds and to strengthen the will of the people of God in the love of God (cf. *DV23*).

Sacraments

The second element of growing communion, the sacraments, has undergone some significant points of convergence due in no small measure to BEM, although unresolved issues still remain. The Catholic Church has conveyed a “significant degree of approval” of BEM’s statements concerning Baptism and the Eucharist, while noting that these fall “short at certain points.”¹⁵ Some of the important unresolved concerns include who may be baptized, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the relation of the Eucharist to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and churches who do not practice Baptism or Eucharist. Thus it is important to keep these unresolved issues in mind when reading the document. Likewise it is important to keep in mind recent liturgical and patristic scholarship on the articulation of the concept of sacrifice and its relationship to the evolving understanding of its application to the Eucharist.

The summary of statements concerning Baptism demonstrates the substantial growth in convergence among churches. This is no trivial matter. In a desire to advance the growth in understanding of Baptism, the Catholic Church invites consideration of aspects such as the indispensable link between Christ and his Body the Church in relation to Baptism. Baptism is likened to a door by which people enter the Church (cf. *LG 14*). Additionally, there are other aspects such as the permanent character imprinted at Baptism, its unrepeatable nature (cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici [CIC] 845*), and how churches define the validity of Baptism (cf. *CIC 841*). Along with these aspects could be added the topic of Chrismation or Confirmation. Progress has been achieved on the issue of the recognition of baptism – and the place of confirmation may be understood as a part of “a life-long process of growth into Christ”.¹⁶ Understanding Christian initiation as a process orientated toward fulfilment in the Eucharist (see Benedict XVI’s 2007 Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* 16–17) may aid in considering further elucidation of the question of the sacramentality of Chrismation.

15. MAX THURIAN, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM* Volume VI, Faith and Order Paper no. 144, Geneva, WCC, 1988. Some of the issues that were lacking in BEM include “the necessity of baptism for salvation,” the avoidance of “the doctrine of original sin,” and the “image of seal” in baptism. The report also spoke of the need to “say unambiguously that the eucharist is in itself a real sacrifice,” and to express the word “transubstantiation” when describing the change of the elements.

16. See *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, Faith & Order Paper, 210 (Geneva: WCC, 2011) §55.

The summary of statements on the Eucharist shows great progress in mutual understanding amongst churches; the statement, “Christians receive the body and blood of Christ” (§42) is particularly profound. This statement simply begs for more explanation! As stated in the introductory paragraph, this was purposely made brief with the hopes of further discussion. A starting point for delineating the Catholic position is a discussion on sacramental theology.¹⁷ In addition, there are practical questions: Who may or may not be admitted to Holy Communion and for what reasons? And, what constitutes the valid elements for Holy Communion – wine or grape juice, wheat bread or other grains?

“Just as the confession of faith and baptism are inseparable from a life of service and witness, so too the eucharist demands reconciliation and sharing by all those who are brothers and sisters in the one family of God” (*TCTCV*§43). The Catholic Church also confirms this in its teaching, “Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another” (*LG*7). This states well the transformation of life and service called for by Eucharistic participation and transformation effected by the action of the Holy Spirit.

In growing towards convergence, dialogues between churches who espouse an “ordinance” perspective with regard to Baptism and the Eucharist and churches who espouse a sacramental approach are significant. Catholic conversations with Mennonites and Baptists have provided a platform for mutually affirming both the ‘instrumental’ and ‘expressive’ dimensions in the sacrament/ordinance. An example of this convergence is expressed in dialogues between Catholics and Baptists as follows:

17. An intriguing example of growing convergence on the topic of sacraments can be found in Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between The Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006–2010*, 2013, §§72–130.

The Latin word *sacramentum* translates the Greek word *mysterion*, which refers to God's acts in history for the salvation of the world, especially the incarnation, death, and resurrection of his Son [cf. Col 2:2–3]. *Sacramentum* was already used in Roman times with the secular meaning of a soldier's pledge of allegiance. In their theological meaning, both terms (*mysterion* and *sacramentum*) have a complementary sense; they express at the same time the action of God (the 'mystery' of God's saving work) and the active and lively human response to that divine salvific act in personal commitment and freedom (the 'pledge' of faith). The term 'ordinance', which most Baptists prefer to 'sacrament', stresses institution by the command of Christ. However, this term *can* indicate both the action of God and the necessity of faith, as does 'sacrament'.¹⁸

It is simply remarkable to witness the considerable agreement that has occurred with regard to the mutual understanding of sacrament and ordinance. However, this sense may be called into question by the addition of the italicized passage that seems to imply that some groups do not adhere with conviction to the profound doctrines just set forth on Baptism and the Eucharist.

Ministry within the Church

Ordained ministry

The third element of communion, ministry, begins with a reference to ordained ministers who "may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments." Unlike previous documents which began with the ministry of all the baptized, this document begins with the ordained ministry.¹⁹ The Catholic perspective would place more emphasis on the *interrelatedness* of the roles of the ordained and the laity in building up the whole Body of Christ: "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" (LG 10).

The *italicized* paragraph following §45 notes there are serious issues that still remain concerning the priesthood of the ordained. What is properly needed is further discussion on the understanding of a theology of priesthood which is rooted in a theology of baptism

18. *Ibid.*, §78. See also §75: "As the Baptists in this conversation have talked together, they have thus come to think that there is not an absolute difference, but a kind of overlapping of meaning between 'sacrament' and 'ordinance.' In fact, while most Baptists today prefer to speak of these acts of worship as 'ordinances' some of the confessions and writings of the early Baptists employed the language of 'sacrament.'"

19. See Faith and Order Paper no. 111, *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, Geneva: WCC, 16–17; Faith and Order Paper no. 181, Geneva: WCC, §§81–84; Faith and Order Paper no. 198, Geneva: WCC, §§82–85.

as distinguished from a theology of *diakonia* or service that is related to the question of ministry.

The life of the church needs to be ordered, and historically it developed into a threefold pattern of “*episkopos—presbyteros—diakonos.*” The Catholic Church teaches that “the divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity (*ab antiquo*) have been called bishops, priests and deacons” (LG 28). We can, therefore, say that the ordained ministry is of divine origin, but its form evolved due to safeguarding the Gospel project and its survival in the world in which the Christian faith was growing, thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We can likewise agree that the ministry is traced back directly to Jesus, the preacher, who then becomes Jesus the preached (either by apostles, prophets and teachers or by the local ministry of bishops, deacons, and presbyters, these being a later gift of the Spirit that gives shape to the Church).

While churches agree on the necessity and importance of some sort of formal structure of ministry, a number of churches do not agree on the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon. The Catholic Church does affirm the hierarchical order of the threefold ministry. The Church sees an ordered structure as a reality beginning with our Lord:

That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world, since the Gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. And for this reason the apostles, appointed as rulers in this society, took care to appoint successors. For they not only had helpers in their ministry, but also, in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their death, they passed on to their immediate co-operators, as it were, in the form of a testament, the duty of confirming and finishing the work begun by themselves, recommending to them that they attend to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit placed them to shepherd the Church of God. (LG 20)

Also, the Catholic Church can give an enthusiastic endorsement of the conclusion of §47 “that the threefold ministry ‘may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.’” Moreover, *TCTCV* takes a step with which Catholics and others would also agree. §47 recalls that BEM (§22) only affirmed that the threefold ministry “may serve as an expression of the unity we seek.” The italicized text that follows §47 offers a welcome challenge to go further and to face the issue more directly: “*Given the signs of growing agreement about the place of ordained ministry in the Church, we are led to ask if the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills.*” *TCTCV* therefore keeps this issue before the churches in a forceful way.

The threefold ministry

The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church

Since all authority in the Church comes from Christ as Lord and head, the successors in the ministry of oversight (*episkopè*) exercise authority (*exousia*—power, delegated authority) in Gospel proclamation, in celebration of the Sacraments and in pastoral guidance. Pope John Paul II describes the Catholic perspective on the ministry of *episkopé* thus: “[T]his service of unity, rooted in the action of divine mercy, is entrusted within the College of Bishops to one among those who have received from the Spirit the task, not of exercising power over the people – as the rulers of the Gentiles and their great men do (cf. Mt 20:25; Mk 10:42) – but of leading them towards peaceful pastures” (*UUS* 94).

The distinctive temperament of authority in the Church is fashioned in Christ who humbled himself for our redemption. The Catholic Church teaches that the exercise of authority by the ordained ministry must be characterized by service (*diakonia*), love (*agape*) and communion (*koinonia*) as modelled in Christ himself (cf. Jn 13:1–7). In teaching, for which Christ promised the Spirit to guide into all truth (Jn 16:13), church authority presents truth and guidance for acceptance as and when circumstances call for this.

The multifaceted aspects of authority in the Church must be distinguished from mere power but instead understood as in a life of holiness in the Triune God. The Second Vatican Council in a similar way asserts:

Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use *only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness*, remembering that he who is greater should become as the lesser and he who is the chief become as the servant. (*LG* 27, *emphasis added*)

Catholics can concur with the other sources of authority in the Church as including Sacred Scripture, Tradition, worship, the Councils and Synods, and the lives of the saints. However, an authority that is missing, but essential for Catholics, is the Magisterium of the Church (*DV*10). The lives of Christian martyrs are another significant source of authority for all Christians, as Pope John Paul II notes: “The lives of Christian martyrs cut across all Christian Communities” (*UUS* 83). Pope Francis has referred to “this ecumenism which is giving us strength, the ecumenism of blood. The martyrs belong to all Christians”.²⁰

On the “certain kind of authority” which may be ascribed to agreed statements of ecumenical dialogue commissions (§50, final lines), the Catholic Church remains reserved,

²⁰ POPE FRANCIS, Address to the Moderator and Representatives of the Church of Scotland, Monday, 16 February 2015.

if only because of the massive production of such statements.²¹ A sign of this reservation is the term “Study Document” in the subtitle of the Lutheran–Catholic text, *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2006), expressing the long-assumed qualification of such statements. In contrast, the Lutheran–Catholic–Methodist *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999, 2006) clearly has authority for Catholics by reason of its official reception by the Catholic Church. The other dialogue statements remain for Catholics significant and stimulating works of theology crafted amid collaboration in the special circumstances of ecumenical service. They are not yet final words on their topics, but remain to be officially assessed by Catholic authorities for their coherence with Catholic faith and doctrine.

The Catholic Church encourages the process of reception of the results already achieved:

The whole process is followed and encouraged by the bishops and the Holy See. The Church’s teaching authority is responsible for expressing a definitive judgment. In all this, it will be of great help methodologically to keep carefully in mind the *distinction between the deposit of faith and the formulation* in which it is expressed, as Pope John XXIII recommended in his opening address at the Second Vatican Council.²² (*UUS 81, emphasis added*)

The exercise of authority in the Church is shared by the entire people of God. The Catholic Church concurs with this based on the teaching that “the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues” (*LG 12*). Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* says, “The Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church” (*EG 130*).

Authority in the Church and its Exercise

The Ministry of Oversight (episkopé)

The diversity of charisms in the Church needs co-ordination through the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*). The Catholic Church sees this exercised through the order of bishops. This is because “it is the duty of all bishops to promote and to safeguard the unity of faith and the discipline common to the whole Church” (*LG 23*). The bishops, as successors of the apostles and vicars of Christ, are to be committed pastors of their flocks in a manner of *diakonia* (cf. *LG 24*). They are to govern “by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power” (*LG 27*). The Catholic Church sees much

²¹ Volumes 1–4 of *Growth in Agreement* (1984, 2000, 2007, 2015) offer 162 dialogue statements, of which one-half came from commissions with Catholic members.

²² Cf. *AAS 54* (1962), 792.

advancement from the consensus statements of BEM but still needs to affirm the unique role of the head of the college of bishops in determining the truth of teaching and the “strengthening of his brothers” (Lk 22:32) in oversight concerning the whole church (cf. *DV*7 and *LG* 18–22). While the oversight “needs to be exercised in personal, collegial, and communal ways,” as Faith and Order has declared especially in BEM (Ministry §26), Catholics have before them the example of Vatican II’s process of finalizing its Dogmatic Constitutions and other Decrees. Open discussion had its place, but the overriding aim was consensus over the truth of the teaching, along with the role of the head of the college. However, it needs to be underlined that it is not consensus that establishes the truth, but the truth that makes consensus possible. The Church is not simply a consensual community, but it lives out of the unity of truth. The truth of faith is not ‘produced’ by discussion and consensus, but discussion and consensus are a service to the truth that God has revealed to the Church.

The quality of the ministry of oversight is manifested in synodality or conciliarity. This quality is attuned to the Catholic Church’s manner of addressing ecclesial, doctrinal and moral issues through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This practice involves the entire people of God (lay and ordained) at different levels. This is evident in the formation of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and other Synodal fruits like the African Synod, the Asian Synod, etc. According to Pope John Paul II, “Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path *towards human self-realization*, the self-realization both of *each individual and of every human community*” (*UUS* 28, emphasis in original). The Catholic Church considers some doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irreformable expressions of the faith. Moreover these normative teachings may be presented in a different way while preserving the substance of their truth.

The Catholic Church’s growing experience of synodality in practice at the local, regional and universal level of church life and pastoral action may be seen as an instance when the Church must teach together, celebrate together and decide together to maintain the unity of the faith.

Regarding the positions presented in the italicized passage after §53, the Catholic Church considers some doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irreformable expressions of the faith. At the same time, following Pope John XXIII’s distinction, “The substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another” (Opening Speech to the Council), it holds that normative teachings have a substance which can be presented in different ways.

The Authority of Ecumenical Councils

In important decisions and councils, “there is need for someone to summon and preside over the gathering” (*TCTCV*§54) as seen throughout Church history. Particularly, in the Catholic Church, “The supreme power in the universal Church, which this college enjoys, is exercised in a solemn way in an ecumenical council. A council is never ecumenical unless it is confirmed or at least accepted as such by the successor of Peter; and it is the prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to convoke these councils, to preside over them and to confirm them” (*LG* 22). Papal primacy or Petrine primacy or, at least, Petrine ministry is understood as the continuation of the role of Christ among the people of God. The link between the Bishop of Rome and the bishops is essential:

The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful. The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, which are fashioned after the model of the universal Church; in and from these churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason the individual bishops represent each his own church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity. (*LG* 23)

The Catholic Church would also note that the duty of a primate is to strengthen the colleagues in oversight (cf. Lk 22:32) while respecting local churches’ integrity. The inclusion of Canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons is especially helpful since the Canon looks to the observance of its rule as contributing to all giving glory to God.

In light of the fact that churches outside the Catholic Church do not share the same doctrinal view on primacy, Pope John Paul II made the bold invitation to theologians and leaders to “enter into patient and fraternal dialogue” (*UUS* 96) with him on the topic of personal primatial ministry. With firm commitment to bilateral and multilateral dialogues, the Catholic Church must consider doctrinal statements such as this:

But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head. The pope’s power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact. In virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power. (*LG* 22)

Papal authority must be seen, as Pope John Paul II rightly states, as a ministry of *servus servorum Dei* (*UUS* 88). Therefore, the interpretation of the exercise and limit of authority of the Petrine ministry is obviously the point of divergence. An elucidation becomes an indispensable step towards a common understanding of the necessary ministry of Christian unity in the Universal Church, how it is to be carried out and by whom.

Much work still needs to be done in dialogue with this pertinent issue of the Petrine ministry. Catholics hold in tension a deep commitment to sacred doctrine handed down to us and, on the other hand, an openness to growing deeper in the faith. Thus, we state:

The Catholic Church, both in her praxis and in her solemn documents, holds that the communion of the particular Churches with the Church of Rome, and of their Bishops with the Bishop of Rome, is—in God’s plan—an essential requisite of full and visible communion. (*UUS* 97)

The topic obviously calls for much further dialogue. Currently there is no agreement among Christians that a universal ministry of primacy is necessary or even desirable. At the same time, several bilateral dialogues have acknowledged the value of such a ministry. All would do well to take the approach of *TCTCV* in treating it as a consideration following upon the topics of *episkopé* and synodality/conciliarity. Perhaps recalling and/or observing the pastoral and ecumenical outreach seen in each of the Vatican II popes from John XXIII to Francis, and the current pontiff’s promotion of “a synodal church,” might offer an illustration of the pastoral character of a universal ministry of unity.

We can also say, “Indeed, the Church is not a reality closed in on herself. Rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavour...” (*UUS* 5). Therefore, a commitment to the deposit of faith is not antithetical to frank and candid conversations with other churches in coming to understand the great depths of the faith given to all of us together.

CHAPTER IV: The Church: In and For the World

The underlying tone of the whole of Chapter IV is characterized by a positive approach towards the world in which the Church finds itself and to which it is called to proclaim the Kingdom of God as the final end. This approach, in defining God's plan for creation, echoes that which has characterized the Catholic Church at least since the pontificate of John XXIII. In particular, one can see this outlook mirrored in the opening address of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudet mater ecclesia*, in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* on "The Church in the Modern World," and in the more recent apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis on "The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World." All three of these documents, not coincidentally, already have in their titles an explicit reference to *gaudium*, a joy that, in tracing its origin to God himself, who "so loved the world" (Jn 3:16), is not overwhelmed by the "problems and tragedies" that mark our world and that "cry out for the compassionate engagement of Christians" (cf. *TCTCV* §64).

A. God's Plan for Creation: the Kingdom

If the affirmation of *TCTCV* that "the Church is called by Christ in the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the Father's reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation" may seem to lead too readily to the consequence that "a constitutive aspect of evangelization is the promotion of justice and peace" (*TCTCV* §59), it should be borne in mind that the intention of the fourth chapter was not to restrict the mission of the Church to social activism. As is abundantly clear from the convergence text as a whole, the Church's mission is holistic and multidimensional, including a necessary balance between the aspects of *diakonia* (service), *martyria* (witness), and *leitourgia* (worship or liturgy).

A Catholic comment on the first section of this chapter, which places Jesus' message about the Kingdom as the framework for Christian social involvement, would emphasize that the reality of the Church is profoundly related to Jesus' inauguration of the Kingdom: "The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in its very foundation. The Lord Jesus set it on its course by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God, which, for centuries, had been promised in the Scriptures: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' " (*LG* 5). The Second Vatican Council adds that the Church, "equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom" (*LG* 5).

When *Lumen gentium* speaks of the Church as the “seed” and “beginning” of the Kingdom, it intends to express the subtle relation between the two, to express their simultaneous unity and difference. As the International Theological Commission of the Catholic Church has noted, given a sufficiently careful explanation of the terms “sacrament” and “kingdom,” the Church may be called a “sacrament of the Kingdom”: “The expression’s aim is to relate, on the one hand, the Kingdom, understood in the plenary sense of its final realization, with, on the other hand, the Church in its ‘wayfaring’ aspect.”²³

In delineating an “ecumenical response to religious pluralism”, *TCTCV* §60 calls to mind the continuing and significant difference in positions among the churches, citing correctly the Catholic position in this regard as one among other options. That Catholic view is expressed in part in *Gaudium et spes* 22: “For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.” In consequence, Vatican II went on to state that “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men” (*NA* 2). Given that the duty of “the Church’s preaching [is] to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows” (*NA* 4), we could therefore ask whether the variety of different approaches to the question of religious pluralism that characterizes our era might not, instead of reflecting mutually exclusive views and thus a cause of division among the churches, amount to a diversity that is not only legitimate but also evangelically fruitful.

However, the path towards a more positive approach to interreligious dialogue – undertaken for some decades now by different ecumenical bodies – is recalled in *TCTCV* as an unavoidable issue for any Christian confession: “inviting others to the fullness of life in Christian expression of respectful love” (*TCTCV* §60). As stated by Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* 14, quoting Pope Benedict XVI: “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction”.

Nevertheless, we feel that, as Catholics, it remains very important to reaffirm clearly our faith in Christ as the unique Saviour of the world. During the Jubilee Year 2000, this was done by the declaration *Dominus Iesus*, which pointed out that because of the “‘unique

23. “Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council,” in *International Theological Commission, Vol I: Texts and Documents, 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 303.

and special relationship' which the Church has with the kingdom of God among men – which in substance is the universal kingdom of Christ the Saviour – it is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God” (§21). Such a rejection of interreligious relativism in no way contradicts the Catholic teaching that God “does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain ‘gaps, insufficiencies and errors’ ” (*Redemptoris missio* 55).

B. The Moral Challenge of the Gospel

With regard to this section, it is significant that *TCTCV* places it within the perspective of the *sequela Christi* and that this discipleship is understood primarily as a call to Christians “to repent of their sins, to forgive others and to lead sacrificial lives of service” (§61).

If “the ethics of Christians as disciples are rooted in God, the creator and revealer” (*TCTCV*§62), they are also, and not least so, in Jesus Christ our redeemer and saviour. Therefore, both the teaching, attitude, and “lifestyle” of Jesus, along with his behaviour towards the men and women he encountered during his earthly ministry, must guide the ethical discernment of Christians. A more faithful *imitatio Christi* in its tangible manifestation of outreach to human sinners is called for, together with the due reaffirmation of unchanging moral principles and a pastoral approach of compassion and mercy even towards divisive and diverse moral options, in such a way as to be sensitive to the suffering of individuals and of local communities.

Undoubtedly, due to the very involvement of the Church in different societies and cultures, the sphere of ethical opinions is revealing itself to be potentially and often actually divisive among the Churches. This is so not only with regard to principles, given that some opinions are held by some Churches not to be “in harmony with the Gospel,” but also with regard even to agreeing whether “moral questions are [...] of their nature ‘church-dividing’” (*TCTCV*§63). Thanks to the extensive ecumenical journey that has already been undertaken, churches realize “that what one does affects the life of others” and consequently they are “accountable to each other with respect to their ethical reflections and decisions” (*TCTCV*§62). The mutual recognition of baptism should encourage the

recognition of the demanding search for fidelity to the Gospel that gives life to every Church.²⁴

Regarding the question of the potential for moral teachings to be of such seriousness that they could justify division, it must be asserted that, according to Catholic teaching, faith possesses a serious moral imperative: “It gives rise to and calls for a consistent life commitment; it entails and brings to perfection the acceptance and observance of God’s commandments” (*Veritatis splendour [VS]* 89). Jesus Christ, “the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6) provides the ultimate answer to the religious and moral questions of human beings. The Gospel story about the young man who asked Jesus “what must I do to have eternal life?” (Mt 19:16) implies that moral behaviour is so important that it is decisive for arriving at the happiness that God intends to bestow upon human beings. Thus, for Catholic doctrine, unity in those moral teachings that are decisive for eternal life is an essential aspect of the unity of the Church. Of course, moral teaching can and even must develop over the course of time, according to new insights and new possibilities demanding moral decision-making. But there is also a certain continuity of the Christian moral imperative, which extends to all times and places, based upon the laws inherent in the way that God has created human beings and, especially, in light of revelation. As Pope John Paul II’s encyclical on the importance of the teachings of the Magisterium concerning moral questions has affirmed: “People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil. Christ is the Teacher, the Risen One who has life in himself and who is always present in his Church and in the world. It is he who opens up to the faithful the book of the Scriptures and, by fully revealing the Father’s will, teaches the truth about moral action” (*VS* 8).

To serve the unity of the Church in the area of moral doctrine and practice, Christ chose the apostles and entrusted to them a special role in promoting and preserving all that He had taught them (cf. Mt 28:19–20). We believe that this task continues in the ministry of their successors in the college of bishops (cf. *VS* 27). The encyclical letter on the “Gospel of Life” (*Evangelium vitae*, 1995) is an example of how official Catholic teaching exercises its task of moral guidance concerning contemporary questions such as abortion and euthanasia. Clearly, according to Catholic doctrine, some differences in moral teaching are simply not able to be reconciled with the realization of full communion for which the ecumenical movement strives.

24. In this sense the path of reflection undertaken by ARCIC III could offer insight into practices aimed at a convergence in undertaking an ethical discernment in different spheres. In fact, after drafting a common text the relation between the local, regional, and universal expressions of the Church, this bilateral dialogue has now undertaken the second stage of its mandate which concerns the precise question of “how in communion the local and universal Church come to discern right ethical teaching.”

C. The Church in Society

The churches' presence and action in society and their passion "for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ" (*TCTCV*§64). This requires the responsibility and daily commitment of the churches to defend human life and dignity within the context of the proclamation of the "*diakonia* of Christ," in his self-offering to death, even to death on a cross, an example left to his disciples to follow (cf. 1 Pt 2:20). Christian *diakonia* is therefore not more or less reducible to philanthropy or to a praiseworthy standard of ethical humanism, but is an anticipation of the "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pt 3:13). This verse, along with others, constitutes an eschatological proclamation of that fullness of life awaited by all humanity and all creation (cf. Rev 21:1; Rm 8:19).

On the precise question of the relation of the Catholic Church to civil society, clearly that relation has taken various forms not only throughout the ages but also in different parts of the world in any given age, even today. We do not consider such variety as something to lament but rather as an expression of the important exercise of the Church's vocation to engage in a positive way with culture, government, and social systems, to be salt of the earth and light of the world, within the variety of possibilities that history offers. The temptation for those in both political and religious power to dominate and determine the laws and customs of a particular society in an exaggerated, unilateral, and exclusive way has often led to regrettable consequences on one side or the other. In recent times, approximately from about the time of the social doctrine of Pope Leo XIII in the late 19th century (*Rerum novarum*) and continuing into the present, Catholics have been encouraged by their pastors to engage fully in political and social activities in order to promote the values of the Kingdom and respect for the human person, protecting minorities both in countries where Christians are in the majority and in those where they are not. A new landmark in this process occurred in Vatican II's declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis humanae* [*DH*], which affirms: "All nations are coming into even closer unity. Men of different cultures and religions are being brought together in closer relationships. There is a growing consciousness of the personal responsibility that every man has. All this is evident. Consequently, in order that relationships of peace and harmony be established and maintained within the whole of mankind, it is necessary that religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society" (*DH* 15). Unfortunately, this has not always been observed, as *TCTCV*§65 has affirmed: "The witness (*martyria*) of the Church will entail, for both individuals and for the community, the way of the cross, even to the point of martyrdom (cf. Mt 10:16–33)."

The message of witness until the shedding of blood of so many sisters and brothers in faith, independently of the origin of their Christian confession, should also constitute a validating aspect of ethical discernment: the sufferings borne for Christ are themselves a powerful call to the radical demands of the Gospel.

The encyclical *Ut unum sint* of Pope John Paul II affirms that all the Churches “have martyrs for the Christian faith. Despite the tragedy of our divisions, these brothers and sisters have preserved an attachment to Christ and to the Father so radical and absolute as to lead even to the shedding of blood. [...] In a theocentric vision, we Christians already have a common *Martyrology*. This also includes the martyrs of our own century, more numerous than one might think, and it shows how, at a profound level, God preserves communion among the baptized in the supreme demand of faith, manifested in the sacrifice of life itself. [...] ... this communion is already perfect in what we all consider the highest point of the life of grace, *martyria* unto death, the truest communion possible with Christ who shed his Blood, and by that sacrifice brings near those who once were far off (cf. *Eph* 2:13)” (*UUS* 83–84).

This “ecumenism of blood”, so often cited by Pope Francis, has been acknowledged in the last few decades also in meaningful moments within ecumenical liturgical celebrations: one need only mention the memory of the martyrs of the 20th century at the Colosseum during the Jubilee Year 2000 or the prayer in April 2017 for the Coptic martyrs in which Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other bishops and patriarchs of the Middle East joined Pope Tawadros II to pray in the church in front of the Cathedral of Saint Mark in Cairo.

Shared martyrdom is thus an appeal for the visible unity of Christians, a call that paradoxically reaches the Churches from the very persecutors of the Christian faith (cf. *Acts* 8:1b–4). With the suffering inflicted on our sisters and brothers in faith, these persecutors demonstrate, despite their own intentions, that Christians are “already one” in shedding blood for their one Lord. Pope Francis never tires of insisting on this fact, as in his address to members of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships (31 October 2014): “For persecutors, we are not divided, we are not Lutherans, Orthodox, Evangelicals, Catholics.... No! We are one in their eyes! For persecutors we are Christians! They are not interested in anything else. This is the ecumenism of blood that we experience today.” Similarly, he stated to members of the Charismatic Renewal: “If the enemy unites us in death, who are we to be divided in life?” (3 July 2015). The underlying idea is the same: martyrs of different traditions, who give their witness until the shedding of blood, are opposed and then killed simply for being Christians who seek to live according to the Gospel.

Finally, Chapter IV is the place where *TCTCV* deals most explicitly with the Church's response to the sufferings of human beings and the tragedies that affect them in so many ways throughout the world today. We appreciate very much the material about this topic in this chapter. It harmonizes well with the convictions and practice that has been an important part of Catholic life, both at the global level and regionally and locally. In 2016, as part of the reform of the Vatican curial structure, the Pope unified various offices that had previously been devoted to promoting the well-being and development of the human person in separation from one another. The document establishing this new unified structure included the following rationale: "In all her being and actions, the Church is called to promote the integral development of the human person in the light of the Gospel. This development takes place by attending to the inestimable goods of justice, peace, and the care of creation. The Successor of the Apostle Peter, in his work of affirming these values, is continuously adapting the institutions which collaborate with him, so that they may better meet the needs of the men and women whom they are called to serve. [...] This Dicastery will be competent particularly in issues regarding migrants, those in need, the sick, the excluded and marginalized, the imprisoned and the unemployed, as well as victims of armed conflict, natural disasters, and all forms of slavery and torture" (Pope Francis, *Humanam progressionem*).

The voluminous size (583 numbered paragraphs with 1232 footnotes) of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published in 2004, suggests that, for Catholic sensibilities, the main problem with this fourth chapter is not its content but rather that it is too brief. Perhaps the chapter can also be criticized for the fact that it does not specifically relate Christian social commitment to the liturgy, especially to the celebration of the Eucharist, although that relation is treated in the beautiful paragraphs which make up the conclusion to *TCTCV* (§§67–69). The relation between the Eucharist and concern for those who are suffering has been well expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum caritatis* 90:

The food of truth demands that we denounce inhumane situations in which people starve to death because of injustice and exploitation, and it gives us renewed strength and courage to work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love. From the beginning, Christians were concerned to share their goods (cf. Acts 4:32) and to help the poor (cf. Rom 15:26). The alms collected in our liturgical assemblies are an eloquent reminder of this, and they are also necessary for meeting today's needs. The Church's charitable institutions, especially *Caritas*, carry out at various levels the important work of assisting the needy, especially the poorest. Inspired by the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity, they become a concrete expression of that charity; they are to be praised and encouraged for their commitment to solidarity in our world.

Another issue missing from *TCTCV*'s discussion of the responsibility to care for those who suffer is the frank admission that currently divided Christian communities do

not always agree about the proper, morally acceptable way of responding to social questions. For example, Catholic participation with the WCC in a program entitled Sodepax (standing for Society, Development, Peace) proved to be unsustainable because of disagreements on questions such as that of over-population and the moral means to address it, if and when it is verified as a genuine problem. What level of discernment needs to enter into the Church's promotion of the well-being of the human person? How is ecclesial social doctrine at the global level which proposes principles for the guidance of the whole Church to be applied in specific local situations? These are important issues that *TCTCV* did not take into consideration.

Chapter IV begins and ends with forceful statements concerning the need for the Church to serve the dignity, well-being, and happiness of human beings. In this it should be applauded and praised. As such, it resonates well not only with the strong emphasis of recent Catholic theological anthropology but with an ever-recurring theme of Catholic magisterial teaching, perhaps most succinctly expressed by Pope John Paul II's *Redemptor hominis* when he taught that "Man is the way of the Church."

CONCLUSION

The Conclusion of the document (§§67–69) offers a very positive and fitting synthesis of the essentials of the active and transforming presence of the Church in contemporary society. It also gives a good pneumatological and eschatological perspective for taking ecumenism forward in the world we live in today. It emphasizes the fact that ecclesial *koinonia* finds its concretization in unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service to the world. It may be noted that the Fathers of the Church both in the East and the West insisted on the fact that these different dimensions of the Church's *koinonia* are inextricably intertwined. "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma–martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable." (*Deus caritas est* 25a). The *martyria*, *leitourgia* and *diakonia* describe different aspects of the Church's presence in the world. As they celebrate the sacraments, Christians are personally and socially transformed through the effects of sacramental grace and are thus encouraged to strengthen the bonds of communion which unite them, to offer wholehearted service to their brethren and, in so doing, to bear witness in contemporary society.

The presentation of the Christian liturgy as a living experience which truly animates the daily life of those participating could have been developed further not only in the Conclusion but also throughout the text of the whole document. The Conclusion rightly highlights that we already share a deep degree of *koinonia* and invites the churches to meet the challenge of finding more concrete ways to give expression to this real although still incomplete unity. It is hoped that readers and in particular church leaders on various levels of the Church's life will not dismiss this exhortation as "homiletical" but will find themselves inspired for action after giving these paragraphs serious and prayerful consideration. Uplifting aspirations are much needed in the demanding project of promoting the unity of Christians.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1:

To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The Faith and Order Commission of the WCC presents *TCTCV* as a convergence text, and it is such in many aspects. Of course, there are still various theological statements in the text that Catholic teaching would find inadequate. Nonetheless, reflecting the decades in which Catholic theologians have engaged with other Christians in dialogue, *TCTCV* presents some convergences on the meaning of the Church which reflect, in very substantial ways, the ecclesiological understanding of the Catholic Church.

The following affirmations are consistent with some of the principal claims of Catholic doctrine concerning the Church (they are not exhaustive, but some of the most important):

- The Church is a “communion” (*koinonia*) of persons sharing in the life of the Holy Trinity and in God’s mission (§1). It is “both a divine and a human reality” (§23). It is the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Head of the Church.
- The insistence on faith, sacraments and ministry as essential elements of communion (§§37–57) reflects well the Catholic understanding of the Church.
- The whole people of God has a prophetic, priestly, and kingly vocation. It is through the sacraments of initiation that people become members of the Body of Christ (§21). They renew their communion with Christ when they receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper (§42) and are refreshed and equipped for Christian living and mission by the Holy Spirit (§§19–21). Their discipleship requires moral commitment (§§61–62). Mary, the Mother of God, is the model for the Church and for every Christian of several dimensions of responding to God’s Word (§15).
- Jesus laid the foundations for community leadership by calling and sending the twelve apostles (§19) He “shared his authority with them” (§48). Faithful to his example, some believers are called to exercise “specific authority and responsibility,” a special ministry of “word, sacrament and oversight” to equip the Church for its mission in the world (§§19–20). Their successors in the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*) exercise authority in the same threefold ministry (§48). The Church has never been without such ministers (§20). They remind the community of its dependence on Jesus Christ (§19).

- The four marks or notes of the Church affirmed in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed – unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity – are God’s gifts that show that the Church has a divine mission (§22).
- The catholic unity of the Church allows for diversity, but there are “limits to legitimate diversity” (§30). “In crucial situations synods have come together to discern the apostolic faith in response to doctrinal or moral dangers of heresies” (§53). When the Church is called to make important decisions, “there is need for someone to summon and preside over the gathering for the sake of good order and to facilitate the process of promoting, discerning, and articulating consensus” (§54).
- One of the foremost tasks of the Church is evangelization. The promotion of justice and peace is one of its constitutive dimensions (§59). God reaches out to those who are not explicit members of the Church (§25), but this does not excuse Christians from their mission to invite them, by witness and word, to know and love Christ Jesus.
- In general, much progress has been made since the BEM document, but there is still some way to go to achieve greater convergence. At the same time, the opportunity to engage with *TCTCV* is for the Catholic Church also a good opportunity to reflect on some particular points of its own ecclesiology. In some aspects, for example in the teaching and exercise of primacy and synodality, some progress could be made to facilitate convergence with Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and also other Churches.

QUESTION 2:

To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

Catholics can identify some ways in which *TCTCV* offers a basis for growth in unity. Some consensus statements accept the contributions of Catholic theologians on previously disputed points; others advance the consensus by explicitly rejecting faulty views of the Church or calling attention to questions needing discussion.

- *It encourages recourse to the Tradition.* In setting out to discern God’s will for the unity of the Church, *TCTCV* looks not only to Scripture but to the witness of the “living Tradition” (§11). It cites several early witnesses to the Church’s experience and teaching, e.g., Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, the *Apostolic Canons* and St. John Chrysostom (§§23, 39, 55, 67). It also notes the function of synods (§53) and the significance of the Nicene Creed as an ecumenical symbol that serves the unity of the Church (§39).
- *It traces ordained ministry to the Lord’s choice of the Twelve.* In its treatment of the ordained ministry, *TCTCV* distinguishes the Twelve/the Apostles from the rest of the disciples and acknowledges that Jesus shared his authority with them (cf. Jn 20:22) and sent them “to serve [the Church] as its foundation and to oversee its mission” (§22). It identifies the functions of the apostles as “proclaiming the Word, baptizing and celebrating the Lord’s Supper” (§2), and it asserts that their “successors” in the ministry of *episkopé* exercise the same functions (§48). In this way, it promotes the view that certain aspects of the Church’s order were willed and instituted by Christ himself.
- *It values the idea of apostolic succession.* “The Church is apostolic because the Father sent the Son to establish it, and the Son sent the apostles [and prophets] ... to serve as its foundation and to oversee its mission.” It cites Clement’s Letter to the Corinthians in support of this and acknowledges that “apostolic succession in ministry, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church” (§22).
- *It expands and clarifies what the ministry of episkopé involves.* *TCTCV* confirms and extends the growing consensus with respect to the function of *episkopé* and its necessary service to the essential elements of *koinonia* – faith, sacraments, and ministry – by considering more fully the role of those who fulfil this office.
- *It promotes the value of synodality and primacy.* In promoting and illustrating the concept of synodality (or collegiality), *TCTCV* supports the view that the visible unity of the Church will be achieved by the collaboration of those who exercise *episkopé* (§53), and it introduces consideration of the Church’s historical experience of regional and universal primacy (§§54–55).

- *It adds elements to its previous definition of the Church.* *TCTCV's* definition of the Church now includes “the apostolic faith confessed,” and “a ministry of *episkopé*” – along with “a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached,” and “the sacraments are celebrated” (no. 31). *TCTCV* identifies the “universal Church” as “the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world (§31). It also acknowledges that the Church needs a ministry of *episkopé* at the local and universal levels for coordination and mission and in order to maintain “continuity in the apostolic faith” and “unity of life” (§§52, 54; see also §29).
- *It notes the problem posed by conflicting moral norms.* *TCTCV* recognizes that the re-thinking of moral norms poses new challenges and introduces new divisions, even within a particular church (§63). It asks when these differences become “church-dividing.” Moral questions must be explicitly addressed if the ecumenical movement is to retain its credibility.

If the insights of *TCTCV* were received by the various churches and communions, their members might recognize some common understandings of the Church which their theologians have identified through dialogue. The faithful in all of the churches and Christian communities may not realize that these common understandings of the mystery of the Church have been acknowledged; such a realization can bring hope and encouragement for future dialogues. This situation raises the crucial question of reception of ecumenical dialogues within the churches, and it points to the urgency of ecumenical formation.

QUESTION 3:

What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

As affirmed earlier in this response, the Catholic Church is highly appreciative of *TCTCV*. Furthermore, a truthful reading of the document has enabled us to reflect once again and, hand on heart, to embrace – with a rediscovered vigour – certain crucial aspects indicated here below. The Catholic Church earnestly commits itself to the challenges posed in *TCTCV*.

- The Catholic Church commits itself to respond to the call to grow in holiness. *TCTCV* §35 refers to the reality of sin and division. The Church is holy because it is the Body of Christ, but, at the same time it is touched by sin because of the actions committed by its members. The Church Fathers have indeed, at times, used the term *casta meretrix* to describe the Church. *TCTCV* rightly states that “although sin is in contradiction to the true identity of the Church, it is nonetheless real” (§35). Whatever the manner in which different churches and communities understand the reality of sin and division, all Christians are called to grow in holiness. The personal commitment of each Christian to grow in holiness will contribute to the holiness of the Church (cf. Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, Study Document *Be Renewed in the Spirit: The Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism*, 2013). Indeed, an authentic personal commitment to Christ is conducive to a deepening of one’s faith and to a more radical embrace of discipleship. The Catholic Church commits itself – both on a universal level, as well as at a grassroots level – to remind the baptized faithful, through the new evangelization and through catechesis of the daily call, addressed by Jesus to each of its members, to grow in holiness.
- The Catholic Church commits itself to an authentic spirit of renewal. In certain aspects of the life of the Catholic Church, the much needed *aggiornamento* initiated by the Second Vatican Council, unfortunately, did not always lead to a renewal in the life and mission of its members. The conciliar Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, refers to renewal in various spheres of the Church’s life, such as biblical studies, liturgy, the preaching of the word of God, catechetics, the apostolate of the laity, new forms of consecrated life and spirituality of marriage and the family, and the church’s social thought and involvement (cf. §6). It is indeed encouraging that similar initiatives are present in other churches. The churches are therefore encouraged to deepen their commitment to these areas of renewal and to collaborate together by doing together whatever can be done together. The Catholic Church, thus, reaffirms the perennial validity of the Lund Principle (1952). Furthermore, the Catholic Church commits itself to the words pronounced by Pope Francis in Geneva

to the World Council of Churches: “Let us help one another to walk, pray and work together” (21 June 2018).

- The Catholic Church commits itself, once again, to being the Church of the poor and for the poor (cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 186–216). *TCTCV* affirms that solidarity with the poor is a challenge facing the contemporary Church. While the social encyclicals of the Catholic Church have shed an important light on its responsibility vis-à-vis the poor and the marginalized, much more needs to be done. It realizes that, in certain aspects regarding the care and support of these strata of society, it is duty-bound to move decisively from words to concrete actions. Good intentions must be followed by radical choices to put these intentions into action. The contribution of international church bodies, episcopal conferences and local churches on this prophetic option has had a global hearing. In the face of different kinds of poverty in today’s world, the challenge for Catholics to witness effectively to the Gospel is closely linked to the mission of being a Church *of* the poor and *for* the poor. Reducing the gap between theology and life in this field will pave the way for a more integrated Catholic Church, and thus, a more convincing witness and holy dialogue partner to other churches.
- Reading *TCTCV*§53, the Catholic Church is challenged to continue to develop its current practice of synodality. Since the ecclesiological shift in the context of the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar period, synodality and collegiality have continued to flourish. In a landmark speech on the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis underlined the centrality of synodality. He stated that “a synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn” (17 October 2015). He also acknowledged that the hope expressed by the Council to promote decentralization, collegiality and synodality on all levels of Church’s life “has not yet been fully realized” and affirmed his will to promote and stimulate this process. Responding to this intention, the International Theological Commission recently published a study which offers guidelines for a renewed theology of synodality as well as useful pastoral orientations about what it implies for the Church’s life and mission in the third millennium.²⁵

Some have rightly affirmed that an enhanced commitment to the synodal principle enables a fruitful and regular exchange of available material and lived experiences among local churches, an exchange facilitated by the guidance of the Bishop of Rome. This is indispensable in a world and Church that are progressively becoming

25. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018).

more global and at the same time more pluralistic. Indeed, synodality – underlined so positively *TCTCV*§53 – and proposed for “all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional and universal” has been increasingly encouraged within the Catholic Church.

Synodality is not solely a style of exercising authority, service and collaboration in the formal structures of the Church but is also an ecclesial attitude which can be adopted by all Christians, whatever their responsibility, even at the grassroots. The Catholic Church commits itself to facilitate this two-way process within its own life. This takes place centripetally, from the local Churches to the centre, as well as centrifugally from the centre to the peripheries. This ecclesial transformation marks a shift in behaviour and in the way of doing things, but, more profoundly, it signals a radical change in attitude. Regarding synodality at the grassroots level within the Catholic Church, it will seek to promote a more inclusive attitude in its structures wherever this is either absent or weak – as in diocesan and parish pastoral councils of consultation and collaboration.

The ecumenical significance of synodality is to be highlighted, as it brings the Catholic Church closer to churches which have practised it. Such convergence has assisted different churches in approaching a common Christian understanding of the interrelationship between primacy and synodality, as well as the entering into collaboration with other Christians. Furthermore, each church is encouraged to refrain from the taking of important decisions which may have grave repercussions on relations with other churches, until it first takes into consideration their position. This can be carried out by adopting the same synodal attitude mentioned above, through consultation, thus avoiding the creation of avoidable divisive situations resulting from unilateral decisions.

In a more synodal and conciliar Church a new light can also be shed on the interrelationship between primacy and synodality. The *Catholic Church is challenged to look for new ways of exercising the ministry of primacy on all levels of the Church's life* which are correctly balanced with the practice of synodality and collegiality.

On the grassroots level, the pastor (*parochus*) is the one who presides over the parish community (cf. *CIC*, can.515). However, he is called to exercise his ministry in cooperation with other presbyters or deacons and lay members of the faithful (cf. *CIC*, can.519). While presiding over the community, he is to encourage the proper part which all members have in the mission of their parish and to promote the spirit of communion (*koinonia*).

On the local level the diocesan bishop is the chief shepherd who has responsibility for the pastoral care of the faithful within his jurisdiction (cf. *CIC*, can.381, §1). He is the visible principle of unity in his diocese. As the figurehead of the particular church

he is responsible for teaching, governing, and sanctifying the faithful. However, he shares these duties with the priests, deacons and lay ministries. He is called to preside over the particular Church in the communion of all its members, and to ensure that their diverse gifts serve to build up the community in union with the universal Church.

The practice of primacy culminates in the service of the Bishop of Rome. He exercises his universal ministry of primacy as perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of the whole Church (cf. *LG* 23). In line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and calling to mind an ancient tradition, Pope Francis affirms: “The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time – as Successor of Peter – to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches”.²⁶ This unique ministry of “presiding in charity over all the Churches” entails that synodality be exercised in communion with the Bishop of Rome as the visible sign of the Church’s unity and the head of the college of bishops.

The Catholic Church is aware that the ministry of primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not always recognized by non-Catholic Churches and Ecclesial Communities and continues to be a difficulty on the way to full visible communion. While the Catholic Church affirms that this ministry corresponds to the will of Christ and thus belongs to the very nature of the Church, it also affirms that in the new situation of Christianity influenced by the ecumenical movement, its exercise needs a new evaluation and vision. This is why John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* urged the pastors and theologians of all Churches to help him, while in no way renouncing what is essential to this mission, to find the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all Christians (cf. *UUS* 95).

- The Catholic Church accepts the challenge to strengthen the laity in their vocation as “missionary disciples”. The Second Vatican Council had emphasized the role of the lay faithful, empowering them to act in ways they had not experienced before. Inspired also by *TCTCV* §48, Catholics are urged by the Church to spread “the joy of the Gospel” to all those they meet.
- The Catholic Church commits itself to the new paths opened by receptive ecumenism. In addition to Pope John Paul II’s description of ecumenism as an exchange of gifts (*UUS* 28), receptive ecumenism emphasizes in a special way the importance of being open to learn from others.

26. POPE FRANCIS, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015.

- The Catholic Church accepts the challenge to instruct its leaders to shoulder responsibly the promotion of the formation of ministers and laity, with particular attention to their ecumenical formation and commitment. Ordained ministers as well as lay pastoral agents and all those involved in formation are to be ecumenically minded. This necessitates a solid grounding in all the aspects of ecumenism, both from an academic point of view, as well as on a practical hands-on level.
- The Catholic Church renews its commitment to facilitate encounters with the leaders and representatives of the various churches. These personal encounters are precious not only in strengthening the bonds of friendship between church leaders, but also have a powerful and positive media impact on the individual members of the respective churches.
- Finally, the Catholic Church also renews its commitment to collaborating in joint projects within the social field with other churches on a local level.

QUESTION 4:

How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

This question refers to the Church *ad intra* (the life of faith) and to the Church *ad extra* (its mission). The answer to this question will highlight examples of what we have been able to do – and what we can do – together as churches, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

It is very painful that we cannot celebrate the Eucharist with members of other churches. This reality enables us to recall the wounds of division we have inflicted upon each other in past centuries. However, this does not impede us from inviting members of other churches to the liturgies we celebrate, just as nothing stops us from attending the liturgies of other churches when it is acceptable. The liturgy is an opportunity to learn about each other: as we pray, so we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*).

As explained earlier, in the answer to question three, we will renew our commitment to do together whatever we can do together, even in the context of the liturgy. These are some examples: the highly significant gesture of the washing of the feet, signifying service as well as intimacy, following Jesus' example; the imposition of ashes on the first day of the Lenten season; celebrating together the liturgy of the Word and other symbolic gestures during the vigils of solemnities such as Christmas, Epiphany, the Ascension, Pentecost and the Martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul; local religious festivities in significant shrines to which Christians from different churches journey as pilgrims (cf. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, §§116–119).

The Catholic Church encourages its members to engage in common spiritual initiatives, as for example, shared bible study and *lectio divina*, common spiritual retreats (particularly in Advent and Lent), reading together the texts penned by spiritual masters and mystics from all Christian Traditions. The Catholic Church gladly joins the Orthodox Church, as well as other churches, in the celebration of the World Day of Creation on 1 September (cf. *Directory*, §215).

The Catholic Church renews its commitment to put into practice the letter and the spirit of the abovementioned *Directory*, in particular Chapter 5 which treats Ecumenical Cooperation: Dialogue and Common Witness.

A number of markedly prophetic gestures, carried out jointly by church leaders, have had a positive impact on all Christians. As far back as 1966, during the encounter between Pope Paul VI and Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope recognized Ramsey as “a brother in Christ” by placing on the Anglican leader's finger his own episcopal ring, a gesture which witnesses said moved the elderly Archbishop to tears.

In a reciprocal gesture on 5 October 2016, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby gave Pope Francis a silver Cross of Nails, based on the Coventry symbol of reconciliation, as a sign of their renewed partnership in the urgent work of reconciliation today. The Pope put it around his neck before the two leaders gave a joint blessing, a gesture that would have been unthinkable half a century ago. On the same occasion, on the spot where Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine out on mission to evangelize the English at the end of the sixth century, Pope Francis and Archbishop Welby “sent out” on mission together pairs of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops, before signing a common declaration recommitting their Churches to take the gospel “to the ends of the earth”, and, in particular, “to those on the margins and the peripheries of our societies”. Other joint gestures by Pope Francis and leaders have taken place at Lesvos, during the poignant encounter with migrants (16 April 2016), Lund, during the beginning of the fifth-centenary commemoration of the Reformation (31 October 2016) and Bari, at the ecumenical prayer for peace in the Middle East (7 July 2018). The Catholic Church highlights the important ecumenical significance of these and other gestures, by church leaders at a local level, and encourages them.

The Catholic Church has nurtured closer relationships with other churches in the difficult and challenging contexts of persecution, war and natural calamities. The ecumenism of the martyrs has been reiterated, time and time again, by Pope John Paul II and by Pope Francis. In *Tertio millennio adveniente*, Pope John Paul II reminds us that “witness to Christ, borne even to the shedding of blood, has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants, as Pope Paul VI pointed out in his homily for the canonization of the Ugandan martyrs” (§37). Pope Francis has expressed himself, time and time again, on the ecumenism of blood. In his encounter with Abuna Matthias I, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church, he affirmed: “The ecumenism of the martyrs is a summons to us, here and now, to advance on the path to ever greater unity” (29 February 2016). Addressing members of the Renewal in the Spirit Movement, Pope Francis stated:

“A few months ago, 23 Egyptian Copts who were beheaded on the shores of Libya. In that moment, they said the name of Jesus. ‘Oh, but they are not Catholic!’ But they are Christians! They are brothers! They are our martyrs! This is the ecumenism of blood!”. He then went on to say: “And 50 years ago, Paul VI, at the canonization of the young martyrs of Uganda, made reference to this: that for the same reason, their Anglican catechist companions also shed their blood. They were Christians, they were martyrs. Forgive me, do not be scandalized, but they are our martyrs because they gave their lives for Christ! And this is the ecumenism of blood!” (3 July 2015).

The Catholic Church expresses its gratitude to God for the large number of bilateral and multilateral ecumenical consensus or convergence documents and will spare no effort in proceeding in this direction.

Closer relationships in life and mission are enhanced because there is a commonly felt need by Christians across the globe for *a call to conscience* by respected Christian leaders. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Patriarch Athenagoras, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Pope John Paul II, to mention a few examples, spoke loudly and clearly to the conscience of the human family on the common good. The Catholic Church reiterates its readiness to support the courageous stance taken by leaders of other churches in the defence of human dignity, and the rights of indigenous populations. On a local level, too, the Catholic Church will continue to offer its support to other churches and their leaders in presenting a common front against injustice and intolerance, and in the support of human rights, justice and peace.

QUESTION 5:

What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

In its response to *TCTCV*, the Catholic Church has reflected on the extent to which this document can be used to address a variety of issues. Furthermore, the Catholic Church is convinced that what has been achieved in *TCTCV* could be a platform for future fruitful endeavours carried out by Faith and Order. The Catholic Church therefore suggests that the ongoing work of Faith and Order in the field of ecclesiology, in the coming years, include the following dimensions:

- Among the aspects of the life of the Church which could call for further discussion, priority ought to be given to a more extensive study of the relationship between *diversity* and *separation*, as well as the limitations of diversity. Further discussion can be carried out on the theological principles for discernment on legitimate diversities and on diversities which separate the churches. After so much progress achieved in the last decades, the quest for visible unity is a pressing challenge which ought to be continued further in the light of the ecumenical dialogues of the last fifty years and *TCTCV* itself.
- Faith and Order is encouraged to reconsider the question of a universal ministry of primacy at the service of Christian unity (cf. *UUS* 89; Fifth World Assembly of Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela, *Confessing the One Faith to God's Glory*, 1993, 31, 2).
- The Catholic response points to those areas in *TCTCV* where differences require further work. The Catholic response to *BEM* in 1987 had mentioned three critical issues, all forming a part of ecclesiology, which should be part of Faith and Order's continuing work: 'Sacrament and sacramentality', 'Apostolic tradition', and 'Authority in the Church'. One can state that *TCTCV* has made some progress in each of these areas, since *BEM*: regarding Sacrament and sacramentality (cf. §§25–27, 40–46), regarding Apostolic tradition (cf. §§22–24), and regarding Authority in the Church and its exercise (cf. §§45–57). Although the progress achieved is still insufficient, nonetheless, the Catholic Church is extremely grateful for what has been achieved so far. We are duty-bound to reiterate that the convergence achieved by *TCTCV* is indeed useful for further study. What has been accomplished, so far, may truly serve as a springboard for further studies and reflection.
- In particular, the work of Faith and Order could profit from further discussion on sacramentality. Christians do not yet have a common understanding of the sacraments and sacramentality. A deeper study of the instrumental and the expressive perspectives is required. The Catholic Church affirms that Christ is the principal

minister of the sacraments, and that they are both signs and instruments, or causes, of grace. The question of instrumental causality deserves more attention. For Catholics, this is not just a question of terminology, but represents a fundamental belief regarding how Christ is present and active in the Church, namely, by means of efficacious signs. The discussion on this may be advanced by considering unresolved questions on Baptism and Eucharist; and why Catholics call Holy Orders a sacrament and how apostolic succession fits into this question.

- Another important area of study is that of Christian anthropology (especially the relationship between person and nature), as this is related to discipleship and ethical issues. Reflection on the relationship between Creator and creatures, and consequently, on human freedom, sin and human weakness, sheds light on the extent to which humanity can shape and discover a deeper meaning to its own existence. Indeed, the freedom with which Christ has set us free encourages Christians to become authentic servants of their sisters and brothers.
- We underline the importance of attending to cultural contexts, such as the shifting of the Church's centre of gravity from Europe and North America to the global South. As a result, a new evangelization and catechesis is required since some of the 'new emerging churches' seem to give less importance to the sacraments, doctrine and ecclesiology. The importance of seeking to engage these churches is not meant to distract from the thrust of the new evangelization in the 'older historic churches'. Together we are to seek answers to the question of the ecclesiological challenges facing these 'older churches' and their experience of declining numbers. The latter are called to share 'traditional' values with the 'new' churches.
- Faith and Order can deepen its study on charisms and the charismatic dimension of the Church. Although mentioned in *TCTCV* §§16, 18, 21 and 28, it is worth focusing, in faithfulness to Scripture, upon their constitutive dimension regarding the local and the universal Church. An awareness of the plurality of charisms is a decisive factor for a constant renewal of the churches. Many movements born of the Spirit, in contemporary times as in the past, have energized church life and evangelization.
- The role of the Church in the world can be studied further, especially in the context of religious pluralism and serious ethical questions. This reiterates the importance of Christian anthropology, as stated above, because the primacy of the person is fundamental. The place of the Church is, therefore, also within the 'secular' dimension of economy, politics, human rights, ecology, etc., namely, the 'new areopagi' of our times. The challenge, therefore, is to strengthen the relationship between ecclesiology and anthropology.
- Further study on ecumenical spirituality is also suggested. The Catholic Church – in union with other churches – is convinced that by focusing our life on Christ,

crucified and risen, it will be possible, despite the obstacles and barriers that still exist, to grow in an authentic experience of *koinonia* that will be conducive to full visible unity. Deepening the implications of this ecumenical spirituality, possibly with a specific study project on 'the spirituality of encounter', could be an important avenue of research in the 'ecumenical pilgrimage' towards full communion. Pope Francis' frequent emphasis on the spirituality of encounter is a valuable tool towards a greater mutual understanding among Christian churches. This dimension thus merits further study.

FINAL REMARKS

The Catholic Church wishes to express deep gratitude to the World Council of Churches, and in particular to the Commission on Faith and Order, for *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. This Response drawing upon comments sent to the PCPCU from various episcopal conferences, theological faculties and individual experts from around the world represents an important stage in the process of reception of the document. We hope that it will assist the Catholic Church at local, regional and universal levels to continue to engage with the text and to draw the pastoral consequences of the doctrinal convergence reached in the text on some crucial aspects of ecclesiology. We hope that the reception of the text in all churches will lead us to more genuine church fellowship and cooperation. We are very mindful of the fact that the unity that Christ prayed for will be realized through renewal in each of our churches so that we become more faithful to the Gospel. The Church is always in need of renewal and reform under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We receive this document as an instrument of renewal within the Catholic communion. It offers a way for each of us to work with our ecumenical partners as we listen to the voice of each other and together to the voice of the Spirit guiding the Church in our own time.