

S T *A Reformed Contribution to an Ecumenical Dialogue* G Y

BRILL

Theology of Ministry

Studies in Reformed Theology

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Theology of Ministry

A Reformed Contribution to an
Ecumenical Dialogue

By
Eduardus Van der Borght



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PART THREE

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FOREWORD

Before you lies the English translation of my thesis that I defended at the University of Leiden on 21 November 2000 under the supervision of Professor Dr. A. van de Beek and Professor Dr. G.G. de Kruijf. There is only one material difference with the Dutch original. The first part, a study into the official theology of ministry of the Roman Catholic Church since the Council of Trent, has been omitted. This part of the research enabled me to increase my sensitivity to the questions posed by theology of ministry. The descriptive character of this section also helped me to find a way of developing a theology of ministry that differed from a traditional, controversy-based theological discourse. The danger of an approach that is too defensive is far from imaginary because the church's doctrine and, in particular, theology of ministry has a character that strongly defines the identity of churches and traditions. Despite this, I decided not to include this part in the translation because, as a synthesis, it did not contain any new research results that are not already available in English literature. I hope that my revisiting of Calvin's theology of ministry in the *Institutes* will act as a stimulant for international research into the ecumenical potential of Calvin's theology. The section dealing with the paragraphs about ministry in the BEM text of *Faith and Order* offers a paragraph by paragraph analysis of this basic reference text that, to date, has not been available in English books. I also give a model for the reception of ecumenical texts in existing traditions, which opens more fruitful perspectives than the traditional rejection of what does not agree with the reader's own tradition. Finally, I offer a proposal for new emphases in Reformed theology of ministry with the hope of an international response.

The adage that all theological research is contextual applies to theology of ministry as well. The references to the theological discussions between Protestants in the Netherlands in the past few decades and to the United Protestant Church in Belgium (UPCB) in the introduction and conclusion reveal the background of this research: the discussion about ministry of theology in the Netherlands and my own work

as minister of Word and sacrament of the UPCB in the 1990s. Since then my extended international contacts through my involvement with the *International Reformed Theological Institute* (IRTI) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam have taught me that the Reformed tradition's structure and theology of ministry might be somewhat different elsewhere in the world. All the same, the results of this research reach beyond its own context. Within the framework of the catholicity of the church, this publication is intended as a Reformed contribution to the ecumenical theological discussion about ministry in the church. The reinterpretation of the heritage from the time of the Reformation in terms of theology of ministry (part 1) and the analysis of the BEM text's challenge to the Reformed tradition (part 2) are much less contextual.

More than five years have passed between finalizing this study and the completion of the translation. During that period a number of books and articles have been written that would have been relevant for the ongoing research. I would have liked to have been able to make use of, among other things, D. MacCulloch's new historical insights into the Reformation period or of Ph. Benedict's recent study of the social history of Calvinism that paints such a clear picture of the Presbyterian tradition in the Anglo-Saxon context and compares it with the Reformed tradition in continental Europe, or of R. Muller analysis of the different text editions of Calvin's *Institutes*.¹ Even the numerous ecumenical articles that were written to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the BEM text would have been useful.² Two dissertations were published in the Netherlands that contained a plea for a bishop's office in the Reformed tradition.³ But none of these publications would have made a fundamental difference to the result of my

¹ D. MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700*. (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Ph. Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: a Social History of Calvinism*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002); R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*. (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

² We refer, among other things, to the themed edition of *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 92 (2002) 3 that was dedicated in its entirety to the reception of the BEM text after 20 years.

³ J. Kronenburg, *Episcopus Oecumenicus: Bouwstenen voor een theologie van het bisschopsambt in en verenigde reformatorische kerk* (Elements of a Theology of Episcopacy for a United Protestant Church) (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2003), and R. de Reuver, *Eén kerk in meer-voud: een theologisch onderzoek naar de ecclesiologische waarde van pluraliteit* (One Church in Plurality: a Theological Investigation into the Ecclesiological Value of Plurality) (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2004).

study. This is why I have not tried to incorporate all the literature that was published in the past five years.

The translation of the Dutch word *ambt* into English was a difficult issue. Should it be 'ministry' or 'office'? When my kindly, Anglican colleague in Antwerp said in 2000 that he would write the English summary of my thesis, I noticed that the English terminology is, to a large degree, determined by church tradition. In the meantime, I have learned that usage within the English speaking Reformed tradition varies according to the region and the church. My English translator, who is a member of the United Reformed Church, sometimes favored translations that differed from the ones proposed by two American consulting theologians who are members of the Reformed Church in America. Another consideration is that the term 'ministry' is preferred in ecumenical texts. Depending on the context, both terms have been used to translate the Dutch word *ambt*. Sometimes both 'ministry' and 'office' are possible; sometimes it has to be the one or the other. The context is the deciding factor. I suspect that American translators would have made more use of the word 'office' and less of 'ministry.' In this matter, I followed my English translator because I chose to use the most ecumenical usage possible.

In conclusion, all that remains is for me to say some words of thanks: to the *Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* (NWO or Dutch Organization for Scientific Research) for awarding me the translation subsidy; to my translator, Hillian Durell, for the perseverance she has shown in completing this large translation project; to the ministers of the Reformed Church in America, Okke Postma and Allan Janssen, who gave me advice about the translation of theological terminology; and the publishing company Meinema's K. Korenhof for his permission to have the Dutch text translated into English; and to the members of the editorial board of *Studies in Reformed Theology* for the permission to publish this translation in the series.

Eddy Van der Borgh
Mechelen, September 2006

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

Currently an academic study about ministry in the Reformed tradition is a rather unexpected phenomenon. Such a topic appears to have too much of an intra-church character. Today other matters determine the theological and ecclesiological agenda. In particular, the declining relevance of the church within contemporary European culture affects academia as well as the churches. The churches are still not familiar with their new role. They no longer take center stage in the field of faith and ethics. They are now only one of many players in the market of religion. Do they still have a task in a secularized, post-modern society? This situation affects theological thinking. The most important question now is how, in such a fundamentally changed situation, the churches can credibly continue to communicate the gospel. That credibility relates both to the credibility vis-à-vis the churches' contemporaries and to faithfulness to the Word that has been revealed.

It is not surprising that in the past few decades little attention has been given to ecclesiology and, in particular, theology of ministry. Just a few examples will illustrate this. When the Dutch Reformed Church introduced a new church order in 1951, many questions about ministry remained unanswered. Some of which were questions that particularly related to the difference between ministry and service, the ministerial status of the vicariate, who was authorized to administer the sacraments, the possibility of female ministers and the possibility of complementary consecrations in *The Church of England* with a view to preserving the uninterrupted line in the apostolic tradition. For this reason, a study commission under the leadership of A.A. van Ruler was commissioned in 1952. After fourteen years of exhausting labor, they submitted their report to the Council for Church Affairs and Theology. The criticism was so severe that it was decided not to send it to the General Synod. Then H. Berkhof was asked to write a new report.

This led to the study report entitled *Wat is er aan de hand met het ambt?*¹ This report was also so heavily criticized that the General Synod did not accept it; rather, it was merely offered to the congregations for consideration. Apart from a number of articles by individual theologians,² not much was written or said about ministry. This did not mean that there were no longer any questions about ministry, as can be seen from the remaining discussion about the option to give elders and deacons authority to administer the sacraments in small congregations that can no longer call a full-time minister to lead their worship each Sunday. In addition, the formation of the new Protestant Church in the Netherlands (originating from a combination of two Reformed churches and one Lutheran church) required a rethinking of the ministerial structure. However, the changed social situation meant that the ministry issue remained deadlocked.

The development within the Roman Catholic Church has been even more profiled over the past 50 years. At the Second Vatican Council, she managed to express her identity in a completely new way. This resulted in a number of new emphases for the theology of ministry. As a result of the strong restorative wind that blew from Rome, this new fire was to be extinguished during the coming decades. The official documents from the bishops' synods after Vatican II did not provide new perspectives in terms of ministry. Quite recently, at the European bishops' synod held in Rome in October 1999, people talked openly about a crisis in the Roman Catholic Church. It became apparent that this church also found it difficult to find her place in the changed social context.

The final example comes from the ecumenical world. In Lima (1982), *Faith and Order* presented the third part of the text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), to the churches. This was the result of fifty years of

¹ *Wat is er aan de hand met het ambt?* (Study report about ministry presented by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church further to the decision taken by its meeting on 18 February 1969.) (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1970).

² Some of these are A. van de Beek, who spoke about a functional approach to ministry from the congregation in his collection: *Tussen Traditie and Vervreemding. Over kerk and christenzijn in een veranderende cultuur* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1985), in particular in the articles, "Het pastoraat in de gemeente" (85–97), "Ambt en avondmaal" (115–125) and "Over protestantse reacties op de ambtsvisie van het rapport over doop, eucharistie and ambt van de Wereldraad van Kerken" (126–132). With regard to ministry, the thoughts of G.D.J. Dingemans, *Een huis om in te wonen. Schetsen en bouwstenen voor een Kerk and een Kerkorde van de toekomst*. (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1987) took the same direction with a plea for a more congregationalist church order.

ecumenical theological discussions about ministry. The fact that theologians from so many different traditions were able to jointly present this was regarded as something so exceptional by the commission members that they saw the presentation of this document to the churches as a *kairos* to help church unity take a large step forward. Nevertheless, despite the responses from many churches, the concrete result was disappointing. The crisis that has plagued the ecumenical movement during the past ten years resulted in a loss of theological creativity needed to overcome traditional deadlocks in the ecumenical thinking about ministry.

This overview shows that a number of factors caused the theology of ministry to stagnate in the last decades, and that the *Zeitgeist* was not conducive to the study of ecclesiological questions. The incentive to revive this issue came from elsewhere, in particular—from the sphere of personal circumstances. On 2 April 1989, the author of this study was ordained as minister of the Word in the United Protestant Church in Belgium in the congregation at Boechout. This ordination was seen as a moment in which the call by people and by God crystallized into the conscious choice to give a positive response to that call. This event caused the author (with his Roman Catholic roots) to wonder what it meant to become a minister in a church of the presbyterial-synodal type³ that has its own ecclesiology and view of ministry. He was not consecrated as priest and ordained within a hierarchical structure, but was ordained as a minister of the Word and attached to a local congregation where, together with two other offices (that of elder and that of deacon), he was called to give pastoral leadership to the congregation. Many questions presented themselves. They were connected with church order and liturgy, but there were increasingly some of a systematic nature. What is the exact meaning of ministry in this ecclesiological

³ The United Protestant Church in Belgium was formed at the end of 1978 as a result of 7 years of discussions about unity between the (then) Protestant Church in Belgium (itself a conglomeration of an earlier, loosely connected synodal union between presbyterial congregations—the synod of the Protestant Evangelical Church and the Belgian Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church), the Reformed Church of Belgium (a synodal association of primarily French-speaking congregations with their roots in the Geneva revival of the first half of the nineteenth century), and the Belgium district of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The ‘Evangelical Church’ in Boechout is one of the six former Reformed Churches. Further information about this can be found in the historical notes that are included in the *Constitutie, Kerkorde en andere reglementen van de Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België*. (Brussel, 1994), III.1–10.

tradition? How would ministry be defined? If it is possible to make a distinction between the ecclesiastical offices and other functions within the church, such as caretaker or choir leader, where is their additional value? In the specificity of their functions? In an institution that dates back to Christ or the apostles? Or is there something else?

The questions about ecclesiastical ministry in the Reformed tradition appeared to be in accord with the growing problem awareness within this tradition itself. Not long after his ordination, a new trial order of service for the induction of office bearers was published in the Netherlands.⁴ The fact that the ‘principles’ were only defended after the notes in the margin and the actual orders points to a certain degree of embarrassment. In a foreword there was reference to the rule *lex orandi—lex credendi*. This may be a convenient way to avoid discussions concerning church order and theology in order to justify the liturgical proposals, but it is doubtful whether this was convincing.

It was not only the liturgy, but also the theological reflection in the framework of the ecumenical movement that raised new questions concerning ministry in the Reformed tradition. The Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, in a joint response to *BEM*, admitted that they did not have a detailed concept of ministry.⁵ This embarrassment challenged M. Gosker, a minister of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, to write a research master thesis⁶ about the ecclesiastical ministry in the Lima document in order

⁴ See *Bevestiging van ambtsdragers*, issue 2 of Trial Orders of Service, a series of publications on the way to a book with Orders of Service for the Churches, from the Orders of Service of the Commission of the Cooperation Organisation for Worship of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. (Leidschendam/Leusden, 1989).

⁵ *Churches respond to BEM, Vol. I* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), 109: “... (given the fact that our churches do not have a detailed conception of ministry), ...”.

⁶ “Dat een theologisch goed uitgewogen ambtsopvatting in onze kring feitelijk niet voorhanden is, maakt dat wij niet de gemakkelijkste gesprekspartners op dit punt zijn in het oecumenisch gesprek. Wellicht tillen wij niet zo zwaar aan de ambtsvraag. LA daagt ons uit de vragen van het ambt opnieuw te doordenken, zodat niet alleen duidelijk is wat wij niet willen (hiërarchie, uitmondend in een pauselijk ambt) and vrezen (om in sacramentalistisch vaarwater terecht te komen), maar ook welke mogelijkheden wij dan wel zien om te komen tot een oecumenisch ambtsverstaan.” M. Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument: een hermeneutische doorlichting en kritische evaluatie van de Lima-Ambstekst* (Utrecht/Leiden: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1990). This study formed the basis for her dissertation, *Het ambt in de oecumenische discussie: De betekenis van de Lima-ambstekst voor de voortgang van de oecumene and de doorwerking in de Nederlandse SOW-kerken*, Budapest–Amstelveen, 2000, which she defended at the Karoli Gáspár University in Budapest on 5 June 2000.

to clarify ministry issues within the Reformed tradition. Before she formulated a number of questions to the Protestant tradition, she wrote:

Because in our circles there is no theologically well-balanced concept of ministry we are not the easiest of discussion partners at this point in the ecumenical dialogue. Perhaps we do not take the ministry issue seriously enough. LA challenges us to fresh reflection about issues of ministry, so that it not only becomes clear what we do not want (hierarchy, resulting in the papal office) and what we fear (to end up in sacramentalism), but also what the possibilities are to achieve an ecumenical concept of ministry.⁷

While during the past decades we have seen stagnation in the systematic-theological study of ministry, the practical theological research on the ecclesiastical ministry has continued. The fact that the systematic element of theology of ministry remains underdeveloped is a handicap in the development of a theology of ministry as a behavioral science. When the tradition is hesitant in the formulation of the function, role and identity of ministry, the development of an integrated pastoral theology of ministry becomes difficult.

These publications (from the period of the author's ordination) made him realize that the questions he was asking were not merely concerned with a personal issue. They were an encouragement to give attention to these issues in the field of systematic theology and to delve deeper in order to find an answer.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

M. Gosker's study, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument. Een hermeneutische doorlichting en een kritische evaluatie van de Lima-Ambtstekst*, was important because it helped to raise personal, diffuse questions to a clearly defined problem formulation to a general level. Both her working method and the final result pointed the way. Her study of the ecumenical theology of ministry based on the Lima text resulted in a number of questions addressed to the Reformed tradition. This was an incentive to formulate our own concrete purposes and research methods.

Our aim is to provide a number of building blocks for an updated theology of ministry within the field of systematic theology that builds on the foundations of the Reformed tradition. In this way, we want

⁷ Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 153.

to contribute to the ministry's identity formation and effectiveness in the church. In doing so, we go a step further than Gosker does. While she ended her study by questioning the Reformed tradition, we want to give a number of answers by discussing numerous, fundamental elements of a renewing theology of ministry from a Reformed perspective. The result can be found in the final chapter of this study.

THE ROUTE FOLLOWED

How can we achieve our aim? In our opinion, a renewed theology of ministry must not ignore the results of the ecumenical theology of ministry. An updated theology of ministry must be ecumenical; it must leave controversy theology behind. In doing so, we intend to concentrate on the ministry section of the Lima report. Since 1982 this document has been a fixed reference point for all traditions. Within the Reformed tradition, as in many other traditions, receiving the results has, in general, not moved beyond reiterating a classical position. In our analysis of the ministry section of the Lima text, we want to go much further than Gosker's study. While her work consisted mainly of an introduction and explanation of the Lima text, we intend to provide a detailed, historic, and intra-textual analysis of the text. In addition, we will provide an analysis of the reception of the various sections of the text within the Reformed tradition from both churches and individual theologians. Finally, we will formulate a number of questions and lessons for the Reformed theology of ministry. This section is the most extensive part of our study. This is, among other things, due to the fact that—until now—each paragraph of the text has not been systematically analyzed. We hope that this section of the study will prove useful to people who, without further interest in the Reformed tradition, want to know what a specific paragraph in the text means in its context and based on the historic evolution of the text.

If there is to be a dialogue between Reformed and ecumenical theology of ministry, we must first gain an insight into the elements that determine the specific ministerial structure within the Reformed tradition. A variety of non-theological elements contributed to this structure, but in the framework of our study, we shall concentrate our search primarily on the fundamental theological arguments that played a part in the development of the Reformed ministerial structure. For this reason, a section about Reformed theology of ministry will

precede the section about the Lima text. When we say ‘Reformed,’ we refer to that specific tradition that followed in the footsteps of the Swiss Reformation in the sixteenth century and led to the formation of separate churches, thus making a distinction between them and the Lutheran, Anabaptist and Anglican traditions (which also developed in the framework of the Reformation in the sixteenth century.) The limited nature of the study forces us to make a choice: either we present a synthesis of existing dogma historic (overviews⁸ of the different elements of Reformed theology of ministry) or we make an attempt to provide an independent analysis of a few core texts. We opted for the second method. The disadvantage of this method is that it will be impossible to deal with all aspects, persons, periods

and areas. The lack of completeness is, in our opinion, not enough of a disadvantage when set against a direct confrontation with and a thorough analysis of some fundamental representative texts. In this way we hope to gain a better insight into several of the deepest theological elements that shaped Reformed theology of ministry. We shall select a number of important works that had a considerable influence on the development of this tradition, in particular—texts by Zwingli and Calvin and a number of confessions of faith from the sixteenth century. The *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, the *magnus opus* of the most important theologian of the Reformed tradition in the sixteenth century—John Calvin, will be the subject of the most detailed analysis. We hope that this study will help us to prepare for the encounter with the ecumenical theology of ministry in the next chapter.

We can summarize the route to be taken as follows: Initially, the specificity of Reformed theology of ministry is to be determined with

⁸ We can make use of the articles about the Reformed tradition under the heading ‘ministry’ in the most recent editions of the most important theological encyclopedias. In particular, the article by H. Fagerberg, “Amt/Ämter/Amtsverständnis—VI Reformationszeit” in *Theological Realenzyklopedie*, Bd. 2, (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1978³), 552–574 strikes us as a result of the thoroughness with which Luther and Calvin’s theology of ministry is introduced. In addition, the notes about church and ministry in works that describe the history of dogma of the Reformed tradition will be very helpful, among others the contribution written by W. Neuser, “Dogma und Bekenntnis in der Reformation: Von Zwingli und Calvin bis zur Synode von Westminster” in: C. Andresen (Hrsg.), *Die Lehrentwicklung in Rahmen der Konfessionalität* (Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte Bd. 2) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 167–352 and J. Rohls, *Theologie reformierter Bekenntnisschriften: von Zürich bis Barmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987). In addition, studies about church and ministry by specific Reformed reformers and confessions of faith will be studied. A number of these texts will be quoted later in the study.

the help of a number of source texts. Armed with this knowledge, we shall then make a thorough analysis of the ministry section of the Lima text. We hope that this will result in a number of critical questions for the ecumenical tradition from the Reformed tradition and that, on the other hand, there will be a number of lessons and questions for the Reformed tradition. The final section will lead to the formulation of a number of building blocks for a renewed Reformed theology of ministry.

We intend to have contributed to the present systematic reflection on ministry in the church, with a view to optimize the formulation of theories and the way that ministers function in practice. At the same time, we hope to have been able to provide a useful instrument for the churches in their reflection on their role in our secularized society. One of the confusing elements in this situation is that many pastors in the church have themselves become unsure of their task and role in the church and in society.

PART ONE

MINISTRY IN THE REFORMED
TRADITION OF THE 16TH CENTURY

MINISTRY IN THE REFORMED TRADITION OF THE 16th CENTURY: INTRODUCTION

Anyone who intends to supply building materials for a renewed Reformed theology of ministry will sooner or later have to answer the question of what the classic Reformed view of ministry exactly is. Very often the first thing that springs to mind is the special structure of ministry at the level of the local community of the faithful that includes the three offices of preacher, elder and deacon. In reality, it involves much more than that, i.e. its own way of election and ordination, and, at an even more basic level, a personal understanding of the significance of the ministry and a specific formulation of the essence and function of the ministry in the way God acts in the whole church. In this part of our study, we will attempt to penetrate behind the ecclesiastical structure of ministry to the fundamental theological motivations that played a part when the developing Reformed tradition formulated its own doctrine and practice of ministry in the sixteenth century.

In the introduction to this study, we indicated that we would not attempt a summary of the development of the Reformed theology of ministry from the sixteenth century to the present day, but that we would opt for a personal analysis of a limited number of core texts. Although we realize that during the past centuries the Reformed tradition has developed further into a number of sub-traditions and areas,¹ we limit our choice to a number of fundamental texts from the sixteenth century because this is the time when theological decisions were taken that determined the identity of the whole Reformed tradition until today.

¹ A fascinating investigation into this development can be found in C. Graafland's recent study, *Gedachten over het ambt*. (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1999). After a summary of Calvin's doctrine of ministry, he spends approximately two hundred pages discussing the development of the post-Reformation doctrine of theology, the ministry in the Netherlands Reformed Church from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, and the way in which the twentieth century Reformed Church in the Netherlands viewed ministry on the basis of the review of the theology of ministry of a number of theologians.

Based on a list of priorities, we have tried to make a representative selection from the Reformed body of texts from the sixteenth century. First, without any doubt, the most important 16th century theological work within the Reformed tradition is John Calvin's *Institutio Christianae Religionis*. In this work he discusses the significance of the ministry within the church in great detail. For this reason, this work will play a vital part in our investigation into the roots of the Reformed theology of ministry. Second, we looked for a theologian who, independent from the route chosen by Calvin, also played an important part in the formation of the Reformed tradition. We have opted for H. Zwingli. Third, we were of the opinion that we could not ignore a number of early Reformed confessional documents in order to get a feel for the developing Reformed tradition in the sixteenth century.

We realize that in following this route we have ignored a number of important Reformed theologians who developed their own theology of ministry. In this context we mention (first of all), M. Bucer—the Strasbourg Reformer, who greatly influenced Calvin and was his friend. We also mention T. Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva; his own interpretation of Calvin's work steered theology of ministry in a non-Episcopalian direction. The last person on the list is J. a Lasco, leader of the London congregation for refugees from the Netherlands. A Lasco's works influenced the ecclesiastical organization of ministry of churches 'under the cross' on the continent. If our study had concentrated on church order, we would have also had to include these three theologians in our study. Because our study aims to investigate the fundamental theological arguments on which Reformed theology of ministry is founded, it should be possible to make statements about the theology of ministry that are representative for the whole of the Reformed tradition on the basis of the writings of Zwingli, Calvin and a number of early confessions because they are representative for the whole Reformation.

Methodologically, we want to combine a description of the various theologies of church and ministry with a hermeneutical, theological reflection. A critical reading will, we hope, chart both strengths and weaknesses. We hope this helps us to achieve a double result within this part of the investigation. First, we want to use the elements of Reformed theology of ministry that have been found as a reference framework in our assessment of the section of the Lima text that deals with ministry, and we want to also use the elements as a starting point when formulating the building materials of an updated Reformed theology of ministry. Second, a critical reading must make it possible to

gain insight into the limitations of the Reformed theology of ministry: the one-sidedness, the omissions, the inconsistencies and the loose ends. We will reread the ministry part of the Lima text against the background of these findings in the hope of discovering a number of elements that will help us correct the imperfections in the Reformed theology of ministry.

In the following chapters of this section, we will discuss the passages that deal with the theology of ministry in the works of Zwingli and Calvin and in the Reformed confessional texts from the sixteenth century. In the concluding chapter we will formulate a number of conclusions. Prior to all this, we intend to add a chapter with the main outlines of Martin Luther's theology of ministry. As a second-generation church reformer, Calvin built upon Luther's work, and a recent study has proved that Zwingli, one of Luther's contemporaries, knew his work better than had been thought until now.² Luther led the way for a successful Reformation of the church and created a new way of considering ministry. For this reason, we are of the opinion that the works of the German Reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) must not be ignored.

² The relation of Zwingli—Luther and Calvin—Luther will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

MARTIN LUTHER AND MINISTRY WITHIN THE CHURCH

Luther and Lutheran theology of ministry are outside this study's actual field of investigation. We do not want to ignore him completely, however, because the French and Swiss Reformers of the church continued on the trail started by Luther. Therefore we want to use this chapter to explain the theological boundaries within which Luther developed his thoughts about theology of ministry. We hope to gain a clearer insight into the emphases that Zwingli, Calvin and the Reformed confessional writings developed. Within the limited purpose of this chapter, we intend to use a method that is different from the following chapters. Here we limit ourselves to a synthesis of secondary literature. On the basis of a few studies and articles,¹ we hope to obtain an overview of the conclusions drawn by Luther in the field of theology of ministry through his newly obtained insight into the evangelical message. Although a number of systematic studies have attempted to assess his thoughts about ministry throughout the last fifty years, it is not easy to do that. Luther did not leave a rounded theology of ministry behind. His thoughts about ministry can be found scattered about in his many works. Mostly they only deal with one or two aspects and are polemic in tone. We must also take into account the evolution that took place in his thoughts during the course of his long career.

¹ We made use of the works listed below:

J. Aarts, *Die Lehre Martin Luthers über das Amt in der Kirche: Eine genetisch-systematische Untersuchung seiner Schriften von 1512 bis 1525* (Helsinki: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1972); H. Fagerberg, "Amt/Ämter/Amtsverständnis—VI Reformationszeit," *Theologische Realenzyklopedie* Bd. 2, (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1978³), 552–574; B.A. Gerrish, "Priesthood and Ministry: Luther's Fifth Means of Grace" in: B.A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New. Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 90–105 and 314–320; B. Lohse, *Martin Luther. Leben und Werk* (Munich: Beck, 1982²); B. Lohse, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 303–316; H. Meyer, "Het ambt, gezien in het licht van het lutherse kerkbegrip," *Lutherbulletin* 3 (1994), 4–21; C.W. Mönnich, "De bisschop in het Lutheranisme" in: Th.A.G. van Eupen e.a., *Het bisschopsambt* (Baarn: Ambo, 1976), 33–45; W. Stein, *Das Kirchliche Amt bei Luther* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974); G. Tröger, "Bischof III. Das evangelische Bischofsamt," *Theologische Realenzyklopedie* Bd. 6, 690–694.

Luther's points of departure in terms of theology of ministry are connected with his central thoughts about justification by faith. His doctrine of justification of the *extra nos* influences his ecclesiology and colors his opinions about ministry. The gospel as *verbum externum* does not originate in humankind and cannot be transferred from one person to another. Therefore, the church must not be seen primarily and fundamentally as a human organization but as *creatura evangelii*. In this context the gospel is not Holy Scripture, but the proclaimed message, the spoken Word, the *viva vox evangelii*. This good news message, which is not invented by humans, requires preachers who are called by God. In addition to the reference to ministry as a consequence of the forensic character of the gospel, we discover a second line from the doctrine of justification to the ministry via faith. God's justice has been made plain in Christ and is revealed in his gospel, proclaimed in preaching and received by faith. This gospel of the forgiveness of sins is based on justification by faith. Faith is a gift from God, which takes root when we hear God's Word. To hear the Word, we need people to proclaim it, i.e. preachers.

This new approach to ministry based on his doctrine of justification gives Luther a whole new view of the task. The fundamental task of the minister is to be the servant of the Word because this is the only way in which faith can be generated. This task consists of preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. The ministry becomes *ministerium verbi*, or—as Luther prefers to express it from his antithesis Law-Gospel—*ministerium evangelii*.

It is the same for the office of bishop. He does not have a separate office with its own ordination. Even though the bishop (as office bearer) has a specific supervisory task, he is still a servant of the Word. Despite all his criticism of the papacy, he never had any doubts about the bishop's office. This office is not only mentioned in the New Testament; it also functioned in the early church. Because ministers in the local congregations, as well as those who exercised a supervisory role over a larger area, were all servants of the Word, they must, in principle, be seen as equals. Bishops do not have their own legal authority. Luther's criticism was not aimed at the bishop's office itself, but at the way it functioned. For that reason, he did not want to abolish it but to reform it. Luther did not leave us a self-contained theology about the bishop's office either. As a result, different episcopal traditions have developed within the Lutheran world family that, to this day, exist side by side. In the Netherlands, the Lutherans have a structure involving

presbyters or elders, while the synod president, due to his authority to ordain, reminds us of a bishop. In Germany, Lutherans have bishop-superintendents, and some Scandinavian Lutherans try to place their bishops in the apostolic succession.

Because the minister has been given this new task of proclaiming the gospel, there must also be a new description of the double authority of ministers, such as had been secured by medieval canon law. The *potestas ordinis* is limited to the authority to preach the Word and administer the sacraments. The number of sacraments is limited to three and are the three that were instituted by Christ himself: baptism, confession and the Lord's Supper. They function as gifts from God to mankind, and their purpose is the forgiveness of sins. The Word of God in the sacraments must be preached and believed. The sacramental task has no sacrificial significance, and there is no power of the keys in the sacrament of penance. Even the *potestas jurisdictionis*—the power to lead, teach and judge—is limited. The practically unlimited power to reign over the faithful is expressly limited by the authority of the Word. In this way, ministry in the church is given a much more functional character. Instead of ascribing to the theology of the time—which gave the priest a mediating position as leader, judge and sacrifice-offering priest—Luther emphasizes the mediating power of the Word. Ministry exists only as a function of, and for the purpose of, this mediating power of the Word. Ministry in itself has no mediating function. The ministry does not usurp the gospel's forensic character, its sovereignty or its sacrosanct nature.

The ministry is subservient to the Word. But there is more. His experiences with Rome taught Luther the danger of understanding a ministry that stands above the church. As a result, he advocates for ministry to be limited by the church as *communio sanctorum*. It already echoes in the name of the office as *ministerium evangelii*: it is about ministry and not about ruling over the souls of the believers. What is being proclaimed is the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, not the law with which the Roman Catholic priests, with the pope as their head, try to bind and intimidate the faithful. The importance of the faithful is given theological significance with the scriptural expression: 'priesthood of all believers.' With this expression Luther wants to emphasize the fact that all believers have received the Holy Spirit because they have been baptized and that, for that reason, they are members of the 'clerical order.' In their capacity as priests, they have direct access to God, and they share in Christ's ministry as king and high priest

on the basis of their faith and baptism, which means that they can proclaim God's Word to others. The *potestas jurisdictionis* is no longer the prerogative of the clergy; it is placed where it belongs: in the church as communion of saints. The hierarchical structure of the church is rejected for this reason. The local congregations have a say in calling and appointing ministers. Perhaps this emphasis on egalitarianism is one of the reasons why, in contrast with Zwingli and Calvin, Luther shows so little interest in the distinction between different offices on the basis of scripture. Despite the polemics, he does not lose sight of what lies at the heart of his theology: humankind is joined with Christ through faith and baptism, which means participation in his tasks as a high priest. All believers know only one reign: that of Christ and his Word. It is on this basis that the freedom of the Christian within the church is given substance.

This redefinition of the ministry means that ordination is given a different interpretation. It is no longer a *consecratio* that is linked with a personal blessing that raises the ordained person to an elevated plain above others, but an event as a result of which the ordained person is recognized by the communion of the faithful as someone who is called by God to carry out this ministry. In the liturgy the minister is equipped for this service by a prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit and a blessing. Although ordination does not take place outside the congregation, the ministry finds its most profound relationship—not within the congregation—but in God, who calls with a calling that goes above all human callings. On the basis of this dialectic Luther rules out reordination. Luther also rejects a *character indelebilis*, not only because this leads to an undesirable connection between the Sacrifice of the Mass and priesthood, obfuscation of the gift of grace at baptism and cancellation of the equality of all Christians, but—in particular—because in this way a connection between ministry and minister is created which endangers the sovereignty of the gospel. For this reason, a minister who is dismissed, retires or resigns is no longer a minister. A minister is only a minister for as long as he carries out his ministry. The rejection of the *character indelebilis* shows that Luther is opposed to too close a link between ministry and minister: salvation is not caused by the personal qualities of the minister, but by the mediating power of the Word, which creates faith. A connecting theme runs through his view of the ordination: his intention to guarantee the sovereignty of the gospel in the way ministers carry out their work. It is therefore not surprising that Luther does not regard ordination as a sacrament,

although we have to point out that this is also connected to his view of the sacraments in general. Christ did not institute it in the gospel, and the external mark, which in his opinion is required, is missing from the ordination.

More than once this functional view of the ministry and emphasis on the priesthood of all believers created the impression that a specific ministry is no longer needed. The spiritualizing tendency on the left side of the Reformation came to this radical conclusion. They are convinced of the possibility of a direct relation with God without external Word or sacrament. These believers appeal to the general priesthood and are of the opinion that an inner calling to proclaim the Word suffices. Luther does not want to reach this conclusion. For this reason, he begins to weaken his emphasis on the priesthood of all believers after 1525 and limits its significance to the private sphere and to emergency situations. His pronouncements on the general priesthood are specifically aimed at the Roman Catholic Church. Their intention is to emphasize the independence of the secular authorities with their own task, but not to deny the importance of a specific ministry. From 1520 onward he makes a distinction between *sacerdos*, used nearly exclusively for the priesthood of all baptized Christians, and *minister* for the minister. As far as Luther is concerned, the doctrine of general priesthood does not lead to congregationalism.

The sovereignty of the gospel must be defended, not only with regard to the minister, but also with regard to the congregation. This is why he emphasizes the necessity and the value of the ministry. The ministry is, after all, not a human institution, but one instituted by Christ and therefore is a divine institution. This means that the minister must ensure that true doctrine is proclaimed in accordance with the Word, and it means that the congregation must accept the words spoken by the minister as if they were the very Word of God. The ministry cannot just be assumed; a person must be called to it. This involves a call from the congregation or the government, i.e. the call has a public character. This call is institutionalized in the ordination. Therefore, the one ministry is called 'the public ministry of Word and Sacrament' in the Lutheran tradition. Two levels of ministry are distinguished. At the level of individual believers, one speaks of the priesthood of the believer that has been instituted by Christ and applies to all believers. At the level of the church, the public ministry of Word and sacrament applies, which has also been instituted by Christ, but which is additionally dependent on a particular call from the church.

This leads to a differentiation between preachers and other believers that is not based on a qualitative distinction but on two different kinds of calling. In his various lists with *notae ecclesiae*, the ministry is given a permanent place. It belongs to the *esse*, that which is necessary for the existence of the church of Christ. Luther would emphasize this ever more strongly, especially in his later works. In doing so, all he did was to carry out a shift of emphasis, not a breach. For, even in his earlier works, he never denied the need for the ministry.

Summarizing, we may conclude that, in comparison with the medieval theology of ministry, Luther opted for a much more functional approach. The ministry is service to the Word, no more and no less. It is not the minister, but the gospel of justification by faith that must take center stage. The minister is the first person who must be the servant of that Word. The minister cannot carry out his task unconnected to the church, which he describes as the communion of saints and priesthood of believers. However, putting the ministry into perspective must not lead us to the conclusion that the church can do without the ministry. The gospel does not emanate from mankind; it must be proclaimed. To grow in faith we need to hear the Word, and that means that the ministry is indispensable. In the nineteenth century there was a stream of studies dedicated to this subject,² which demonstrates that it has always been difficult to reconcile these two sides of Luther's view of the ministry, i.e., relativity and indispensability. In particular, the relationship between the priesthood of all believers and the special ministry remained a point of attention. The question that kept turning up was whether the special ministry was based on the general priesthood or directly on a divine institution. A more congregationalist explanation said that Luther understood the ministry of the preacher of the Word to be a delegation by and on the authority of the believers, who are all priests. Then there was the more high church approach that pointed to Luther's texts in which the institution by Christ is emphasized: Christ

² In 1850 J.W.F. Höfling published *Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung*, the first in a series of works that emphasized a functional interpretation of the ministry. More studies and articles were published about Luther's views on the ministry and his relation to the priesthood of all believers after the second world war. W. Brunotte, *Das geistliche Amt bei Luther* (1959) rejected a congregationalist interpretation of ministry and basing ministry on the priesthood of all believers. H. Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melancton* (1962) came to the conclusion that both trains of thought could be found in Luther's work, but that the view, according to which the ministry is based on general priesthood, is subordinate.

gave the church not only his Word and sacraments, but he also stipulated that the public proclamation of his Word and the celebration of the sacraments be allocated to ministers that were appointed specially for that purpose. To do the theology of ministry justice, it is necessary to hold on to both aspects because both are based on the gospel of justification by faith.

The way in which Luther developed his theology of ministry from his central theme of justification by faith leads to the question of how Zwingli and Calvin connected their theology of ministry with their central theological themes and whether they relativized the importance of ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

HULDRYCH ZWINGLI AND MINISTRY WITHIN THE CHURCH

The Swiss Reformer Zwingli¹ was clearly influenced by the German Reformer Luther, but to what extent has not yet become totally clear.² In any case, Zwingli developed his own theology of ministry. He deserves the distinction of being the first Reformer to have made the ministry a separate point of interest for systematic debate. In this chapter, the works and passages in which Zwingli developed his theology of

¹ Zwingli came from a family of dignitaries in the Toggenburg region in northeast Switzerland. After an academic education, he was ordained into the priesthood by the bishop of Constanz in 1506. He worked in Glarus (1506–1516) and in Einsiedeln (1516–1518). In 1518 he was elected as *Leutpriester* in Zurich cathedral. Even during his training, he was receptive to the humanism of Erasmus with its emphasis on returning to the Bible as the source for new inspiration, and as a call to differentiate between what comes from God and from humans. The *via antiqua* was to have a deep and lasting influence on him: first of all, Augustine, but also Anselm, the Scholastics (in particular Duns Scotus), authors from the classical antiquity (Stoicists and Neo-Platonists) and modern authors. M. Lienhard's "L'action et la doctrine de Huldrych Zwingli" in: *De la Réforme à la Réformation (1450–1530)*, (Histoire du Christianisme, tome VII) (Paris: Desclée, 1994), 771–787 provides a good, brief introduction to his life and work.

² W.H. Neuser, *Die reformatorische Wende bei Zwingli* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977). In his article, "Zwingli als Schüler Luthers," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 96 (1985) 3, 301–319, M. Brecht pointed out that Luther had a greater influence on Zwingli in his first period than had been thought until now. During the key years 1519 and 1520 (which are thought to mark Zwingli's change-over to the Reformation), Luther's works played an important part. Between 1520 and 1522, he made use of Luther's exegesis (Psalms and the Letter to the Galatians). The differences between the two were connected with the difference in context and personality. Humanism had a lasting influence on Zwingli, and he processed Augustine's theology independently. What is more, the reformation of the church in Zurich took place much faster than that in Wittenberg. Zwingli placed a stronger emphasis than Luther on the need for real social reforms as a consequence of the new doctrine of justification. Their different interpretations of the significance of the Lord's Supper would lead to a lasting conflict. See also M. Brecht, "Die Reform des Wittenberger Horengottesdienstes und die Entstehung der Zürcher Propheze" in: H.A. Oberman (Hg.), *Reformiertes Erbe* (Zwingliana Bd. 19, T.1) (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 49–62 and Lienhard, "L'action et la doctrine de Huldrych Zwingli," 771–787.

the ministry will be discussed. M. Hauser dedicated his dissertation³ to Zwingli's view of ministry, and we use the edition of his works in the series *Corpus Reformatorum*.⁴

DER HIRT (1524)

Zwingli used the second disputation organized by the city authorities in October 1524 to offer nearly all ministers from the city of Zurich and the surrounding area (approximately three hundred and fifty in total) a biblical perspective in the execution of their ministry. The following year he would, for the first time, publish his thoughts on the ministry under the title *Der Hirt*.⁵ In the midst of the general disorientation of the clergy in the late Middle Ages and intensified by the commotion surrounding the revolutionary changes in Zurich, Zwingli shows his audience the topicality of the biblical image of the shepherd as a model for his idea of the ministry. The practices and teachings of the ministry within the official church of his time revealed to him what the bad shepherds were like. He is scathing in his criticism of the parasitism of the clergy who prey on the poor, their political boot-licking in respect to the authorities and their adherence to human, ecclesiastical laws to the detriment of proclaiming the Word. He contrasts this with the good shepherd who—in imitation of Christ—exclusively preaches God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit, is full of dedication, and is ready to take up his cross, i.e., self-denial and willingness to make sacrifices.⁶ Zwingli gives parish priests a new task as pastors—to preach forgiveness and take a critical stance of society, and to be a servant of

³ M. Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof: Huldrych Zwinglis Amtsverständnis im Rahmen der Zürcher Reformation* (Freiburg (Schweiz): Universitätsverlag, 1994).

⁴ Zwingli's works appeared in the series *Corpus Reformatorum* (CR) from volume LXXXVIII; these then start to be numbered as the works of Zwingli (Z) volume I. From now on any references to his work will be made only by counting from the first volume of the works of Zwingli.

⁵ H. Zwingli, "Der Hirt" in: *Z III* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1914), 1–68. In 1984 a contemporary French translation by J. Courvoisier was published under the title, *Le Berger*, in the series Textes—Dossiers—Documents, nr. 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984).

⁶ The willingness to make sacrifices is expressed by his famous words: "Nit fürchten is der harnesch" (Not being afraid is the armor), *Z III* 39, 16.

the community in an urbanizing society. Only calling qualifies people to this service just as brotherly love finds its origin in the call of God's love.⁷

Although, from his first Reformation works, he emphasized the priesthood of all believers in the congregation that was enriched by gifts of grace,⁸ he still sees the pastors as having a fundamental task within the church. Zwingli proves that he has great strategic qualities when he realizes the importance of the use of local ministers for the success of the reformation of the church.⁹ Now that they are together, they will hear how their own workplace is a crucial spot to loudly and clearly proclaim the gospel and to reform the church. He impresses two things on them.¹⁰ First, like Luther, he redefines the task of the pastor. The pastor is no longer the priest officiating at the sacrifice, but the preacher of the Word. The seriousness by which he took this task had already been demonstrated in January 1519 from his first sermons in his new office in Zurich. It was at this time that he abolished the system of Sunday pericopes and adopted *lectio continua* of the scriptures, as had been the practice in the early church.¹¹ Second, he invites the pastors to proclaim the gospel without reservation, and to unmask the lie of the parasitical clergy (if necessary with willingness to accept martyrdom) during the battle for the plain proclamation of the gospel. Ministry is not only a task or a profession; it is also a calling and a lifelong commitment. With its call to renewed existential commitment to the Lord and his congregation, *Der Hirt* rises above the battle situation with the hierarchical Roman church. The biblical sound that colors this work is not only to be found in the many direct quotations from scripture, but also in its tone. It deals with the ethics and spirituality of the ministry rather than its structures.

⁷ H. Scholl, "Nit fürchten is der Harnisch," *Reformiertes Erbe*, 375–391.

⁸ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 73.

⁹ See B. Gordon, "Preaching and the Reform of the Clergy in the Swiss Reformation" in: A. Pettegree (ed.), *The Reformation of the Parishes. The Ministry and the Reformation in Town and country* (Manchester: University Press, 1993), 63–84 offers a detailed exposé about reforming the clergy by Zwingli and his successors.

¹⁰ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 104 and 121.

¹¹ Lienhard, *De la Réforme à la Réformation*, 775.

VON DEM PREDIGTAMT (1525)

The developments in Zurich would soon force Zwingli to give an even more systematic and comprehensive formulation of his views on ministry. Like Luther, Zwingli was overtaken by people who radicalized his ideas. In their opinion, the reformation of church and society had to be taken further. They wanted the founding of free churches of confessing members (as symbolized by believers' baptism) that were not dominated by an ecclesiastical hierarchy or patronized by civil authorities, and a society without governmental compulsion to swear oaths or to carry out military service. Had not Zwingli himself given rise to such opinions with his pleas for a ministry in the framework of a charismatic community of believers?¹² Had not Zwingli himself recognized the right of lay persons to explain the scriptures on the basis of what Paul wrote about prophesying under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 14?³ These questions forced Zwingli to re-examine the specific tasks and authority of ministers. As had been the case in Wittenberg, a second front opened up in Zurich. Not only the doctrine and practice of the ministry in the Church of Rome demanded a theological, scripture-based response, but also those of the Anabaptist radicals. But where Luther did not get further than incidental thoughts, Zwingli put pen to paper for a work dedicated specifically to the ministry that was to be published on 30 June 1525 under the title *Von dem Predigtamt*.¹³

In his preface he dedicates the work to the council and the congregation of Toggenburg, who told him that the Anabaptists had confused them in their attempts to reform.¹⁴ He wanted to demonstrate that God had not sent them, and that they should not be admitted into the churches unless the whole congregation unanimously agreed.¹⁵ He starts by quoting Eph. 4:11–14, on the basis of which he concludes that the offices referred to there have been instituted by Christ himself,

¹² In regard to church and ministry, a summary of Zwingli's ideas from his first years in Zurich can be found in Hauser's *Prophet und Bischof*, 73.

¹³ The text can be found in *CR XCI, Z IV* (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1927), 369–433. The introduction (369–379) is by W. Köhler. Recent commentaries on the text can be found in Scholl, "Nit fürchten is der Harnisch," 365–375 and in Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 135–147.

¹⁴ Köhler, *Z IV*, 370–371 suspects that the direct cause was a letter dated 8 June 1525 in which the lay preacher, Max Murer from Wil (near Toggenburg), asks Zwingli to support him in his activities.

¹⁵ *Z IV*, 389, 33–35.

and that, therefore, they are necessary to build up the church. For this reason, nobody should just appropriate these offices. He first explains which offices are referred to here.

The first office that the author of the letter refers to is the office of apostle.¹⁶ Apostles are literally messengers, i.e. envoys. In this context, Zwingli thought about the first instance of the twelve sent out by Jesus himself, but the term is also used for all those who, even in later times, knew that the Lord had sent them. Apparently, the office of apostle is not limited by time. A special characteristic of these envoys is that they travel and do not remain in the same place. In principle all those who preach the gospel have a task that is similar to that of the apostles, but the specific characteristic of the office of an apostle is that it involves proclaiming the gospel in an environment not yet reached by the Word of God. His description calls to mind the classic image of a missionary in a region where nobody knows the gospel. Here Zwingli attacks the Church of Rome,¹⁷ whose bishops and prelates call themselves apostles. The Reformer rejects this pretension because these officials do not fulfill either of the requirements. They do not proclaim the gospel, and they do not travel. Here Zwingli does not make any further connections with the apostolicity of the church.¹⁸

The search for the task description of the second office, that of the prophets,¹⁹ provides two biblical models.²⁰ In the prophet Jeremiah, he

¹⁶ *Z IV*, 389, 1–393, 25.

¹⁷ This is a surprising fact. The sub-title of the book would lead us to expect that Zwingli would use his opinions about the apostles against the Anabaptists. The sub-title begins with the words, “Darinn man sicht, wie die selbgesandten ufrürer—*mit apostel, als sy wöllend gesehen syn*—...” (italics EVDB). With his emphasis on the traveling character of the apostolic service, he can hardly attack the Anabaptists. On the contrary, they appear to be very mobile in fulfilling their task.

¹⁸ This means that we do not agree with Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 137 when he comes to the conclusion: “Damit ist nach Zwingli die Apostolizität der Kirche gerade auch durch die Gegenwart der evangelisch predigenden Amtspersonen festgelegt. Da Zwingli in der Folge die Linie zu den anderen mit Predigt beauftragten Ämtern synchronologisch, aber auch (bis in seine Gegenwart hinein) diachronologisch auszieht, zeigt er damit auch das wie der faktischen Apostolizität der Kirche: Gerade durch und in den Ämtern, auch durch die Jahrhunderte hindurch, wird diese festgehalten.” In the first place, Zwingli does not make the connection between the biblical designation ‘apostle’ and the designation ‘apostolic’ from the creed. In addition, the jump from noun to adjective cannot be made because Zwingli does not just link apostleship with proclamation of the gospel, but also with a traveling existence.

¹⁹ *Z IV* 393, 26–398, 10.

²⁰ In his *De ouderling* (Amsterdam: Bolland, 1975), 61, A. van Ginkel misinterprets the prophet passage. Because of the two origins of the office of prophet in Eph. 4,

reads about plucking out what is against God's will and building up what is in accordance with God's will (Jer. 1: 9–10). This interpretation of the prophet's office coincides with the work of the New Testament office of the evangelist, bishop or pastor. Prophet, evangelist, bishop and pastor can all be regarded as one ministry. In 1 Corinthians 14:26–33 we discover another model of a prophet (where we find a different interpretation of the task); namely, explaining the scriptures. Zwingli assumes that, in this pericope, scripture refers to Old Testament and that γλώσσα λαλεω refers to speaking or knowing the (scripture) languages.²¹ In this Bible passage a prophet explains scripture and proclaims the gospel on the basis of the original languages. Zwingli interprets the special role of the prophets during the service as follows: two or three prophets take turns in speaking, whereby the first one reads the text in Hebrew, the second one reads the Greek translation, and the third one expounds the text in the local language. With this explanation he has changed his interpretation of this pericope.²² Previously, his understanding of the text had been that it gave all male members of the congregation the right to speak in the framework of the charismatic congregation, provided this was done in an orderly manner. Now he sees it as a description of professional prophesying or explaining scripture by returning to the original languages. This means that the other members of the congregation may speak only if the last prophet has failed to explain the meaning clearly. The ordinary members of the congregation do retain some sort of role: they still have the authority to judge the explanation because of the Spirit that also lives in them. A difference with the Roman church remains because there the parishioners do not have any such authority. This new interpretation is aimed mainly at the traveling Anabaptists with their free preaching. He criticizes their conduct because (in his opinion) it does not conform to the image of the biblical prophets: they were builders and did not cre-

an Old Testament one (watcher function) and a new Testament one (proclaiming the scriptures from the original languages), Van Ginkel comes to the conclusion that Zwingli distinguishes between two offices: prophets and preachers. This conclusion ignores Zwingli's opinion that preaching is the prophetic task *par excellence*. The rest of the investigation will demonstrate that Zwingli is not focusing on differentiation in offices, but on differentiation of tasks within one ministry.

²¹ In Luther's work we find the same interpretation in his first attempt at a church order *Von Ordnung Gottesdiensts in der Gemeinde* of 1523 (WA 12, 31–37). Brecht, "Die Reform des Wittenberger Horengottesdienstes und die Entstehung der Zürcher Prophezei," 51–52.

²² Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 140.

ate confusion, they did not travel from one congregation to the next, they respected order during the service, and they listened to others and spoke as experts who knew the original languages.

To conclude his discussion about the office of prophet, the Reformer explains how at that time this way of organizing the service was beginning to be adopted in Zurich. In June 1525 he actually started the *Prophezei*.²³ To a large extent the practice coincides with the theory in *Von dem Predigtamt*. Five mornings a week a pericope was read in *lectio continua*, first from the Vulgate and then from the Hebrew text and the Septuagint. After the reading, it was explained in Latin for the benefit of a public that consisted of canons, chaplains, preachers and advanced students. Then the doors were opened, and one of the preachers would preach to the congregation. Finally, the service was closed with prayer. There is no mention of any addition or judgment from the congregation. In practice, therefore, this was a gathering for the purpose of exegetical and theological work that included an opportunity for the congregation to hear the Word. Zwingli was a church reformer and a scholar trained in humanism. For him, the proclamation of the Word of God based on the original language took center stage in the task of ministers, and, for that reason, he had no faith in untrained, traveling, Anabaptist preachers.

The importance that he attached to knowledge of the original language is also evidenced by his discourse on the final office referred to in Ephesians 4—that of doctors or teachers.²⁴ They know Hebrew and Greek, and they teach these languages. In practice this office is not so different from that of the prophets. He counters the Anabaptists' contemptuous rejection of the demand for philological training under the slogan "es ligt am geyst und nit an der kunst"²⁵ with Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 14:5: "Now I want you all to speak in tongues, ...,"

²³ For a description we rely on *Ordnung der Kirche in Zürich* (1535), *Z IV* 701–703, which dates to Zwingli himself. Brecht in his article, "Die Reform des Wittenberger Horengottesdienstes und die Entstehung der Zürcher Prophezei," 49–62 compares the development of the *Prophezei* in Zurich with a first attempt to reform the monastery hours in Wittenberg in 1523. Both Luther and Zwingli appeal to 1 Cor. 14. Luther involves the whole congregation in the event, while Zwingli, as a result of his emphasis on original languages, opts for a gathering with a more exclusive character that is reserved for educated people. Through this practice, he positions the minister as prophet *par excellence* and lays the foundation for the expansion of a theological academy in Zurich.

²⁴ *Z IV* 416, 26–421, 18.

²⁵ *Z IV* 417, 26–27.

whereby he interprets glossalalia as the knowledge of or the ability to speak biblical languages. He refers to a number of painful incidents where the Anabaptist preachers made themselves into a laughing stock. His standpoint is not based on humanist contempt for the uneducated, but on his insistence that the truth be preached to the congregation of Christ.²⁶ Knowledge of the original languages is a prerequisite to come to a sound exegesis.

After discussing the prophets, he deals at great length with the next office referred to in Ephesians 4:11: the evangelists.²⁷ In so far as the prophet's office is one of uprooting and planting, it does not differ from that of evangelist. Zwingli goes even further in his assertion that the offices are identical by comparing the office of evangelist in Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5) with his task description (2 Tim. 4:2), which describes what a bishop or a pastor does. Because he regards the office of evangelist as being identical with that of prophet, bishop or pastor, Zwingli does not succeed in identifying the office's own character in the various New Testament references.²⁸ In fact, Zwingli reduces the variety of offices in the New Testament to just two: the office of apostle that is characterized by a traveling existence, and the office of prophet-evangelist-bishop that is characterized by a sedentary existence. Apostles become bishops-evangelists when they give up their traveling existence.²⁹

His defense against the radicals, who rejected his interpretation of ministry on the basis of the sending out of the disciples in Matthew 10, is founded on this differentiation. This text refers specifically to the office of apostle because people who travel are central to this text in Zwingli's opinion. He defends the regular wages paid to ministers because of the sedentary character of the evangelist's ministry instead of advocating an existence that is dependent on gifts. This would lead to the beggar's staff; give insufficient stability, security and order; and would prevent the incumbent from concentrating on his task. It would also carry with it the risk of a disordered life.³⁰ He then speaks about

²⁶ Scholl, "Nit fürchten is der Harnisch," 372–373.

²⁷ *Z IV* 398, 11–416, 4.

²⁸ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 141.

²⁹ We are of the opinion that to conclude that Zwingli was aware of the shifts in the office structure in the various letters in the New Testament would be premature. Scholl suggests this in footnote 34 of his article, "Nit fürchten is der Harnisch," 370. As far as Zwingli is concerned, people move from one office to another, but this does not mean that the office structure itself is changed.

³⁰ In this context of this argumentation, Zwingli thinks it is self-evident that the poor cannot become bishops because, as a rule, they are not able to run their own

his own financial situation and that of his wife in great detail. He is painfully open about personal accusations of profiteering. As a Bible scholar and humanist, Zwingli advocates an economic existence for ministers that is characterized by neither plenty nor by poverty. Also, he regards the fixed abode of ministers as a good basis for marriage and family.

All this means that he can be brief about the pastor's task.³¹ This office is more or less identical with that of evangelist or bishop. In this instance, he emphasizes the watcher aspect, i.e. the pastoral work. Because the combination of preaching and watching over the sheep in large churches can become too much for one, Zwingli suggests that these tasks be allocated to more than one person. This means that one would be responsible for proclaiming the Word while the other would concentrate on spiritual leadership.³² In doing so Zwingli opens the door to a functional specialization of the ministry.

Zwingli has discussed the whole series of offices referred to in Ephesians 4. His aim in doing so was not to differentiate between them, but to list the various aspects of the one task of ministers: the initial proclamation while traveling in a pagan environment as apostles, the advancement of the Christian community as prophet-evangelists, the proclamation based on the original languages of the Bible as prophets, the teaching of the reading of scripture in its original languages as teachers, and the watching of the flock as pastors. Based on this functional interpretation of the ministry, the self-made ministers of the Anabaptist tradition are rejected. What they do is not in accordance with the task of the minister as it is given in the Bible.

This does not conclude Zwingli's investigation. In the second part of this work, he examines the biblical roots for calling and mission to the ministry more closely: "Diser ämpteren aller samenn hat sich nye gheyn frommer Christ für sich selbs angenommen, sunder erst, so er von gott gesandt ist worden oder von den kilchen oder apostlen erwellet, dat ouch nûts anders ist den ein berüffung und sendung."³³ Zwingli systematically trawls the scriptures to demonstrate that there

households properly. This means that they would fail to comply with one of the prerequisites for this office in 1 Tim. 3: 4-5. Zwingli betrays an aristocratic trait when he adds: "Dann wo man wol regiert, wirt man ouch statthaft (*wealthy*)." On the other hand, he warns against entrusting the bishop's office to the rich.

³¹ *Z IV* 416, 5-25.

³² *Z IV* 416, 18-24.

³³ *Z IV* 421, 19-22.

can never be a ministry without calling and mission. It was so at the time of Moses (Num. 16), and it also applies to John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. But how do you know if you have been called and sent by God? This is possible only as a result of an accompanying miracle or election within the congregation. Zwingli identifies three election methods in the Bible: by the whole congregation, by the apostles or by one apostle.

Because of his experiences with the falsification of elections under the papacy, he advises for elections to be made by the whole congregation in consultation with some “frommen, wolverstendigen bischoffen oder Christen.” He does not explain further who these sensible bishops or Christians are, but this becomes clear when we look at the practices as they were prevalent in Zurich and the region. Bishops refer to people like Zwingli himself, who—in exercising their ministry—have gained standing and authority beyond their own congregation. Zwingli does not understand this as the construction of a hierarchy of ministers, but as the distinguishing between responsibilities with a lesser or greater jurisdiction. As a consequence, the congregational tone of his early writings is colored by a catholic component in the manner of election.³⁴ Because it appears that Zwingli assumes that some ecclesiastical office bearers have supra-local authority, he uses the word ‘bishop’ without hesitation.³⁵ This type of election evokes memories of the description in the *Traditio Apostolica* of Hippolytus of Rome from the first half of the third century, where both the local congregation and the neighboring bishops played their part.³⁶ When Zwingli speaks about ‘sensible Christians,’ we may suppose that he refers to representatives from the civil

³⁴ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 143–145.

³⁵ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 203 is convinced that, as far as Zwingli and Calvin are concerned, the evolution of the churches of the Reformation towards a church order without bishops was the result of the concrete historic situation, i.e. the rejection of the gospel proclamation by the Roman bishop, and not the rejection of an episcopal church order as such.

³⁶ More about the election and ordination in the *Traditio Apostolica*, in J. Freitag, “Amt, theologischer Begriff, III Kirchen-, theologie- und dogmengeschichtlich,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 1 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1993³), 547; L. Ott, *Das Weihesakrament*, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Bd. IV, 5 (Freiburg: Herder 1969), 12–18 and E. van Waelderren, *Gidsen en herders gevraagd* (Westerlo: Abdij Tongerlo, 1989), 71–76. We do not know if Zwingli knew this work. As a humanist, he was familiar with the early church and its sources, which he valued highly. Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 210–211 presupposes that there might be a strategic reason for not mentioning these sources. The Anabaptists only accepted the Bible, and, vis-à-vis the Roman Catholics, he only wanted to use the Bible itself.

authorities, which in Zurich had a say in the appointment of ministers. In this respect, he still thinks like a medieval person, who based his view of the world on an undivided Christian society where a Christian government that had to support and submit to the proclamation of the gospel was entrusted with the care for society and had co-responsibility for church affairs. For this reason, government representatives played a part in marital courts of law, in church discipline and the appointment and supervision of ministers.

After Zwingli has given this description of the calling and mission of ministers on the basis of a scriptural model, he evaluates the practice of the Anabaptists. The external marks for calling and mission are lacking. Their internal calling and mission lead to revolt for the sake of worldly goods, to disobedience to civil authorities and to discord. They do not make the distinction between traveling apostles and residential bishops. Zwingli emphasizes the importance of order in the congregation. The priesthood of all believers is not a proper basis for the ministry, because not all are apostles or bishops (1 Cor. 12:29). Zwingli's final assessment is withering. He condemns the headstrong behavior of the radicals as anti-Christian and regards it as the work of the devil. He closes with a call to pastors to be steadfast in their task and not to be disheartened, but to trust in the Lord, who will come soon.

We list the conclusions drawn from *Von dem Predigtamt*:

1. The ministry is instituted by Christ and cannot be seized, but can only be received as a gift from God.
2. On the basis of Ephesians 4, Zwingli tries to come to a clear task description. This results in one ministry of the Word that has two basic types depending on the situation: the apostle as traveling preacher in a Gentile environment and the prophet-evangelist-pastor-teacher, also called bishop, who remains in one place and proclaims the Word, who teaches a Christian community and watches over the flock that is entrusted to him. The latter ministry is the norm.
3. The residential status of the proclaiming bishop is preferred over the custom in the Church of Rome where the bishops often did not reside in their diocese, but appealed only to their consecration. Zwingli rejects this. It is not the consecration, but the actual execution of the task in the congregation that determines whether there is a ministry or not. The Anabaptist traveling preachers did not comply with the requirement of ministers who reside within the congregation.

4. His emphasis on knowledge of the original languages of the scripture as a requirement for the prophet-bishop is striking. From now on this requirement of Zwingli will remain applicable to ministers in the Reformed tradition.³⁷
5. Zwingli does not say anything about administering the sacraments in this work. Perhaps he does not speak about them because in his opinion they are not necessary for salvation.³⁸ In his earlier works Zwingli spoke about removing the administration of the sacraments from the minister's tasks, but later he revised this opinion due to influence from the authorities.³⁹
6. Because the ministry can only be received as a gift from Christ, vocation, election and mission are prerequisites. God's calling and mission take form both in an inner calling and in a calling by the church. Because this latter aspect is lacking in the Anabaptist ministry, they cannot be regarded as ministers called by Christ.
7. The congregation and the bishops play a part in calling, election and mission. The bishops' contribution is evidence of the need for wider ecclesiastical connections. The earlier congregational emphasis is complemented with a 'catholic' notion.
8. The authorities also have a say in the election of new ministers.
9. Zwingli tries harder than Luther to find a model for the organization of the congregation in the New Testament itself. In doing so, he is a forerunner of Calvin. But in contrast to Calvin, he does not develop different ministries on the basis of Ephesians 4 and other New Testament texts (as we shall see later).

FIDEI RATIO (1530)

This "Account of the Faith,"⁴⁰ that unfolds the content of the Christian religious conviction in twelve articles, had originally been intended for the Diet of Augsburg. Our attention is drawn to the tenth point, which deals with "the ministry of the proclamation or the prophecy." The

³⁷ This requirement also applied to the Lutheran tradition. As early as 1518 Melanchton, in his inaugural oration as professor of Greek at Wittenberg, pleaded for the knowledge of the original languages with the expression: "Das Messer des Geistes steckt in der Scheide der Sprachen."

³⁸ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 204.

³⁹ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 159.

⁴⁰ The Latin text can be found in *Z VI/II* 753–817. A German translation of the *Fidei*

analyzing and engaging style of the previous works has made way for a synthetic, postulating style. The following aspects are important here:

1. Zwingli gives ministry in the church an important place because it has developed into one of the twelve core points of his belief. The first sentence of the tenth chapter, in which he expresses his conviction that the ministry of the proclamation or the prophecy is sacrosanct (*sacrosantum*)—even that it is the most necessary of all the offices—could not be clearer. From the context we can deduce that when he speaks of “other offices,” he thinks of the office of the government that had also been instituted by God and which is discussed in article eleven.
2. Even more so than in *Vom Predigtamt*, it is obvious that he prefers the word ‘prophet’ to indicate the ministry of the Word.
3. The ministry of the Word is very important because it can bring faith to life and support social order and the law.
4. But this ability of the ministry of the Word can become effective only through the working of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Word is not autonomous, the Spirit has the primacy.⁴¹
5. This is the only occasion in his main works where he indicates that administering the sacraments belongs to the responsibilities of the ministry of the Word.⁴²
6. Diakonia (caring for the sick and the poor) and theological instruction are also regarded as part of the minister’s tasks.⁴³

Ratio is contained in the series Zwingli's Hauptschriften, Bd. 11. *Zwingli der Theologe III* Hrg. F. Von Blanke, O. Farner, R. Pfister (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1948), 253–293.

⁴¹ No matter how important the ministry may be, in itself it is nothing. It functions only in dependence on the working of the Spirit of God. This idea is in accordance with the often repeated emphasis that Zwingli places on the divine nature of the LORD as the only source of goodness and the only Lord. There is a sharp demarcation between Creator and creature, and Zwingli is forever watchful not to make the creature divine. See also Lienhard, *De la Réforme à la Réformation (1450–1530)*, 783. This fundamental duality in Zwingli's work was confirmed again in a recent study by M. Sallmann, *Zwischen Gott und Mensch. Huldreich Zwinglis theologischer Denkweg im “De vera et falsa religione commentarius (1525)”* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 242–243.

⁴² Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 188–189.

⁴³ Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata. Die Kirche in den reformierten Bekenntnisschriften* (Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 1968), 65 wonders if here we ought to be speaking of more than one office because of the way they are listed: “those who, . . . , those who, . . .” Although this expression might give that impression, it seems more likely that this passage should be seen as an enumeration of *Funktionsbereiche* (where the author speaks of one ministry; namely, that of the prophet) because of the context of the whole paragraph and in the context of his whole oeuvre.

LAYING ON OF HANDS AS SACRAMENT

M. Hauser pointed out in his dissertation that within four works that were written in the last period of his life (1526–1531),⁴⁴ Zwingli counts the laying on of hands during ordination as among the sacraments (along with baptism and communion). Zwingli was of the opinion that these *ceremoniae*, which are also *symbolae*, had been instituted by Christ. It is true that sacraments do not have the significance of effective marks, but—by analogy—illustrate the divine grace that gives itself to humankind. Hauser⁴⁵ suggests that this development in Zwingli can be explained by the fact that until 1525 he had worked only with Catholic priests who had already been consecrated, but that from 1526 the first evangelically trained theologians offered themselves for ordination. The sacramental significance of the laying on of hands is also compatible with the ever greater emphasis that he placed on the significance of the ministry of the Word.

CONCLUSION

1. The ministry gains an ever greater importance in Zwingli's works. The historical context plays a decisive part in this. While during the first period he turned mainly against the practice of ministry and theology of the medieval Western church, in the final phase of his life he felt that he had been called mainly to defend the ministry against the radicals, who doubted the necessity of a separate ordained ministry. The concrete reformation of the church in Zurich told him that strong church leadership was essential. In this way the ministry became one of the central points of his creed, and ordination becomes one of the sacraments.

2. The ministry is instituted by Christ with a goal to build the church. But the ministry is not an instrument that the church can use autono-

⁴⁴ These are "*Responsio brevis ad epistolam . . . , in qua de eucharistia quaestio tractatur*" of 14 August 1526, "*Antwort über Straussens Büchlein, das Nachtmahl Christi betreffend*" from early 1527, "*Ad illustrissimos Germaniae principes Augustae congregatos, De convitiis Eckii epistola*" from 27 August 1530 and "*Christianae fidei brevis et clara exposition ad regem Christianum*" from the summer of 1531. See Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 180–181, 191, 198.

⁴⁵ Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 181.

mously.⁴⁶ The effectiveness of the ministry depends on the working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is necessary to be called to this ministry by God in *vocatio interna* and *vocatio externa*. Here we distinguish the beginnings of a Trinitarian theology of the ministry.

3. Zwingli knows only one basic type of minister: the bishop-prophet. He is responsible for the interpretation of a whole package of liturgical, pastoral and diaconal tasks, but the topical, instructive proclamation of the scriptures from the original languages takes center stage. The episcopal aspect leaves room for supervisory tasks that go beyond the local sphere.

4. Zwingli leaves a number of fundamental questions unanswered:

- a. The relationship between the ministry and the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts, like the priesthood of all believers, are primarily in the spotlight in his first period. When he later describes the ministry as a gift from Christ, this seems to imply that—as far as he is concerned—the ministry is not a particular gift of the Spirit but a separate divine institution. Zwingli does not clarify how we should interpret the interaction between the two. In his doctrine they are not made into a coherent unit.
- b. The relation between Christ and the ministers. Zwingli emphasizes more and more strongly the sacrosanct significance of the ministry given by Christ, but he is not able to explain how Christ relates to the minister. He does not use the image of representation, or any other model. It appears that he had not yet had an opportunity to think through this relationship, and—due to his premature death—he would not get the opportunity to do so.
- c. The relationship between the minister and the congregation. The ministry is gaining importance in the church, but there is no theological explanation for this. The ministry does not have its origin in the congregation, but, on the other hand, it must remain closely attached to the congregation. How can both aspects be brought together?

⁴⁶ In his conclusion, Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof*, 204 speaks of a theonomous ministry concept that he contrasts with the Roman Catholic ecclesiocentric interpretation of the ministry. In doing so, he refers to the sacerdotal character of the Roman Catholic ministry. In our opinion, the ecclesiological character of that ministry is expressed most strongly in its hierarchical structuring.

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN CALVIN AND MINISTRY WITHIN THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Context

Calvin¹ was born in 1509 under the name of Jean Cauvin in Noyon in Picardy, where his father worked for the bishop's administration. In 1536 he was forced to flee from France because of his sympathies for the Reformation. The rest of his life, until his death in 1564, was dedicated to reforming the church; he worked mainly in and from Geneva.

Calvin would never forget his French roots. He remained registered as a French foreigner until 1559, when he was offered Geneva citizenship—free of charge. He followed the developments in France closely and tried to influence them. He secretly sent scores of preachers from Geneva to France. His ecclesiastical, political aim was to support the reformation of the church in France, and he intended to achieve this through his main work—the *Institutio* and the foundation of the *Académie* in Geneva in 1559.²

There is uncertainty about the exact circumstances of Calvin's conversion to the Reformation. Very little is known about his personal life.³

¹ For an initial introduction to Calvin, see W. Nijenhuis, "Calvin Johannes (1509–1564)," *Theologische Realenzyklopedie* Bd. 7 (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1981³), 568–592 and A. Ganoczy, "Calvin," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 2 (Freiburg/Basel/Rom/Wien: Herder, 1994³), 895–897. Recently a number of new biographical studies about Calvin have been published: W.J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New-York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); W. de Greef, *Johannes Calvin, zijn werk en zijn geschriften* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1989); A.E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin. A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) and B. Cottret, *Calvin. Biographie* (Paris: Payot et Rivages, 1995).

² For more information about the legal approach to the prosecution of heretics in France by church and state, see W. Monter, *Judging the French Reformation: heresy trials by sixteenth-century parliaments* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

³ H.A. Oberman aptly formulated this in *De erfenis van Calvin: grootheid en grenzen* (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 23: "Calvin spreekt niet graag over zichzelf. Daarom horen wij ook zo weinig over zijn bekering. Zijn thema is niet zijn eigen *conversio* maar de grote *conversio*, de reformatie van de Kerk. Hij wil daarom ook niet zijn eigen dwaalspoor voor

All his life he remained very reticent about his personal circumstances. In later years he speaks of a *subito conversio*, but it is likely that here *subitus* does not mean ‘sudden,’ but ‘unexpected’ in the sense of without any connection in human thought processes or experience and as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴

After his first schooling at the chapter school in his birthplace, Noyon, his training continued in the humanist spirit in colleges in Paris (1523–1527). Then he studied law at the university level in Orleans and Bourges (1528–1533). In 1532 these legal studies resulted in his first scientific work: a commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia*. His legal education was to stand him in good stead later in life when he wrote about ecclesiastical law and ecclesiastical order, and in his theology of civil authorities. As a result of his humanist studies, he also obtained an extensive knowledge of ancient and classical philosophy and of the church fathers.⁵ He would remain a man of science throughout his life.⁶

de bekering of zijn morele wroeging in de bekering beklemtonen, maar de geschiedenis van de Kerk beschrijven, de geschiedenis van de grote reformatie onder het verborgen bestuur (*arcana operatio*) van God.” (Calvin does not like to speak about himself. This is why we hear so little about his conversion. His theme is not his own *conversio* but the great *conversio*, the Reformation of the church. This is why he does not want to emphasize his own erring ways or his moral remorse in his conversion, but wants to describe the history of the church, the history of the great Reformation under the hidden governance (*arcane operatio*) of God.)

⁴ H.A. Oberman, “Initia Calvini: The Matrix of Calvin’s Reformation” in W.N. Neuser (ed.), *Calvinus sacrae scripturae professor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 113–154; in particular, 114–115 for the *subita conversio*.

⁵ For the importance of Calvin’s humanist academic education, see also W. Nijenhuis, “Calvin Johannes (1509–1564),” *TRE* Bd. 7, 580–581. In his biography, *A Life of John Calvin. A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture*, 51–78, A.E. McGrath emphasizes that in the sixteenth century humanism is more a method of thinking, speaking, and writing than a philosophy with clearly defined contents; under the motto *ad fontes* whenever that is possible, everybody returns to the classical source texts of civilization and tries to understand them from a philological approach. R.C. Gamble, “Current Trends in Calvin Research, 1982–1990” in Neuser, *Calvinus sacrae scripturae professor*, 91–112 draws our attention to C. Augustijn’s proposition that defends a determination of the concept of ‘humanism’ that is based more on content (97–101). For Calvin’s humanist schooling in an aristocratic environment, see also W. de Greef, *Johannes Calvijn, zijn werk en geschriften*, 14–23; about the influence of the college years in Paris on Calvin, see McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 21–50; about Calvin’s attempt to combine a responsible and scientific interpretation with *persuasion*, a plea that would touch the listeners’ hearts, in the humanist tradition of his time, Bouwsma, *John Calvin—A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 137–154; and about the significance of the humanist culture of important theologians of the Reformed protestant tradition, O. Millet, “Les Eglises réformées,” *Le temps des Confessions (1530–1620)* (Histoire du Christianisme, tome VIII) (Paris: Desclée, 1992), 61–63.

⁶ “Terwijl men van Luther zeggen kan, dat hij ook in de collegezaal nog predicator

The fact that both Zwingli and Calvin were asked to give leadership to the reformation of the church in towns in southwest Germany and in Switzerland was, in part, due to their intellectual training. This reformation took place against the social background of an emancipation process that helped these towns to extricate themselves from medieval structures. This emancipation process was characterized by economic dynamism, political maturity, a local republican patriotism, and a vivid awareness that the town was the ideal framework for an organized expression of faith and a practical institution that would give rise to new ways of organizing society.⁷ Against this background, Geneva extricated itself from its subordination to the Duke of Savoy and his ally, the Bishop of Geneva, and, in its emancipation struggle, looked for support from the cantons of Berne and Fribourg in a *combourgeoise*. The city's authorities wanted to achieve a renewal of church life that was purified of all human doctrine and was based on the 'Word of God'; they wanted to reorganize the church and free it from episcopal authority. To realize this they called on Calvin, among others.⁸ One of the results they expected of him was a stop to sectarian tendencies. The city council wanted to differentiate between public morals and ecclesiastical ethics so that the replacement of medieval canon law by the Reformed biblical law would not result in intolerance towards people of other persuasions—as had happened in the past. In theory, Calvin and his followers would make a subtle distinction between the congregation and the civil community, but—in practice—they would not entrust social well-being to the civil community alone. The resulting tensions would lead to his exile to Strasbourg between 1538 and 1541.⁹

In contrast to the Reformer from Zurich, Calvin was not an ordained priest in the Church of Rome. In his early days it seemed that he was also to become a priest, following in the footsteps of his older brother as the son of an influential family involved in the church. His

is, geldt voor Calvijn dat hij ook op de kansel nog lector is ...” (“Whilst it can be said of Luther that he remains a preacher, even in the lecture room, Calvin remains a lecturer, even when he is in the pulpit ...”), Oberman, *De erfenis van Calvijn: grootheid en grenzen*, 16.

⁷ Millet, *Le Temps des confessions*, 58.

⁸ Calvin was not the only Reformer at work in Geneva. In 1532 G. Farel had settled in Geneva with the support of Bern, a city that had already embraced the Reformation, and two years later Bern's city council sent P. Viret to support Farel. On 21 May 1536 the authorities decided officially to adopt the Reformation. See McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 86–95.

⁹ Oberman, *De erfenis van Calvijn: grootheid en grenzen*, 28–31.

father had been curator of church property in the bishop's service. When he was accused of embezzlement and dismissed, he was so furious that he decided to stop his son's, Jean, theological training and to encourage him to study law instead. One wonders if the bitterness over the shame and the damage inflicted on the family by the church authorities was a factor in the son's negative judgment of the Roman Catholic ministry. Be that as it may, after he had become sympathetic towards the ideas of the Reformation the priesthood ceased to be an option for him once and for all.¹⁰ In August 1536 he began in Geneva as a lecturer, explaining Paul's letter. Towards the end of the year, he worked as theological autodidact¹¹ and as a preacher without being ordained a minister. There is no proof that he was ordained at any later stage. According to A. Ganoczy, his activity without registered ordination could be due to his "prophetic self-confidence."¹²

Calvin and His Relationship with Zwingli

The Frenchman Calvin, as a Reformer of the second generation, never met Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer of the first generation. A. Ganoczy¹³ reminds us of the verbal and structural influence of the *Commentar-*

¹⁰ See also de Greef, *Johannes Calvin, zijn werk en zijn geschriften*, 14–23 and McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 21–78.

¹¹ His humanist education provided Calvin with a new form of textual criticism of the text, which he was to apply later to his exegeses of the scriptures. His basic knowledge of Hebrew and Greek would not be deepened until his time in Strasbourg and Berne. He used Erasmus' *Annotationes* for his exegetical work. As far as Calvin was concerned, St. Augustine was the most important of the church fathers; Cyril of Alexandria and St. John Chrysostom were quoted frequently, too. His respect for the church fathers did not mean that he read them uncritically. The scriptures were the highest authority. He also read medieval theologians, among others P. Lombardus, D. Scotus and B. of Clairvaux. For Calvin's knowledge of the works of the church fathers, see A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin: student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999). Gradually he familiarized himself with the works of the first generation theologians of the Reformation: Luther, Zwingli and Bucer. See also Nijenhuis, "Calvin Johannes (1509–1564)," 580–581. Nijenhuis describes Calvin's strength as a theologian in his historical context as follows: "Als Theologe der zweiten Generation der Reformation zeichnet sich Calvin nicht in erster Linie durch Originalität aus, sondern vielmehr durch sein Vermögen, das ihm aus der kirchlichen Tradition von Ost und West, aus dem Humanismus und aus der ersten Generation der Reformation Überkommene in sich aufzunehmen und zu einer Einheit zu verschmelzen. Dieses Vermögen gab seiner Theologie einen objektiven und universalen Charakter, der durch die ihm eigene dialektische Denkweise nicht gemindert wird."

¹² Ganoczy, "Calvin," 586.

¹³ A. Ganoczy, *Le Jeune Calvin. Genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice* (Wiesbaden:

ius de vera et falsa religione (1525) on the first edition of Calvin's most important dogmatic work in 1536. Zwingli had written this *Commentarius* specifically at the request of a number of Frenchmen, and it had been dedicated to King Francois I. His book was certainly read in French humanist circles that were sympathetic towards the ideas of the Reformers. Calvin, the young law student, will certainly have visited these circles, and it is more than likely that it was here he became acquainted with Zwingli's *oeuvre*. Calvin never quotes Zwingli directly in his dogmatic works or his exegetical writings. He mentions his name only in a few letters. F. Blanke¹⁴ studied all these references and comes to the conclusion that positive and negative judgments alternate, but that later the positive comments gain the upper hand. In particular, in the beginning Zwingli is esteemed less than Luther, but later on both are honored as faithful servants of Christ who reformed the church in obedience to scripture.

The most important difference of opinion was formed by Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper as merely symbolic: Calvin missed the element of communion with Christ. Calvin maintained good contact with Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich; through these contacts he was introduced to Zwingli's later writings, which demonstrated that Zwingli's view in this respect had become more nuanced. In 1549 discussions with Zwinglians led to an accord over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the *Consensus Tigurinus*. Whether there are differences or parallels in doctrine of church and ministry will become evident later.

Working Method

In contrast to the chapter about Zwingli's theology of ministry—where we worked chronologically through his most important works in connection with the church's ministry—in the case of Calvin,¹⁵ we intend to restrict ourselves to only one work—the last edition of his main work, the *Institutio Christianae religionis*. This work gives us a systematic exposition of Calvin's theology and has the advantage that Calvin continued

Steiner, 1966), 156–166. See also F. Wendel, *Calvin, sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse* (Paris: PUF, 1950, 99–100).

¹⁴ F. Blanke, "Calvins Urteile über Zwingli," *Zwingliana* Bd. XI/2, 1959, 66–92.

¹⁵ Just like Zwingli's works, Calvin's whole *oeuvre* is included in the series, *Corpus Reformatorum*, abbreviated to CR, from part 29 to part 88. Sometimes the abbreviation CO is used for Calvin's work, which stands for *Calvini Opera*. CO1 is then the equivalent of CR29.

to work on it throughout his life. A comparison of the different editions of the *Institutio* shows how his Bible exegesis, his continued study of the church fathers, his discussions with other theologians, and his battle against heresies with all their ecclesiastical and political circumstances are reflected in the text.¹⁶ A number of pages in this book are dedicated to the theology of ministry in the framework of his ecclesiology. When the need arises, we will refer to other writings where he touches on ministry and theology of ministry. Also, his work, *Les Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques de l'Eglise de Genève*,¹⁷ points the way to practical functioning of the ministry.

There is yet another way in which this approach to the study of Calvin's work differs from that of Zwingli's. We had a more descriptive approach to Zwingli, but Calvin will be read more critically. The main reason for this is the nature of the *Institutio*. Zwingli had a period of less than ten years at his disposal, but Calvin was able to subject his systematic main work to a permanent process of revision for more than twenty years. A systematic theological contemplation of this caliber merits a critical approach. Second, the more critical approach is appropriate in view of the greater amount of attention given to Calvin's work because of the greater impact it had on the Reformed tradition.

¹⁶ B. Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists" in G.E. Duffield (ed.), *John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 19–37; in particular, 19–25 argues for the importance of the *Institutes* in his *oeuvre* as a whole to gain a balanced judgment of his ideas. For further reading about how ecclesiastical and social developments are reflected in the *Institutes*, see H. Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982).

¹⁷ This first printed church order from 1561 is preceded by the first written version dated 1541; in particular, in the years 1560–1561 many additions were made. The approval of the draft only came about after years of arguments between the church and the civic authorities in connection with the independence of the church from the city council in the exercise of its own task; in particular, with regard to discipline. In 1555 the party that sympathized with Calvin gained the upper hand in the city council, and, as a result, the church council was now able to independently exercise the right to excommunicate people; ministers gained the right to have a say in the appointment of the *anciens*. See also B. Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 99–101 and more recently, H.A. Speelman, *Calvijn en de zelfstandigheid van de kerk* (Kampen: Kok, 1994). The text edition with a brief introduction can be found in W. Niesel, *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche* (Zollikon–Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1938), 42–64.

Institutio Christianae religionis

Before we begin reading the *Institutio Christianae religionis*, we must consider its structure and growth. We base our study on the final Latin version of this work that was published in Geneva in 1559.¹⁸ The word *Institutio* in the title, beloved by the humanists,¹⁹ can mean ‘instruction,’ ‘manual,’ and ‘summary,’ or a combination of all three. As the book grew, its aim changed. The first edition of the *Institutes* of 1536 was strongly catechetical; it had been inspired by Luther’s *Kleine Catechismus* (1529)—both with regard to form and content. This document is dedicated to the French king, which also gives it the character of an apologetic confession to defend the followers of the evangelical faith in France, who were unjustly being equated with the Anabaptist rebels. It is likely that the work of the then young and unknown Calvin was a first attempt to justify his faith to himself. As early as the second Latin edition of 1539, however, it becomes clear that the book is also emphatically intended as a dogmatic handbook to familiarize students with the main points of biblical doctrine. In the fifth and final edition this is emphasized even more strongly by presenting the work as an aid to understand scripture. Calvin wanted his *Institutio* to be no less than the offer of a hermeneutical key for the study of scripture. He provided the French translation himself, which indicates that he expected a distribution and influence far beyond the academic world.²⁰

Whereas the first edition consisted of just six chapters, the final edition had grown to a hefty tome that is subdivided into four ‘books’ (*libri*) with a total of eighty chapters.²¹ The first book (*De cognitione*

¹⁸ Our reference text is the textual-critical edition of the final Latin version, included in the selection of Calvin’s work and edited by P. Barth and G. Niesel in the five-volume series, *Joannis Calvinii Opera Selecta* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1962²); in particular, the fifth volume which contains the fourth book of the *Institutes*. From now on, this will be referred to as *OS V*.

¹⁹ Erasmus used this word in a number of different titles, as the authors from antiquity did; see also McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 136–137 and Bouwmsma, *John Calvin*, 26–27.

²⁰ About the specific, more popular character of the French translation, see J.D. Benoît, “The History and Development of the Institutio: How Calvin Worked?” in G.E. Duffield, *John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 104–107. The same J.D. Benoît also provided the textual-critical edition of Calvin’s French translation of 1560, *Institution de la Religion Chrétienne*, Edition critique avec introduction, notes et variantes, publiée par Jean-Daniel Benoît (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957–1963). This edition will from now on be referred to as *IRC*.

²¹ Further information about the development and the structure of the *Institutio* in

Dei) mainly describes the sources of knowledge of God (natural and biblical knowledge of God), the Trinity, and the doctrine of providence. Book II (*De cognitione Dei redemptoris*) deals with Christology (incarnation, two nature doctrine, threefold ministry of Christ, and the unity of old and new covenant). Book III is devoted to the internal working of the Holy Spirit in the life of individual believers in taking up the cross, in self-denial, in *meditation futurae vitae*, in Christian freedom, and in prayer. The fourth book describes the external working of the Holy Spirit in the church, in its offices, in the sacraments, and in the civil authorities.

In the framework of our study, we direct our attention to book four. First of all, we will establish how ministry in the church is discussed in the framework of ecclesiology. After that we intend to concentrate on the third chapter that is devoted in its entirety to the church's ministry. We shall follow and weigh Calvin's thoughts accurately and register his use of words. In the next two sections, we will investigate how in chapters 4 to 12 of the *Institutes* he evaluates the church's historical development of the ministry in the church, and whether he regards ordination as a sacrament.

INSTITUTES IV. I AND II: CHURCH: ALL OR NOTHING?

The Title: the Church as External Aid to Salvation

The fourth and most extensive book of the *Institutes* deals with the church under the promising title: *De externis mediis vel adminiculis, quibus Deus in Christi societatem nos invitat, et in ea retinet*. The external aspect that takes center stage in the fourth book complements the internal working of God with the salvation of humankind as its aim, which was given attention in book three. There the content of salvation was treated as a gift from the Holy Spirit, which works in an invisible way, i.e., in the heart of the individual in accordance with God's hidden counsel. This way of thinking, based on the private, hidden election, is now complemented by a description of another aspect of the work of the Spirit; namely, how he works in the community of people, in the visible reality. So the fourth book has as its subject the external means with

J.D. Benoît, "The History and Development of the Institutio: How Calvin worked" in Duffield, *John Calvin*, 103–117, de Greef, *Johannes Calvin*, 179–185, and McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 129–174.

universal significance, which includes the church that is used by the Holy Spirit to lead humankind to salvation. As a result of this double offer of salvation in the working of the Spirit, there are two ways in which we speak about the church; namely, an invisible and a visible church.²²

The next part of the title—*mediis vel adminiculis*—is also significant for two reasons. In the first place, the importance of the church is placed in perspective. As the title indicates, the importance of the church is related to Christ and to communion with Christ. In itself, without this communion with Christ, the church is nothing. It has meaning only in relation to Christ. Or, to put it differently, the church is not an end in itself, it is only a means of bringing humankind to salvation. By emphasizing this Christological-soteriological aim, the importance of the church is reduced to a mere external means. Through this instrumental approach to the church, Calvin prevents us from speaking ontologically about it, and—for that reason—Calvin will not be able to afford the church sacramental significance.

This secondary character of the church is one of the reasons why Calvin places the church outside the actual doctrine of salvation; in doing so he breaks away from the structure of the Apostles Creed, which he had used as his guideline in the first three books of the *Institutes*. Here Graafland also points out that there is a connection with the emphasis Calvin places on the doctrine of election that is always focused on personal election and salvation. As a consequence, the church is only a means to this personal salvation that God has reserved for his chosen ones. For this reason, it is possible to push the doctrine of the church to the end of his doctrine of faith. At a later stage in the Reformed tradition, thinking strongly as it does from the covenant (people) and the church towards the achievement of personal salvation, the doctrine of the church will once more be placed at the heart of the doctrine of faith.²³ On the other hand, it is important to

²² In his study about Calvin's ecclesiology, *Kinderen van één moeder Calvijns visie op de kerk volgens zijn Institutie* (Kampen: Kok, 1989), 24–29, C. Graafland analyzes the problems that Calvin has in the *Institutes* of bringing together in his thoughts the visible and the invisible church because of the tension between election and covenant.

²³ Graafland, *Kinderen van één moeder*, 11–18. It does look as if Graafland tends to exaggerate the contrast between salvation itself, discussed in the first three books of the *Institutes*, and the external means that help us to share in salvation—among other instances—when he writes: “Het zijn de middelen, waardoor wij in het heil gaan delen, maar die middelen behoren niet tot het heil zelf.” (“These are the means through which we obtain a share in salvation, but these means are not salvation itself”) (italics by EVDB), 13.

remember that Calvin, following Bucer, aimed at the realization of the *regnum Christi* in Geneva.

However, we should not diminish the importance of the church too much because the church is, after all, an instrument in the mediation of communion with Christ—the most important aspect of human existence. The church was appointed by God himself as his instrument. And thus the church once more gains importance as an instrument of the Lord, but an instrument that depends on him. To formulate it even more sharply: the church is dependent on the Spirit of Christ. Thus the title gives a foretaste of what is going to be discussed in this chapter: the church as an instrument, conductive rather than active.

With the church as instrument of the Spirit, having Christological and soterio-historical aims, Calvin is able to sail between two danger zones: on the one hand, the independence of the church as an end in itself, and—on the other hand—contempt for the church. These two viewpoints seem to correspond with two actual fronts, which we have already met in Luther and Zwingli: the Church of Rome, which tends to see the church as an absolute and which speaks of the ministry in terms of bestowing special authority, and the Anabaptists, where church and ministry are reduced almost to nothingness. In the first two chapters Calvin will give a more detailed description of his position in relation to these two danger zones.

We use the word *Anabaptists* for lack of a better name. The same name was used when discussing how Luther and Zwingli viewed the ministry. The word covers different groups that did not have a central organization. They are given different names, such as ‘Radical Reformation,’ the ‘left wing of the Reformation,’ the ‘non-conformists,’ the ‘dissidents,’ or ‘Anabaptists.’ Different communities developed in Europe independently from each other. Many attempts have been made to distinguish between them.²⁴ Here we will continue to use the

This begs the question of whether the way to salvation, the means to salvation, is not part of salvation. This formulation opens the way to the suggestion that the fourth book of the *Institutes* is just an appendix and not an essential part of the doctrine of the faith. This does not coincide with Calvin’s intention, who was involved in the reformation of the church his whole life long, because the church was so important in the mediation of salvation. The fourth book is an integral part of his *Institutes*, and therefore of his doctrine of the faith. B. Hall, “Calvin against the Calvinists” in Duffield, *John Calvin*, 23–25, emphasizes the fact that all four books within the *Institutes* are of equal value.

²⁴ M. Lienhard, “Les Anabaptistes” in M. Venard (resp.), *Le temps des Confession (1530–1620/30)* (Histoire du Christianisme Tome VIII) (Paris: Desclée, 1992), 119–182, mentions classifications by E. Troeltsch and Fast. The latter distinguishes between

word *Anabaptists* as a general nomenclature for the left wing of the Reformation, while being aware of considerable heterogeneity within this movement.

Institutes IV.I.1–3: The Invisible Church, Grounded in the Election

The title of the first chapter is *De vera Ecclesia, cum qua nobis colenda est unitas: quia priorum omnium mater est*. This chapter begins with a call to not reject the aids that God offers us because of our weakness—as creatures and as sinners. Calvin immediately sets the tone: we will not be able to manage without these external aids. We need them throughout our lives, both to come to faith and to make progress towards the finishing line. They are like a treasure that has been given to the church for safekeeping. For this reason, Calvin compares the church with a mother. This is not just a mother in whose womb the children are conceived, but also a mother who continues to carry out her supervisory role for the whole of the children's lives. For this reason, the fatherhood of God and the motherhood of the church are inseparable. What are these external means that have been given to the church's safekeeping? In the first instance, Calvin refers to the appointment of pastors and teachers (cf. Eph. 4:11), who teach with authority and, in the second instance, to the sacraments (IV.I.1).

In the second paragraph Calvin explores the importance of the church in the Apostles Creed. The church that is referred to here consists, in the first place, of the true faithful of all times—the elect in accordance with God's hidden counsel, and who are known to God alone. According to Calvin, this is the church that the Apostles Creed refers to when it confesses its catholicity and unity. Even though the church seems to have degenerated into a sad wilderness, God watches over this invisible church as a remnant. The election is clearly the foundation of this church, which God watches over until the end—despite all oppression. The true believers can feel comforted and encouraged by this knowledge that God knows them.

In the third paragraph Calvin wants to prevent the invisible church of the believers from evaporating in every day life. This church—founded on election, on Christ's work, and on the truth of the gospel—

Anabaptists—the enlightened (Hoffmann type), the spiritualists of the evangelical type (Schwenkfeld) and of the rationalist type (Franck), and the anti-Trinitarians on the left of the Reformation.

must also have an external side; otherwise, the Apostles Creed would not be able to speak about the “communion of saints.” This concrete side becomes visible when the saints tell one other of the blessings (*beneficia Dei*) that are the result of communion with Christ. Calvin distinguishes between these gifts and the gifts of the Spirit. The invisibility of the church of the true believers is connected with the fact that the true church is not a question of seeing, but of faith.

In our opinion, this attempt to make the invisible church ‘visible’ leads to more questions than answers. The communion of saints is given a very mystical and elusive meaning. God’s hidden blessings also seem to us to be of a very speculative nature. In Calvin’s writing, the relationship between the invisible and the visible church is under pressure because of the tension between election and covenant. For this reason, this intermezzo about the invisible church is unsatisfactory. This start to his ecclesiology demonstrates the impact of the doctrine of election. When Calvin makes such a clear distinction between the invisible and the visible church at the start of his ecclesiology, it is possible that he was considering a double treatment of the doctrine of the church: on the one hand, focusing on the invisible church at the center of the doctrine of the faith in accordance with the Apostles Creed and, on the other hand, focusing on the visible church for the external aids in the fourth book. It is quite possible that he shrank away from a dualism within his doctrine of the church that was too radical. Another reason might be that the invisible church offers no possibilities for any further thematic distinctions because its foundation, God’s hidden election, is realized only in personal faith.²⁵ This individualistic approach to the meaning of salvation, combined with a preference for the spiritual above the material-physical life,²⁶ offers few possibilities for treating the church as a faith community.

In the development of the *Institutes* over time, we see—on the one hand—that Calvin had remained faithful to the fundamental difference between the invisible and the visible church, but that—on the other hand—his emphasis on the visible church grew ever stronger. While in the first edition of 1536 the invisible church still occupied a central position—discussed as it was in the framework of the doctrine of election, in the final edition of 1559 all discussion about the church is based on the visible church. This shift from ecclesiology to the external means

²⁵ Graafland, *Kinderen van één moeder*, 28.

²⁶ Graafland, *Kinderen van één moeder*, 38.

is connected with a changed approach. Initially, Calvin's main aim was to mount a counter-attack against the Church of Rome with her universal and exclusive salvation claim as a visibly hierarchically organized church, but later he increasingly recognized the need to defend the Christian faith against radical, spiritualistic groups for whom the visible church no longer had much meaning, if any at all.²⁷

Institutes IV.4–7: The Importance of the Visible Church

From the fourth paragraph onwards, Calvin treats the visible church as the community of true as well as of false believers. The church is as necessary for the believer as the passage of the child through the birth canal is for entry into the world, or as the mother's milk is for the growth of the child. Until such time as we leave our mortal flesh, the faithful remain under her protection and guidance. Because of their weakness, they cannot be discharged from this school, and they remain pupils for the rest of their lives. What is more, this mother, the church, is not only necessary for survival, she is also necessary for our salvation. With reference to the psalms and the prophets, Calvin agrees with the insight of Cyprian that outside the church there is no forgiveness of sins and no salvation. This means that although for Calvin the visible church is not of the same rank as the invisible church of the elect, and as an external means is not salvation itself, yet this visible church is still an indispensable entrance into communion with Christ.

After the rather pneumatological opening with regard to the invisible church, as a result of which the importance of the visible church is put into perspective, it is surprising that the importance of the visible church is linked with the mother metaphor. The church of Rome also used this image as an argument for the fact that without her it was impossible to achieve salvation. It is difficult to reconcile this powerful, suggestive metaphor with the fact that the instrumentality of the church makes her of only relative importance, as Calvin has argued earlier. In our opinion, Reformed theologians tend to be too eager to harmonize

²⁷ H. Strohl, *La pensée de la Réforme* (Neuchâtel/Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1951), 209–224, gives a description of the evolution of the debate about church and ministry in the various editions of the *Institutes*. A detailed description of this debate can be found in A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans, Dienende Kirche und kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 140–175. This book is an adaptation of A. Ganoczy, *Calvin, Théologien de l'Eglise et du Ministère* (Paris: Cerf, 1964).

the tension between the relativity and the indispensability of the church in Calvin's work.²⁸

In the next paragraph, Calvin adds another reason for not despising the visible church: she functions in accordance with an order instituted by God. He argues on the basis of Ephesians 4:11 that the educational task of the mother-church is only carried out instrumentally in accordance with the will of God through the ministers' proclamation of the gospel.²⁹ This *ordo* was God's *modus operandi* in Israel: he not only gave the law; he also provided priests to explain it. Therefore, God appoints masters to lead us in order to test our obedience: when we hear his servants speak it is as if we hear God himself speaking in order to be able to communicate with us optimally, i.e., in accordance with our human limitations. Calvin then turns against those who think they can attain wisdom on their own by just reading and contemplating scripture, and who thus scorn public meetings and sermons. He condemns them because they break the band of unity and spurn this proclamation by ministers and God-given church order. Because there are also places where the dignity of the ministers' proclamation is inflated—he thinks here of the situation within the Roman Catholic Church—Calvin substantiates his point of view with regard to the effectiveness of the proclamation as well as dependence on the working of the Holy Spirit (IV.I.6).

²⁸ Graafland, in *Kinderen van één moeder* 41–43, is right when he says that the solid (ontological) Roman Catholic interpretation of the mother image is lacking in Calvin's work, but that does not mean that that the image in itself is not already quite solid, and that Calvin gives it an additional dimension by emphasizing the life-long caring nature that is connected with it. L. Schümmer who dedicated his dissertation, *L'ecclésiologie de Calvin à la lumière de l'Ecclesia Mater* (Bern 1981), to the motherhood of the church as described by Calvin tends to emphasize the fact that the 'mother church' is essential for the survival of the believer by phrases such as "... Le Christ total, tête et corps, n'est pas une image, mais une réalité divine humaine, le grand mystère de l'histoire." (57–58) and "... L'Eglise prolonge, d'une manière incompréhensible, le Christ." (59). On the other hand, he wants to hold on to the instrumentality of Calvin's vision of the church when he denies that the motherly function of the church has mediator importance (52). The mother church, the bride of Christ and his body is God's chosen instrument. He can hold on to these two interpretations of Calvin's doctrine of the church because in his interpretation of Calvin he departs from a standpoint that demonstrates insufficient distance: "On ne prête qu'au riches. L'évidente richesse de la construction théologique de Calvin, permet à tout chercheur de trouver en elle ce qu'il cherche." The admiration Schümmer has for Calvin's work causes him to give Calvin's point of view validity for all times and to make Calvin's systematics sterile by turning it into a closed system where everything depends on everything else.

²⁹ About the institution of the ministry within a soteriological, ecclesiastical context, see also C.-H. Han, "Theology of Ministry in John Calvin" in W. van 't Spijker (ed.), *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag. Festschrift für Willem Neuser* (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 95–105.

In this context, however—using many scriptural references—he clearly places the greater emphasis on the former.

For the first time Calvin mentions the church's ministry as part of his pleading for the great importance of the visible church. She is the mother of all believers, and God works in her through a given order of the proclamation by ministers. The church as mother is a necessary part of the process of salvation, in which God makes use of the instrument of ministry. The Holy Spirit is not only connected with but also bound to the church and to its ministry. This way of thinking about ministry runs parallel with that within the Church of Rome, which also presents itself as the mother who is essential for achieving salvation, and points to God's approach to mankind through ministers' authority in accordance with divine institution. With this view of church and ministry, Calvin places himself in the line of tradition. But with his more functional approach he brings his own emphasis. There is a shift of emphasis from the person to the object, but the object remains bound to the person.

There are some critical comments to be made about this introduction of the ministry in the doctrine of the church.

1. Calvin introduces the church's ministry as a response to the doctrine of those groups who want to negate the importance of the church as a visible, structured community. This leads to the question of whether the context of the defense of the usefulness and importance of the visible church forms a suitable basis for the introduction of ministry into the doctrine of the church in the *Institutes*.
2. The service character of the ministry is mortgaged when, at the outset, the God-given order is emphasized—immediately bringing with it connotations of authority and power, and when the testing of obedience is given as the first reason for this order.
3. When the proclamation by ministers is given such prominence as the God-given order, then we have to ask ourselves how much room is left for a meaningful working of the Spirit outside this ministerial access.
4. Based on these premises there is no problem in presenting ministry as an 'opposite' of the congregation, but is there any room for presenting the ministry as standing before God 'on behalf of' the congregation? The strong emphasis on the line Christ → ministry → congregation does not leave much room for the line Christ →

congregation → ministry. It seems to us that emphasizing a community called by God for proclamation offers more possibilities for a balanced view of ministry.

5. The fact that Calvin emphasizes a particularistic, personal election that concentrates on individuals makes it difficult to discuss not only ecclesiology but also the doctrine of ministry.

In the seventh paragraph Calvin again emphasizes that scripture speaks of the church in two different ways. Sometimes the church is referred to as the community of the elect throughout the ages, sometimes as the multitude of confessors, around Word and sacraments. We must respect even this visible church, which contains many hypocrites, and keep in communion with her. With this call, Calvin closes his investigation into the importance and dignity of the visible church.

Institutes IV.I.8–29: The notae of the Visible Church

Because the characteristics of the church as listed by the Apostles Creed apply only to the invisible church, the question of the characteristics of the visible church remains unanswered. Before Calvin starts to tackle this problem, he warns that nobody should try to establish who the members of the invisible church, God's chosen ones, are because this is hidden in God's counsel, which is unknown to humankind. We must adhere to the judgment of charity (IV.I.8). Although we do not know who the elect are, we can recognize³⁰ the visible church as a community, a body, on the basis of the characteristics of purity in preaching the Word, being obedient,³¹ and administration of the sacraments in accordance with Christ's institution (IV.I.9). In the framework of our investigation, it is important to note that he does not mention ministry as one of the marks of the church. In this respect, Calvin follows where

³⁰ In his dissertation, *Analogia Caritatis. Kirche als Geschöpf und Abbild der Trinität*, Amsterdam 1994, 142, S. Tobler points out that the Reformers, including Calvin, used the *notae ecclesiae* as marks to distinguish between the true and the false church. Where the word was proclaimed, there was the possibility for the church to be reformed, but where the word was blocked, this hope came to nothing. Later these distinguishing marks would become the point of departure for a comprehensive doctrine of the church, a task for which they had not been designed and for which they were not suitable according to Tobler.

³¹ Calvin refrains from making discipline the third mark of the visible church, as is the case in the *Confessio Belgica*. According to O. Weber, "Calvins Lehre von der Kirche" in id., *Die Treue Gottes in der Geschichte der Kirche* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 28, the addition, "and obeying," opened the way to a separate ministry of discipline.

Luther had led: where the Word is, there the church is to be found. For Calvin these two marks are the absolute minimum: where they are lacking there is a justifiable reason to withdraw from the community. But if they are present, even if much can be improved in life and doctrine, to distance oneself from communion with such a church is not allowed because she adheres to the Word and administration of the sacraments in accordance with scripture. This last thought, in particular, is important for the last paragraphs of the first chapter. Calvin seeks to convince the Anabaptists on the basis of this argument.³²

Those who abandon the church in order to form a holy gathering without spot or wrinkle forget that the church stands in an eschatological perspective and is grounded in the justification of the godless. They lack mercy. Calvin confronts this misplaced hankering after holiness by saying that the church is not just built on holiness in the Spirit, but is above all rooted in the reconciliation and justification of the cross. In this context, he again speaks about proclamation by ministers as it had been entrusted by Christ to the church and her servants from the time of the apostles; namely, as the power of the keys. With Paul, he characterizes this service as an ambassadorship of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:20). The theme of the proclamation by ministers is reconciliation with God in the name of Christ. The forgiveness of sins must be sought where God has placed it; namely, within the community of the church (IV.I.22). Countless examples from the Old and New Testaments demonstrate that humankind can live before God only on the basis of continuous forgiveness of sins. This is confirmed in the creed: the forgiveness of sins is coupled to the church.

In addition to these marks, Calvin distinguishes different 'degrees,' levels in the visible church (IV.I.9). In the first place, he mentions the *ecclesia universalis*. This primary attention to the universal church corresponds with his intensive ecumenical-ecclesiastical praxis. The question as to how this universal church is given concrete form remains unanswered. He mentions the local congregation as the second form that the visible church takes. He emphasizes that this constitutes not a secondary, but a fully-fledged form of the church, which is justified in claiming the name and the authority of the church. The third stage is formed by the individual people, who are regarded as church on the basis of their profession of religion.

³² W. Balke, *Calvijn en de doperse radikalen* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1977), 213–240.

Institutes IV.II: The Boundaries of the Visible Church

There is a limit to gentleness and forgiveness. The Church of Rome has overstepped this limit. In the second chapter, *Comparatio falsae Ecclesiae cum vera*, Calvin takes up his position as an opponent of Rome since this church has, in his judgment, abandoned the foundation of prophets and apostles (IV.II.1). The false church under the papacy tries in vain to claim legitimacy by pointing to an uninterrupted line of bishops, which allegedly started with the apostles (IV.II.2). Calvin rejects this claim that succession in the legal apostolic office is a mark of the true church because the Lord never recognizes anything as his own, except where his Word is heard and scrupulously observed. He rejects the boasts of and the reliance on temples, ceremonies and priesthoods (*sacerdotia*), like those of the Jews of old. Calvin unmasks them for what they are: ‘outward appearances’ (*larvae*). If that temple that seemed consecrated as God’s everlasting dwelling place could be abandoned by God and made profane, then there is no reason why God should be so bound to places or persons and attached to external observances that he has to remain among those who have only the title and appearance of the church. The reference to Malachi 2:4 shows that God himself denies that he is bound to godless priests. Any worldly government that has succession without observance and steady progress slides into tyranny. Therefore, the governance of the church, which is based solely on personal succession without observance of doctrine, must be regarded as absurd (IV.II.3). With his appeal to Ephesians 2:20, Calvin states that the church is not founded on the judgment of people or on priesthoods, but on the doctrine of apostles and prophets. In the church as the kingdom of Christ, Christ alone reigns through his Word (IV.I.4).

In the second part of this chapter, Calvin defends himself against the Roman Catholics’ reproach that he and his followers behave like schismatics and heretics. The church’s fellowship, held together by the bonds of sound doctrine and brotherly love, is broken when it is given form outside the Word of the Lord (IV.II.5). It is the Church of Rome that has broken communion with Christ, her head, and it is the church herself, with her *anathemas* against the followers of the Reformation, that has destroyed unity (IV.II.6). The Church of Rome makes two demands to restore that unity, but it is impossible to fulfill them. The first demand—participation in their prayers, holy actions, and ceremonies—cannot be fulfilled because this would mean partici-

pating in the Mass, the greatest abominable sacrilege (IV.II.9). The second demand—recognition of their honor, authority, and jurisdiction—is unacceptable because they are no longer entitled to the power of the keys as they did not hold on to the Word (IV.II.10). But Calvin does not definitively write off this church. Some traces (*vestigia*) still remain. He thinks, in particular, of baptism as a mark of the covenant (IV.II.11). But the whole body of the abominable papacy cannot possibly be the true and legitimate church, as she herself claims (IV.II.12).

Conclusions Regarding the Ministry in the Ecclesiological Principles

In the two introductory chapters, Calvin tried to explain the essence of the church between two extremes: all or nothing. In the arguments used, the ministry plays an important part. We shall now summarize point by point.

1. The starting point is the difference between the invisible and the visible church. The invisible church is the church that consists of the elect of all ages and known to God alone. God's hidden election, aimed at personal salvation, means that at the invisible level there is no ministry.
2. The visible church, as the community of true and false believers, does not belong to the primary faith tradition as it is presented in the Apostles Creed, which means that it is of only relative significance. The visible church does, however, receive a place among the 'external means,' used by the Holy Spirit, with communion with Christ as its aim. The ministry belongs to the visible church and—in the same way—shares in the instrumental and Christ-centered starting point.
3. As far as Calvin is concerned, this instrumental approach to the visible church does not mean that she is not important. On the contrary, like a mother she remains essential for the life-long education of the believer. The proclamation of the Word belongs to this essential nature of the church. This means that the ministry is by no means insignificant because it is through the service of ministers that he has instituted that God approaches humankind. This emphasis is particularly important in the debate with Anabaptists.
4. At this point in his ecclesiology Calvin struggles to reconcile instrumentality and indispensability, and therefore any thinking about the ecclesiastical ministry shares these problems in recon-

ciling instrumentality and indispensability. Here Calvin's ecclesiology and his doctrine of ministry demonstrate the consequences of a theology that takes individual election as its starting point, with the result that the need for God's activity through a community of faith seems in the first instance superfluous. The importance of the church is placed in perspective because the proclamation by ministers of the Word and not the ministry itself takes center stage. It is, therefore, not surprising that the pure proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to scripture, and not the ministry, are seen as marks of the true visible church.

5. When confronting the Anabaptists, the ministry comes to the fore for a second time. Where the Anabaptists demand holiness, Calvin points to the Pauline definition of the ministry as ambassadorship of reconciliation.
6. The ministry is not explained as a sign of unity. The degeneration of the bishop's office in the history of the church is emphasized.
7. The apostolic succession, claimed by the Church of Rome, is invalid without succession in the proclamation of the Word.
8. The Church of Rome is wrong to claim authority and jurisdiction because of her abominable papacy and offices without connection with the Word.

We may conclude that Calvin follows tradition in his approach to church and ministry. The church is necessary for salvation, and the proclamation by ministers is an institution ordained by God. With these ecclesiological principles, he not only stands in the mainstream of the tradition of the Western and the Eastern Church, but in his thinking about the church he is much closer to the Church of Rome than to the Anabaptist tradition. This means that to the end he has remained faithful to his intention in his dedication to the King of France in the first edition of the *Institutes*; namely, that the new evangelical faith must not be confused with the Anabaptist revolutionary way of thinking. Even in his doctrine of the church, it must be made clear that he adheres to what the church has taught since time immemorial—the understanding that she must be instrumental in speaking of God through his Word. He does not want to overthrow the church and found a new one, but he wants to reform the existing church. He does not remove the basis of the ecclesiological tradition; all he does is to make an important correction; namely, that church and ministry lose their authority as soon

as they are no longer instrumental in the proclamation of the Word. Their authority is not automatic and autonomous; it is valid only in so far as church and ministry are instrumental in the coming of the Lord through his Word.

CHAPTER FOUR

CALVIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF MINISTRY WITHIN THE CHURCH

The previous chapters showed us how Calvin, on a number of occasions, discussed the church's ministry in the framework of his ecclesiological introduction. Ministry itself is not one of the *notae ecclesiae* because it is not a distinguishing mark of the true church. But the proclamation of the Word is part of the God-given order through which salvation enters the church. It is one of the instruments used by the Spirit in coming to humankind. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that Calvin discusses ministry before he deals with the sacraments; in doing so he indicates how important ministry is for the functioning of the church, which is a necessity for salvation. The third chapter is dedicated entirely to ministry and received its definitive form in the Latin edition of 1543. This chapter will be read attentively, paragraph by paragraph, so that we can trace and evaluate Calvin's exact train of thought.

The title of the third chapter is *De Ecclesiae doctoribus et ministris, eorum electione et officio*, a fascinating and significant title. First of all, two offices are discussed here—that of teacher and that of minister. Who is Calvin referring to? Who in particular are the ministers? Is that, in this instance, a general name for different offices, or is it used to refer to a specific ministry? In combination with 'doctors,' the second possibility is the more likely one. Calvin also indicates which elements of their ministry he wants to discuss in particular: their election and their *officium*. With regard to the first element, we note that he does not want to discuss ordination or vocation in general, but about the election procedure of ministers in the church. With regard to the second element, the *officium*, this poses a translation problem. The noun *officium* with its different forms occurs 112 times in book four, and seven of these are in the third chapter.¹ The dictionary² gives three meanings

¹ For this concordant investigation we used the CD-rom *Calvin's Institutes Latin-English Search and Browser Programs*, Grand Rapids, 1999.

² We make use of F. Muller, E.H. Renkema and A.D. Leeman (adaptation), *Beknopt Latijns-Nederlands woordenboek* (Groningen: Wolters Noordhoff, 1982¹²).

for *officium*; 1) helpfulness, service; 2) service, task, ministry; 3) duty. The second meaning is the most likely one, but it is important not to lose sight of the connotation of the first meaning. To function as a minister implies involvement as a servant and not as a ruler. The third meaning, ‘duty,’ arises naturally from the second meaning. In the context of this chapter, we choose to translate *officium* with *task*. Calvin investigates what the functions and the tasks of teachers and ministers are.³

Calvin’s strongly functional, task-orientated approach is also evidenced by the use of words in this chapter. The most frequently used terms are *munus*, literally—‘task,’ which occurs 16 times out of a total of 98 locations in the third chapter in Book IV, and *ministerium*, literally—‘service, task, office, serving,’ which occurs 16 times out of a total of 105 locations in the third chapter in Book IV.⁴ The noun *function*, literally meaning ‘implementation,’ is used 22 times in Book IV, four of which occur in the third chapter.

INSTITUTES IV.III. 1–3: NATURE, NECESSITY AND DIGNITY OF THE MINISTRY

The first significant sentence of the third chapter reads: “Iam de ordine dicendum est quo Ecclesiam suam gubernari voluit Dominus.”⁵ When referring to ministry, Calvin uses the language of church tradition: ministry is a matter of *ordo*, literally—‘rank.’ The verb ‘to ordain’ is derived from this word. The literal meaning is: ‘to be allocated your place.’ This terminology was already being used during the Middle Ages, and the Council of Trent also made use of the concept. In a sense, Calvin is much closer to the Tridentine theology of ministry than we might suppose at first sight. He, of course, does not share such specific Roman Catholic elements as those concerned with sacerdotal priesthood, but he shares many principles and concepts with Roman Catholic theology.

³ The same interpretation of the meaning of the title can be found on p. 6 in H.B. Weijland, “Teveel gewicht? Over ouderlingen en diakenen in de calvinistische traditie,” *Kerk en Theologie* 43 (1992) 1, 5–12.

⁴ According to W. Herrenbrück, “Presbytery and Leadership in the Church” in: D. Willis and M. Welker (ed.), *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions* (Grand Rapids /Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 293, Calvin rarely uses the expression *ministerium* in his writings and prefers the term *munus*.

⁵ *OS* V. 42, 20–21.

The function of ministry is to rule, govern, give leadership, and this is not a matter of free human institution, but has to be carried out in accordance with the will of the Lord. Immediately a problem arises. How can a ministers' leadership be in accordance with reign of God in the church? Calvin's starting point is that the Lord alone reigns in the church, and that he exercises his authority through his Word. Does that mean that service by people is not needed? No, because God does not dwell among us in visible presence to explain his will verbally and in person. Therefore, service by ministers within the church is part of the way in which God makes allowances for human limitations.⁶ God makes use of the service of people "... quasi vicariam operam ..."⁷ Calvin does not want to give the wrong impression. What he is talking about is a quasi vicariate; it looks like substitution, but the comparison is not quite right because God does not transfer his right and honor as a result. He does the work himself as if through their mouths, "... qualiter ad opus quoque faciendum instrumento utitur artifex."⁸

Calvin carefully searches for the right words and images to capture the essence of ministry. He introduces the word 'vicariate' very cautiously, but he is hesitant to use the concept because it still awards too much honor to the minister and his contribution. Then he arrives at the much humbler concept of 'instrument.' This word reminds us of *medii adminiculi* from the title of Book IV of the *Institutes*. There is a straight line from the church as an aid to ministry as instrument. Where ministers are instruments in the service of the Lord, they fulfil a specific function in the church.⁹ Whether ministers carry out their ministry instead of or on behalf of the community is a question that has to remain unanswered for the time being. Calvin is still struggling to find the right words. Even the word 'instrument' might be interpreted as an infringement of God's sovereignty, and this is why he adds that God is

⁶ About God's accommodation as fundamental theological principle in Calvin, see McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 129–132 and about *adaptio* in humanistic perspective, see Bouwsma, *John Calvin* 150–152.

⁷ *OS* V. 42, 25. The Latin text here appears to be more cautious than the French text: "... les faisant comme ses lieutenans ...".

⁸ *OS* V. 42, 28–29.

⁹ Ganoczy, in *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 363, characterizes this instrumental line that is transferred from church to ministry as follows: "eine Aktualisierung, eine Konkretisierung, eine Individuation der Dienst-Struktur der ganzen Gemeinschaft." Ganoczy regards Calvin's consequently instrumental approach as the best guarantee against rash clericalization and for a collegial order of the various offices within the church.

not obliged to involve people. God would be able to complete the work on his own and without any aid or instrument¹⁰—or he could involve angels.

But once God's autonomy has been guaranteed, Calvin searches for the reasons why God prefers to make use of human service in ruling the church. In the first place, it is a sign of grace that he chooses a number of people who act as his ambassadors in the world,¹¹ who must be interpreters of his hidden will, and who must represent his person.¹² In the second place, the involvement of people is an exercise in humility; God wants us to get used to obeying his Word even if it is proclaimed by people who are our equals, or sometimes even our inferiors. This is yet another way of demonstrating how God hides his treasure of heavenly wisdom in weak earthen vessels. We have already come across these two arguments in IV.I.5, where Calvin gave two reasons for the divine institution of the human proclamation of the Word.¹³ And here Calvin adds a third argument. Offices are not only a sign of gracious esteem towards people and an exercise in humility, they are also the best guarantee for the bond of love and unity because the believers are dependent on the pastor's instruction; they are unable to believe while they retain their proud self-sufficiency. Here Calvin depicts ministry as the connecting sign in the church—the sign of unity. Calvin's description of the relationship between pastor and congregation reminds us of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep; the early church liked to represent it as a flock of sheep around the bishop. It is significant that Calvin presents the ministry as a sign of unity in the church. We will have to see whether he elaborates this point further later on. Calvin closes the first paragraph with a long quotation from scripture from Ephesians 4:4–16.

When we look back on the first paragraph, it becomes clear how Calvin tries to determine the nature of the ministry: in answer to the Church of Rome, he emphasizes Christ's enduring reign; with regard to the Anabaptists, he emphasizes—in three different ways—the necessity

¹⁰ "... aut adminiculo aut organo ..." *OS V*. 43, 2.

¹¹ "... pro se in mundo legatione fungantur ..." *OS V*. 43, 5.

¹² "... qui personam denique suam repraesentent." *OS V*. 43, 6–7.

¹³ The first reason given, the obedience test, is the equivalent of the second argument in IV.III.1; namely, an exercise in humility. In my opinion, this second formulation is better because the first one is reduced to bowing in the face of power. The second reason from IV.I.5, the gracious divine accommodation, is the equivalent of the first argument in IV.III.1.

of the ministry. The ministry is presented as the best medicine against the Anabaptist diseases: pride, cold-heartedness and strife. The strong emphasis on the divine institution is complemented by an emphasis on the divine will to involve people in his route to salvation. This proves that the human dimension is important, too.

In the second paragraph, Calvin quotes from Ephesians 4 and argues for the indispensability of ministry. Inspired by the human body images, Calvin reminds us of the importance of the nervous system¹⁴ in holding the body together as an image for the importance of the ministry in safeguarding the unity of believers. The church cannot withdraw from the means that the Lord has made available to his church with a view to its safekeeping and fulfilment; namely, the apostolic and pastoral ministry. Through this ministry, Christ shows his presence,¹⁵ and, in addition, the power of the Spirit is revealed. Anyone who undermines this order and government causes the downfall of the church. The ministry for the church on earth is a greater necessity than food, drink, and the light and warmth of the sun are in order to sustain present life. This formulation clearly demonstrates how important the ministry is to Calvin. This brief second paragraph does not contain any new arguments, but further elaborates on the evidence for the indispensability of the ministry that had already been given—in particular—the third reason from the first paragraph; namely, the ministry as divine instrument of unity within the church.

What better way of demonstrating its dignity than by reminding us of the praise from God's own mouth with regard to the ministry? The third paragraph consists of a list of Bible passages where God sings the praises of the ministry: how beautiful are the feet of the prophets who announce peace to Jerusalem (Is. 52:7); the apostles as salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt. 5:13–14); "he who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me" (Luke 10:16); the unsurpassed service of the gospel as the administration of the Spirit, of justice, and of eternal life (2 Cor. 3 and 4). In addition to this praise from God himself, the scriptures also contain the examples of Cornelius (Acts 10) and Paul (Acts 9) who get to know God in accordance with God's will through

¹⁴ The Latin text mentions "... praecipuum esse nervum ..." (OS V. 44, 16), while the French text emphasizes the connecting character "... est comme la ioincture des nerfs,"

¹⁵ Here, it is also important to note how cautious Calvin is when he describes the ministry as Christ's representation. Here this reservation is expressed with the help of the adverb *quodammodo* (OS V. 44, 24)—to some degree, somewhat.

the agency of people. If God praises the worth of the ministry in this way, humankind does not have the right to despise it.

The first three paragraphs form a sort of fundamental introduction, which describe the essence, the necessity, and the dignity of the ministry. We list the most important conclusions from these foundation paragraphs:

1. The church's ministry finds its origin in the will of God to speak to us through the service of people. This also ensures the ministry's indispensability and dignity.
2. The function of ministry is to give leadership within the church.
3. There is a direct line from Christ to the minister. Christ uses ministry to offer the church his Word that brings salvation. Therefore, the leadership given by the minister is a symbol for Christocracy.
4. Calvin is very cautious when he attempts to interpret the relation Christ → minister in greater detail. Vicar, instrument and substitute are concepts that are only partially successful in expressing this relationship. Calvin continues to safeguard God's sovereignty and honor and places the significance of the minister into perspective.
5. Ministers are only servants of Christ and his Word. They are not delegated by the congregation. And it is only as servants of the Word that they can be servants of the church, and not the other way around.¹⁶

INSTITUTES IV.III.4–9: DIFFERENTIATED OFFICES

From the fourth paragraph onwards, Calvin tries to classify the offices. To do this he returns to the key text from Ephesians 4. While in the first paragraphs this text served as proof that the offices were gifts from Christ to safeguard the unity of the church, now he uses this Bible passage as his key text to demonstrate the need for a plurality of offices within the church. As Calvin sees it, in this passage Paul gives a list of five offices that have to govern the church in accordance with Christ's institution: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Zwingli

¹⁶ B.C. Milner, Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 136. When Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 58–59, writes that the offices arise from the church itself, we find this an unsatisfactory choice of words.

used the same core text in *Von dem Predigtamt* to list and differentiate between the offices instituted by Christ. Like Zwingli, Calvin uses this pericope as the central Bible passage on which he bases his complete argument.

*Institutes IV.III.4–5: The Difference between
munera extraordinaria et ordinaria*

In the fourth paragraph, he will give a brief explanation of these offices. But first of all, he establishes a ranking. He classifies the first three as *munera extraordinaria* to distinguish them from the *munera ordinaria* to which the last two belong—which are essential for the existence of the church. The extraordinary offices function only in extraordinary times, or during the foundation period when the Christian churches had to be established where there had been no churches before, or where Jesus as savior had to be proclaimed to the Jews, or in later periods when circumstances required it because the church started to follow the Antichrist. Calvin regards his own time as such a period and acknowledges that in his time, too, God has called apostles and evangelists. In other writings Calvin refers to Luther by name as an apostle.¹⁷ Calvin's whole *oeuvre* was characterized by the realization that he lived in such an emergency situation and is a testimony to the realization that his own activity must also be regarded as the work of an extraordinary office bearer.¹⁸

Calvin merely gives this differentiation between the offices without offering any further arguments for it. This makes it seem rather random. The suspicion arises that Calvin interpreted the scriptural text in the light of the actual situation within the church as he knew it in

¹⁷ He describes Luther as “cet insigne Apôtre de Christ, par le ministère de qui la lumière de l’Evangile a lui en notre temps”, ‘Fragmentum praefationis novae...’ in: *CR XXXIV OC VI*. 844. Elsewhere he says: “Encore maintenant comme par ci devant, dit-il encore, nous déclarons expressément que nous le tenons pour un excellent Apostre de Christ, par le labeur et ministère duquel sur tous autres la pureté de l’Evangile ait esté emise sus de nostre temps.” “Reponse aux calomnies d’Albert Pighius” in: *CRXXXV OC VII*. 250. This does not mean that on all other occasions he has only addressed uncritical words to Luther; in particular, with regards to the Lord’s Supper.

¹⁸ Nijenhuis refers to the correspondence from Geneva and adds: “Wie aus dieser Korrespondenz ersichtlich, war sich Calvin eines besondern Auftrags, den er von Gott für die Beförderung der Einheit der Kirche empfangen habe, und der Bedeutung der diesem Auftrag zugeordneten Funktion Genfs als kirchlicher Metropole bewusst.” (“Calvin Johannes (1509–1564),” *TRE* Bd. 7, 576).

Geneva.¹⁹ The four offices of ‘pastor, teacher, elder and deacon’ are not given a systematic reflection until the 1543 edition of the *Institutes*—two years after he introduced these four offices into his church order for Geneva, *Les Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques de l’église de Genève*. This new church order has its historical roots in his stay in Strasbourg where, under the influence of Bucer, he became much more conscious of the visibility of the church and the multiplicity of biblical offices. Bucer introduced the office of elder and spoke of four offices.²⁰ For an exegetical treatment, we will have to wait for Calvin’s later commentaries and sermons. Another explanation why this difference is not underpinned by arguments can also be found in the exegetical tradition of which Calvin was an heir—which regarded the difference between the two types of offices as quite obvious.²¹

Calvin then continues with a discussion of each of the five offices referred to in Ephesians 4:11. For his explanation about ‘apostles,’ he takes, as his starting point, the universal mission command in Mark 16:15. Apostles are not tied to one place; they have a world-wide calling. Calvin is of the opinion that Paul uses this way of arguing as proof for his apostleship in Romans 15:19. With reference to the next verse 20, it appears that Calvin introduces a second characteristic; namely, not building on someone else’s foundation. They are *primi Ecclesiae architecti*.²² On the basis of the nature of their task, he decides that this first foundation period is now past, and this is therefore a non-permanent office.

¹⁹ See also Van Ginkel, *De ouderling*, 125–126 and 144.

²⁰ The development of the doctrine of the offices in Bucer in its historic perspective was described in great detail by W. van ’t Spijker in his 1970 dissertation at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and published again in 1987 in Kampen: *De ambten bij Martin Bucer*. In 1996 an English translation was published: *The ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). For studies of a more recent date, see G. Hammann, *Entre la secte et la cité. Le projet d’Eglise du Réformateur Martin Bucer (1491–1551)* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1984) and A.N. Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline* (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publications, 1994).

²¹ E.A. McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry. The Role of exegetical History in illuminating J. Calvin’s Theology* (Genève: Droz, 1988), 137–165. McKee has a tendency to rather glibly reduce the difference that Calvin makes between extraordinary and ordinary offices to the contrast between temporary and permanent offices. Temporary suggests that this is finally over, while it is possible that in extraordinary times an extraordinary office may be needed again and may be able to function.

²² OS V, 46,12.

Calvin sets his face against the Roman Catholic claims of continuity of the papal primacy and the continuation of the apostolic task that is used by the itinerant Anabaptist pastors to prove their legitimacy.²³

To what extent do Calvin's arguments on this point run parallel with those of Zwingli? We find parallels as well as differences. Zwingli also refers to not being tied to one place and laying the first foundation. But while Zwingli uses the fact that the apostles are not tied to one place mainly to demonstrate the contrast to the office of bishop with his ties to one diocese,²⁴ Calvin emphasizes the freedom that arises from the boundlessness of the gospel itself. Zwingli differentiates between the original twelve disciples of Jesus, and those who are called to be apostles to this day. In principle Calvin limits the apostles to the foundation period of the church without limiting them to the original twelve; he leaves an opening for apostles in later periods in extraordinary circumstances. It is odd that he leaves out the most important aspect of the apostle's office; namely, that the apostles were not only witnesses but also bearers of the revelation, in continuity with the prophetic revelation in the Old Testament and the revelation in Christ.²⁵ Just like Zwingli, Calvin does not make a connection with the church's apostolicity when he discusses the office of apostle, nor does he make a connection between the apostles and the church's apostolic calling.²⁶

The office of prophet is the second extraordinary office. 'Prophet' is not a collective name for all those who explain God's will, but refers to those who excel through special revelation.²⁷ Are special revelations no longer received? Calvin leaves some room for maneuver here. Either there are no longer any prophets, or they still exist, but people fail to realize that they are prophets.

Due to the brevity of his explanation, it is not clear what he means by the prophets' 'special revelation.' Exegetical tradition knew two possibilities: predicting the future or enlightened scriptural exegesis in relation to the prophet's own time.²⁸ His Bible commentary proves that he

²³ McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 160–161.

²⁴ The contrast to bishops who are tied to a particular region can still be found in the first Latin edition of the *Institutes* of 1536 (See *OS* V. 46.4, footnote a and *OS* V. 49, footnote a) and the first French translation of 1541 (*IRC*, 58, footnote a).

²⁵ Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 66.

²⁶ See the enlightening article by W.F. Dankbaar, "Het apostolaat bij Calvijn," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 4 (1949–1950) 177–192 and included in the collection *Hervormers en Humanisten* (Amsterdam: Bolland, 1978), 185–199.

²⁷ "... qui singulari revelatione excellabant: ...," *OS* V. 46, 15.

²⁸ McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 157–159, 214–215.

avored the second interpretation.²⁹ In his first commentaries he seems to opt for a permanent prophetic office, but in his later commentaries this is changed to an extraordinary office.³⁰ The prophet is the exegete of the scriptures, whose preaching is characterized by special spiritual enlightenment—in contrast to the teacher, whose work is based on study. It is very likely that Calvin limited this office to extraordinary times to negate the Anabaptist claim of special, prophetic revelation.³¹ It remains surprising, however, that Calvin classifies the prophet's office as inspired scriptural proclamation among the extraordinary offices because understanding, interpreting and proclaiming scripture in the light of the current situation³² always requires special enlightenment and inspiration by God's Spirit. As enlightened scriptural proclamation, the prophetic office belongs to the essential core tasks of ministerial functioning in a church where the Word occupies a central position.

With respect to the prophet's office, it is fascinating to compare Calvin's response to the activities of the Anabaptist pastors with that of Zwingli. Whereas Calvin works defensively and assigns the prophet to foundational times and emergency situations, Zwingli goes on the offensive and takes the opportunity to elevate the prophet's office to a higher plain than is the case with the Anabaptists. Like the Anabaptists, Zwingli wants to view the prophet as an inspired preacher, but not as one who creates confusion and refuses to listen to others. Rather, he should be one who preaches from and is rooted in scripture on the basis of knowledge of the source languages. Unlike Calvin, Zwingli does not minimize the prophet's office, but professionalizes it and makes it the core office.

The evangelist is mentioned in a third position in Ephesians 4:11. When speaking about evangelists, Calvin thinks of people such as Luke, Timothy or Titus, and perhaps even the seventy disciples also sent into

²⁹ W. de Greef. "Calvin on Prophecy" in: W.H. Neuser, H.J. Selderhuis (Hrsg.), *Ordentlich und fruchtbar*, Festschrift für W. Van 't Spijker, (Leiden: Groen, 1997), 111–128.

³⁰ McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 214–215 and Balke, *Calvijn en de doperse radikalen*, 244–252.

³¹ McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 157, 159, 214–215 and Balke, *Calvijn en de doperse radikalen*, 244–252.

³² I do not want to enter into a discussion here about whether or not the church has a prophet's office when there is no theocratic framework. See G.G. de Kruijf, *Waakzaam en nuchter. Over christelijke ethiek in een democratie* (Baarn: ten Have, 1994), in particular, 236–241. The argument is that the office of prophet as defined by Calvin cannot be limited to the foundation times for the church. The church is constantly in need of inspired scripture interpretation and proclamation.

the world by Christ; they are all people with a task that is similar to that of the apostles, but their dignity is of a lower level than that of the apostles.

Zwingli also called Timothy an evangelist, but was not able to give this office its own task description. The same applies to Calvin. Both reject traditional interpretations of the evangelist's office as a gospel writer or a deacon.³³

Calvin ends the paragraph with a brief explanation of the two ordinary offices, pastors and teachers. The teachers are only responsible for explaining scripture in order to keep the church's doctrine pure. Pastors also have this task, but they are responsible for discipline, administering the sacraments, warnings, and exhortations as well.

This distinction leads us to ask if the teacher's office is a fully independent office alongside the pastor's office, or whether it has to be considered merely as part of that office. The teachers do not make an appearance until the edition of 1543, possibly under the influence of contacts with Bucer.³⁴ They make their first real appearance in the 1541 church order of Geneva where the teacher's office is explained as one of the four *ordres ou espèces d'offices* (art. 2). There their task³⁵ is also described as instructing the believers in sound doctrine, so that the purity of the gospel is not polluted by ignorance or wrong opinions. W.F. Dankbaar comes to the conclusion that—to Calvin—the 'doctor's office' was more a special activity than an independent office, as had been the case in the Middle Ages.³⁶ In this respect, Calvin's viewpoint is in agreement with the actual situation in Geneva during his time. There the office of theological teacher was coupled to the pastor's office.

The following provisions of the church order demonstrate how Calvin imagined the office of doctor in the situation of those days. He saw doctors first and foremost as teachers of theology whose task it was to train new pastors for the congregations. Second, he thought of teachers as working in higher and basic education, where those training as pas-

³³ McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 213–214.

³⁴ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 310–315.

³⁵ See article 43–47 in "Les Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques de l'Eglise de Genève 1561" in Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*, 48.

³⁶ W.F. Dankbaar, "Het doctorenambt bij Calvin," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 19 (1964–1965), 135–165, included in the collection of articles by Dankbaar, *Hervormers en Humanisten. Een bundel opstellen*, 153–184. We shall refer to this last edition.

tors needed to learn languages and science. Calvin still thinks in terms of the medieval tradition, where teaching was the church's responsibility. The written history shows that there had been differences of opinion with the city council about the right to make appointments. The council accepted that teachers were subject to church discipline, but they wanted to have the final say in appointments. Calvin himself introduced grades into the doctors' education. The doctors in the narrower sense, those who taught theology, were church ministers because they were first and foremost pastors. The doctors in the wider sense, those who were involved in education, also carried out church work, but with them the link with the church was a bit looser and that with the government a bit closer.³⁷

When comparing Zwingli with Calvin, we find that Zwingli gives the office of teacher a more specific meaning; in particular, teaching the source languages, and teaching scripture based on the source languages. In the case of the pastor, Zwingli constantly thinks of watching over the flock, but in *Von dem Predigtamt* the description remains thin. For Calvin, however, the pastor is the minister *par excellence*.

It is striking how cautious Calvin is in this paragraph.³⁸ He appears hesitant when writing about the prophets and the question whether prophets still exist, as well as when interpreting the evangelist's office and distinguishing between doctors and pastors.

In the fifth paragraph Calvin brings the difference between extraordinary and ordinary offices into perspective by making links between apostle-evangelists³⁹ and pastors, on the one hand, and prophets and teachers, on the other. Although the prophet's office was rated more highly because of the special gift of revelation, there is still a line from prophet to teacher because of similarities in aim and working method. In the same way the apostles, including Paul in addition to the original twelve,⁴⁰ are higher in rank and dignity than the pastors, but both have the same task—except that the pastor's task is limited to a church with

³⁷ Dankbaar, *Hervormers en Humanisten*, 179.

³⁸ This can be seen most clearly in the sentence: "Secundum hanc interpretationem (quae mihi et verbis et sententiae Pauli consentanea videtur) ..." *OS V*, 46, 21–22.

³⁹ The connection between apostles and evangelists has already been made in the fourth paragraph.

⁴⁰ The two scripture references here are Luke 6:13 and Gal. 1:1. These two quotations from scripture are in the wrong place in A. Sizoo's translation, *Johannes Calvin Instituție of onderwijzing van de christelijke godsdienst*, deel III, containing book IV (Delft: Meinema, 1985¹⁰), 59.

a clearly defined area. As if in passing, Calvin remarks that—according to the etymology—the word ‘apostle’ can be used for all servants of the church, in the same way as Paul does (Romans 16:7), but that it is better to reserve the word ‘apostle’ as title for the twelve who proclaimed a new and unheard of message. In doing so, Calvin once more accentuates the second mark of apostleship referred to in the previous paragraph: the fact that they were the first to do so.

Calvin refrains from awarding the result of their work its own benchmarking importance, nor does he speak about the ‘apostolicity’ of the church. But by emphasizing continuity in carrying out the task during the transition from apostles to pastors, apostolicity is not applicable to persons, but to the activity of the office bearers, i.e., the proclamation of the Word. This explanation gives apostles, evangelists and prophets an even stronger profile as offices that, in principle, only belong to the foundation period of the Christian church. On the other hand, their tasks are taken over—to a large degree—by the pastors and teachers.

Institutes IV.III. 6–9: The Different munera ordinaria

Calvin has now finished his differentiation between extraordinary and ordinary offices, and he goes on to discuss the ordinary offices. Although Ephesians 4 gives two ordinary offices, he does not continue with his explanation of the teacher’s office. This proves again that Calvin found it difficult to give this office its own scripture-based profile.

Calvin concentrates first and foremost on the office that Christ entrusted to his apostles and is continued by the pastors. With reference to Matthew 28:19 and Luke 22:19, he concludes in the sixth paragraph that the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and communion are the tasks that have been set. The first task does not only refer to public proclamation, but also to private admonition. The one who neglects these tasks uses the apostles only as a pretext. Those who call themselves pastors must know that they do not have a sinecure, but must teach the doctrine of Christ, administer the sacraments, and exercise correct discipline. This formulation seems to indicate that there is a third task: that of exercising discipline. We must ask ourselves if this is really a new task, taking into account that he has given proclamation and administering the sacraments as the two most important tasks of the apostles. It appears to be more self-evident in this context to regard exercising discipline as a derived task. The pastors are exhorted to carry out

this task as an extension of the two tasks that are concerned with the eternal salvation of humankind. In exercising discipline, the pastors demonstrate the seriousness, the carefulness, and the involvement with which they carry out their ministry. In his description of the pastors' tasks, he rejects the Roman Catholic bishops' and priests' interpretation of this ministry.

In the next paragraph Calvin attacks the itinerant Anabaptist pastors when he again emphasizes the differences in the work spheres of apostles and pastors: for apostles, it is the whole world; for pastors, their own flock. This territorial delimitation of the area is not a human invention, but—according to Calvin—God himself instituted it to keep peace, as he says is evidenced by numerous scripture references from the Acts of the Apostles and from the letters that describe how Paul appoints presbyters and bishops in a number of places. Calvin realizes that there are situations in which it is possible to help a flock outside one's own territory by giving advice where there is confusion; what is not intended is that the pastor 'deliberates'⁴¹ each day where he is going to go. In addition, Calvin knows all too well that relocation is possible only if the authorities give their permission.⁴²

At the beginning of paragraph eight, Calvin says that the words 'episcopus,' 'presbyter,'⁴³ 'pastor,' and 'minister' are interchangeable because they are also interchangeable in scripture. With text references from the letter to Titus, Philippians and the Acts of the Apostles, he proves that *presbyteri* and *episcopi* refer to the same people. In these four names we always have the same office, whereby the central task is the proclamation of the Word. By treating all these offices as equal, Calvin hands us the key for the correct interpretation of his terminology. The

⁴¹ The meaning of *quaerere liberationem* in "... sed is qui in unum locum vocatus est, non debet ipse de migratione cogitare, nec, prout sibi commodum putarit, quaerere liberationem." (*O.S.* V. 49,27–29) is not completely clear. Sizoo gives a translation that is less than felicitous when he says: "Maar hij die naar één plaats geroepen is, moet niet zelf over verhuizing denken," (But someone who has been called to one place must not think about moving). The context and the French translation of 1560 give a translation that makes more sense: "Mais i'enten que celuy qui est appellé en un lieu ne doit plus penser de changer et prendre de iour en iour nouvelle délibération, selon que sa commodité le portera." (*IRC*, 62).

⁴² Here the French translation ("... mais qu'il se doit reigler par l'autorité publique de l'Eglise," *IRC*, 62) is different from the Latin text ("... sed expectare publicam autoritatem," *OS* V. 50,1–2).

⁴³ Sizoo wrongly translates the word as *ouderlingen*, Johannes Calvijn, *Institutie*, deel III, 62.

use of the word 'minister' is particularly striking. Whenever Calvin speaks about ministers in the context of the office, he means the pastors. In this way the title of the chapter also becomes clear. The ministers, who together with the doctors form the subject of this chapter about offices, are the shepherds, the pastors, or—to put it differently—the 'ministers of the Word.'

This completes the discussion of the five offices referred to in Ephesians 4; all of them are related to the proclamation of the Word. Calvin then gives us two lists of offices in Romans 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 12:28: "... potestates, donum sanationum, interpretationem, gubernationem, pauperum curationem."⁴⁴ Apart from two of them—ruling and taking care of the poor—he pays no further attention to these offices because they are only temporary. The *munus guberationis*, on the other hand, is an office for all times, which is confirmed by centuries of experience. Calvin offers no further proof for this assertion, which therefore seems a bit random,⁴⁵ as in his treatment of the extraordinary offices. On the other hand, his treatment of these verses, in which he interprets gifts as offices and differentiates between temporary and permanent offices, appears to have been quite common in the exegetical tradition.⁴⁶ In the case of the office of deacon, there is no further justification for the permanent character.

Who are these governors? They are, in Calvin's opinion,⁴⁷ elders that have been chosen from among the people so that, together with the bishops, they can supervise people's behavior and exercise discipline.⁴⁸ This led to the name *anciens*,⁴⁹ in Dutch petrified to *ouderlingen* (elders). Right from the start, Calvin sees these elders, in every church, as a council⁵⁰ of pious, serious, and holy men, who have to pronounce judgement in order to combat vice. This governing must therefore

⁴⁴ OS V. 50,17–18.

⁴⁵ According to McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 189, it is possible that Calvin wants to indicate that no community can exist without rules and without a body that ensures the rules are adhered to.

⁴⁶ McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 170–181.

⁴⁷ Here, too, his careful use of words is striking, as if he is not completely sure of himself.

⁴⁸ "Gubernatores fuisse existimo seniores e plebe delectos, qui censurae morum et exercendae disciplinae una cum Episcopis praessent." OS V. 50,21–23.

⁴⁹ "Or i'estime qu'il appelle Gouverneurs les Anciens qu'on eslisoit d'entre le peuple ...," IRC, 63.

⁵⁰ The Latin text speaks of a *senatus* (OS, 50, 26), the French one of *un conseil ou consistoire* (IRC, 63).

not be seen in the sense of implementing policies, but in the sense of exercising control over and supervising morals.

It is important to note how Calvin differentiates between a ‘presbyter,’ another name for pastor or minister of the Word, and a *senior*, or *ancien* or ‘elder.’ In his French translation, Calvin also uses two different terms; namely, *prestre* and *ancien*.⁵¹ In the Dutch translation by Sizoo, that differentiation has completely disappeared. Sizoo translates both presbyter and *senior* with *ouderling* (elder). This is a translation error with a long history; in the translation by W.J. Wijenberg from 1869, the word *ouderling* is also used as translation for both presbyter and *senior*.⁵² It also makes an appearance in the Dutch translation of the editions from 1536.⁵³ In our opinion, the translation with *ouderling* (elder) is justified only in the case of the word *senior*. We plead that the word ‘presbyter’ should be left untranslated; it is an historical term for a particular office in the early Christian congregations and an ecumenical, technical term for the pastor of the local community. The term *senior* occurs only thirteen times in Book IV, two of which are quotations from the Old Testament and one a quotation from a church father. This means that the share of the *senior* in Calvin’s ministry of theology is quite small—in particular, when compared with the 87 times the word ‘presbyter’ is used in Book IV of the *Institutes*.

Both doctors and elders are introduced in the third edition of the *Institutes* of 1543. They functioned in a rudimentary form in Basle (Oecolampadius) and Strasbourg (Bucer). As Bucer, Calvin refers to Paul’s exhortation in the Latin translation: “Qui praeest, id faciat in sollicitudine”⁵⁴ (Romans 12:8). The scriptural foundation for this office is weak. Ganoczy⁵⁵ is of the opinion that Calvin has not sufficiently substantiated this office from a theological point of view.

⁵¹ In the French Bible translation of 1534 by P. Robert, alias Olivetanus, a nephew of Calvin—for which he wrote the foreword—the New Testament *presbyteros* had already been translated with *ancien* and not *prêtre*. But B. Cottret, *Calvin*, 109–110 points out that in some instances Calvin objected to this translation for linguistic reasons.

⁵² This translation was published by G.Ph. Zalsman in Kampen during the years 1890–1893.

⁵³ K. Runia (in footnote 7 p. 111 in “Calvijns visie op de ambten” in: M. van Campen, W. de Greef, F. van der Pol (red.), *Reformatie: prediking en ambt* (Woerden: Stichting ter bevordering van de kennis van de Reformatie, 1994) places a note in the margin in the translation by W. van ’t Spijker of *presbyter* in de *Institutes* of 1536 with *ouderling* (elder).

⁵⁴ *OS* V. 50, 17–18.

⁵⁵ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 315–324. He thinks in this context of the royal priesthood of the believers.

In paragraph nine he investigates the importance of the office of those who minister to the poor. Without any further evidence, he says that the care of the poor is the task of deacons—another office referred to in the New Testament. Later⁵⁶ Calvin will give a detailed description of the way this office degenerated to liturgical assistance of the priest under the papacy. Because of the way he interprets⁵⁷ Romans 12:8, he comes to the conclusion that there are two kinds of deacons—those who administer alms, and those who care for the sick and the poor. He calls these two kinds ‘grades,’ a term we also find in the theology of ministry of the Middle Ages and would also be used in the ministry texts of the Council of Trent, where there is mention of seven consecration stages. He regards the second kind of deacon’s office, that of caring for the sick and the poor, as the only office open to a certain group of women, the widows, whom Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 5:10.⁵⁸ Although the word *διακονία* in scripture has a wider meaning, it is also specifically used for the work of the distributors of alms and the caretakers of the poor appointed by the church. He is convinced that Luke describes the origin, the institution, and the functioning of this office in Acts 6. With this differentiation, Calvin conforms to the existing practice in Geneva, where under the leadership of the authorities, administrators of the church’s goods and hospital almoners were active.⁵⁹ The administrators of a French fund for the support of refugees in Geneva were called ‘deacons’ soon after the institution of the fund.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See IV.5,15–19 and IV.19, 32.

⁵⁷ Note the use of language, which indicates a certain degree of reservation, “Nisi me fallit iudicium, ...” (*OS* V. 50,35), translated into French as follows: “Or si ie ne suis bien abusé, ...” (*IRC*, 63).

⁵⁸ In chapter thirteen, where Calvin speaks of the monastic life, he mentions the female deaconate as an alternative to the life of nuns under the papacy (IV.13, 19).

⁵⁹ This is confirmed in article 56 of the 1561 Geneva church order: “Il y en a eu tousiours deux especes en l’Eglise ancienne: ... A quoy c’est bien raison que toutes villes Chrestiennes se conforment, comme nous y avons tasché et voulons encor continuer à l’advenir. Car nous avons procureurs et hospitaliers ...” (Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*, 49). See also R.M. Kingdon, “The deacons of the reformed church in Calvin’s Geneva” in: *Mélanges d’histoire de XIIe siècle, offerts à Henri Meylan* (Genève: Droz, 1970), 81–90 and G. Hammann, *L’Amour retrouvé. La diaconie chrétienne et le ministère de diacre. Du Christianisme primitif aux réformateurs protestants du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 245–247.

⁶⁰ J.E. Olson, *One Ministry Many Roles. Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries* (St.-Louis: Concordia, 1992), 112–119.

From his biblical roots Calvin sketches a separate charitable deacon's ministry in addition to the pastoral ministry with its own specific task. The tasks of teachers and elders could be assumed by the pastors, but this is not the case with the deacons' task. The offices of pastor and deacon are very different and form the two basic offices in Calvin's theology of ministry. Both are mentioned in the first edition of the *Institutes* of 1536. Later on there will be no Calvinist church order where these two offices are denied a place.⁶¹

From an historic-exegetical point of view, the novelty of his interpretation of Romans 12:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 is not to be found in his reading of gifts as offices, but in the fact that he no longer regards the tasks of caring for the poor and discipline as exclusively worldly responsibilities but also as fully ecclesiastical functions that must be exercised by the church itself. By entrusting these tasks to the church, the clerical interpretation of ministry is broken, and the scope of ministry is widened.⁶²

Conclusions

1. Distinguishing between offices is not to be regarded as a biblical puzzle, but the result of an attempt to find a functional description of the office. The office is not a question of names, titles or dignities, but of tasks that are accepted. In paragraph 4 to 9, Calvin tries to explain what the *officium* of doctors and ministers entails. Offices in the church obtain their meaning in carrying out a function.

2. While Luther repeatedly emphasized one core office based on one core task, we notice a shift in Zwingli and Calvin. Both are attempting to justify a differentiation in tasks on biblical grounds. In the case of Zwingli, this is a differentiation in ministers' tasks. In Calvin's case, it is an evolution from different tasks to different offices. The core office, that of minister, also called the pastoral office, or bishop or presbyter, revolves around the same core task as in Luther's or Zwingli's writings; namely, the ministry of the Word. Based on that core office, two

⁶¹ Hammann, *L'amour retrouvé. La diaconie chrétienne et le ministère de diacre. Du Christianisme primitif aux réformateurs protestants du XVI^e siècle*, 214.

⁶² E.A. McKee, *John Calvin. On the Diaconate and liturgical Almsgiving* (Genève: Droz, 1984); McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 222 and E.A. McKee, "Calvin's exegesis of Romans 12:8—social, accidental, or theological?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988) 1, 6–18.

tasks develop into an independent office. First, there is the exegesis of scripture in order to keep the church's doctrine pure. This 'specialized' task leads to the separate doctor's office. Calvin proves here that he is a man of vision. A church whose life is based on the living Word needs a thorough exegesis of the scriptures for its task of proclamation, and needs people who are able to undertake the training of future pastors. A second task that gives rise to a separate office is the pastors' responsibility to govern. They are aided by those who watch over the people's morals. These seniors or elders accept their responsibility to govern collectively as members of a council. The description of these two independent tasks demonstrates that they exist in the shadow of and function in connection with the core task of the pastors, as ministers of the Word. Finally, there is one task that is not directly connected with the ministry of the Word; namely, the care of the poor. Calvin calls the separate office based on this task the deacon's office; as a result this traditional liturgical office from the Middle Ages, when it was very much seen as a preparation to the priesthood, gains a social-diaconal reorientation. By giving this diaconal task of the church a ministerial significance, Calvin shows that he has great insight into the calling of the church. This relative independence of the deacon's office does not mean, however, that this office has the same importance as that of the pastor. In addition, this office lives in the shadow of that of the presbyter, who is responsible for proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments. We must therefore come to the conclusion that Calvin does not attach equal importance to the four offices.⁶³ Ganoczy speaks of a special hierarchy:

In a hierarchy whose only justification is the service of God they occupy the first level; this is not on the basis of an ordination which is supposed to have changed them ontologically, nor is it due to a characteristic which has changed their personality, but to a pneumatic dynamic and a functionality of a higher order which finds fulfillment in service.⁶⁴

⁶³ On p. 8 of his article "Teveel gewicht? Over ouderlingen en diakenen in de calvinistische traditie," *Kerk en Theologie* 43 (1992) 1, 5–12 H.B. Weijland comes to the same conclusion.

⁶⁴ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, a.w., 329. "In einer 'Hierarchie', deren einzige Berechtigung der Dienst Gottes ist, nehmen sie die erste Stufe ein, und zwar nicht kraft einer Weihe, durch die sie ontologisch umgestaltet würden, nicht kraft einer Eigenschaft, die ihre Person veränderte, sondern kraft einer pneumatische Dynamik und einer in Diensten sich erfüllenden Funktionalität von hohem Rang."

3. The method that Calvin uses is much more important than the result of his attempt to find a biblical foundation for his differentiation between the offices. He very carefully attempts to understand the significance of the information given in the scriptures in the light of the time in which he lives. He speaks in particular of “the necessity of the times” (§4) or of the experience over a long period (§8).⁶⁵ For this reason, the paragraphs 4 to 9 are particularly fascinating. The tone is searching and hesitant. Calvin does not want to give the impression that the last word has been said about the different offices.⁶⁶ He interprets and makes choices in the light of his times. Calvin’s method challenges us to consider how we can interpret the biblical record about how ministry functions in the church in the context of ‘the necessity of our own time.’

4. On closer inspection, his classification of offices is much closer to the classical division of the tradition with the three offices of bishop, presbyter and deacon than would be expected at first sight from the quartet of pastor-teacher-elder-deacon. If we leave the weakly-profiled offices of teacher and elder out of the equation, the bishop-presbyter and the deacon remain.

INSTITUTES IV.III. 10–16: ELECTION TO THE MINISTRY

Institutes IV.III.10: The Importance of an Orderly Election

After the importance of the institution of ministry has been underlined in the first section (§§ 1–3), and a more detailed differentiation has been given of the offices based on the tasks, the third part consists of a study of the formal aspect of the function of the ministry in the church. Calvin focuses on lawful calling to the ministry. This formal aspect was, in his opinion, not just a side issue, which is demonstrated by

⁶⁵ Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 36–86 in his study of Calvin’s theology of ministry is searching for the hermeneutical keys with which he reads the scriptures.

⁶⁶ The clear tone in *Les Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques de l’Eglise de Genève* (1561), where we read in article 2: “Premierement il y a quatre ordres ou especes d’offices, que nostre Seigneur a institué pour le gouvernement de son Eglise: ...” (See Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*, 43) contrasts with the searching, listening and scripture-searching tone to find the suitable order of the church in the *Institutes*. The practice of church life requires clear rules.

the relatively large amount of attention he pays to it; namely, seven of the sixteen paragraphs of this chapter. Here Calvin also finds his own way between two fronts: the Church of Rome, where the hierarchy indicates the office bearers and ignores the members of the local faith community, and the radical churches, within which chaos threatens because of the uncontrollable appeal to the personal, internal call by the Spirit of God. How is it possible to behave responsibly when appointing office bearers if you neither want to operate hierarchically, nor fall into the trap of arbitrariness and individual initiative? Calvin allows himself to be led by what he reads in the New Testament, and by the practice of the early church as well as the example of the church in Strasburg. He not only wants to achieve a practical order, which he regards as essential because of his sceptical view of human nature, but also one that is based on sound theological thinking.

In the tenth paragraph Calvin argues that the Christian church needs to think about how the office bearers are to be elected. The office bearer does not only have to take on the task that is entrusted to him, he must also first be elected in a proper way within the church in order to prevent wild elements⁶⁷ from penetrating the church in order to teach and rule. In conclusion, Calvin refers to Paul who founds his apostleship not only on the faithful fulfilment of the task he is given, but also on his calling.

At the start of the eleventh paragraph, Calvin sums up four aspects of the election that have to be dealt with: Who is to be called? How is the call to be carried out? Who is to issue the call? With what rite are those who are called to be initiated?

The choice of words leads us to believe that Calvin speaks about the calling of the ministers. This is the word that we have already come across in the title of this chapter. Later on this office is identified as the pastor's office. When discussing the calling of the ministers,⁶⁸ Calvin emphasizes that the ministry comes 'from above'; it is of transcendental origin.⁶⁹ With the *vocatio externa* one has to trust that the ministers who are called will receive from God the gifts that they need to accept their task.

⁶⁷ The Latin text speaks of "... homines inquieti ac turbulenti ..." (OS V. 52,3), the French translation mentions "... esprits volages et seditieux ..." (IRC, 64).

⁶⁸ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 252–253 points to the analogy with the connection invisible—visible church.

⁶⁹ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 253.

Institutes IV.III.11: Who is to be Called?

The first half of the twelfth paragraph answers this question. On the basis of the advice in the pastoral letters (Titus 1:7 and 1 Tim. 3:1 ff. and 5:22), Calvin exhorts his readers to take note of the sound doctrine and irreproachable conduct of the candidate ‘bishops.’ These requirements also apply to deacons and elders.⁷⁰ Calvin also tells us to prevent the selection of unsuitable or incompetent candidates, who are incapable of carrying out the bishop’s office.⁷¹

Institutes IV.III.12: How is the Call to be carried out?

Paragraph twelve deals with the question as to the way the election is to be carried out. This is not a practical formality, but a spiritual matter of great importance that requires reverence and great care. When presbyters were elected in the early church,⁷² the process was accompanied by fasting. This can be of lasting value in order to receive the Spirit’s council and discernment.

Institutes IV.III.13–15: Who is to issue the Call?

Calvin devotes three paragraphs to this question, and this proves that he regarded this as the most important issue. Calvin indicates that we cannot draw a parallel with the apostles because they were called by the Lord himself and were not elected by people. This again confirms that the office of apostle is an extraordinary office. That principle remained intact at the replacement of Judas, when the Lord indicated who his choice was by means of the lots that were drawn, and when the apostle Paul was called. According to scripture, the order for the legitimate calling of bishops is that they are appointed by the people. Even Paul had his calling to the apostle’s office confirmed by an election in the church.

Now that Calvin has established that, according to scripture, the election of office bearers is to be carried out by people, the next ques-

⁷⁰ The French translation refers to “aux Diacres et aux Prestres” here.

⁷¹ Articles 6–9 of the 1561 church order describe how this can be verified on the basis of an examination consisting of two parts.

⁷² The Latin text does not give any specific text references; the French translation only mentions Acts 14.23 (*IRC*, 66).

tion is: who elects? At the beginning of paragraph 15 Calvin lists three possibilities: an election by the whole church, an election by colleagues and by elders,⁷³ or an election at the authority of one man. Defenders of this last option choose to refer to the counsel Paul gave Titus (1:5) and Timothy (1 Tim. 5:22). Calvin is convinced that this advice does not mean that they chose people arbitrarily, to please themselves without reference to others involved, but that they led the election procedures as chairmen. He reinforces his interpretation by referring to the way in which Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters in Acts 14:23; namely, χειροτονήσαντες. Calvin does not interpret this raising of the hands as a consecration rite, but as an expression of approval by the congregation in accordance with Greek election practices described by Roman historians.⁷⁴ It is also possible to deduce from the order given to Titus and Timothy that bishops were chosen by means of popular elections. Calvin provides further proof for his thesis by quoting Cyprian who said that electing the priests in the presence of the people was based on divine authority, and that the priests had to be found to be worthy and suitable by public judgment and witness—as is demonstrated by the biblical example of the election of Levites, of Matthias as an apostle as replacement for Judas, and of the first seven deacons. Calvin comes to the conclusion that for the election of office bearers to be in accordance with God's Word, it must happen with the consensus and approval of the people and that the other pastors must supervise the election to prevent the multitude from sinning through thoughtlessness, partiality, or tumult.

Ganoczy, who traces developments in Calvin's thinking in his works, summarizes his evolution under the denominator of searching for a middle course between election by one person and the election by an anonymous mass—because both extremes can lead to arbitrariness.⁷⁵ The Church Order of 1561, which is based to a considerable extent on the first edition of 1541, decrees that the pastors should make a choice that is then to be submitted to the small town council (article 10). After their approbation, the candidate is introduced to the people. This means that the approval by the believers is rather passive, since

⁷³ The French text uses the word *gouverneurs* here as a translation of *senioribus*.

⁷⁴ The fact that he knew of this alternative interpretation is proved by his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, *CR LXXIVIA*, *OC XLVIII*. 333, according to Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 263.

⁷⁵ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 255–266.

it consists of being present at the first service to be led by the new pastor by way of approbation.⁷⁶ Article 11, which was added in 1560, shows a tendency to a more active participation by the people in the approbation. Another development is concerned with limiting the role of the civil authorities in the election that is based on the example set by Bucer in Strasburg. Ganoczy is of the opinion that when looking for a method of election, Calvin was not just concerned with practical motives, but also with theological ones. Because the ministry is a divine institution, it is fitting that the election is carried out by those who have been called as governors of the congregation by the faith community. In this context, he refers to the 1559 *Discipline ecclésiastique* of the *Eglise Réformée de France*, developed under the direct influence of Calvin, that states that the synod elects the pastors.⁷⁷

Institutes IV.III.16: How is Ordination carried out?

The apostles used laying on of hands, a rite derived from the custom of the Hebrews, (Gen. 48:14) and used by Jesus (Matt. 19:15). For the apostles, the laying of hands symbolized the fact that the ordinand was offered to God and received the visible gifts of the Spirit (Acts 19:6). Although Calvin did not find the express command to use the laying on of hands anywhere in the scriptures, the continued use of the laying on of hands during the ordination of pastors, doctors, and deacons is as good as compulsory. Calvin sees two other advantages in this rite: to the gathered congregation the laying on of hands symbolizes the dignity of the ministry, and to the ordinand it signifies that he is no longer a law unto himself, but that he is now bound in servitude to God and to the church. Calvin defends the laying on of hands during ordination as a meaningful gesture that is ordained by God's spirit, stripped of superstitious malpractice, and restored to its original significance.

Finally, Calvin considers those who perform the laying on of hands. Only the pastors are qualified to do this. There can be several people (as is the case with deacons and with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 6:6 and

⁷⁶ Rohls, *Theologie reformierter Bekenntnisschriften: von Zürich bis Barmen*, 296: "Die ordentliche Berufung vollzieht sich hier nach vorangegangener Prüfung als Wahl, die allerdings nur vom Pfarrkapitel vorgenommen wird und vom Staat bestätigt werden muss, während der Gemeinde allein ein Einspruchsrecht eingeräumt wird."

⁷⁷ A heated dispute arose in France about the right of the believers in the local congregation to elect their own ministers. For a description and evaluation of this dispute, see W. van 't Spijker, *Democratisering van de kerk anno 1562* (Kampen: Kok, 1975).

13:3)) or only one person, as was the case when Paul performed the rite for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:6). In 1 Timothy 4:14 laying on of hands is mentioned during the ordination of presbyters, but Calvin does not regard this as a reference to the council of elders,⁷⁸ but to the act of the ordination itself when they were elected presbyters.⁷⁹

Conclusions

The paragraphs about calling appear to have been written with ministers in mind. In these paragraphs Calvin also uses the other terms for these office bearers; namely, bishops, presbyters, and pastors. The same applies to the paragraph about ordination. Calvin also indicates that in the early church teachers and deacons⁸⁰ were ordained. There is no evidence anywhere of ordination of seniors with laying on of hands.⁸¹ The authorities in Geneva refuse to recognize deacons as church office bearers, and, in practice, they continued with the annual appointment of deacons as social functionaries.⁸² When there were no longer any bishops, a dispute arose between church and civil authorities about under whose auspices election and appointment of office bearers were to be carried out. In the sixteenth century, laying on of hands was not practiced during ordinations in Geneva because of the fear of superstition.⁸³ According to the Church Order of 1561, new ministers were ordained during a ceremony in which another minister reads the charge with an exhortation that was followed by a prayer (art. 14). Finally, the minister is sworn in by a government official (art. 15–19).

⁷⁸ The French translation uses “la compagnie des Prestres.”

⁷⁹ In his commentary on this book, Calvin regards both interpretations as legitimate. (*CR LXXX, CO LIII*, 417–430).

⁸⁰ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 324–329 assumes that Calvin still regarded the deacons as part of the clergy, in part due to their involvement during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

⁸¹ When discussing this paragraph, Van Ginkel, *De ouderling*, 130, remarks that Calvin does not indicate whether the ordination with laying on of hands should be practiced for every office or only for the offer of pastor, as prescribed by him in *Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques*. In our opinion, Calvin does indicate this where he lists ‘pastors, teachers and deacons.’ Elder/seniors are not included here.

⁸² Hammann, *L'Amour retrouvé*, 257–262.

⁸³ The first edition of the *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* of 1541 says that the laying on of hands is a good practice, but that at the moment it will no longer be performed because of the necessity of times. The edition of 1561 (art. 14) does not mention it and refers to the danger of superstition.

We want to remark in passing that in this section the seniors—the elders—are mentioned three times. On two of those occasions they are referred to as acting as a council. It is strange that in his French translation Calvin does not once use the word *anciens*, but *prestres* and *gouverneurs*. In paragraph 15 Calvin translates *sacerdotes* with *prestres*. The traditional French name for parish priests is used for the presbyters, for the *seniores* and also for the Roman Catholic priests. We suspect that the reason for this is to be found in the lack of technical terminology in the vernacular. There was no other word available. Here Sizoo's translation, like the older Dutch translations, also completely fails to differentiate between pastors/presbyters and seniors/elders. Due to incorrect translations, a wrong impression was created about the importance of elders in the *Institutes*. Because A. van Ginkel fails to identify this problem in his standard work about the office of elder,⁸⁴ and, as a result, fails to undertake any research into it, we must question his conclusions, at least with regard to the section about elders in Calvin's work.

Traditionally the ordination as formal confirmation of ministry in the church was very important. This also applies to Calvin. Here he continues to a far greater extent in the traditional Catholic tracks than one would initially suspect. However, there are two corrections. In the first place, he does not want to discuss the formal side of ministry until he has explained its function and content. In the second place, he emphasizes that the election of ministers in the process that leads to ordination has to take place with the approval of the people. What he does is to restore the early-medieval *a clero et populo*, which had not been observed since the 1059 Lateran Council.

⁸⁴ Van Ginkel, *De ouderling. Oorsprong en ontwikkeling van het ambt van ouderling en de functies daarvan in de Gereformeerde Kerk der Nederlanden in de 16e en de 17e eeuw*.

CHAPTER FIVE

CALVIN'S ASSESSMENT OF MINISTRY: ITS HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND ITS SACRAMENTAL NATURE

INSTITUTES IV.IV–XIII: ASSESSMENT OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MINISTRY

In the third chapter Calvin explained the importance of the offices in the church, their functional significance and the manner of election/ordination—a process he completed by listening to the scriptures. From the fourth chapter onwards, he explores the church governance in a historical perspective. After studying the way that the New Testament offices functioned in the early church (chapter IV) and their subsequent degeneration (V), he contemplates the assumptions for the papal primacy (VI) and its historic growth (VII), and concludes by assessing the mandates to teach (VIII–IX), pass laws (X) and act with legal authority (XI–XII). The thirteenth chapter on making vows—in particular, by monks—is a transitional chapter that leads into the doctrine of the sacraments. In the framework of this study we do not only want to know how he evaluates development in the early church, but also on the basis of what criteria and to what degree his exegetical work in the last chapter results from his church history studies in the chapters that we are ready to deal with now.

INSTITUTES IV.IV: THE OFFICES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The fourth chapter describes the way that the early church was governed, and the church as it was before the development of the papacy.¹ It is Calvin's opinion that this church let itself be led in its internal organization by God's Word, which was its only guideline. This did

¹ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 223 supposes that when Calvin speaks of the 'early church' he means the church of the first five centuries.

not prevent the emergence of *canones*, which seem to lay down more than the scriptures themselves. For this reason, the early church can be regarded as an example to be followed; it no longer plays the role of a model church, as was the case in the first edition of the *Institutes* of 1536,² but taking note of its practices makes good sense.

In the first paragraph he emphasizes the parallelism between the structure of ministry in the Bible and in the early church. He writes:

Quemadmodum tradidimus triplices ministros nobis commendari in Scriptura, ita quicquid ministrorum habuit vetus Ecclesia, in tres ordines distinxit; nam ex ordine presbyterorum partim eligebantur Pastores ac Doctores: reliqua pars censurae morum et correctionibus praeerat. Diaconis commissa erat cura pauperum et eleemosynarum dispensatio.

As a follow-up to the previous chapter, this is an amazing passage because there he never counted the different offices and their various tasks, but if we had had to think of a number, we might have thought of four offices, i.e., the four permanent offices of teacher-pastor-elder-deacon, or of two offices; namely, the doctors and the ministers from the title, or of one core office; namely, that of pastor. In this passage he speaks of three offices that are mentioned in scripture and in the early church. Second, the meaning of the words *minister* and *presbyter* is changed. In the previous chapter they indicated the office of pastor or minister of the Word, but in this passage they acquire a broader meaning. They stand for an order, a class of office bearers that is subdivided into three groups; namely, teachers, pastors, and discipline supervisors. On closer inspection we can distinguish four offices; namely, teachers, pastors, supervisors, and deacons. However, it might be more precise to speak of two offices, that of presbyter and that of deacon, each of which is subdivided into sub-categories. The teachers, pastors, and discipline supervisors all belong to the office of presbyter, while the deacon's office consists of hospital chaplains and the administrators of church property.

We would propose not to attach too much importance to the figure three that is mentioned here. In the remaining arguments it does not play a structuring part, and the previous chapter showed us that distinctions between the offices were of a provisional nature that were made with the necessary reserve. This also applies to Calvin's outline of the historical development of the offices in the church where teachers and discipline supervisors are rarely mentioned. In chapters four to ten

² Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 218–219.

the *seniores* are mentioned only three times, and all of those are biblical quotations.³ They will not play even a modest part until chapter eleven and twelve, which are concerned with the jurisdiction of the church.

When discussing the offices of the early church, Calvin does not distinguish between three offices, but between two; namely, presbyters and deacons. Until the 1543 edition Calvin recognized only these two offices for the congregation of his time,⁴ and the later editions do not make any material changes in this respect. This is because the doctors and seniors are part of the order of presbyters. He will return to the senior as part of the order of presbyters later. The fact that the teachers belong to the order of presbyters follows naturally from the line of argument in the previous chapter; namely, that there is a connection between the tasks of teachers and pastors (IV.III.4), and that pastors are sometimes referred to as presbyters in scripture (IV.III.8).

After the introductory paragraph he proceeds to discuss the two office orders in paragraph two to nine. He begins with the presbyters. Each town or region had its own college of presbyters. In order to safeguard order and unity they elected a bishop, who acted as chairman and presided over them without dominating his colleagues. Although this chairman's function was not an institution of the Lord, Calvin did not regard this as a negative development, but one that came about because the circumstances at the time made it necessary.⁵ Bishops do not form a separate order; all they do is to carry out a *munus*—a supervisory task.⁶ Calvin refers to the Jerome commentary on the letter to Titus where he says that a presbyter is the same as a bishop (IV.IV.2). Because there is no difference between bishop and presbyter, there can be no separate bishop's office.

This description of a bishop as president of the *presbyterium* occurs for the first time in the editions of 1543; it is more than likely that it due to Bucer's influence. In the 1536 edition the bishop's function consisted of carrying out the fundamental ministers' tasks—preaching and administering the sacraments—in accordance with the apostles' example, and it was limited to one local congregation.⁷ Although Calvin

³ Ezekiel 7:26 in IV.IX.6, Acts 15:20 in IV.X.21, and Isaiah 29:13–14 in IV.X.23.

⁴ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 233–234.

⁵ See H. Berkhof, "Een calvinistisch 'neen' tegen de bisschop?", *Kosmos en Oecumene*, 7 (1973) 4, 136–139.

⁶ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 244–245.

⁷ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 218–222.

always reserved space for an episcopal function in his ecclesiology, he did not include it in his own church order, presumably in order to avoid confusion with the Roman Catholic, episcopal, hierarchical structure. In his own ministry he functioned like a real bishop. Towards the end of his life, he appears to have considered the introduction of an episcopate within the Reformed tradition—as is evidenced by the occurrence of a ‘superintendent’ in article 32 of the *Confession de foi et discipline de l’Eglise réformée de France* (1559) and a number of comments in sermons.⁸

Supported by quotations from the church fathers, Calvin states that the chief duty of bishops and presbyters is to devote themselves to proclaiming the Word of God, administering the sacraments, and building up the church with sound doctrine (IV.IV.3). In the fourth paragraph he discusses the rank of archbishop or patriarch that had been instituted in order to exercise discipline over a larger area. They never acted without their council, the provincial synod. If necessary, the patriarchs were able to meet at a general council. Calvin did not think it was correct to describe the way the early church was governed as a hierarchy—this is not a word that is encountered in scripture, and it would give rise to dreams of dominating the church.

Beginning in the fifth paragraph, he describes the order of deacons. They administered the income of the church that was used to pay the ministers and to support the poor, and for which the bishop had the final responsibility. Liturgical tasks were only a subordinate matter (IV.IV.5). Calvin reminds us how the early church regarded all the possessions of the church—be that money or land—as the patrimony of the poor. There are quotations from church fathers in which the clergy’s love of money is criticized (IV.IV.6). By means of ecclesiastical legislation, attempts were made to prevent misuse of funds; in particular, by bishops (IV.IV.7). Even liturgical vessels could be sold and the proceeds used for poor relief (IV.IV.8).

Other offices mentioned by ecclesiastical writers—such as lecturers, acolytes, wardens, and others, who formed the lowest grades of office within the medieval church—are not really offices, but preparatory stages to these offices. Calvin approves of the institution of a *seminarium* because there people can receive a good preparation for their future office. He does not approve of the word ‘clerics,’ used for those who

⁸ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 329–337.

followed the preparatory training because—according to 1 Peter 5:3—all those within the church are ‘the clergy’ (IV.IV.9).

After discussing the various orders of office, Calvin proceeds to the way they were labeled within the early church. They followed scripture not only by praying earnestly and carefully, but also carried out a serious examination of the candidates’ life and doctrine. Their mistake was to demand a celibate lifestyle (IV.IV.10). The election was not just a matter for the clerics and possibly dependent on the consent of the worldly authorities, but the people were always consulted (IV.IV.10–13). Finally, Calvin examines the initiation rite that is called ordination or consecration in Latin and χειροτονία or χειροθεσία in Greek. The bishops presided over the elections, examined the candidates, and carried out the laying on of hands. The power to ordain was a prerogative of the bishops that distinguished them from the other presbyters (IV.IV.14–15).

With this detailed description, in which he demonstrates he has a thorough knowledge of the early church, Calvin wants to show the close link between this church and the church in Geneva. The Reformed church is a truly catholic church. There is a development in his description of the early church. In the first edition of the *Institutes*, its unity is emphasized: the one foundation-laying service of Christ is entrusted to the apostles, and they, in their turn, pass it on to their successors in the proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments. Diversity is expressed in the service carried out by presbyters/bishops. Later on there is greater emphasis on diversity and variety: the one fundamental ministry based on divine institution appears in multiple forms in a multiplicity of offices. Unity is given form in the figure of the bishop—the *primus inter pares* and the president of the council—that governs the church in order to achieve order and peace.

Except for a few critical notes in the margin in connection with compulsory celibacy and the use of words (clergy, hierarchy), Calvin is positive about the way in which the early church is governed. In his judgment this shows how biblical doctrine can be put into practice. The structure of offices in the early church continues in the church of the Reformation. The two ordained offices of the early church—presbyter and deacon—are restored to their original function with the correct calling and consecration in the churches of the Reformation. On the other hand, Calvin wants the exemplary function of the early church to function as a mirror for the Church of Rome, and show it how far it has strayed from the practices of the early church.

INSTITUTES IV.V: THE DEGENERATION OF THE
CHURCH OF ROME'S MINISTERIAL GOVERNMENT

In the next chapters the tone changes. Serenity is replaced by indignation and outrage. This church, which likes to boast of its roots in the early church, appears to have deviated from these roots without any shame.

In chapter five Calvin examines the practices of the Church of Rome in the light of scripture and the practices of the early church. First of all, he examines the appointment methods, starting with the election of bishops. This leaves much to be desired because there is no longer an examination of the candidate's conduct and doctrine. Then the choice is made by canons or princes without consulting the people (IV.V.1–3). In their turn, the bishops have appropriated the election of presbyters and deacons for monetary gain. Titles and monetary advantages are bought, sold, and accumulated (IV.V.4–7). Second, he looks at the contents of the offices. Neither monks nor secular priests, canons, deacons, chaplains, provosts, or bishops find time for the one task to which they have been called: to lead the people and administer Word and sacraments. This means that there is no apostolic succession in their office (IV.V.8–13). He aims his criticism at deacons, who spend their time in liturgical trifles instead of administering the income of the church for the benefit of the poor, and he is scathing about the lack of sobriety, moderation, and humility of the Roman Catholic office bearers (IV.V.14–19).

Calvin's judgment of the development of the offices in the early church is remarkably positive, but his judgment about the evolution of the offices in the Medieval church is extremely negative. According to Calvin, the early church was far removed from the hierarchical and sacerdotal interpretation of office in the Middle Ages. This discrepancy is not in accordance with historical reality. It is impossible to understand how the offices functioned in the church of the Middle Ages without understanding their development in the church of the first centuries. The development from a charismatic congregational structure towards a hierarchical structure can be found as early as the later texts of the New Testament and continues in the church of the early fathers. In the letter from Clement of Rome to the congregation of Corinth between 90 and 100, it is obvious that—for him—the office is more than a mere function. He tackles it in a judicial way and gives it a theological foundation by speaking of an all-encompassing structure that is sanctioned

by God. The letters from Ignatius of Antioch, which date from a time between 110 and 130, show how a step is made towards a theological analysis of a tripartite office under the leadership of a monarchical episcopacy. Cyprian of Carthage, who was bishop from 249 to 258, will develop the theology of apostolic succession by describing it as a means of passing on authority by consecrating bishops. Last but not least, Hippolytus and Tertullian—late second, early third century—will be of decisive importance in the sacerdotalization of the ministry.⁹ It is quite obvious that Calvin tended to idealize the early church and to present the medieval church in a less than favorable light; the result was that the connection between the two is not sufficiently clear.¹⁰

INSTITUTES IV.VI AND VII: THE PRIMACY OF THE POPE: FOUNDATION AND HISTORY

In the sixth chapter, Calvin's tone has quieted; here he discusses the Roman claim to the primacy of the Roman See. He wants to defend himself against the reproach that the Reformers broke the unity of the church when they refused to submit to Rome (IV.VI.1). In the first place, Calvin refutes the interpretation of Bible passages that are used by Roman Catholic theologians to prove that this see is superior in dignity and power to all the others. Christ himself is the eternal head of his congregation. He has not appointed anyone as his representative (*vicarious*). In addition, the power of the keys was not given to Peter alone, but to all apostles. The separate position occupied by Peter does not serve to place him above the others, but was given to promote the unity of the church.¹¹ It is a natural development: a group has a chairman to preserve order. Calvin has no problems with recognizing the fact that, in scripture, the honor of the first place is Peter's due, but nowhere does scripture attach any authority (*potestas*) to this. Christ

⁹ See J. Roloff, "Amt/Ämter/Amtsverständnis IV Im Neuen Testament" in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 509–533, R.P.C. Hanson, "Amt/Ämter/Amtsverständnis V. Alte Kirche" in *TRE* Bd. 2, 533–552 and P. Schmidt, "Ambten in het Nieuwe Testament en de vroege kerk" in J. Kerkhofs (red.), *Europa zonder Priesters?* (Averbode: Altorja, 1995), 55–116.

¹⁰ See also A.F.N. Lekkerkerker, *Oorsprong en functie van het ambt* (The Hague: Boeken-centrum, 1971), 142–144.

¹¹ In this context, Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 214, speaks of a functional primacy that is not tied to the person, but has the aim to preserve unity.

himself remains present through the ministry of people who have been appointed to govern the church. Peter's historic primacy was never transferred to a successor (IV.VI.2–10). Finally, he pays attention to the respect with which the old writers speak about the Church of Rome. This respect found its origin in the wide-spread belief that this Church had been founded by Peter, in the fact that Rome was the state capital, and that it had a less turbulent history than the Asiatic and African churches. Nowhere is there any mention of the primacy of the Church of Rome or of a highest authority (IV.VI.11–17).

In the very detailed seventh chapter an attempt is made to trace how the papacy managed to place itself above the other sees, and how freedom was lost. Calvin describes how, in an intervening period during the time of Popes Gregory and Leo, the See of Rome systematically began to draw all ecclesiastical power in four domains to itself; namely, the ordination of bishops, calling councils, hearing appeals, and exercising discipline. The next phase, which opened the way to the papacy in its current form, started when the emperor appointed Boniface III as head of all churches. The tyranny of the Roman See was made possible through the promulgation of false decrees, and the claim that the pope cannot err. Calvin contrasts this with the words of popes from the middle period, who did not want one church to be elevated above the others, and the words of Paul about the Antichrist in the temple (2 Thess. 2:4). The Roman pope is not a bishop because he fails to carry out the work that a bishop ought to do; namely, instructing the people by proclaiming the Word of God, by administering the sacraments, and by exercising discipline. The office does not exist as a result of the title, but in carrying out the office itself (IV.VII.23). In a final paragraph he describes how the priests lost their places to cardinals, and how deacons came to have no function at all (IV.VII.30).

Calvin rejects the papacy because the popes do not accept their task as shepherds who watch over their flocks by proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments and exercising discipline. Just like other Reformers, he is horrified by the degeneration that took place in the way the ministry was exercised: they behaved like the vicars of Christ. They declared themselves to be head of the church, and, instead of carrying out their ministry in a collegial way, they became dictators. The result was that they became so alienated from the believers that they were no longer able to speak on behalf of them. It remains to be seen whether or not the conclusion can be drawn that, as far as Calvin is concerned, there can be no universal office whose aim is the unity of

churches and believers. When describing Peter's task and function, he recognizes the need for a person who is a symbol of unity.¹² His radical language is aimed mainly at how the papacy functioned in his own day and has a conditional, provisional character.¹³ In Calvin's judgment, this center of unity cannot be based on divine law and scripture.

INSTITUTES IV.VIII–XII: THE POWERS OF THE CHURCH

Institutes IV.VIII–IX: The Doctrinal Authority of the Church

After an analysis of the offices in the early church, a description of the degeneration of the official government in the Church of Rome, and a dissection of the papal primacy, Calvin begins to study the power of the church as it is expressed in its authority in the field of doctrine, legislation, and jurisdiction. Chapter eight covers doctrinal authority. This power is not unlimited, but subject to the Word of God (IV.VIII.4). All authority and dignity accorded to priests, prophets, apostles, and their successors by the Spirit in scripture is not given to these people personally, but to the ministry to which they have been called; namely, the Word, which they have to proclaim in accordance with the ministry entrusted to them (IV.VIII.2). The prophetic and apostolic scriptures are the result of inspiration by the Holy Spirit (IV.VIII.6). The church has to conform its teaching to the rules and regulations of the Word. The difference between the apostles and their successors is that the

¹² The Reformed theologian K. Blei suggests that it is possible to have a personal universal ministry in the midst of a collegiate structure which functions as *centrum unitatis* in analogy to the position of Peter in the circle of the apostles in "Een 'Centrum Unitatis' in de kerk: Reformatorische overwegingen" in A. Houtepen (red.), *De verscheidenheid verzoend?*, (Utrecht–Leiden: IIMO, 1989), 85–109; in particular, 104. See A.A. Helleman, "The Contribution of John Calvin to an Ecumenical Dialogue on Papal Primacy," *One in Christ* 30 (1994) 4, 328–343, which points to five principles in Calvin's view of carrying out office: the Christ representation aspect, the pastoral aspect, the communal aspect, the collegial aspect, and, finally, the personal aspect. With regard to the personal aspect, Helleman has to admit that Calvin developed it mainly in the context of the local congregation and much less in a broader context. Finally, Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 342, points out that Calvin has many positive things to say about the work of archbishops and patriarchs in times of division and threatening schism within the church.

¹³ A.A. Helleman comes to the same conclusion as the result of a detailed study he mentions in the article "The nature of Calvin's rejection of papal primacy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994) 2, 432–450.

former were certain and authentic secretaries of the Holy Spirit, while their successors' only task was to teach what had been revealed and sealed in the Bible. Calvin is convinced that the Church of Rome, when it was not prepared to restrict its doctrine to the Word of God, appeals in vain to the Holy Spirit.

In the ninth chapter he continues his research into the authority of the church in the field of doctrine; in particular, the authority of the councils—to which the Church of Rome likes to refer. Calvin recognizes the need for bishops' synods—in particular, when there is controversy about doctrine—but he does want to put their importance into perspective. They have to be read in their historical context because sometimes they contradict each other; they must always be tested to make sure their pronouncements are in agreement with the Bible. The tone of this chapter is critical. He unmasks the opinion that the truth only abides in the church when there is agreement among the pastors by referring to many scripture passages that warn against pastors, priests, and prophets, who err jointly (IV.IX.3–4). Calvin does not want to systematically undermine the authority of pastors, but he wants us to learn the difference between pastors whose teachings and lives are in accordance with God's Word and those of whom this is not true (IV.IX.5).

Institutes IV.X: The Authority of the Church to make Laws

After Calvin's arguments in chapters eight and nine that the church never has any authority over doctrine, but is itself bound and subject to the Word, chapter ten is devoted to a detailed study of the Church of Rome's claim to authority in the field of legislation. Although Calvin realizes that there is a need for laws and agreements in connection with liturgy and church order because of public honor and the general good, he is opposed to the more than human status that is given to these ecclesiastical laws—as if our salvation depended on them. Human institutions must be judged according to their foundation in scripture. We must not expect too much from scripture, however. It restricts itself to general rules and leaves much room for a contextual interpretation, depending on the demands made by the time we live in. He reproaches the Church of Rome for wanting to suppress the believers' consciences and wanting to bind them to itself. He disputes the right of its 'pseudo bishops' to present themselves as spiritual legislators appointed by God.

Institutes IV.XI–XII: The Church's Judicial Power

To Calvin, the *potestas jurisdictionis* is an important part of the church's power. This means that the church is not allowed to leave moral discipline to the civil authorities, but that it must develop its own jurisdiction that is unconnected from the civil authorities. Calvin assumes his position in a matter that was sensitive to the government, and that caused disunity within the Reformed tradition. Within the framework of our study, we must pay specific attention to the question of how the judicial power is exercised by the offices within the church.

Calvin is very careful in dealing with this delicate matter. He is of the opinion that it is possible to deduce from scripture that from the beginning the church had its own courts of judgment¹⁴ in order to censure morals, to punish vice, and to exercise the office of the keys. He refers to three quotations that, in his opinion, prove that the church had a special calling with respect to these tasks. First of all, he refers to the text in 1 Corinthians 12:28 that mentions ruling. With this interpretation he joins a host of Reformation exegetes who break with Roman Catholic exegesis. These latter exegetes regarded the text as a biblical support for the primacy of the pope on the basis of the universal rule by the apostles. Zwingli was of the opinion that this rule was not applicable to the clergy and bishops, but that it might apply to civil rulers, who had co-responsibility for the church. According to Bucer and Calvin, Paul refers here to government by the church, but not by bishops.¹⁵ Calvin finds his second biblical support in Romans 12:8, where Paul speaks of "ruling with diligence." With this interpretation Calvin departs from his own exegesis in the first edition of the *Institutes* and from Zwingli. In 1536 he still used this expression in connection with the civil exercise of power, but in 1543 he follows the majority of the medieval exegetes and Luther, according to whom this applies to an ecclesiastical rule. Bucer taught him to combine this text with 1 Corinthians 12:28, and Calvin now interprets the text as follows: it applies to ecclesiastical government by elders, not bishops.¹⁶ He rejects the interpretation that this refers to government personnel because in

¹⁴ Sizoo (*Johannes Calvinus Institutie*, part three, 235) translates the general *iudicia* (OS 5, 195, 14) here with *kerkeraden* (church councils), which is too specific. In his French translation, Calvin himself opts for a general term *certaines compagnies de gouverneurs* (IRC, 219).

¹⁵ See the detailed exegetical study of McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 61–85.

¹⁶ See the exegetical study of McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 39–59.

those days the magistrates were not Christians. In his opinion, these texts refer to the pastors and the spiritual governance of the church.

We are reminded of the fact that Calvin used the same texts to introduce the elder's office in the chapter about the offices in the church (IV.III.8). In this instance, however—where he advocates a non-episcopal, office-based interpretation of the judicial power in the church—he adds a third Bible passage; namely, 1 Timothy 5:17, where two types of presbyters are mentioned, one category that proclaims the Word and another that gives leadership without proclaiming the Word. In Calvin's view, the latter group supervises morals in accordance with the power of the keys that Christ bestowed on the church (Matt. 18:15–18). This interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17 is new—not because of the difference between the presbyters, which had already been practiced in the medieval exegesis of this passage, but because of its interpretation of the second type of presbyter as a church office aimed at maintaining discipline.¹⁷ He also tries to give scriptural arguments for the distinction of three sorts of presbyters, which he had started in the fourth chapter.

After having provided a biblical foundation for the office bearers' competence regarding the church's jurisdiction, he finds that this jurisdiction itself is scripture-based in Matthew 18:18. Before explaining this text about the power of the keys—to bind and to loose—he makes a distinction between this text and Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:19 and to the apostles in John 20:23, where similar words are used. To Calvin, the two latter texts have the character of a promise accompanying the ministry of the Word. In the proclamation of the gospel, the Word of the Lord himself is heard. This ministry is of such fundamental importance that it can open or close the gates to the kingdom of heaven. This means that the power of the keys is exercised by proclaiming the gospel. The power of the keys is not something that is primarily given to mankind; it is connected to the Word, and God has commanded people to serve the Word.¹⁸ The office bearers who administer this power of the keys are the pastors and the ministers of

¹⁷ McKee, *Elders an the plural Ministry*, 87–114, traces how Calvin does not introduce the text until the 1543 edition of the *Institutes* at the moment when the transition of exercising discipline as being a function in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes* into a separate office is completed.

¹⁸ “Habemus, potestatem clavium esse simpliciter in illis locis Evangelii praedicationem: nec tam potestatem esse quam ministerium, si ad homines respicimus. Non enim hominibus hanc potestatem proprie Christus dedit, sed verbo suo, cuius hominines ministros fecit.” (*OS* 5,197, 27–32).

the Word. Here Calvin distinguishes between the task and the person carrying out the task. The power is connected to the task, but not to the person. Calvin does this to prevent himself from following in the footsteps of the Roman Catholic interpretation of the office. In the Church of Rome, the power is bound to the person by means of consecration. When the gospel is proclaimed, it is not the apostles who take center stage, but Christ himself: he speaks through their mouths.

Now that he has explained that the power of the keys in both texts refers to proclaiming the gospel, he can explain the specific importance of the power of the keys in Matthew 18:18; namely, exercising discipline. This is the responsibility of the church. When the church binds, it cuts somebody off from its communion, and when it looses, it readmits someone to its communion. When the church binds, this does not mean the same as eternal rejection, but it is a reminder of damnation that is the fate of anybody who does not repent.

Now that he has provided a biblical foundation for the right and the duty of the church to maintain and, where applicable, exercise the discipline of excommunication, he denies—as from paragraph 3—that the jurisdiction of the church passed to the government as soon as this became a Christian government. Without mentioning them by name, he reacted against the Zwinglians here. The church must never neglect its own responsibility to exercise discipline. He uses examples to demonstrate how the pastors must exercise this spiritual power in the framework of administering the Word, rebuking sins, and admonishing the sinner (IV.XI.3). Even in the early church, the church never transferred its judicial authority to the government IV.XI.4. It is important to adhere to the way in which the early church exercised this judicial authority in accordance with scripture. First of all, the church never resorted to the sword to inflict punishment, but the Word of God was its only instrument of power. Based on Paul (1 Cor. 5:4 and 2 Cor. 10:4), the pastors could exercise the power to rebuke people privately and exclude them from the Lord's Supper.¹⁹ Second, decisions taken by the church never relied on the judgment of one person, but on that of a lawful assembly IV.XI.5.

¹⁹ According to Cottret, *Calvin*, 94–100, the French evangelically-minded Protestants, in particular, were very sensitive about the purity of celebrating the Lord's Supper. To this end he refers to the influence and the commotion surrounding the 'edicts' in France in October 1534.

The above demonstrates that as office bearers the pastors were first of all responsible for judicial authority in the church. But via the *consensus seniorum*,²⁰ the elders also played a part. In this context Calvin quotes Cyprian. The bishops were aided by the whole clergy and took account of the approval of the people. Calvin interprets this as a reference to the *senatus presbyterorum*,²¹ a body that consisted of those who had been ordained to teach and those who had been appointed to watch over morals. Calvin indicates that he had already made this distinction at an earlier stage.²² This arrangement disintegrated when the clergy appropriated the ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Calvin then quotes Ambrose—who expressed his displeasure at this development—referring to the organization at the time of the synagogue and the early church, when there were still seniors.²³

In this section, Calvin compares the ecclesial with the civil form of government. He makes no distinction between a bishop who wrongly appropriates the jurisdiction that belongs to the church as a whole with a consul who drives out the senate and usurps all power. This comparison, made by Calvin almost in the form of an aside, gives us the opportunity to draw attention to the clear parallel between the polity of the free city-states in Switzerland, governed by a self-confident citizenry, and the form of government modeled by Calvin for the city churches.²⁴ We are, first of all, struck by the fact that he develops a form of government for the level of the cities, but not for a national level. For this to happen, he must wait for developments in France; he had been involved in these developments from the sidelines, but this is not where the center of gravity of his church order was situated. We are also struck by the fact that government via councils can also be found in the Calvinist Reformation. The government of the church is not the responsibility of one person, but of committees—such as the *Vénérable Compagnie*, the city council of ministers, and the *Consistoire*, the council of ministers and elders. Both the city and ecclesiastical forms

²⁰ In his French translation Calvin uses the expression *la compagnie des Anciens*.

²¹ In his French translation Calvin uses the expression *compagnie des Prestres*.

²² Namely, in the fourth chapter in the first paragraph and the present chapter also in the first paragraph.

²³ In his French translation Calvin writes *Anciens*.

²⁴ "... dus sola scriptura civitate inspirata, de Heilige Schrift 'alleen', maar dan wel geduid in het licht van de ervaring in de stad" ("... sola scriptura civitate inspirata, Holy Scripture alone, but interpreted in the light of the experience in the city"), Oberman, *De erfenis van Calvin: grootheid en grenzen*, 49.

of government express abhorrence to both forms of government where one person has all the power—because they can very easily degenerate into tyranny—and of eagerness for participation in government.

Both governing levels complement each other within a society that regards itself as a *corpus christianum*, and where both civil authorities and church regard each other as partners in building up society. In his dissertation, the historian Speelman analyzed how the church in Geneva had, in practice, only a modest degree of independence with regard to the civil authorities.²⁵ But tension surrounding the question of how far the authority of the church and that of the government interfered with each other increased. Because of the theocratic aspirations of the Reformed church, the government was anxious about a new form of church dictatorship that occurs after the bishop has been driven away. And the church wanted to be on its guard against a new threat to the government of Christ because of an interfering government. This conflict is centered on the question about how much the government should be involved in church discipline. This conflict develops in the same direction: from the *Eherichter* in Zurich via the presbyter in Basel and the *Kirchenpfleger* in Strasbourg to the *ancien* in Geneva, we see that the person responsible for discipline develops from a worldly government official to a fully-fledged church office bearer.²⁶

In the remaining paragraphs, Calvin describes in detail how the bishop took away the jurisdiction from the *presbyterium*, thereby opening the way to tyrannical arbitrariness. In the end, the Church of Rome also usurped the civil jurisdiction.

After this biblical and church history study into the church's legal power in chapter eleven, Calvin continues in chapter twelve with the search for the correct way to practice discipline in the church.²⁷ He makes a distinction between the general discipline, i.e., for the whole of the people, and the particular discipline that additionally applied to the clergy, i.e., to those who fulfil a public office in the church. This particular discipline does not only judge the conduct and actions of the clergy according to stricter criteria,²⁸ but also applies to the way

²⁵ Speelman, *Calvijn en de zelfstandigheid van de kerk*.

²⁶ This development is summed up by Van Ginkel, *De ouderling*, 139–143.

²⁷ About the development of Calvin's vision regarding discipline, see also J. Plomp, *De kerkelijke tucht bij Calvijn* (Kampen: Kok, 1969) and R.R. de Ridder, "John Calvin's views on discipline: a comparison of the *Institution* of 1536 and the *Institutes* of 1559," *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986) 2, 223–230.

²⁸ How strong this emphasis on pure conduct of life was is proved by the fact that

they carry out their ministry. It may surprise us that Calvin makes a distinction between clergy and people because previously he had rejected it (IV.IV.9) as not in accordance with scripture. However, this does not necessarily mean a contradiction. In the fourth chapter he expresses his regret about the growing use of the word ‘clergy’ in the ecclesiastical language of the early church because this accentuated the separation of this group from the rest of the church, and it meant that clergy and laity started to see each other more as opponents. Even Calvin, however, needed words to distinguish between those who fulfilled a public office in the church and the rest of the believers. He is of the opinion that the former group needed stricter disciplinary supervision because they needed to set a good example.²⁹ It remains unclear whether Calvin regarded the office of elder as a ‘lay office.’³⁰

First of all, he speaks about general discipline. He compares it with the importance of the nerves in the body. By their impulses they restrain or arouse the body.³¹ All believers are made aware of the need for discipline, and therefore should be willing to be admonished and to admonish one’s brother. The pastors and presbyters have a special responsibility in this respect—not only by preaching, but also by means of privately rebuking congregants, usually in their homes. It is quite likely that, in this context, presbyters stands for elders, who were exactly the people who were responsible for discipline supervision at home. If somebody refuses to listen, he is judged by the church and is called to appear before the *consensus Seniorum*.³² Whoever refuses to listen at this stage is cut off from the communion of believers (IV.XII.2). In the following paragraphs, Calvin distinguishes between concealed (*private*)

most ministers left during the first years of the Geneva Reformation, A. Pettegree, “The clergy and the Reformation: from ‘devilish priesthood’ to new professional elite” in A. Pettegree (ed.), *The Reformation of the Parishes* (Manchester: University Press, 1993), 9.

²⁹ About the didactical importance of the particular ecclesiastical discipline for office bearers, see also R. Hedtke, *Erziehung durch die Kirche bei Calvin* (Heidelberg, Quelle & Meyer, 1969), 126–128.

³⁰ See Van Ginkel, *De ouderling*, 137 and 148, footnote 357 and McKee, *Elders and the plural Ministry*, 10. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 322–324, suspects that Calvin regarded the elder as member of the laity as well as of the clergy.

³¹ Calvin evidently liked this physical metaphor, he used it in IV.III.2 to indicate how God instituted the ministerial service to keep the church together as one body. Graafland, *Kinderen van één moeder*, 78–79.

³² The French text omits this sentence.

and open sins, and lighter sins from real crimes. In this latter category, it may be necessary to resort to excommunication. In the fifth paragraph, he lists three objectives of church discipline: keeping the body of Christ and the community at the Lord's Supper pure, preventing the wicked from corrupting the good, and finally opening the way to regret and repentance.

The Geneva church order describes how the *anciens* had to carry out their work as people who were co-responsible for discipline: with friendly rebuke, and, if necessary, by bringing the matter before the church council (art. 48). We also read here what the eligibility requirements are for the office of elder, how the election and ordination are carried out, and what their status exactly is in the church. The elders must be city council members who are known for their god-fearing and good conduct, and who are from the various districts "afin d'avoir l'oeil par tout" (art. 49). They are elected by the small council of the city, in consultation with the minister, after which the plenary council gives its approval (art. 50). Finally, they are confirmed in the church council with an oath (art. 51–54). Their mandate must be confirmed each year (art. 55). Although the elders are also town council members, they have a seat in the church council as church office bearers. In order to make a clear distinction between ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction, the elders are not allowed to wear civil office insignia during the church council meeting (art. 168).

The discipline regulations for celebrating the Lord's Supper, as laid down in the church order of 1561,³³ appear to have had a great impact on social life. Through the *anciens*, who fulfilled a sort of bridging function between civil authorities and church, the authorities were also involved in maintaining discipline. Between 1541 and 1564, the years of Calvin's second stay in Geneva, this led to a number of death sentences and banishment of people from the city. By additions to the church order in 1560, the grip of the church on the behavior of people and of society became even more extensive.³⁴ In the first place, the members of the congregation are instructed so that superstition vanishes. Children cannot be admitted to the Lord's Supper until they have proved to have sufficient knowledge of the catechism, in which they are instructed

³³ "Les Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques de l'Eglise de Genève" (1561) in Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*, 42–64.

³⁴ J. Witte, Jr., "Moderate Religious liberty in the theology of John Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (1996) 2, 359–403; in particular, 394.

every Sunday afternoon (art. 141–147). The knowledge of adults is also tested, and they are instructed during home visits. Anyone whose knowledge is deemed to be insufficient by the visitors is summoned before the church council (art. 148–153). Strangers and newcomers are interrogated as well and have to prove that they have adequate knowledge before they are admitted to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (art. 77). In the second place, the purity of the Lord's Supper is protected by encouraging those who are in a state of sin to repent, and, if necessary, excluding them from communion (art. 154–159). Those who stubbornly persist in their errors or in their disdain of the church order by not showing any sign of improvement after having been excluded from the communion table for six months must expect a seven year banishment from the city (160–163).

In paragraph seven he emphasizes that even princes are not exempt from the discipline of the church. He does not repeat who should exercise this jurisdiction because he has already discussed that elsewhere. Without doubt, he refers here to the method used in the early church, as explained by him in chapter eleven. He adds, however, that in case of excommunication the elders should not act without the approval of the church. This means that the people must be witnesses so that nothing is done according to the whim of a few.

From paragraph 8 he pleads for mildness in discipline. In paragraph 11 he refers in this context to Augustine's response to the Donatists. He was of the opinion that a lack of corrective zeal in the *concilium seniorum*³⁵ was not sufficient reason to leave the church; similarly, the pastors had no right to resign their ministry if they could not completely cleanse the church. His answer to the Anabaptists' hankering after perfection³⁶ is moderation in discipline. He ranks discipline only as the third point in the government of the church with its full mandates. However important discipline is, it does not have the same essential, primary position as Word and sacraments in the life of the church. It was still not an essential mark of the church, next to Word and sacraments, as would become the position in the *Confessio Belgica*.

Part of discipline is the invitation to fasting and public prayers (§§ 14–21). From paragraph 22, Calvin discusses discipline for the clergy. Here he refers to the rules of the early church. It is obvious that clergy

³⁵ Calvin's French translation here uses *les Prestres*.

³⁶ Balke, *Calvin en de doperse radikalen*, 225–231 and Graafland, *Kinderen van één moeder*, 77–79.

includes bishops and presbyters. In this context there is no longer any mention of elders. The remaining paragraphs are used to dispute the Roman Catholic demand for celibacy of the clergy.

The church order of 1561 gives a detailed description of how the doctrinal discipline for clergy is maintained: each week there is a compulsory *conference des Escritures*, each month a Bible passage is interpreted, and if there is any unresolved difference of opinion about doctrine the elders are called in, and—if necessary—the civil authorities, in order to put things in order (art. 20–22). When it comes to discipline regarding conduct, there is a differentiation between grave, intolerable offences—such as heresy, schism, blasphemy—and a list of less serious offences—such as occupying oneself with vain affairs or neglecting studies. If an offence on the first list is committed, immediate dismissal follows, as well as punishment by the civil authorities. Where offences on the second are concerned, there is the possibility of improvement in conduct. First of all, via brotherly exhortation in the *Consistoire Ecclesiastique*, of which ministers and elders are members, but if it is necessary the help of the government may be called in. Every three months a ‘cleansing’ is organized for and by the ministers, whereby each minister in turn leaves the room in order for his conduct to be judged by his colleagues (art. 23–30). There was even a disciplinary procedure for ministers in the area surrounding Geneva (art. 31–34).

In the Geneva of Calvin's day the elders were overshadowed by the ministers' council. The *Consistoire*, the council in which ministers and elders jointly watched over the discipline, was overshadowed by the *Vénérable Compagnie*, the council of ministers and assistant ministers that met every week and watched over doctrine, conduct, and ministerial work of each member of this council. The elders were called in only if there was any dispute about doctrine, and, if they could not resolve the matter, the magistrates made the decision. The task of the elders was restricted to supervising discipline. The policy of the church was more a matter for the *Vénérable Compagnie*, which had the right to place candidates in elections, and of the magistrate, who, in addition to having the final say in doctrinal disputes, was also responsible for finances.³⁷

³⁷ Van Ginkel, *De ouderling*, 120–122.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Calvin attaches great importance to church tradition. He does not want to be taken for a modernist, who founds a church with a new structure of ministry based solely on an appeal to the Bible. He wants to project himself as a man who seeks to follow where the early church led with regard to the offices in the church. Calvin has great respect for the teachings of the church fathers. In principle, he does not have a problem with a church with an episcopal structure, nor with a three-fold authority in carrying out office bearers' duties. It is quite significant that nearly half—nine of the twenty chapters—of the fourth book of his *Institutes* occupy themselves with an attempt to bring the Reformed churches into line with the development of the offices in the early church; this demonstrates that he attached much importance to this matter. In this way he can discredit the Church of Rome. It has scandalously deviated, not just from the Bible, but also from the early church. Mercilessly, he exposes the degeneration of the ministry in this church.

2. The same criteria are used for his judgment on how ministry developed in history as are used in his exegetical chapter about offices, election/ordination, and how tasks are to be interpreted. Offices in the Church of Rome are deprived of any credibility—not because of the way they are structured, but of the office bearer's failure to take up his task as minister of the Word and as deacon, and because of his complete indifference to the opinion of the believers concerning his election. There is nothing wrong with the offices; the office bearers themselves are at fault. They do not proclaim the Word of God and do not administer the sacraments as they should. The financial means of the church are not used for the benefit of the poor, but for their own gain. They monopolize all power and place themselves above the Word. In doing so, they corrupt the authority of the church: they teach without due regard for the Word, they dare give their own legislation divine status, and they are lax in maintaining discipline over morals.

3. The apostolic succession to which the Church of Rome appeals is not legitimate. The apostolic succession does not depend on legally correct ordination by the correct person, but on the exercise of the apostolic office, i.e., proclaiming the Word. The most basic criticism of the papacy is not based on form, but on content; namely, the reproach

that the popes do not carry out the task of pastor. Authority is not dependant on the person of the office bearer, but depends on the exercise of the task itself. At the most basic level, this is about the authority of the Word and how it functions. The service of the Word determines the boundary of the church's and the ministry's claim to power. This also means that ordination to the ministry is no longer an event of ontological significance. Offices are never the personal property of a subject.

4. Calvin agrees with Jerome that bishops and presbyters are not separate offices. There is only one pastor's office that is responsible for administering the Word and the sacraments and the discipline over morals and doctrine. Because Calvin theologizes within the context of the Swiss city-states, he does not say anything about the needs of larger regions with regard to office bearers. However, he does recognize the value of a personalized supervision and unity task carried out by the bishops in the early church. For this reason, he leaves room for a future episcopal structure of the Reformed Churches.

5. The distinction of three offices in the *ordo presbyterorum* (IV.IV.1) is an unstable structure: both exegetically and historically. It lacks a sound foundation. The teaching office disappears in the discourse about the early church, and even when the teaching authority of the church is discussed, there is no longer a separate teaching office. The exegetical foundation of the elder's office with only three Bible texts is weak and very questionable.³⁸ When discussing the offices in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the presbyter's office quotes from Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine are interpreted as references to this office.

6. The elder's office only turns up in this part in chapters eleven and twelve, where the judicial power of the church is discussed. Calvin uses the word 'senior' five times in the specific meaning of the office for discipline maintenance—twice in paragraph six of chapter eleven and once in paragraph two, seven, and eleven of chapter twelve. The word is used twice in the plural, and the other three times the term is connected with an expression of collegiality (*consensus* or *concilium*).

³⁸ T.F. Torrance, "The Eldership in the Reformed Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984) 4, 503–518, on page 507 criticizes Calvin's interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17 because he regards the presbyter's and elder's offices as identical.

The elder's office is an office that is carried out jointly in order to prevent discipline from being delivered to the arbitrariness of individual pastors. Not only the election of the office bearers to be ordained, but the exercise of discipline is also something that must not be carried out without the involvement of the people.

7. The separate teaching and discipline offices within the *ordo presbyterorum* are not given a very high profile because doctrine and discipline are matters that remain entrusted to the pastors in the first instance. Supervision of doctrine and discipline flow from the administration of the Word. The doctor's office and the elder's office do not gain a status that is higher than that of auxiliary offices, which support the tasks entrusted to the pastors.

INSTITUTES IV.XIV–XIX: THE MINISTRY AND THE SACRAMENTS

In the next six chapters Calvin discusses the doctrine of the sacraments. In an introductory chapter about the importance of the sacraments, he comes to the conclusion that Jesus instituted only two sacraments; namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. He devotes two chapters to each of the sacraments. In conclusion, he discusses the five other sacraments that are used within the Church of Rome. On two occasions Calvin refers to ministry; namely, when he rejects a sacerdotal interpretation in the framework of the Roman Catholic Mass and when dealing with the question whether or not the ordination of ministers is a sacrament.

INSTITUTES IV.XVIII: THE REJECTION OF THE SACERDOTAL MINISTRY

After having discussed the Lord's Supper in great detail as a sacrament instituted by Christ, Calvin rejects the Roman Catholic celebration of the Mass in the next chapter. His indignation can be seen from the title, where he speaks of sacrilege and of nullification of the Lord's Supper. Calvin then lists five negative consequences of the Mass. The first of these relates to the sacerdotal character of the ministry. When the minister acts as *sacerdos*, he blasphemes Christ, the only one who has been consecrated as Priest and High Priest by the Father. Christ does

not need any sacerdotal partners (IV.XVIII.2). Christ did not institute a priesthood to offer daily sacrifices, and no such priesthood is mentioned anywhere in scripture. He did not consecrate any *sacerdotes* so that they could offer sacrifices, but *ministri* to celebrate Holy Communion (IV.XVIII.12). Ministers are not *sacerdotes*, who intervene with a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people and who, having appeased God, obtain atonement for the people's sins. After all, Christ is the sole priest and mediator of the New Testament, to whom all priesthoods have been transferred and in whom they have been closed and terminated (IV.XVIII.14). If we must speak about sacrifice, it must be of a sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15). When during the celebration of the Lord's Supper the death of Christ is proclaimed and the Lord is thanked, then sacrifice of praise is offered. This ministry of sacrifice is not a special task for a separate group—all Christians are invited to take part in this service, as can be seen from Peter's words when he speaks of a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Thanks to Christ the mediator and high priest, we can appear before God with our sacrifice of praise as kings and priests (Rev. 1:6).

In comparison with the earlier editions of the *Institutes*, we are struck by the fact that the theme of 'priesthood of all believers' has been forced into the background. In those early editions this subject was used to open the access to God because the Church of Rome, with its priesthood, monopolized this access. All could freely gain access to God without a separate clergy caste. As from the 1543 edition, this part is completely omitted. It is quite likely that this was due to Bucer's influence because he had discovered—even before Calvin—how the Anabaptists used 'the priesthood of all believers' to reject all offices.³⁹ Calvin now places much more emphasis on the sufficiency of Christ's priesthood as opposed to that of the Roman Catholic priests. The believers' royal priesthood is given a strong Christological anchor. In Christ we offer to the Father all we have, and, in this way, it becomes a sacrifice of praise and thanks to the Lord. The topic is not given any further pastoral elaboration.

The sacerdotalization of the ministry was not a separate focus in the chapters where the historical development of the ministry was weighed. In these chapters Calvin particularly concentrated on malpractices by office bearers. Sacerdotalization was referred to only occasionally. Even

³⁹ Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 196.

in this section about the sacraments, not much detail is given. Perhaps this is a missed opportunity. Calvin, who placed such a strong emphasis on the functional interpretation of the ministry, could have made a sharper contrast between the Reformed interpretation of ministry and the function it fulfils in the Church of Rome. Also, the representation idea that plays such an important part in the Roman Catholic theology of priesthood could have given rise to a sharper formulation of Calvin's own opinions about representation in how the ministry functions.

INSTITUTES IV.XIX: IS ORDINATION A SACRAMENT?

The question of whether or not ordination is a sacrament finds its origin in three remarks in the *Institutes*. First of all, Calvin refers to the relationship between ordination and sacrament in his introduction to the sacraments, where he speaks of the number of sacraments (IV.XIX.20). He establishes that Christ himself gave his church only two sacraments; namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the middle of a text that dates back to the first edition of 1536, Calvin places a parenthesis in the 1543 Latin edition.⁴⁰ He then goes on to explain that he now speaks of the sacraments that have been instituted for the whole church. He graciously allows the laying on of hands with which the servants of the church are initiated into their office to be called a sacrament, but he does not count it among the ordinary sacraments. The French translation of 1545 adds—as extra explanation—that these ordinary sacraments had been given for the benefit of everyone. Therefore the laying on of hands during the ordination of office bearers can be called a sacrament, but it must not be counted among the ordinary sacrament because those are given to all believers. Here he does not develop this train of thought any further. In *Institutes* IV.III.16 the laying on of hands was presented as a legitimate, meaningful rite with a biblical foundation, but here the act is not called a sacrament either.

The section that was added in 1543 about the number of sacraments contains another remark; he announces that the other rites that are usually regarded as sacraments will be discussed at a later stage. He devotes a separate chapter to this—chapter nineteen, about the five

⁴⁰ “Loquor autem de iis quae in usum totius Ecclesiae sunt instituta. Nam impositionem manuum, qua Ecclesiae ministri in suum munus initiantur, ut not invitus pator vocari Sacramentum, ita inter ordinaria Sacramenta non numero.” (*OS* 5, 278, 15–19).

other ceremonies that are falsely called sacraments. In this chapter he explains why they are not sacraments, and what they really are. He then discusses the five other signs that are called sacraments by the Church of Rome: confirmation, confession, extreme unction, holy orders, and marriage. In the introductory paragraphs (IV.XIX.1–2), he states that he is not merely a linguistic purist. In the case of sacraments there is much more at stake. According to the definition of the Church of Rome, sacraments are visible figures of invisible grace. In his own view of the sacraments, Calvin says that a sacrament is a seal with which God's covenant or promise is sealed in order to awaken and comfort the consciences of the believers. This means that a real sacrament is far from powerless, but for a rite to be a sacrament it must have been instituted by the Lord in his Word. Calvin's criticism of the other five sacraments of the Church of Rome is that they have not been instituted by God, but are based on human institution alone. Paragraphs 22–33 are devoted to discussing the minor and major orders. In this section, Calvin refers twice to the question as to whether ordination is a sacrament.

The section is divided into two parts. The first three paragraphs discuss the orders themselves and the question of whether they might be sacraments; the next paragraphs deal with the question of whether the ordination ceremony itself can be called a sacrament. He starts with the fixation on the number seven when listing the ranks. They are considered to consist of the *ostiarii* (doorkeepers), the lectors, the exorcists, the acolytes, the sub-deacons, the deacons, and the *sacerdotes* (priests). Calvin proves to be well-informed about the discussion within the church of whether the tonsure and the rank of bishop must also be counted among the orders, and whether the seven orders form one or seven separate sacraments (IV.XIX.22). Soon the Council of Trent would come to a decision about these matters. Calvin mocks the far-fetched attempts to create a theological foundation for the orders by placing them back in history and in the life of Jesus himself (IV.XIX.23). The names of the grades have become empty titles without any real task or content (IV.XIX.24). Much attention is given to the ceremonies that belong to the grades. All arguments to justify the tonsure as a sacrament are rejected as falsehood; they only serve to camouflage the pride in those who set themselves apart from other believers (IV.XIX.25–27). The rites for all grades ask for an instrument that is handed over. The logical consequence, when seen from the Roman Catholic opinion of the sacrament, is that in each change

of grade new invisible grace is passed on. In Calvin's opinion, this reasoning proves that it is absurd to make the four first grades, the *ordines minores*, into a sacrament (IV.XIX.27).

From paragraph twenty-eight onward, he concentrates on the three *ordines maiores* and their rites. First of all, he focuses on the rank of the *sacerdotes*. Referring back to what he has said in the chapter about the papal mass, he repeats here that to regard this ministry of a priest offering sacrifice as instituted by God is unbiblical and sacrilegious. The text that goes back to the first edition of 1536 is supplemented with a new addition in the Latin edition of 1543. In this parenthesis he says that—to make matters worse—the sacrilegious interpretation of the ministry is crowned with the title 'sacrament.' However, he would like to regard the true office of *presbyter* as such,⁴¹ an office that was recommended by Christ himself. In the French translation of 1545 he expresses himself more clearly: when laying on of hands is used during the introduction of real priests and ministers of the Word into their ministry, he does not object to this being called a sacrament.⁴² The reason he gives for this is the fact that this rite comes from scripture, and that in 1 Timothy 4:14 Paul says that it is not superfluous, but a true sign of spiritual grace. But he still does not count the laying on of hands during confirmation in office as a third sacrament because it is not usual nor common to all believers, but it is a special rite for a particular function. It annoys Calvin that the honor that is awarded to the true Christian service is misused by the papal priests in their conceit. Christ said that those who proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments must be ordained, but not that people bringing sacrifices must be inaugurated. The grace from the Holy Spirit is not promised to accomplish the forgiveness of sins, but with a view to the governance of the church.

In comparison with the remark from the fourteenth chapter, it is striking that here he argues more in favor of calling the laying on of hands during ordination a sacrament. It is a rite from scripture, and the Bible says that it is a faithful token of spiritual grace, therefore—a true seal of the divine promise. Then he repeats why he does not call

⁴¹ "Quantum ad verum presbyterii munus attinet, quod ore Christi nobis est commendatum, libenter eo loco habeo;" (*OS* 5, 463, 7–9).

⁴² "Quant est de l'imposition des mains, qui se fait pour introduire les vrais Prestes et Ministres de l'Eglise en leur estat, ie ne répugne point qu'on ne la recoyve pour Sacrement." (*IRC*, 496).

the ordination a third sacrament: it does not apply to all believers. But there is a strategic argument in what he says after this. The Church of Rome abuses the sacrament title in order to decorate its degenerated ministry interpretation.

In the following paragraphs, he discusses the ceremonies in ordaining priests. First of all, there is the insufflation as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Calvin rejects the argument that in using this they are following the Lord's example (John 20:22). This type of aping Christ is being mocked (IV.XIX.29). With regard to anointing, the Church of Rome defends itself by pointing to the sons of Aaron without realizing that Christ's priesthood has superseded and fulfilled that of Aaron (IV.XIX.30). This sacred oil is supposed to leave an indelible mark, but the oil can be washed off with soap and does not leave an imprint on the soul because the Word is missing. Finally, there is the laying on of hands. Here too, Calvin adds a parenthesis to the text of 1536 in the 1543 edition. With regard to the laying on of hands, he admits that this is a sacrament—provided it is carried out at a true, legal ordination, but he denies that it has any place in this comedy.⁴³ The French translation of 1545 more clearly says what is meant with this true, legal ordination; namely, at a real promotion of legitimate ministers, and not a farce, such as the ordination of Roman Catholic priests.⁴⁴ They have not received Christ's command, nor do they consider the end to which the promise made during the laying on of hands should lead. If they do not wish the sign to be denied them, they must apply it to the reality and to which it was appointed. (IV.XIX.31). For the third time Calvin concedes that the laying on of hands during the ordination can be called a sacrament. He does not give any further reason. The emphasis lies on the denial of the sacramental nature during the consecration because of their interpretation of the ministry.

Finally, he discusses the liturgical office interpretation of deacons and sub-deacons in the Church of Rome that is far removed from the biblical task of looking after the poor. The rites during both consecrations are discussed, and their sacramental significance denied because they do not find their origin in a command from the Lord, and—for this reason—they cannot carry a promise from God (IV.XIX.32–33).

⁴³ "Superest impositio manuum, quam ut in veris legitimisque ordinationibus Sacramentum esse concedo, ita nego locum habere in hac fabula, ..." (OS 5, 465,22–24).

⁴⁴ "... comme il faut, en faisant une vraye promotion des Ministres légitimes; mais ie nie qu'elle ait lieu en ceste farce qu'ils iouent en ordonnant leur Prestres." (IRC, 499).

In the 1960s, L. Schümmer, in the framework of his thesis at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Brussels, looked into the question of whether or not Calvin regarded the ordination as a sacrament. His study received wide renown thanks to the Roman Catholic theologian A. Ganoczy, who wrote a dissertation about Calvin.⁴⁵ In the first instance, his study led Schümmer to the conclusion that ordination only applies to pastors and ministers. Our own research confirms this opinion. Second, on the basis of extrapolation of the general sacrament doctrine in the fourteenth chapter of the *Institutes*, Schümmer comes to the conclusion that—in Calvin’s opinion—the ordination certainly was a sacrament. We are a little more cautious in this respect. In our opinion, Calvin himself was too reticent to explicitly formulate this opinion. But on the basis of the text fragments referred to above, we are of the opinion that Calvin left the possibility open to award the ordination sacramental significance. We find the extrapolation method applied by Schümmer too speculative, and are of the opinion that it is based on a false assumption. This is because Schümmer regarded the *Institutes* as a structure that was nearly perfect both logically and rationally, and where everything fits together seamlessly. This meant that he manages to link text fragments without any problem. In this way he loses the open character of Calvin’s thinking, and the possibility for critical dialogue with his *oeuvre* is lost. Calvin’s thinking is both clear and open. It is exactly this combination that makes his work such fascinating reading to this day.

On the basis of his hermeneutical standpoint, Schümmer goes a step further. Because of the significance that Calvin attached to the laying on of hands in the third chapter; namely, that the ordinand is offered to God and therefore no longer belongs to himself, Schümmer concluded that the ordination of ministers with laying on of hands brings with it a sign that is not to be seen as magic but spiritual. Because the pastoral task and the gift of the Holy Spirit are irrevocable at the consecration-ordination to the office of pastor, the person does not

⁴⁵ The study was published in 1964 as a Master’s thesis at the Faculté Universitaire de Théologie Protestante de Bruxelles/Universitaire Protestantse Theologische Faculteit te Brussel; its title was *Le ministère pastoral dans l’Institution Chrétienne de Calvin à la lumière du troisième sacrement*. In 1965, thanks to Ganoczy, it was published in the series, “Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz,” Bd. 39, Wiesbaden, 1965. Schümmer repeated his findings in a detailed article called “Le ministère pastoral dans l’*Institution Chrétienne* de Calvin” in *La Revue Réformée* 45 (1994) 5, 9–47.

remain the same, and he receives an ontological added value.⁴⁶ With this formulation Schümmer agrees with the classic interpretation of the significance of the consecration in the Western church. The task description, however, is different. The sacerdotal priest has made way for the blessed distributor of grace in scripture, sacrament, forgiveness of sins, and benediction. As a result of this ontological interpretation, Schümmer undermines the pastoral dichotomy between person and task which he had recommended.

FINDINGS

1. A sacerdotal interpretation is emphatically rejected because this does not do justice to the unique sacrificial mediation of Christ as the only priest, or the task of the royal priesthood of the believers to bring sacrifice of praise. Calvin does not elaborate on this, which means that he has not used all opportunities to go into further detail about the involvement of the believers with gifts of grace in building up the body of Christ.

2. In Calvin's opinion, the New Testament knows only two ordinary sacraments that apply to all; namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. He rejects the sacramental significance of the laying on of hands during the consecration of priests in the Church of Rome because Christ did not call his disciples to be sacerdotal priests. The ordination with laying on of hands of pastors, who are called to govern the church through the Word, can—in some sense—be called a sacrament because this rite is offered by the Lord and is a true sign of spiritual grace. He hesitates, however, because this sign does not apply to all believers, and also due to his fear that it might make the pastors arrogant—as in the Church of Rome. Despite this, he leaves the possibility open.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The ministry has a strong Christological flavor. The rule of the church's office bearers is carried out in the service of the Christocracy. The minister of the Word represents Christ in the congregation.

⁴⁶ Schümmer, *Le ministère pastoral*, 17–20 and *La revue Réformée* 45 (1994) 5, 16–17.

Although the ministry receives its place among the external aids used by the Spirit, the pneumatological side of the ministry is worked out in much less detail, and the pastor does not function as representative of the community of believers. Despite this, his theology of ministry—rooted as it is in the election doctrine—with its Christological interpretation and its pneumatological framework offers possibilities for the development of a Trinitarian theology of ministry.

2. In his development of his theology of ministry, Calvin wants to be a scriptural theologian. Because contextually reading scripture is a fascinating business, his search for a biblical structure for the ministerial government of the church is an open question. With his searching working method he does not try to have the final say for all times; what he does is to show a way to find an adequate structure of ministry in every age based on the Bible. To him the guarantee of the freedom of the Word is much more important than the concrete historic development in a multitude of different offices. He is careful and searching in the way that he writes while listening to scripture; his judgment about the structure of offices in the Church of Rome is provisional and conditional, and all this demonstrates that Calvin himself does not feel tightly restricted to one new form of ministry.

3. Calvin aims for a theology of ministry that is in keeping with the tradition of the church. He uses nearly half of the fourth book of the *Institutes* for this! As far as he is concerned, the church is unthinkable without proclamation by ministers. Christ himself gave his church the ministry so that the congregation might be governed. On closer inspection, the two autonomous basic offices of his structure of ministry—first, that of pastor/presbyter/minister of the Word and that of deacon—coincide with the two ordination offices from the early church; namely, priest and deacon. The formal side of the ministry, the election and the ordination, are of essential importance. The church, with its structure of offices, has been given authorities; the sacramental nature of the ordination is an open question.

4. Ministry as an instrument of Christocracy is used on three fronts: against the Church of Rome, which has abandoned the Word; against the Anabaptist radicals, who are in danger of losing the Word because they ignore the ministerial proclamation; and against the civil authorities, which form a new threat to the Word.

5. His basic criticism of the offices of his time has to do with the fact that the office bearers do not carry out the task that was entrusted to them. Bishops and presbyters do not proclaim the Word and stand at the Lord's Table as sacerdotal priests. Deacons do not take care of the poor. Those who do not take up their functions lose their legitimacy. Those who fail to take up the apostolic proclamation task no longer stand in the apostolic succession. The validity of the election and the consecration are in danger because the candidates have not been selected carefully on the basis of suitability and training, and the people of God are not consulted in the selection of office bearers.

6. By declaring the church and the proclamation by ministers as essential parts of the instrumental salvation necessity, he attacks the Anabaptists. Calvin regards their rejection of the proclamation by ministers as the equivalent of rejecting Christ, who gave the church the ministry.

7. Calvin emphasizes that the church is responsible for its own jurisdiction, an authority that it must not leave to the government. In doing so he attacks the Zwinglians.

8. Because of the concern about the Christocracy within the church, Calvin introduces new separate offices in addition to that of minister of the Word: the office of doctor in theology, which has to guarantee continuity in the future with regard to the proclamation by ministers in the church, and the office of elder for independent ecclesiastical discipline. Neither of these offices, however, rises above the level of auxiliary office to support the pastor's office of the minister of the Word. It is this low level of attention to the auxiliary offices in his doctrine and the limited exegetical and church historical foundation that prove that Calvin himself did not expect anything more from them.

9. The exegetical and church-historical foundation of the seniors' office is very weak. In the *Institutes* the role of the seniors is quite marginal. This is obscured by the fact that in the Dutch translations the word *ouderling* (elder) is used both for presbyter and senior. Their discipline task is carried out, in the first place, by the pastors. The elders only make decisions as a council. In this way, they give the decisions about discipline a broader base within the faith community.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY IN REFORMED CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

From the sixteenth century until today, confessions of faith have played an important part in church formation within the Reformed tradition all over the world. For this reason, it is possible to say that Reformed churches are not just confessing churches, but also confession churches. In this instance, we do not want to consider the questions this poses in regard to the relationship between the confessions of faith as *norma normata* and scripture as *norma normans*.¹ In the Reformation of the sixteenth century, confessions of faith gained ecclesiastical status and became a touchstone for preaching and doctrine. What interests us is how the doctrine of the Reformers is incorporated in the confessions of faith; in particular, with regard to the church's ministry.

In contrast to Lutheranism, where the development of the confession of faith was finalized in the *Konkordienbuch* of 1580, the Reformed tradition did not arrive at one confession of faith or book of confessions which unites all the Reformed churches. The reason for this is to be found in their roots in the Swiss Reformation that developed relatively autonomously in individual cities; the result of which was that there was never one dominating point of view.² This means that, in principle, these Reformed confessions of faith have an open character that is strongly determined by the situation of the time and place concerned. For our study we make use of E.F.K. Müller's³ and W. Niesel's⁴ collection of Reformed confessions of faith and the dogmatic-historical

¹ In this context, see M.E. Brinkman, "Onwil en onmacht tot het formuleren van een gereformeerde identiteit," *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 95 (1995) 2, 59–68.

² See G.P. Hartvelt, *Symboliek. Een beschrijving van kernen van christelijk belijden* (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 4.

³ E.F.K. Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche. In authentischen Texten mit geschichtlicher Einleitung und Register* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1903).

⁴ Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen*.

overviews of W. Neuser⁵ and J. Rohls.⁶ We can also refer to the thorough study of church and ministry in the Reformed confession of faith documents from the pen of the Roman Catholic theologian B. Gassmann.⁷

First of all, we want to point out that many of these sixteenth century confessions of faith do not contain any separate ecclesiological sections, as is the case in the *Dordse Leerregels* (Dordrecht Canonical Rules), nor a separate section about ministry, as in the case of the Heidelberg Catechism. We restrict ourselves to just a few confessions of faith in which the doctrine of ministry is developed further.

CONFESSIO HELVETICA POSTERIOR (1566)

In 1566 Elector Frederic III of the Palatinate asked Zwingli's successor in Zurich, H. Bullinger (1504–1575), for a confession of faith that would demonstrate what the Reformed Protestants could offer as an alternative to the Lutheran Augsburg Confession. As a response to this request, Bullinger sent him a detailed document consisting of thirty articles that he had compiled as early as 1561, and which became known under the title *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*.⁸ This is a document that would gain great authority in the southeastern part of Europe, in particular.⁹ This particular confession of faith was our first choice because it is closest to the Swiss context of Reformation in city-states, where church and civil authorities jointly tried to shape the reformation of the church, but each with its own responsibilities. In three consecutive chapters, ecclesiology, the offices, and the sacraments are discussed—the same order we also find in the *Institutes*.

⁵ W. Neuser, "Dogma und Bekenntnis in der Reformation: Von Zwingli und Calvin bis zur Synode von Westminster," in C. Andresen (Hrsg.), *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte Bd. 2: Die Lehrentwicklung im Rahmen der Konfessionalität* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 167–352.

⁶ Rohls, *Theologie reformierter Bekenntnisschriften*.

⁷ Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata*.

⁸ We have made use of the Latin text edition as it can be found in Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, 170–220 and a French translation in O. Fatio, *Confessions et catechismes de la foi réformée* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1986), 183–295.

⁹ For more about the development and reception of the document, see Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 107–108.

The title of the seventeenth chapter—about the doctrine of the church—*De catholica et sancta Dei Ecclesia, et unico capite Ecclesiae* is inspired by the Apostolic Creed and indicates that the chapter has two focal points—one concerning the universality and sanctity of the church that is aimed, in particular, at the Anabaptists, and one concerning the sole sovereignty of Christ over the church that is aimed at the Roman Catholic Church. The existence of the church finds its reason in the will of God himself because it is his aim to offer salvation to this community. There is, therefore, no salvation outside the church. Although the visible church is a *corpus permixtum*, the emphasis is mainly on holding on to the church and not prematurely passing judgment. Bullinger does not make use of Calvin's image of the church as mother. This church is of all times, from the beginning of time to the end of the world. The marks of the church are the pure and legitimate preaching of the Word of God and partaking of the sacraments instituted by Christ.

We are particularly interested in the next chapter entitled *De ministris ecclesiae, ipsorumque institutione, et officiis*. Bullinger bases his writings on the salvation history. It is clear that God himself opted for the ministry from the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets, through Jesus and the apostles to their successors of today: pastors and teachers who govern and safeguard the church by their human service. On the one hand, we must not forget that it is God himself who calls people, but, on the other hand, we must not despise the service of people called by God. They are, after all, not servants of people, but servants of God whose aim is the salvation of humankind.

After that, Bullinger looks into the New Testament terminology for these ministers. It was the task of the apostles to proclaim the Word to the whole world in order to gather churches and without being tied to one location. Their task has now been taken on by the pastors, but, in contrast to the apostles, they are tied to one local church. In days gone by it was the task of the prophets to receive knowledge from God about the future and to explain scripture. They still exist today. The evangelists wrote the gospels, and they were the apostles' helpers. The bishops were the overseers of the church, and they made sure that the people were fed. The presbyters were *seniores et quasi senatores*, the fathers of the church, who governed the church with their sound counsel. Pastors watched over the flock of the Lord, and saw to what was necessary. The task of the teachers was education in the true faith. For this reason, the ministers of the church of today can be called

bishop, presbyter, pastor, or teacher.¹⁰ The hierarchical classification of the offices in the church of Rome is rejected because it is a human institution, in the same way as the monastic existence is rejected.

Nobody can appropriate the honor of being a minister. A lawful call and orderly election by the church are required after a thorough examination with regard to suitability, scriptural and doctrinal knowledge, and lifestyle. Then follows ordination by the elders with public prayer and laying on of hands. Bullinger distinguishes between the *sacerdotium* of all believers in order to offer spiritual sacrifices to God, and the *ministerium* in order to govern the church. This means that, in contrast to the church of Rome, the servants of the Word are not sacerdotal priests, but they are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1) by proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments as servants who only obey their master.

De potestate ministrorum ecclesiae is the subject of the next paragraph. Bullinger differentiates between the power that is given to Christ in heaven and on earth, and the power of the keys that is given to the ministers. This power, intended to govern the church, is dependent on the obedience of the minister himself to the Word of God. All bishops and presbyters have, as equals, been given a joint task without appropriating the right to exercise dominion over their colleagues. The president's function that was created to safeguard order and unity in the early church is not a reason to place himself above the others.

What is the task of the ministers? The proclamation of the doctrine of the gospel of Christ and the legitimate administration of the sacraments are the two tasks that encompass all other tasks; namely, gathering the congregation together in order to proclaim the Word for the education and edification of believers, and administering the sacraments. This education consists of exegesis for the benefit of the uneducated, and exhortation and encouragement of the believers. Administering the sacraments includes liturgical, diaconal and catechismal tasks.

This ministry requires spirituality in the fear of God with daily prayer, scripture reading, and a dedicated life. Only on this basis can the ministers exercise discipline over the other believers. However, Bullinger rejects the error of the Donatists, who regard the value of the

¹⁰ The French translation adds "... mettant toutesfois bonne distinction par tout." Presumably this is an admission to accommodate the French-speaking Reformed people, who leaned more strongly towards Calvin and his different offices.

sacraments as dependent on the conduct of the ministers. All this, however, does not deny the fact that it is the task of the synod to watch over the doctrine and conduct of the ministers. If necessary, the *seniores* may have to dismiss incorrigible ministers. But the other ministers and their families are entitled to a wage.

Bullinger presents a mature and balanced thesis that deals with all the important aspects of a Reformed theology of ministry. Zwingli's influence is recognizable where he speaks of one ministry, when he indicates that there are different names for this ministry in the New Testament, and when he later gives a description of the task of the minister as one task package for the one office bearer; namely, the minister. His separate paragraph about spirituality of the ministry also reminds us of *Der Hirt*. The *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* makes a clear distinction between the ministry as *ministerium* and the *sacerdotium* of all believers. The former does not have its origin in the latter.

It is not entirely clear who exactly the *seniores* referred to above are. The translation for both *presbyteri* and *seniores* is given as *anciens*. *Seniores* carry out the ordination of new ministers with prayer and laying on of hands; they judge the life and doctrine of the ministers at the synod. But the chapter that deals with church discipline (29) does not speak of *seniores* but of 'holy judges.' J.J. von Allmen regards their title as a comparative; namely, as those who have been in the pastoral ministry the longest, and who—for that reason—are allowed to carry out ordination and disciplinary supervision as bishop-ministers over their younger colleagues.¹¹ As 'senior pastors' they do not hold a separate office, but they do carry a heavy responsibility within the church. This interpretation of the episcopal role gives the *Älteren* in Zurich a profile that differs much from that of the *anciens* in Calvin's Geneva, who had a much more limited task that was directed at the individual disciplining of believers.

CONFESSIO GALLICANA (1559)

At the end of May 1559, eleven Reformed churches of 'France parisienne' gathered together to draw up a confession of faith in order to submit it to the king of France through the mediation of Huguenot

¹¹ J.J. von Allmen, *Le saint ministère selon la conviction et la volonté des Réformés du XVIe*

nobles. The aim of the confession was to persuade the king, on the basis of a clearly French confession of faith that was independent of Reformed churches abroad, to be more tolerant towards the Reformed churches. Originally, Calvin had objected to the plan because he was opposed to a diplomatic solution whereby the Reformed church would be recognized by the government as a minority religion in comparison with the Roman Catholic Church. This would destroy the opportunity to achieve reformation of both the church as a whole and the faith of the whole people. Calvin had greater expectations of a strategy in which the Reformed church remained an underground movement for the time being and until the government could be won over to the Reformation.¹² In the end he decided, at the last moment, to send three representatives with his own proposal that was incorporated in the confession of faith that had already been drawn up. The political aim was not achieved. The text would, however, become the basic confession of faith of the French Reformed churches. This *Confessio Gallicana*¹³ is sometimes called *Confession de La Rochelle* because at the 1571 synod in La Rochelle it was again officially accepted and recognized under the leadership of Beza.¹⁴

The context in which this confession of faith functions is completely different from the previous one. There the framework was the cooperation between the city authorities and the congregations, both of which tried to emancipate themselves from the larger national entities. The confession of faith functioned in the reformation process of a people's church with government support. In France, however, the Reformed churches had to defend themselves against a government that carried out acts of violence, and, for that reason, they could not count on the government for the reformation of the church. These congregations were not people's churches; they consisted of people with conviction who were willing to lay down their lives for the reformation of the church. This is not a reformation imposed from above, but a grass roots one. We will see to what extent this influenced the ecclesiology of these "churches under the cross."¹⁵

s¹ècle (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestle, 1968), 49–50 and "Ministry and Ordination according to reformed Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25 (1972) 1, 77–81.

¹² Speelman, *Calvijn en de zelfstandigheid van de kerk*, 125–186.

¹³ The text can be found in Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen*, 65–75.

¹⁴ For the history of its creation, see Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 162–164.

¹⁵ See also Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 158–160.

The text consists of forty brief articles and has the same structure as the *Apostolicum*. The ecclesiology is in accordance with the unique mediating role of Christ. This leads article 25 to state that we cannot withdraw from the order of the church, which was founded on his authority; this means that the church exists only when there are pastors whose task it is to teach. These pastors must be honored and listened to with reverence when they have been elected properly, and when they carry out their office faithfully. God does not want to make himself dependent on an inferior means, but he has chosen a bridle to control us. For this reason, any rejection of the ministry must be condemned. Article twenty-six goes even further by stating that we must not withdraw from the true church, which was instituted by God, even if the magistrates and all their edicts are against it. This leads us to the question in article twenty-seven: where is the true church to be found? The true church is the communion of the believers who want to follow the Word of God all their lives, and who always remain dependent on the forgiveness of sins. There are hypocrites even in the true church, but their evil cannot eliminate the true church. Where the Word of God is not received, and where the sacraments are not received in the right way, there is no church. This is why the gathering of the *Papauté* is condemned. There are still traces of the true church there, especially in baptism. Their baptism does not have to be repeated, but anyone who offers his child for baptism in this church must be aware of the 'pollution' that is the result.

From the twenty-ninth article onward, the *Confessio Gallicana* speaks about the government of the church: pastors, *surveillans*, and deacons with reference to Acts 6, Ephesians 4, and 1 Timothy 3—the three offices that are responsible for pure doctrine, correction of vices, supporting the poor and other afflicted, and the edifying character of the meetings. The next article deals with the equal authority and power of the true pastors under one head—the only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ. The result of this sole leadership is that no church can place itself above others. After that the calling and election of the office bearers is discussed. Nobody becomes an office bearer in the church on his own authority; it happens only through election. Any departure from this rule is possible only in exceptional situations of decline when God himself can come to the aid of the church. The thirty-second article states that it is good and useful for the *superintendans* to be elected too; jointly they can decide which regulations are needed for the whole body and take care that there is no departure

from what Christ had ordered. This does not mean that there is no room for individual rules, depending on the local situation. Finally, all human inventions for the church are rejected. Only excommunication is upheld because this had been instituted by Christ himself.

Here we also find that, right from the start, the church is linked with proclamation. Without ministry there is no church. Second, we see that the distinction between visible and invisible church has made way for the distinction between true and false church. The former distinction seems to be better suited to the framework of a popular church, while the second distinction is clearer where people are called to make a choice between two churches. We must also emphasize that this document speaks only of three offices; there is no separate teacher's office. Because of the sole leadership of Christ, the hierarchy of offices is not the only hierarchy that is rejected: the same applies to the hierarchy of churches. The context of city states has made way for a national framework. In the same context, we also find that a function is introduced that has to watch over the solidarity of the different churches: that of the superintendent. It is not clear how far this is a new office.

LA DISCIPLINE ECCLÉSIASTIQUE (1559)

At the synod of Paris in 1559, the meeting not only approved a confession of faith, but a church order as well. Because the original, handwritten copies were lost, it is not clear whether the original text contained 40, 41, or 42 articles.¹⁶ Later on many additions, improvements, and clarifications were added to this church order. The subtitle *en voicy le premier proiect rapporté à la substance d'icelle, comme elle est contenue és escrit de Apostres* shows that, as far as this church order was concerned, the organization of the church was part of its confession.

This church order reveals how far the context has changed from an urban to a national reformation. The first five articles deal with relations between the congregations on a level beyond the local. The basic principles are that no congregation shall dominate another, that each meeting at this level shall elect a president whose mandate ends at

¹⁶ We base ourselves on the text edition in Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen*, 75–79.

the end of the meeting, that the ministers are always accompanied by several elders or deacons, and that this brotherly gathering is concluded by celebrating the Lord's Supper. The ministers, in the company of an elder or deacon, shall meet twice each year.

Articles 6 to 19 discuss the office of minister: their election by the church council with right of approbation by the congregation (6), their ordination after prayer and laying on of hands (8), their relations with other congregations (7 and 9), the role of provincial synods in case of disputes (10–11), the fact that their ministry is for life (12), agreements in cases of emergency and persecution (13–14), exercising discipline over the ministers by church council and synod (15, 17–19), and the congregation's pastoral responsibility for the minister (16).

Articles 20 to 25 are about elders and deacons; together they form the 'senate' of the congregation under the presidency of the minister (20). This means that the deacons have a seat in the church council, in contrast to what was common practice in Geneva. The elders, whose office is only temporary, are responsible for gathering the people together and for reporting scandals to the church council (21). The deacons, whose offices are also temporary, have responsibility for visiting the poor, the prisoners and the sick, and for instruction in the catechism in people's homes; they are not allowed to preach or to administer the sacrament, but are only allowed to say prayers and read from scripture (22–24). These two offices are also subject to discipline (25). The main subject of the concluding articles is the role of the church council in the case of marriage ceremonies and excommunications.

The persecutions had an impact on how the church was organized. Due to the lack of support from the government and the uncertainty with respect to the permanent availability of ministers, it was important to ensure that the local congregations could look after themselves. This was achieved by building up the church council. While the main purpose of the *Consistorium* in Geneva had been to serve as an ecclesiastical counterweight to disciplining by the government, in the *Discipline Ecclésiastique* the church council had been made into the most important policy making body of the local congregation. Its members are responsible for the election of ministers, discipline—including disciplining the ministers—and marriage ceremonies. Because ministers are not always available, the deacon's office is made into a sort of vicar's office, whereby only preaching and administering the sacraments remain the reserve of the minister. The French Reformed church order is the first one that can be called a presbyteral church order because the presby-

terium, the church council, plays a central role in church life, characterized by the fact that the office bearers act as colleagues.

In addition to its presbyteral character, it also has a synodical character. To promote the unity of the congregations, it has developed a special organizational structure: the synod. In contrast to Switzerland, where synods remained the preserve of ministers, in France deacons and elders also became synod members. The provincial synods have even greater importance than the national synod, which is responsible for amendments to the church order. They are not just a supporting body, but have authority¹⁷ because they make decisions in the case of dispute or contention and are responsible for the allocation of the few ministers to the many congregations that ask for one.

CONFESSIO BELGICA (1561)

With this confession we move from Switzerland via France to the Netherlands. This confession of faith, with its 37 articles, would prove to be very influential. Originally, the text had been written in French, but a Latin version was available, and a year later a Low German translation was made.¹⁸ The Convention of Wesel of 1568, the Synod of Emden of 1571, and the Synod of Dordrecht of 1618/19 later endorsed the document. The author is Guido de Brès, one of Calvin's pupils, who was also familiar with the *Confessio Gallicana*. This confession of faith is accompanied by a petition to the authorities to be more tolerant to the believers in the Netherlands who want to live in accordance with the true reformation of the gospel because their main aim is not revolution, and they must be distinguished from the Anabaptists. This will be made particularly clear in the articles about predestination, baptism, and covenant.

Like the *Confessio Gallicana*, the ecclesiology of this confession of faith is in keeping with the article about the unique mediating role of Christ. After article 27 has explained the catholicity of the church as applicable to all times and all places, the next article, about communion with the church, states that this holy gathering of saved people, outside which there is no salvation, must not be rejected by anyone. All

¹⁷ Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 182.

¹⁸ The Latin version can be found in Niesel, *Bekennisschriften und Kirchenordnungen*, 119–136.

ought to join it in order to safeguard the unity within the church, by subjecting themselves to its doctrine and discipline, by bending their neck under the yoke of Christ, and by serving their brothers with the gifts that come from God. Then there follows the call to withdraw from communion with those who do not belong to the church. In one of the following paragraphs, the question is asked how the true church can be distinguished from the false one—from which the believers have to withdraw. The marks of the true church are pure proclamation of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. Not just the church, but Christians can also be recognized by certain characteristics, such as faith, fleeing from sin, striving for justice, true religion, love of one's neighbour, and crucifying the works of the flesh. Not that true Christians are perfect, but they strive for perfection and go on living thanks to the forgiveness of sins. The false church places human institutions above the Word of God, does not administer the sacraments as Christ demanded in his Word, and persecutes those who, in obedience to God's Word, resist sin, love of money, and idolatry.

The next three articles discuss the church's ministry. This is based on the fact that the church should be governed in accordance with the spiritual policy that Christ taught us in his Word. There must be 'ministers' or pastors who proclaim the Word of God and administer the sacraments. But there must also be elders and deacons, who—together with the pastors—form the *quasi senatus* of the church in order to safeguard true religion, the progress of true doctrine, the spiritual discipline of offenders, and helping the poor and those who mourn. For that reason, people must be elected who comply with the requirements that Paul gives in 1 Timothy 3.

In the next article, 31, three essential aspects of how the office bearers function are listed: the legitimate, ecclesiastical election for the three offices, the equal authority and power of all ministers under the leadership of Christ—the only and universal bishop of the church, and, finally, respect for the ministers and the elders. The deacons are not mentioned here. The next article rejects a number of rules that are human inventions and do not promote unity. Only excommunication is retained because that is in accordance with God's Word.

What is striking when we compare the *Confessio Belgica* with the *Confessio Gallicana* is the great similarity between them, including the way they are formulated. The following differences can be identified: the omission of offices in the ecclesiological foundation, the omission of deacons from the office bearers who merit respect, and the lack of

references to office bearers functioning beyond the local level. For the rest, all conclusions about the ministry in the French confession of faith also apply to this confession of faith from the Low Countries.

CONVENTION OF WESEL (1568)

In October and November 1568, the delegates of approximately twenty Dutch-speaking refugee congregations in Germany gathered to prepare the way for a future general synod in a type of ‘pre-synod.’ The most important matter was to find a joint approach to building up the individual congregations—in particular, with regard to core issues such as offices, administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. Although this text is not included in the confession collections of Müller and Niesel and is not discussed in Gassmann’s work, we want to pay some attention to it because the detailed discussion of how the office bearers function did influence the further development of the offices in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.¹⁹

Four offices—ministers, teachers, elders, and deacons—have been instituted on the basis of apostolic authority; these office bearers are responsible for the correct proclamation of God’s Word, church discipline, and ministry to the poor. The doctrine of ministry is one of those subjects where imprudent deviation from the joint agreement should be avoided because they belong to matters that are based on God’s Word, the practice and the examples of the apostles, and the old established habits of the churches (I,11).

Chapter two, about ministers and teachers, assumes that legitimate calling, election, approbation, serious investigation, and legitimate ordination are absolutely necessary (II,1). With regard to calling and election, it is important to watch out for the ambitions of the person to be called, as well as for the unbridled and impetuous affection of the people and the domineering ambitions of the elders and leaders (II,2–6). After describing the investigation into their doctrine and conduct (II,

¹⁹ For the text of the convention we make use of the German translation of J.F.G. Goeters, *Die Beschlüsse des Weseler Konvents von 1568* (Düsseldorf: Pressverband der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, 1968) and of a large selection of articles of the Wesel Convention in the Latin version with Dutch translations in J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, W.F. Dankbaar, W.J. Kooiman, D. Nauta, N. van der Zijpp, (red.), *Documenta Reformatoria. Teksten uit de geschiedenis van Kerk en Theologie in de Nederlanden sedert de Hervorming*, Deel I tot het einde van de 17de eeuw (Kampen: Kok, 1960), 181–191.

7–12), the task of the ministers, sometimes called pastors and bishops in scripture and sometimes elders or presbyters, is said to consist of the proclamation of the Word of God, the interpretation of the Word for instruction, exhortation, comforting, and admonishing, both in public and at home, and also the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline (II,13).

Teachers and prophets are added to the ministers; they also teach, but in a different way (II,14). II.15 states that a future synod will give a more detailed definition of the office of teacher, but there is detailed information about the office of prophet (II,16–20). Prophets take turns to explain successive scripture passages at regular, set times in a college of prophets, in the presence of the congregation, and in accordance with Paul's institution. Prophesying must not be confused with discussing—a possible cause for dispute. Ministers and teachers, as well as deacons and elders and even members of the congregation with the gift of prophecy, can be counted as members of the college of prophets. Prophets and teachers are invited to the church council in case of disputes about doctrine or ceremonies. According to Balke, this document was influenced not only by Zwingli, but also by the London church order and Á Lasco.²⁰ Both 1 Corinthians 14 and the application of this passage in the first Reformed churches conspire in an attempt to keep joint systematic scriptural exegesis in some sort of framework for ministers within the church. The emphasis on building up the congregation, the rejection of the question and answer method, and the openness of this meeting must prevent the gatherings of the college of prophets from degenerating into a source of dispute and casuistry. There is less emphasis than in Zwingli on academic exegesis of scripture on the basis of the source languages. After the Convention of Wesel, this joint systematic exegesis by ministers will vanish from sight. One reason is probably that Calvin consigns the prophet's office to the past.

The offices of elder (IV) and deacon (V) are discussed in separate chapters. Ministers and elders form the church council. Elders and deacons work together to organize help for the poor. Surprisingly, the chapter about discipline (VII) contains two lists of sins: tolerable and intolerable lapses by ministers that are practically identical with those of the *Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques*.

²⁰ Balke, *Calvijn en de doperse radikalen*, 252.

In conclusion, we can say that the Convention of Wesel regards the way in which the church functions through its office bearers not as a human order, but as one that is based on apostolic institution. This formula is based on a strong wish to achieve uniformity in the way the offices in different congregations function. There is also a considerable fear of misuse of power by ministers, by elders, by church councils and by uncontrolled congregational meetings. This is why the collegial rule of the church by church councils is given such importance. If the church councils fail to find a solution, it will be possible to fall back on the numerous ecclesiastical meetings. The fact that the function of the ‘superintendent’ no longer exists can be due to the circumstance that the churches had to function independently because their situation ‘under the cross’ made regular contact difficult, or to the fear of potential misuse of power. Even the prophet’s office functions only in the framework of communality, as a way to practice collegial exegesis at the level of the local congregation.

THE SYNOD OF EMDEN (1571)

Three years after Wesel, a synod meeting took place in Emden,²¹ for which preparations had been made in Wesel. This was a synod for congregations of refugees from the Low Countries that was also attended by delegates from Germany and the Netherlands. The delegates from England had been invited too late to be able to attend.

At this synod the emphasis was on the organization of the synodal unit and based on the model provided by the French synodal structure. As with the *Discipline Ecclésiastique*, the foundation is the equality of the congregations, whereby no congregation rules over the others. At this synod, this egalitarianism was also applied to the offices: “... gheen Dienaer des Woorts, gheen Ouderlinck, noch Diaken sal d’een over d’ander heerschappie voeren, maar een yeghelijck sal hen voor alle suspicien, ende aenlockinge om te heerschappen wachten” (“... no minister of the Word, or elder or deacon shall exercise dominion over

²¹ The Latin version of the text can be found under the title “Acta synodi ecclesiarum Belgicarum habitae Emqdae 1571” in Niesel, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen*, 279–287; fragments of the Dutch version in Bakhuizen, Van den Brink, Dankbaar, Kooimans, Nauta, Van der Zijpp, *Documenta Reformatoria*. Deel I, 192–193; and a German translation was published by E. Lomberg, *Die Akten der Emder Synode von 1571* (Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1971), 49–66.

another. Rather shall they be vigilant lest they should give cause to be suspected of desiring dominion.”) In the Latin version the avoidance of exercising dominion over others is seen as applicable to each separate office in turn: no minister shall exercise dominion over minister, no elder over elder, no deacon over deacon.²² In addition to the weekly meetings of ministers, elders and deacons in the church council, the annual provincial synod and the biennial general synod, the synod of Emden introduces a three- or six-monthly classis meeting. The classis is an intermediary between church council and provincial synod.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the confession of faith documents researched, we come to the following conclusions:

1. A church without ministers is not a true church. In the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* and in the *Confessio Gallicana* the ministry is a given in the ecclesiological foundation. This is in accordance with Zwingli and Calvin, who saw the church as functioning as mother via the proclamation by ministers.
2. In the church orders, the concrete order of the offices is based on apostolic institution. The tentative attitude, which gave Calvin's structuring in the *Institutes* a provisional character, has disappeared. The specific situations require clear answers. How the ministry is understood has become a matter of confession of faith.
3. Calvin's Christocratic principle remains and obtains two definite emphases: no church shall rule over another church, and no office bearer shall rule over another office bearer.
4. These confessions of faith know different numbers of offices. The *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* has only one office within the church, the other documents that are more strongly influenced by Calvin have three or four—depending on whether or not teachers are given office bearer status.
5. The way the office bearers function at supra-congregational level is ordered via classis and synod meetings. In this way this functioning is given an aspect beyond the local.

²² Niesel, *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen*, 279: “... nullus Minister in Ministros, Senior in Seniores, Diaconus in Diaconos primatum seu dominationem obtenit, ...”

6. At a local level the church council/presbyterium became more and more important as the expression of collegial rule; this means that we can speak of a presbyteral church order.
7. While Calvin regarded the office of elder merely as an auxiliary office to the pastor's office, in the church orders this office is given a role of ever increasing importance in ruling the church. The vacuum regarding governance that was caused by the disappearance of civil authorities support is filled in with persons elected from the congregation; they not only oversee discipline but also take on a broader policy-making task within the church.
8. The oldest church orders have a separate office for safeguarding unity. But for practical reasons, or possibly out of fear of misuse of power, the emphasis is increasingly placed on collegiality in governing the church, not least in order to preserve unity.
9. These different emphases in the various confession of faith become clearer against the background of transition from a situation in which a people's church in cooperation with the authorities is being changed to a situation in which the church is being built up under persecution. In this latter situation, what is needed before anything else is clarity and a rejection of new domination by tyrants. The fear of misuse of power has remained a constant in the order of the Reformed churches.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MINISTRY IN THE REFORMED TRADITION OF THE 16TH CENTURY: CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

In a manual for practical theology, the Reformed theologian G. Heitink writes how in Bucer's and Calvin's works leading lay persons are given the office of elder or deacon as complementary offices to that of minister, and he goes on to say that Calvin links his three offices with the threefold office of Christ: prophet (minister), priest (deacon), and king (elder).¹ It is apparent from our study so far that Calvin does not connect the three offices of Christ with the ecclesiastical offices. The origin of this connection lies in the German Roman Catholic theology of ministry of the last century. They widened the classical dual description *potestas ordinis et jurisdictionis* behind which the priestly and kingly tasks are hidden by adding a third element; namely, the prophetic. But whereas Calvin purposely emphasized the unique nature of the work of Christ by not transferring Christ's offices, the Roman Catholic theologians made this transfer. The thought behind this was that the office of Christ is continued in the ecclesiastical office since Christ is no longer physically present and working on earth.²

It appears that the description, which Heitink gives of this element of Calvin's theology of ministry, is reasonably and widely accepted in certain parts of the Reformed tradition. The fact that such opinions can be read in a series of handbooks that want to offer an overview for practical theology as a whole might indicate that some of the academic theologians within the Reformed tradition have lost living contact with the sources of the Reformed ecclesiology and theology of ministry. This seems to be confirmed by what had been found in the introduction;

¹ "Calvijn verbindt zijn driedeling met het drievoudig ambt van Christus: profeet (predikant), priester (diaken) en koning (ouderling)." G. Heitink, *Praktische theologie: geschiedenis, theorie, handelingsvelden* (Handboeken Praktische Theologie) (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 101.

² In this context, see also P.E. Persson, *Repraesentatio Christi, Der Ambtsbegriff in der neueren römisch-katholischen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 25–33 and 167–177.

namely, that during the past decades silence has descended on the theology of ministry in a considerable part of the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands. More specifically, since the studies of the Roman Catholic theologians Ganoczy and Gassmann, we have found that in the field of theological, scientific research there have been few in-depth, comprehensive studies with a systematic theological emphasis from Reformed theologians of the ecclesiology of Calvin or of individual confessions of faith. A number of publications on these subjects have mainly indicated an interest in church history and/or church order. In the last few decades, Bucer has received some attention with a number of studies about his views of church and ministry,³ and Zwingli was honored with a separate investigation into his ecclesiology in Hauser's 1994 study.

The need for new research into the sources of the Reformed theology of ministry, with systematic reflection as its aim, is not removed by this limited study; rather, it confirms the need. In this section we have gathered the results of the partial studies regarding the theology of ministry in Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and a number of early Reformed confessions of faith. Although, on the one hand, we realize that a considerable number of interesting theologians have been left out of this study; on the other hand, we are of the opinion that the works that have been discussed here were of such vital importance for determining the character of the Reformed tradition that on the basis of this limited research it should be possible to chart a number of fundamental concepts that have strongly influenced the Reformed theology of ministry and ministers' practice right from the beginning. These elements will be used in dialogue with the theology of ministry in the Lima document in the next section, and as basis for suggestions for a renewed Reformed theology of ministry in the concluding part. We present our findings about the Reformed theology of ministry in the sixteenth century in the form of a number of theses, each of which will be explained briefly.

1. Because renewal of a tradition always requires a lively intercourse with the sources of that tradition, it is important that systematic, Reformed theologians repeatedly return to their sources in order to study them, including those concerning theology of ministry.

³ Van 't Spijker, *De ambten bij Martin Bucer*, Hammann, *Entre la secte et la cité. Le projet d'Eglise du Réformateur Martin Bucer (1491-1551)*, and Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ*.

2. Luther's, Zwingli's, and Calvin's reflections on theology of ministry are essentially in agreement with each other. Their differences are not those of principle, but are mainly caused by the fact that they worked in different historical contexts.

The breach between Lutherans and Reformed was not caused by differences in the field of the church's ministry, but by differences of opinion about the understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The differences in theology of ministry between Zwingli, Calvin, and the Reformed confessions of faith from the sixteenth century are mainly concerned with assessment of the role of the civil authorities. What they have in common is an abhorrence of ministers of the church whose aim is to dominate. On the contrary, ministry is service, with Christ's rule as its aim, working through his Spirit and Word—first in the church and from thereon in society. This service needs a description in functional terms.

3. Ministry is a gift from God to his church.

The three theologians and the Reformed confessions of faith do not regard the way the offices function in the church as a question of human organization, but of divine rule; neither the church nor the believers must withdraw from this rule. This is because the Lord chose to use proclamation by ministers to bring salvation to humankind. The proclamation of the Word by ministers is the God-given order through which salvation enters the church. Without proclamation of the Word by ministers, there is no church. The pure proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments—in other words, the *notae ecclesiae*—require that the Word be proclaimed by the minister and the sacrament be administered by the minister. Ministry does not just find its origin in human need, but is fundamentally given from above. This means that the ministry in the church cannot be claimed by just anyone; it can only be received in calling and election. The importance of the ministry in the Reformed tradition cannot satisfactorily be described by using anthropological models and functional concepts.

4. Not the ministry, but service by ministers is the central point of the theology of ministry.

With their functional approach to ministry, Luther and the Reformed theologians broke the tendency to give the ministry ontological significance that had characterized the medieval theology of ministry.

The authority of the ministry is not, in the first instance, bound to the person of the office bearer, but to the correct execution of the task. The authority is the authority of the living Word in the way it functions. The limits to the claims to authority made by the church and the ministry are set by the service to the Word. An office is never a person's possession. Ordination by laying on of hands does not confer a *character indelibilis*. Apostolic succession is not a question of receiving the legally correct consecration, but of accepting the task that was also entrusted to the apostles. The Reformed contribution to an ecumenical discussion about ministry will have to avoid ontological language and use a functional discourse.

5. The ministry is a function that Christ uses for the government of his church.

The central function of ministry is governing the church. This task to give leadership does not mean that the minister is given *carte blanche* to govern autocratically; it can only be understood as *ministerium*, as service, with as its aim the proclamation of the authoritative Word of Christ. In principle, the ministry is service to the rule of Christ in the church. In revitalizing its theology of ministry, the Reformed tradition will have to ask the question how giving real leadership by ministers can retain a serving character.

6. The central service by ministers to the rule of Christ is the proclamation of the Word.

The authoritative Word of the Lord is heard in the proclamation of the Word by the ministers. Proclaiming the Word encompasses not only public proclamation and personal encouragement and admonishing, but also administering the sacraments because administering the sacraments cannot be seen as something that is disconnected from proclaiming the Word. To carry out this central task the minister also has to accept liturgical and catechismal tasks and pastoral responsibilities. This task of proclamation requires a thorough theological training, in which the reading and exegesis of scripture from the source languages take a central position. In a new theology of ministry from a Reformed perspective, the service by ministers within the church will have to be described as service to the Word.

7. The Reformed theology of ministry makes it possible to have a variety of offices.

The response of the Reformation to the hierarchical structure of the medieval theology of ministry was to create a range of tasks to be carried out by a variety of office bearers. An evolution took place during the early development of the theology of ministry in the Reformed churches: Luther and Zwingli had only one ecclesiastical office—the proclamation of the Word, which encompassed all functions. Calvin learned from Bucer to differentiate between various offices; following the example given in scripture, ministers' tasks were made into auxiliary offices. The confessions of faith that were written during the time of persecution continue this trend and relate these offices directly to the wider governance of the church through the church council. When looking for possibilities to enable the church to meet new challenges in the future, it is not so important which specific diversifications of the ministry are used: what matters is the ability to develop offices that make it possible to meet God through his Word.

8. The fear of domination by ministers leads to restraint with regard to creating a bishop's supervisory function and of a universal ministry of unity.

Neither is rejected in principle. On the contrary, Calvin recognizes the importance of the offices for the unity of the church. In case of dysfunction, however, they will lose their legitimacy as a sign of unity. To avoid domination by ministers in the church, the Reformed tradition complemented the personal leadership by ministers with a collegial mode of government at each level. In practice, giving collegial leadership was very often the only form of governance by ministers at the supra-local level. The question has to be asked if the offices within the Reformed tradition are able to adequately fulfil their role as focus of unity.

9. In their ministry, the ministers of the Word represent Christ in that they prefigure his presence.

Not one of the theologians and texts that we studied dares to theologically explore the way in which Christ is present through the service of ministers. Calvin operates very carefully here by using concepts such as 'vicar,' 'instrument,' 'presence,' and an image such as the nervous system. This constitutes a challenge to Reformed theology to give a clearer description of the representation of Christ.

10. The ministers of the Word are not representatives or delegates of the community of believers.

The service of the Word does not originate in the community of believers. This means that the *ministerium*, service of the Word that requires a special calling and ordination, must be seen as fundamentally different from the *sacerdotium* of all believers, a priestly task that applies to all believers. In the Reformed theology of ministry, the priesthood of all believers hardly plays any part at all. Even the link between the offices as gifts from Christ to the church, and the gifts from the Spirit which serve to equip the communion of believers has not received much attention. As a result, the line Christ-Ministry-Church has been elaborated in great detail while the line Christ-Church-Ministry has not. This is quite possibly due to the fact that the theology of ministry has a very strong Christological emphasis—although, in the *Institutes*, it is discussed under the external works of the Spirit. This imbalance explains the permanent threat posed by a domineering ministry and new clericalization within the Reformed churches. Can a renewed ministry of theology incorporate a community of faith empowered with gifts of grace?

11. The Reformed tradition holds on to the sign of ordination of ministers but places its own emphases.

In theory, ordination exists for the two ordained basic offices that the tradition has handed down: that of presbyter/minister of the Word and deacon. In practice, however, ordination is reserved for ministers of the Word. The office of elder is not a consecrated office. The ordination loses its significance if the service is not taken on by the office bearer. In addition, in the Reformed tradition it has always been emphasized that the election in the process that leads to ordination must take place with the approval of the people. Although Calvin hesitated as to whether the ordination can or cannot be called a sacrament, the tradition has not given it that name because of the negative power connotations it might imply.

12. In the search for a biblically founded structure for ministry, it is not the result, but the method that is the guiding principle for the Reformed tradition.

Although Zwingli and Calvin realized that the Bible does not contain a blueprint for the structure of ministry, scripture provided them with norms in their search for a new model of functioning as ministers.

Listening to scripture while keeping an eye on the needs of the time was a fascinating business that led to different results in different contexts. Due to their nature, the confessions of faith were less able to speak in provisional and open terms about offices in the church, but as Reformed confessions they are very much a product of place and time. This method of scripture research with an eye on the need of the time must also be the guiding principle when looking for a structure for the church's ministry that is in keeping with our own time.

13. Reformed theology of ministry needs to be in accordance with the tradition of the church.

When reforming the structure for ministry of the church, Calvin and Zwingli wanted to remain completely within the tradition of the Western church. Even when searching for an adequate order for ministry in the church of their time, they kept in constant dialogue with the church fathers. The *Institutes* especially shows how dependent it is on the tradition. Here we find confirmation that the offices are essential elements of ecclesiastical structure, that the way ministry is ordered is built on the two ordained basic offices of presbyter and deacon, that election and ordination are permanent elements of the process of becoming an office bearer, and that the service of ministers is linked with the exercise of authority.

PART TWO

BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY:
AN ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE TO
THE REFORMED TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

TOUCHING A NERVE

The real weakness and the basic flaw of the Lima statements about ministry are so deeply embedded in the system that it is not possible to repair them with merely cosmetic measures. Lima III brings to light and reveals to the whole world what had already been questionable in Lima I and II. I refer to the idea that a church that trusts its structures and institutions and boasts of its sacramental task to bring salvation would be able to unify the divided churches of today and be a credible witness of God's mercy to the whole world.¹

These are the words of New Testament scholar Markus Barth, the son of Karl Barth. He balks at the words used in the *Faith and Order* statement about baptism (*Lima I*), eucharist (*Lima II*), and ministry (*Lima III*) to the churches drawn up during its meeting in Lima in January 1982.² What he hears here is a sort of ecclesiastical language that uses pretensions that it cannot fulfil because it has forgotten that we are beggars who live by the grace of God, and because the Spirit is free. He feels the threat posed by an ecclesiastical figure that pretends that it incorporates the Spirit. It gives him the impression of a hideous and laughable spectacle. This is completely useless. This theological statement gives a wrong message about the church in the world. The only solution would be a radical breach by responsible church leaders with this sort of thinking and language about the church and its sacraments and services:

¹ M. Barth, "Hinter Glas stecken. Fragen zu den Lima-Papieren," *Evangelische Kommentare* 18 (1985) 4, 213. "Die eigentliche Schwäche und der Grundschaden der Lima-Äusserungen über das Amt liegt jedoch so tief im System, dass ihnen mit etwas Kosmetik schwerlich beizukommen ist. Lima III bringt ans Licht und posaunt in alle Welt, was schon in Lima I und II bedenklich war. Gemeint ist die Vorstellung, eine auf ihre Strukturen und Institutionen vertrauende, sich mit ihrem sakramentalen Heilsvermittlungsauftrag brüstende Kirche könne die heutigen zerspaltenen Kirchen einigen und aller Welt ein glaubhaftes Zeugnis von der Gnade Gottes geben."

² The English version was published as *Faith and Order Paper 111*; its title was *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). This statement is often referred to with the acronym BEM.

Whilst Lima contains a mass of statements which contain claims to ecclesiastical/sacramental provision of salvation on the basis of a ministerial authority guaranteed by God and well-preserved traditions I do not see what the use this document has for inter-church or mission purposes. In the same way as all Christians churches and congregations should confess that they are beggars and that they have always contributed to disharmony among themselves and among groups of people and that they are still doing so.³

As far as he is concerned, the request regarding 'reception' of this text amounts to uncritical acceptance. For this reason, he finally suggests that this statement should be enveloped in glass and concrete for all times; the same fate that is reserved for dangerous nuclear waste:

That does not mean that the reception which the Lima authors hoped to receive and which the ecumenical central committee recommended is refused. Because in its own way this is a consistent, impressive, even classic document, no attempts should be made to tinker with it. Because no criticism or revision proposals were expected, but only acts of reception, the document should in fact be "received" *tel quel* (acknowledged without further comments). It merits careful discussion. After that, however, it should, with thanks for services rendered, be put behind glass or wrapped in concrete, to be put away at some very secure storage place.⁴

It is obvious that the Lima text touched a nerve with Markus Barth. Ecclesiastical convergence texts, with their careful choice of words and balanced arguments, always invite a thoughtful answer. This most certainly applies to the Lima statement and its development history of

³ Barth, "Hinter Glas stecken," 214. "Weil Lima ein Übermass an Aussagen enthält, welche Anspruch auf kirchlich-sakramentale Heilsvermittlung von Gott garantierte Amtsvollmacht und wohlbehüteten Überlieferungen erheben, sehe ich nicht, welchen Nutzen dieses Dokument für innerkirchliche oder missionarische Zwecke haben soll. Nicht anders als jeder Christ sollten Kirchen und Gemeinden eingestehen, dass sie selbst Bettler sind und zur Uneinigkeit untereinander und unter den menschlichen Gruppen und Völkern beigesteuert haben und noch beitragen."

⁴ Barth, "Hinter Glas stecken," 214. "Das heisst nicht, dass man die Rezeption, welche die Lima-Autoren erhofft haben, und welche der ökumenische Zentralausschluss empfohlen hat, verweigert. Da es um ein in seiner Weise einheitliches, eindruckliches, ja klassisches Werk geht, sollten alle Versuche unterbleiben, daran herumzunörgeln oder -zuflicken. Weil weder Kritik noch Revisionsvorschläge, sondern einzig Akte der Rezeption erwartet werden, sollte das Dokument in der Tat *tel quel* 'empfangen' (ohne weitere Kommentare zur Kenntnis genommen) werden. Es verdient, sorgfältig diskutiert zu werden. Dann aber sollte es unter Verdankung der geleisteten Dienste hinter Glas oder in Beton verpackt an einem sicheren Ort aufbewahrt werden."

more than fifty years. His response is definitely connected to the contents of the text. In his opinion, the essence of being the church as he understands it, based on his interpretation of scripture, is in danger of being lost due to the way in which the Lima text speaks about sacraments and ministry.

With his radically negative standpoint, Markus Barth is relatively isolated, but the official responses from Reformed churches to the Lima report also clearly demonstrate a large degree of reservation; in particular, with regard to the Lima text's section about ministry. The tone is generally more diplomatic and moderate, but there is an affinity with Barth's fears. To illustrate this, I quote part of the official response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium,⁵ of which the author is a member.

From the Reformed standpoint, priority has been given through the centuries to the preaching of the gospel. The question of *the* faith of the church can be answered only if appropriate distinctions are drawn. Through the ages, the faith has experienced the constraints imposed by historical circumstances, and there have been excesses and errors. We therefore have to speak both of continuity *and* of discontinuity. In this context, the problem relating to how the ministry and church structures are to be understood is in our eyes only of secondary importance.

Nevertheless we do consider discussion on the ministry to be of first-class importance as BEM seems to uphold a clerical view of the ministry which is liable to channel the saving work of the word and the Spirit into confined traditional courses, leaving no freedom for the prophetic dynamism of renewal.

BEM shows us quite plainly the ministerial structure of the majority of churches, especially those tied to the doctrine of apostolic succession. However, through the centuries, there has always existed a minority, visible more or less, which has not conformed and has rested its case on scripture.

Zwingli and Calvin in particular commended a view of the church which would leave maximum freedom for the activity of the word and the Spirit and would give most scope for a *conciliar* structure as the instrument for taking decisions, in virtue of the elements of participation and inclusiveness which it implied.

⁵ This response can be found in M. Thurian (ed.), *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 168–182.

When we speak of the *ministry of the church* (its service and mission) we are talking about the proclamation of the gospel by word and deed. That ministry is entrusted to all Christians.

We regard as legitimate any ordination of ministries in so far as it matches up to the supreme ministry which is the preaching of the gospel, and in so far as it takes account of the biblical witness and current social realities.⁶

This response expresses fear of domination by ministers, a domination that excludes participation by all believers; fear of an ecclesiastical structure that hampers the freedom of Word and Spirit; and fear of a policy that looks to the past and lacks the prophetic dynamism of renewal.

In the second place, this response demonstrates that the way the Reformed tradition deals with church and ministry is very ambiguous. On the one hand, the Reformed view of ministry and church structures is that they are only of secondary importance, but, on the other hand, the way in which BEM deals with ministry demands a very urgent response. If church and ministry claim that they can dispense salvation, this becomes a matter of the greatest importance because this involves the deepest question; namely, the salvation of humankind and the world. There must be no misunderstanding about this. Most churches of the Reformed tradition do not like to enter into discussion about these subjects. They are very unwilling discussion partners. The Lutheran theologian U. Kühn characterizes the problem of ministry in the ecumenical discussion aptly as “ein ungleichseitiges Problem.”⁷ A. Houtepen refers to it as an “asymmetrical dialogue.”⁸ But if Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians need to have the problem of ministry resolved before it is possible to recognize each other’s ministries and before everyone can celebrate the Lord’s Supper together, then we have no other option but to start talking.

A. Houtepen, one of the Roman Catholic theologians of the commission responsible for writing the text, notices a degree of inconsis-

⁶ *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 174.

⁷ U. Kühn, “Eine ökumenische Schlüsselfrage. Erwägungen zum kirchlichen Amt im Lima-Papier,” *Evangelische Kommentare* 17 (1984) 6, 307.

⁸ According to the title of his speech delivered when he accepted a chair in the field of ecumenism at the University of Utrecht, *Een asymmetrische dialoog. Historische kanttekeningen bij de onderlinge erkenning van de kerkelijke ambten* (Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid Universiteit Utrecht, 1994).

tency in their attitude to the doctrine of ecclesiastical structure in some churches of the Reformed tradition.⁹ It is not difficult to understand why he comes to this conclusion, but there is, nevertheless, some degree of logic in these churches' attitude. The Reformed logic is as follows: we should not stand too much on our principles with regard to church and ministry, but if others want to hold on to their principles at all cost, we have to be careful and keep asking if salvation itself is not being called into question. The churches of the Reformed tradition would do well, however, not to be content with this way of reasoning; they should instead regard Houtepen's remark as a challenge. The ecumenical dialogue should encourage the Reformed churches to reflect more deeply on their doctrine of ministry. Just repeating the classical arguments will not convince their partners in the current dialogue. If ministry and ecclesiastical structures, in particular, are of fundamental importance to the other discussion partner, it is not enough just to shrug one's shoulders or to become indignant if they continue to express their fundamental conviction. Even if ministry is not a matter of prime importance in the Reformed tradition, the fundamental conviction held by the other traditions not only demands respect, but also deserves an active contribution to the thought processes involved: the Reformed churches must ask themselves how they can achieve their own cohesive theology of ministry.

Finally, we note that there is a clear reference to Zwingli and Calvin in this response. This is all the more striking because, traditionally, people from the Reformed tradition refer more frequently to their confessions of faith than to the Reformers themselves. They do not have the absolute authority of scripture, but the way they read scripture and the resulting opinion about church and ministry cannot simply be ignored. What they have to say is too important for that.

When looking at all the responses to the Lima report, we are struck by the fact that the section about ministry evoked the greatest number of responses from all churches and theologians. There is not much in the way of dispute with regard to baptism, but when it comes to ministry the congeniality is at its weakest. In general, there is a considerable degree of agreement about baptism, and there are more questions with regard to some passages about the eucharist and a

⁹ A. Houtepen, "Kerken en het Lima-rapport: een oecumenische vuurproef," *Kōsmos en Oecumene* 21 (1987) 1–2, 24.

considerable amount of reservation about the ministry. In this respect, the churches of the Reformed tradition do not differ much from other churches. However, churches from this group have more objections to the section about ministry than any of the others, and in some instances the attitude is quite simply one of rejection.

These negative responses are challenging and give rise to many questions. Is this reservation really justified? Does this involve putting something on the line which should be regarded as essential when speaking about the Reformed church, its sacraments, and ministry? Is the World Council of Churches being dominated by Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians?¹⁰ Does the Lima text—in particular with regard to its vision on ministry—involve building an ecclesiastical unity based on a view of the church which is founded on an ecclesiastical-sacramental salvation and guaranteed by God in ministers' authority? If so, is there anything left of what Zwingli and Calvin taught about church and ministry?

We have long since left the commotion surrounding the Lima report behind us. In the first instance the churches placed special emphasis on their own theology of sacraments and ministry. Armed with the necessary detachment, we can now return to the text of the Lima report—no longer defensively emphasizing our own values, but listening once more. What is being said here? What are the questions for our own tradition? We do this from the basic standpoint that the Reformed tradition has pronounced fundamentally important opinions about church and ministry, but we also realize that the last word has not been spoken about these subjects; we must be open to what we can learn from the convictions of our discussion partners, because they share in the Spirit of God as well.

¹⁰ Barth, "Hinter Glas stecken," 212 speaks of a "Drei-Viertel Ökumene" in which Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Old-Catholics, and some Lutherans take up position opposite the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists, which could make the rift in the church even deeper.

PURPOSES AND METHOD

The purpose is threefold:

1. A thorough analysis of the section about ministry of the Lima statement of the 1982 *Faith and Order*.

We intend our work to be both history-based and text-based. The development of each chapter and each paragraph will be traced by studying the successive versions which lead to the definitive Lima text. With regard to the text, the emphasis will be on the internal development of the document, and attention will be paid to the connections as well as to the contradictions and discontinuities in reasoning.

2. An analysis of the critical responses from the Reformed tradition, from churches, and theologians.

What do they agree with, but even more importantly, what do they object to? What do they regard as 'unacceptable'? What do they think is missing? Where do they have their own interpretation, approach, emphases, and additions? And where do they disagree among themselves? Here the discussion points are gathered that originate in the Reformed tradition in connection with specific aspects of the theology of ministry, and how they are connected. In addition, however, these aspects will be weighed and evaluated in the framework of the analysis made in the text. Is the criticism justified in view of what is being said? Does it address the issues?

3. An overview of lessons and questions for the Reformed tradition that is based on its analysis of the text and its responses.

In doing so, we will make use of the results of the questions referred to above, but also of the study of the Reformed theology of ministry in the sixteenth century. The approach chosen has been mainly determined by the search for elements that complement and/or correct the Reformed theology of ministry and is born of the conviction that the Reformers did not leave us a comprehensive theology of ministry, and of the feeling that the changed ecumenical context of the early twenty-first century demands new emphasis in the theology of ministry of the Reformed churches.

When structuring this study we will be led by the structure of the text itself; namely, the way it is divided into chapters and paragraphs. This means that we intend to achieve each of the three consecutive aims for

each chapter of the Lima text. But before that, we will have to look at the text: its history, who sent it, to whom was it addressed, the status of the text, its aims, the hermeneutical viewpoints, the relationship between the sacraments of baptism and eucharist in comparison to the ministry, the structure of this study, and that of the ministry text.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ECUMENICAL CONVERGENCE TEXT OF BEM

During its triennial meeting held 2–16 January 1982 in the Peruvian capital, Lima, the plenary Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches unanimously accepted a text with the title *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. The text was released for publication and offered to the churches in the conviction that this document was published at a moment in time to which the commission had been led by the Holy Spirit—“a *kairos* of the ecumenical movement when sadly divided churches have been enabled to arrive at substantial theological agreements.”¹

This document is indeed unique as an ecumenical piece of work. It had never occurred before that theologians from the majority of Christian traditions had been able to jointly write a text that they deemed ripe to be put before their churches about such controversial subjects as baptism, eucharist and ministry—whose practice had produced such exclusion and schism. The responses were overwhelming as well, which can be demonstrated by the following figures: by 1990 the text had been translated into 31 languages, an estimated 400,000 copies had been printed, and 186 official responses from churches had been received.² These figures give some impression of the reception this publication received and of its impact.

In this chapter we shall study the context of the BEM report. To this end, we shall deal with the following subjects: the history leading up to the report, its place in the ecumenical search for unity, *Faith and Order* as sender, the status of the document as a convergence statement, the hermeneutical basis, BEM as element of the tradition, the churches as addressees, a reception process as the aim, and the ongoing reflection on its hermeneutical basis. In this introduction we make use of the foreword that precedes the actual text.³

¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, x.

² The source of these figures is *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990. Report on the Process and Responses* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), 3–10.

³ This foreword does not have the same authority as the three sections of BEM because the commission did not bring it to a vote. About this see M. Kinnamon (ed.),

THE PRECEDING HISTORY

“The three statements are the fruit of a 50-year process of study stretching back to the first Faith and Order Conference at Lausanne in 1927.”⁴ The text is a provisional conclusion to an extraordinarily long period of ecumenical study and theological dialogue about baptism, eucharist, and ministry.⁵ M. Thurian distinguishes two periods:⁶ a preparatory phase from the First World Conference in Lausanne (1927) until the plenary meeting of *Faith and Order* in Bristol (1967), and a finalizing period from Bristol to Lima 1982. Until the Third World Conference of *Faith and Order* in Lund (1952), the first phase was dominated by comparative ecclesiology that led to a summation of points of agreement and disagreement. Since Lund, *Faith and Order* have tried to construct a joint Christological, eschatological, and biblical foundation of ecclesiology. Since Bristol, attempts have been made to make this new ecumenical foundation the basis for consensus formulation to achieve doctrinal agreement between the churches. This led to a text about baptism, eucharist, and ministry that was approved by the plenary meeting of *Faith and Order* in Accra in 1974.⁷ This text was then sent to the churches with the request for comments. The responses received from the churches have been incorporated in the definitive version of Lima in 1982.

In all those intervening years, the width of the spectrum of participating Christian traditions has grown immensely. At the beginning of the 20th century, the American Anglicans, the Episcopalians, stood at

Towards Visible Unity. Commission on Faith and Order Lima 1982. Vol. I: Minutes and Addresses (Faith and Order Paper 112) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 83. Since it was written by W.H. Lazareth, the then president of the *Faith and Order* Secretariat, and by Nikos Nissiotis, the then moderator of the *Faith and Order* commission, it does offer an important reading key for the text.

⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, viii.

⁵ The most important texts produced by this period of over 50 years can be found in L. Vischer (ed.), *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927–1963* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963); G. Gassmann (ed.), *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993) and H. Meyer and L. Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (New York/Ramsey: Paulinist Press; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984).

⁶ M. Thurian, “The Lima Document on ‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’: the Event and its Consequences” in M. Thurian (ed.), *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 2–3.

⁷ Published under the title *One Baptism, One Eucharist, And a Mutually Recognized Ministry. Three agreed Statements* (Faith and Order Paper 73) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975).

the cradle of the ecumenical movement. They took the initiative. The first convergence texts were written by Anglicans and by representatives of the great Protestant traditions. After Lund (1952), the Orthodox churches really started to join in, and, after Vatican II, Roman Catholic theologians joined *Faith and Order* without becoming members of the World Council of Churches. Many 'Free Churches' of the congregational type have not joined, not least because sacrament and ministry have a very low priority for them.

Eight years have passed between the Accra text and the final Lima version. The foreword to the Lima text lists three factors that had a direct influence on recreating the Accra statement into the Lima document. First of all, there were the discussions in the standing commission and its editorial group under the presidency of Brother Max Thurian from Taizé. Second, the responses from the churches were analyzed and taken on board en route to the Lima text. Finally, separate ecumenical consultations were held, such as the study group about *episcopate* and the episcopate⁸ in Geneva in 1979. A. Houtepen notices the greater unity of the text, the clearer distinction between convergences and divergences, and a better incorporation of historical-critical research of scripture and tradition in the Lima version in comparison with the Accra text.⁹

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUBJECT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF STRIVING FOR UNITY

The fact that the text is compiled by *Faith and Order*, the theological commission of the World Council of Churches, determines the purpose of this theological statement about baptism, eucharist, and ministry. This is why the foreword to the text begins with a quote from the constitution of the World Council of Churches.¹⁰ As a community of

⁸ Published under the title of *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective* (Faith and Order Paper 102) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980).

⁹ A. Houtepen, "Naar een gemeenschappelijk verstaan van doop, eucharistie en ambt? Context en receptie van de oecumenische 'convergentietekst' van Lima," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 24 (1984) 3, 250.

¹⁰ The World Council of Churches is "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

churches who want jointly to fulfil their common calling, the World Council of Churches tries to achieve a close cooperation in the field of witness and service and visible church unity. With this aim in mind, the World Council's Faith and Order Commission wanted to give the churches theological help to fulfil their task—in the words of the *By-Laws* “to proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ and to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, in order that the world might believe.”¹¹ This visible unity is not an aim in itself, but part of the broader perspective of the churches' calling, to be supported and inspired by the Holy Spirit, and to become a credible sign and instrument of God's saving and transforming purpose for the whole of humankind and the whole of creation.¹² BEM wants to make a contribution to this aim of visible unity of the churches.

Right from the beginning there has been a debate within *Faith and Order* about the purpose of unity.¹³ The third assembly of the World Council in New Delhi (1961) expressed unity in terms of receiving the same baptism, sharing the same eucharist, and recognizing each other's members and ministry.¹⁴ Later on, these formulations were kept just as

¹¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, viii.

¹² This formulation comes from N. Goodall (ed.), *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches Uppsala July 4–20, 1968* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), 17. M.E. Brinkman, *Progress in Unity? Fifty Years of Theology within the World Council of Churches: 1945–1995. A study guide* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1995), 12, points out that this formulation alludes purposely to *Lumen gentium* 1 where the church is referred to as “...signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis ...”.

¹³ About this ongoing dialogue, see also Brinkman, *Progress in Unity?*, 7–37. A. Houtepen, “Eenheid en solidariteit van het verdeelde Christendom” in B. Hoedemaker, A. Houtepen, T. Witvliet (red.), *Oecumene als leerproces. Inleiding in de oecumenica* (Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica Research Publications 37), (Utrecht [etc.]: Zoetermeer: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica; Meine-ma [distr.], 1993), 238, lists four models of unity: reconciled diversity, conciliar community, organic unity, and mutual acceptance. The theological key concept that characterizes the present ecumenical discourse is the word *koinonia* because it is able to cover most aspects of unity and has room for diversity.

¹⁴ “We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that *ministry and members are accepted by all* (EVDB's italics), and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the

specific.¹⁵ In the context of the discussion about unity of the churches, it is not surprising that baptism, eucharist, and ministry were already on the agenda of the First World Conference of *Faith and Order* in Lausanne in 1927.

Why are these three elements so important for church unity? Because both now and in the past the lack of church unity has always been so painfully obvious in these concrete aspects of being the church. Where the baptism of other churches is not recognized and re-baptism takes place, where churches exclude the members of other churches from the Lord's Table, and where churches fail to recognize each other's ministries, mutual excommunication is given concrete form.¹⁶ It is self-evident that this mutual rejection is caused by a different understanding of salvation in Christ. Right from the beginning, the discussion about sacraments and ministry has been a crystallization point of deeper ecclesiological, Christological, and pneumatological questions.¹⁷ As a step towards visible church unity, mutual recognition of baptism and ministry, and hospitality at the Lord's Table are important signs. But in order to achieve this, a basic theological agreement about these three structure elements is vital and necessary.¹⁸

Even if everybody agrees that unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit, this does not mean that a thorough theological dialogue is superfluous. A

task to which God calls his people." §2 of the report of section III of the New Delhi assembly, quoted in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 3.

¹⁵ The statement about unity of the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi (1975) quotes from the formulation arrived at in New Delhi. The Sixth Assembly of Vancouver (1983), the Seventh of Canberra (1991), and the eighth of Harare (1998) repeat the complete mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist, and ministry as elements of the visible unity. For the formulations see Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 1–5.

¹⁶ In "De kerken en het Lima-rapport: een oecumenische vuurproef," *Kōsmos en Oekumene* 21 (1987) 1/2, 13, A. Houtepen points out that although we all know we are rooted in God's covenant with Israel and the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is given to us by apostles and prophets; although we all know that it is our calling to confess to God's kingdom and its rule, we are no longer one people, and we have avoided each other at the immersion in the water of life and at the Lord's table as if our fellow Christians were unclean and suffering from leprosy. We emphasized this avoidance and excommunication because our guides and ministers, pastors, and supervisors refused to give each other the hand of *koinonia*. They did not do this out of malice or bad faith—as we tend to say in our thoughtlessness—but because of what they regarded as the imperative of faith. As a result, we were—in the bosom of our own meetings—communities that were closed off to each other.

¹⁷ Houtepen, "Naar een gemeenschappelijk verstaan van doop, eucharistie en ambt?", 248.

¹⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, viii.

theological report such as BEM does not lead to visible unity, but it can remove a number of theological obstacles and draw a new joint path for churches and believers. Very often there are also many non-theological factors that play a part. They can no longer be allowed to remain hidden behind theological arguments. At the very least, they will have to be identified.

The approach to baptism, eucharist, and ministry is strongly determined by the way these subjects are treated in the framework of the search for visible church unity.¹⁹ The agreed text about ministry is limited to the aspects that are directly or indirectly connected with problems regarding mutual recognition, and the conditions that have to be fulfilled before greater visible unity is possible. We should not expect a complete theological discussion about baptism, eucharist, and ministry, and—in this context—it is neither suitable nor desirable.²⁰ We shall have to take this into account in our critical evaluation of the declaration.

The aims referred to in the commission's *by-laws* speak of two aspects of visible unity: one faith and one eucharistic community.²¹ The main aim of the Lima text was to provide a contribution to the second aspect. *Faith and Order*, in the meantime, was also at work on the second aspect by deciding in Lima to start a study program: *Towards the common expression of the apostolic faith today*.²² What *Faith and Order* intended to achieve

¹⁹ W.G. Rusch has written a very useful historical introduction to the Lima statement from the perspective of the search for unity within *Faith and Order*: "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry"—and reception," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 1, 129–143.

²⁰ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ix.

²¹ Vischer, "Unity in faith" in M. Thurian (ed.), *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 116) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 1–11, points out that behind these two aims two different approaches to church unity can be found. On the one hand, there is the view of the churches that we might call the 'Catholic' tradition, which attaches prime importance to the sacramental structures with regard to unity. On the other side, there are the churches of the Protestant tradition, which prefer to emphasize the importance of a common creed on the basis of the proclamation of the free Word that is not hidebound by a sacramental structure. Vischer reminds the latter that baptism and eucharist—he omits to mention ministry—must not be regarded as secondary signs that merely confirm the Word, they must also be seen as elements which open the way to the Word. He warns the Catholic tradition that unity on the basis of sacramental structures runs the risk of being a dead unity.

²² About this project and the connection with other agenda points during the commission meeting in Lima 1982, see Kinnamon, "In Sight of the Top: Faith and Order at Lima," *The Ecumenical Review* 34 (1982) 2, 131–140. In his foreword to the

with this project was a communal confession of faith through a joint theological explanation of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.²³ *Faith and Order* would like to emphasize a link between the two projects. L. Vischer²⁴ pointed out that the convergence in the field of baptism, eucharist, and ministry is already an element of jointly expressing the apostolic faith, and that the new study about the apostolic faith cannot be carried out in isolation from the unity already achieved in Lima. On the other hand, a joint confession of the apostolic faith demands more than this agreement and—for this reason—it cannot be seen as its unavoidable result. Therefore, the fourth and final question which *Faith and Order* placed before the churches in their study about BEM was a request for suggestions for the apostolic faith project. It will be interesting for our study to look for the incorporation of the insights of BEM into the wider ecclesiological and pneumatological lines of this study.

Visible church unity is not an aim in itself, but is sought “in order that the world might believe” as the *by-laws* state. This means that the whole world becomes the target. After all, the ultimate aim of all that work to achieve unity must be an improved ability of the churches to fulfil their calling in the world. Does the scope of a text about baptism, eucharist, and ministry reach beyond ‘solving’ a controversy within the church? Does the unity of the churches serve the unity of humankind?²⁵ Does it mean that the churches will be better able to work together for the renewal of human society?²⁶ Does this unity have a precious

collection of accompanying theological essays that was published on the occasion of the publication of BEM, Thurian (ed.), *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, viii–ix, N. Nissiotis emphasized the link between BEM and other *Faith and Order* study projects.

²³ This project is rounded off with the publication of *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (381), Faith and Order Paper 153 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991). For an overview of the attempts of *Faith and Order* to achieve a joint confession of faith, and for a critical evaluation of the detailed apostolic faith project—in particular, the one-sided slant towards Western theology, the failure to relate to our time, and room for contextualization and inculturation—see Brinkman, *Progress in Unity?*, 59–84.

²⁴ L. Vischer, “Unity in Faith” in Thurian, *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 1–11; in particular, 9–11.

²⁵ Based on the name of the study project, *The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Humankind* (1971–1978).

²⁶ Based on the name of the study program, *Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community* (1982–1989). For the reports about the considerations at the transition from the study project referred to in the previous footnote to this program, see Kinnamon, “In Sight of the Top,” 137–140.

added value for the world?²⁷ The foreword to BEM states that this is the intention: “As the churches grow into unity, they are asking how their understanding and practice with regard to baptism, eucharist and ministry relate to their mission in and for the renewal of human community as they seek to promote justice, peace and reconciliation. Therefore our understanding of these cannot be divorced from the redemptive and liberating mission of Christ through the churches in the modern world.”²⁸ In our study we will have to ask to what extent the theology of ministry in BEM has been placed in the context of an ecclesiology that is relevant to the world.

THE FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION AS SUBJECT OF THE STATEMENT

“Virtually all the confessional traditions are included in the Commission’s membership,”²⁹ says the foreword. The members of the commission are representatives of different confessional traditions and are members of different churches, but they are not members of the commission as representatives of their churches, i.e., they do not form a sort of “magisterium.”³⁰ A conflict between the roles of these members cannot be excluded entirely.³¹

²⁷ According to the title of the consultation of the World Council of Churches, *Costly Unity. A World Council of Churches Consultation on Koinonia and Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, Denmark 1993*. Brinkman, *Progress in Unity?*, 138, regards this conference as one of the most successful attempts to bridge the gap within the World Council between the ecumenical efforts to achieve visible church unity and the realization of the importance of witness, service and moral struggle by referring to “essential interconnectedness.” Houtepen, “Eenheid en solidariteit van het verdeelde christendom. De beweging en de Commissie voor Faith and Order” in Hoedemaker, Houtepen, Witvliet, *Oecumene als leerproces*, 187–264 recognizes the inability of *Faith and Order* to make the visible church unity sufficiently fruitful for the service to the world in its theological reflection. In his opinion, this is because not enough importance is attached to ethical questions (229). T. Witvliet provides a more radical, post-modern analysis of this inability in chapters II “De moderne oecumenische beweging en haar historisch-maatschappelijke context,” 29–45 and IV “Sociaal-ethische zoektochten in de oecumene,” 117–186 in the same collection. It is exactly this inability to formulate an overarching ‘Christian vision’ regarding practical social-ethical questions or to design a blueprint of a society based on Christian standards that is a sign of the failure of the ecumenical movement as child of the modern era.

²⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, viii–ix.

²⁹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ix.

³⁰ Houtepen, “Reception, Tradition, Communion” in Thurian, *Ecumenical Perspectives*, 142.

³¹ H.P.J. Witte, T.M.J. Geurts, “Convergentie- en consensusteksten” in idem (red.),

From the beginning, the way in which the three subjects are dealt with within *Faith and Order* is determined by a long tradition with its own concepts, terminology, and controversies. The foreword formulates this as follows: "... the language of the text is still largely classical in reconciling historical controversies ...," but immediately adds that "the driving force is frequently contextual and contemporary. This spirit will likely stimulate many reformulations of the text into the varied language(s) of our time."³² This leads to a number of questions. Does the text demonstrate that the questions presented have been updated and contextualized? Is it possible to ask questions and make analyses that are relevant when using classical language and thinking concepts? Can traditional use of language produce anything but classical theology? Are the old controversies about ministry still relevant, and are the solutions of yesteryear an answer to today's questions about ministry?³³

The composition of the *Faith and Order* commission, of its 'Standing Commission,' and of the BEM editing group speaks volumes. Nearly all of them are Western theologians selected on the basis of their dogmatic expertise; nearly all of them are men and above the age of forty. One is led to wonder what the report would have looked like if the composition had been less one-sided. What about theologians from Asia³⁴ and the southern hemisphere; what about practical theologians;³⁵ what about women and young theologians? To what extent has the fact that only academically trained theologians were involved led to a narrowing of vision?³⁶

These questions are important to the author of this study because his own background and education match those of the members of

Erkenning zonder vernieuwing. Een kritische doorlichting van de luthers/rooms-katholieke dialoog over het ambt in de kerk ('s-Hertogenbosch: Sint-Willibrordvereniging, 1988).

³² *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ix.

³³ An example of a synthetic and relevant (practical-) theological approach to the profession of minister in the Netherlands can be found in the speech by G. Heitink "De dominee gaat voorbij: het veranderende beroep van predikant" held on the Dutch Ministers' Day on 8 April 1997 and published in *Predikant en Samenleving* 74 (1997) 3, 3-8.

³⁴ An example of a number of shifts in the questions being asked from the viewpoint of India can be found in the response from the pen of the Presbyterian theologian C. Duraisingh in "The Lima Text on Ministry: A Theological Response," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 17 (1985) 2, 1-18.

³⁵ Houtepen refers to this deficiency in "Kerken en het Lima-rapport," 25. If practical theologians had been involved, more attention would have been paid to present-day problems regarding sacraments and ministry.

³⁶ About the one-sided composition of the commission, see also Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 11-14.

the *Faith and Order* commission: academically trained, Western theologian, male, and over forty years old. Due to his training, he is well-versed in the classic theological controversies, especially the ones that have set their stamp upon Western Christendom. These factors cannot but determine his manner of reading and judging. On the one hand, this is an advantage. It gives an affinity with the traditional theological problems, without which BEM cannot be read with sufficient recognition. Because BEM fits in with the problems of his study, the subjects touched on and the proposed solutions can be made useful for the Reformed theology of ministry. There is, however, a downside too. Because the traditional controversies threaten to restrict the scope of the discussion around ministry, there is a grave danger of a diminishing problem-awareness, as if this document determined what the worldwide fundamental problems with the ministry are. In short, the author realizes the unavoidable contextuality, and therefore the limited nature of his study.

THE DOCUMENT'S STATUS: A CONVERGENCE TEXT

The Lima text is introduced as a convergence text: "This Lima text represents the significant theological convergence which Faith and Order has discerned and formulated."³⁷ The foreword makes a distinction between convergence and consensus. Convergence is a step on the way to consensus. Consensus is both aim and basis for theological agreements.³⁸ On the one hand, consensus in the form of a statement is valid only if it is supported by a prior agreement from the faith community (*consentire*); on the other hand, such statements help strengthen and deepen the fundamental consensus within the community. The ecumenical movement bases itself on the assumption that in a conciliar process it can help churches to rediscover and strengthen the consensus that had been given to them in their attachment to Christ.³⁹ BEM was

³⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ix.

³⁸ For more details about this, see G. Sauter, "Konsens als Ziel und Voraussetzung theologischer Erkenntnis" in P. Lengsfeld and H.-G. Stobbe (Hrsg.), *Theologischer Konsens und Kirchenspaltung*, (Stuttgart–Berlin–Köln–Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1981), 52–63.

³⁹ The following publications contain more about the significance of consensus, the relation between consensus and truth, the significance of consensus in the different ecclesiastical traditions, and the development of the significance of consensus in ecumenism: G. Sauter, "Consensus," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Bd. 8 (Berlin/New-York:

a unique text of its kind because, up to then, it was the only text containing theological agreement about three important elements in the controversy between churches and theological movements, which was deemed ready for presentation to the churches by such a wide circle of theologians from very diverse traditions.⁴⁰

BEM is offered as a convergence text and most emphatically not as a consensus text because *Faith and Order* did not want to create the impression that there is complete agreement about baptism, eucharist, and ministry. All the same, the two form one sort of text, the genre of consensus or convergence text,⁴¹ and the fruit of bilateral or multilateral dialogues between ecclesiastical traditions or church communities.⁴² They demonstrate how far the agreement reaches (consensus), how far they have progressed on the way to agreement (convergence), and on which points and to what extent they still differ (dissent). These texts have a characteristic structure. Very often these reports consist of fifty to one hundred numbered passages of one or just a few paragraphs long. Each number deals with one of the subjects under discussion and draws broad outlines; the aim is to determine the degrees of dissent, convergence, and consensus.⁴³ The way in which the BEM text is presented helps to distinguish the points where convergence has grown from elements where there is not yet any agreement. The convergences are presented in the main text, while the commentaries describe the points about which consensus already has been achieved and those where dissent still exists.

W. de Gruyter, 1981³), 182–189; R. Frieling, “Konsens (Consensus),” *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon* Bd. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989³), 1399–1403; L. Vischer, “Consensus” in: *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva–Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 221–225; A. Kreiner, “Konsens–II. Systematisch-theologisch,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 6 (Freiburg–Basel–Rom–Wien: Herder, 1997³), 289–291.

⁴⁰ In the foreword to BEM ix, the Roman Catholic theologians, in particular, are referred to as full members of the commission, while reference is made to theologians from “other churches which do not belong to the World Council of Churches itself.”

⁴¹ For extensive details about this see the article by H.P.J. Witte and T.M.J. Geurts, “Convergentie- en consensusteksten. Analyse en perspectieven van een tekstsoort” in idem (ed.), *Erkenning zonder vernieuwing?*, 19–58.

⁴² An overview of theological agreements at the world level up to 1983 can be found in H. Meyer and L. Vischer, *Growth in Agreement. Faith and Order* regularly publishes reports about the bilateral dialogues.

⁴³ H.P.J. Witte, “Ter inleiding: de bilaterale dialogen, een commissie en haar werk” in H.P.J. Witte and T.M.J. Geurts (ed.), *Erkenning zonder vernieuwing?*, 11.

BUILDING ON CONVERGENCE ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

The foreword indicates that the route from dissent to consensus leads via a number of stages of convergence. A theological agreement about baptism, eucharist, and ministry could only take shape after the discussion partners had reached agreement about the primary sources of faith. With regard to that point, a breakthrough was reached at the Fourth World Conference of *Faith and Order* in Montreal in 1963. BEM builds on this convergence about the relation between scripture and tradition(s).⁴⁴

Because we realize the significance of the Montreal text, its most important elements will be summarized here.⁴⁵ First of all, we have to make a distinction between Tradition, tradition, and traditions. ‘Tradition’ (with a capital) refers to the contents of “the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church, Christ himself present in the life of the Church,” while ‘tradition’ (with a small ‘t’) indicates the process of passing on (*tradere*), while the term ‘traditions’ refers to the various expressions of that process in time and space (39). The apostolic witness determines the contents of the Tradition. The oral and written tradition of the prophets and the apostles led to the formation of the scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the canonization of Old and New Testament as the Bible of the church. This means that without Tradition there would have been no

⁴⁴ W.H. Lazareth (Anglican and then president of the secretariat of *Faith and Order*) and M. Thurian are among those who emphasize the significance of this statement in “Introduction” in M. Thurian (ed.), *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, xiv–xviii. They draw attention to the congeniality with the constitution *Dei verbum* of Vatican II, which was finalized around the same time and which followed the same line of argument. In particular, paragraph 7 of *Dei verbum* gives an interpretation of the pronouncements of the Council of Trent, which is different from the one that is usual in the nineteenth century. Trent does not speak of two sources of revelation—scripture and Tradition—but of one only; namely, the Word of God. *Dei verbum* does not go as far as the text of Montreal because in this statement of Vatican II, scripture and Tradition do remain two different entities. See also Brinkman, *Progress in Unity?*, 44–47 and G.H. Jansen, *Naar een oecumenische hermeneutiek: de hermeneutiek van Wolfhart Pannenberg belicht tegen de achtergrond van het hermeneutisch debat binnen Faith and Order vanaf 1963 tot 1993* (Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica Research Publications 52) (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2000).

⁴⁵ The numbers in brackets refer to the paragraphs of the text of the Fourth World Conference of *Faith and Order* in Montreal in 1963. “Scripture, Tradition and traditions” was the title of section II of the Montreal conference. The text can be found in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 10–18.

scripture, that traditions precede the formation of scripture, and that the Bible is the treasure of the Word of God (42). As a consequence, the old controversy from Western Christendom around scripture and Tradition can no longer be upheld in this way (43–44). In paragraph 45, the relationship between Tradition and scripture is formulated in a new way:

Our starting-point is that we are all living in a tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament, and are all indebted to that tradition inasmuch as we have received the revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Tradition taken in this sense is actualized in the preaching of the Word, in the administration of the Sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, and in mission and witness to Christ by the lives of the members of the Church.

This is the paragraph that is quoted in the foreword to BEM. This joint formulation is seen as a great ecumenical step forward.

BEM AS ELEMENT OF THE TRADITION

After Montreal the concept of Tradition, as a dynamic process of passing on the gospel through time, was developed into a central concept in the theology within *Faith and Order*. This is evidenced, in particular, in the presentation of BEM: “The resultant text aims to become part of a faithful and sufficient reflection of the common Christian Tradition on essential elements of Christian communion.”⁴⁶ Behind the variety of Christian traditions, the BEM text wants to return to the common Tradition that should be recognizable to all traditions, and which makes them aware of their great common foundation and places all of them together in the continuity with the apostles and the teaching of the universal church.

Because of this, the question is not whether BEM complies with the standard of any ecclesiastical tradition from the past, but whether in BEM the continuous living Tradition is recognizable. The first question that has to be answered by the churches when studying BEM is not the

⁴⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ix.

extent to which it is in agreement with their own tradition, but “the extent to which your Church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages.”⁴⁷ The faith of the church through the ages is a different way of expressing this living Tradition.

THE ADDRESSEES: THE CHURCHES

The fact that the addressees are the churches is, first of all, proved by the way in which the text was accepted in Lima; namely, by the unanimous positive answer to the question of whether the text in its totality was ready to be put before the churches.⁴⁸ The foreword also states emphatically that the text is addressed to the churches.⁴⁹ As concrete evidence of their ecumenical involvement, the churches are asked—as much as possible—to engage the people of God at all levels of church life in the spiritual process of receiving this text. Specific suggestions for its use in liturgy, proclamation, and study are added as an appendix.⁵⁰ These are aids intended to make the text more accessible to people who are not familiar with the historical development of the old controversies and the specific use of specialist language.⁵¹ This is not a superfluous luxury, even for the churches from the Reformed tradition. Many of its office bearers who have read this text in order to form an opinion about it have not had any academic theological training.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, x.

⁴⁸ From the minutes of the plenary meeting of 12/11/82: “The following motion was put before the Commission: ‘The Commission considers the revised text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to have been brought to such a stage of maturity that it is now ready for transmission to the Churches in accordance with the mandate given at the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi 1975, and re-affirmed by the Central Committee, Dresden 1981.’” in Kinnamon, *Towards Visible Unity*, 83–84.

⁴⁹ “... the Faith and Order Commission now presents this Lima text (1982) to the Churches.” *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, x.

⁵⁰ In an appendix, three accompanying publications from the commission are listed to help the churches in processing the text: an introductory study and discussion guide (Lazareth, *Growing Together in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*), the collection of theological essays already referred to (Thurian, *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*) and a collection of liturgical models (Thurian, *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*).

⁵¹ For a critical discussion of this element, see also Witte and Geurts, “Convergentie-en consensusteksten” in idem, *Erkenning zonder vernieuwing*, 28–31 (Voor wie is een convergentie- of consensustekst bestemd?) and 31–37 (Een convergentie- of consensustekst als taaldaad).

⁵² About the resulting problems, see M. Seils, “Die Problematik der Rezeption aus

The commission also hopes, however, that there will be “an official response to this text at the highest appropriate level of authority, whether it be a council, synod, conference, assembly or other body.”⁵³ With a view to this official response, the commission looks for an answer to four specific questions:

1. The degree to which the faith of the church throughout the ages is recognized in the text,
2. The consequences that are drawn for relations and dialogues with other churches,
3. The degree to which the readers will allow themselves to be led by this text in liturgy, religious instruction, ethics, spiritual life, and witness, and
4. What suggestions the readers will give to the commission to make the text fruitful for its next study project in connection with the contemporary joint expression of the apostolic faith.

With these four concrete questions, the commission hopes to stimulate and steer the discussion about the document to the fullest possible extent. The first and fourth questions have already been touched upon. The second question connects the text to the wide movement, whose aim is to achieve visible unity between the churches. The aim of the third question is to stimulate the churches to use the texts in different areas of church life.

THE INTENTION: A RECEPTION PROCESS IN THE CHURCHES

The foreword describes the intended response from the churches to the text as “the spiritual process of receiving this text.” The four questions are meant to support the ‘process of reception.’ The initial responses from the churches were to prove that the word *reception* was liable to be misunderstood. The use of the word ‘reception’ explains, in part, the annoyance expressed by M. Barth, whom we quoted in the introduction. When the first collection of responses from churches was

der Sicht evangelischer Kirchenleitung” in: P Lengersfeld, H.-G. Stobbe (Hrsg.), *Theologischer Konsens und Kirchenspaltung* (Stuttgart–Berlin–Köln–Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1981), 110–114.

⁵³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, x.

published in 1986, M. Thurian explained the meaning of the word 'reception':

The real significance of the 'reception' of the Lima document has perhaps not been sufficiently explained. There is no question of 'receiving' it in the same way that decisions of the ecumenical councils have formerly been received in the churches, i.e. as texts recognized as authoritative explanations of the word of God. The churches are asked to say whether they recognize in the Lima document 'the faith of the Church through the ages', whether they are prepared to use it as a basis or framework in their theological and catechetical instruction, their liturgical reforms, and in the spiritual life of communities, parishes, mixed households, ecumenical groups, youth groups, etc...

It appears that no one had made the distinction between the new use of the term *reception* in the present ecumenical context and the classical use in the early church, where it meant acceptance of the decisions of councils by the local churches.⁵⁴

Reception is a concept that has started to play an important role in and between the churches; in particular, in the second half of the twentieth century, but it has a history in the churches that dates back many years.⁵⁵ Reception belongs to the basic structure of personal and communal faith,⁵⁶ and from antiquity onward it belongs to the ecclesiological ground structure.⁵⁷ The recent emphasis on reception, however,

⁵⁴ A. Birmelé, "La réception comme exigence oecuménique" in J.-L. Leuba (ed.), *Perspectives actuelles sur l'oecuménisme*, (Louvain-la-Neuve: Artel, 1995), 171–196; in pp. 180–186 he sums up four points of distinction between the classical and the modern ecumenical reception process: the present-day context of division between the churches, the great variety of content characteristics of ecumenical reception texts, which causes the texts to ask for a different reception, and finally the aim of the reception process; namely, to achieve mutual recognition and acceptance on the basis of confirmation of the faith of the church throughout the ages.

⁵⁵ About the development of the reality and the understanding of the concept 'reception' in the life and thinking in the churches, see G. Gassmann, "Rezeption. I. Kirchengeschichtlich," *Theologische Realenzyklopedie* Bd. 29, (Berlin/New-York: W. de Gruyter, 1998³), 131–142.

⁵⁶ 'Reception' as 'receiving,' 'accepting,' 'taking on board,' 'adopting' are basic meanings connected with personal faith. God's salvation in Jesus Christ is received in the faith that is a gift from the Holy Spirit and actively accepted. The church as a community of believers receives its being and mission through the communion with the triune God. In its history the church passes on the faith, which is its foundation (*traditio*), it is received (*receptio*), and confessed anew as basis and tie of the community (*communio*). See Gassmann, "Rezeption. I. Kirchengeschichtlich," TRE Bd. 29, 131–134 and 141.

⁵⁷ In the first centuries the communion between the local churches depended on mutual recognition as churches, in which the one church of Jesus Christ is present.

finds its origin in the Second Vatican Council and in the development of bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues. What does reception of the achieved agreements and convergences by the churches mean? This is not a passive or official acceptance by the churches of the results and decisions that were reached at a higher echelon, but achieving ownership through gradual testing and assimilation in the life and liturgy of the church on the basis of the understanding that here elements of 'the faith of the church throughout the ages' are referred to. This does not exclude a critical attitude to the elements involved.

When the Lima text was published, the concept 'reception' acquired a new dimension; namely, a request for an official ecclesiastical answer and an assimilation process within each church. A commentary or a response to the text, as was given in the case of the 'Urtext' of Accra in 1974, was no longer adequate. Commentaries and responses were, of course, welcome because the participants knew that this was not a consensus text. But the request for reception indicated that the participants were convinced that they were presenting more than a mere discussion paper. They were convinced that the Holy Spirit had led them to this moment, as if to a *kairos*. Here lies the deep core of the authority which the attendees at the congress in Lima attributed to the text. A discussion without commitment was not enough. Reception also requires assimilation.⁵⁸ When asked about the best reception of BEM, M. Thurian answered that the aim of the text was real spiritual conversion of the churches.⁵⁹ In this way the recognition of the church's faith over the centuries in this text becomes part of a wider reception process that continues after gathering the responses from the churches.⁶⁰

This mutual recognition, i.e., reception, took place on the basis of recognition of the apostolic faith in life and confession of the other churches. In particular, the reception of decisions taken at councils and synods by the local churches was of great importance in this context. The council decisions attained validity only through reception. See Y. Congar, "La 'réception' comme réalité ecclésiologique," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 56 (1972) 3, 369–403. See also E.J. Kilmartin, "Reception in History: an ecclesiological Phenomenon and its Significance," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 1, 34–54 for examples of (non)reception of liturgical practices, laws, habits and dogmas, as well as Gassmann, "Rezeption," 134–137 and 141.

⁵⁸ This is what C. Krijnsen implies in his response, "De reactie van de katholieke bisschoppen op het rapport van Lima," *Kosmos en Oecumene* 19 (1985) 1, 3–8, to the non-committal comment on the BEM text from the Dutch episcopate.

⁵⁹ From an interview with M. Thurian in *The Ecumenical Review* 38 (1986) 1, 30 with the title, "'BEM and Spirituality.' A Conversation with Brother Max Thurian."

⁶⁰ Gassmann, "Rezeption," 140, points to the adoption of pronouncements from

Reception becomes a step in the growth towards mutual recognition and visible unity between churches.⁶¹ After all, what is important is not the reception of the contents of texts, but the reception of churches, of their members, and of their leaders.⁶² This new definition of reception fits in with the modern hermeneutical process in which scripture and tradition influence each other. In the meantime, *Faith and Order* continues with its own reflection on ecumenical reception.⁶³

Ecumenical reception is new to all churches because it requires them to no longer take their own tradition as their point of departure. This also applies to churches that have their roots in the Reformation.⁶⁴ The churches of the Reformation did not attach much importance to the concept of “reception by the churches.”⁶⁵ Their most important concern was the rejection of the pope, of the church’s teaching office, or of councils that demanded obedience on the basis of their supposed infallibility, and which thought they could impose reception. It is part of their collective memory that all these authorities are fallible. Their decisions could be accepted only in so far as they were in agreement with the witness of the scriptures. This does not alter the fact, however, that there definitely had been reception in the churches of the Reformation. The creeds of the early church had been accepted and interpreted, and the confessional documents from the Reformation itself had

the Lima Declaration in bilateral dialogues and agreements between churches and in reforming work within the churches, such as the liturgy. There is a concrete reference to the results of the ministry section of the Lima text in *The Porvoo Common Statement. Conversations between The British and Irish Anglican Churches and The Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches* (Council for Christian Unity—Occasional Paper No. 3) (London: Church House, 1992).

⁶¹ The churches that accepted the Porvoo declaration officially restored their full church communion in 1996.

⁶² A. Houtepen, “Reception, Tradition, Communion” in Thurian, *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 140–160; in particular, 153–155 and U. Kuhn, “Reception—an Imperative and an Opportunity,” in the same collection, 164–174; in particular, 68–171. Further, Houtepen, “Naar een gemeenschappelijk verstaan,” 254.

⁶³ An intermediate report about this can be found in A. Falconer (ed.), *Faith and Order in Moshi. The 1996 Commission Meeting* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998), 58–96.

⁶⁴ M. de Montmollin, President of the Synod Council of the Reformed Church of the Canton de Neuchâtel, gives a clear-sighted explanation of the ecclesiological consequences of the reception of an ecumenical document in his own church on the occasion of the reception of the BEM report in the article, “Questions posées à une Eglise réformée par la ‘reception’ d’un document oecumenique,” *Irénikon* 59 (1986) 2, 189–200 et 3, 307–313.

⁶⁵ See also Kuhn, “Reception,” 163–174.

been accepted. Since the Reformation, it has been common practice to send confessions of faith to sister churches with a view to reception.⁶⁶ The tradition to invite guests from sister churches to attend synods is connected with this. However, all these attempts to achieve catholicity through written confessions of faith cannot hide the fact that these writings have only a limited authority. Scripture alone is the *norma normans*. An additional problem for the churches of the Reformation is the question to have the results of the ecumenical dialogue accepted at the highest appropriate level of authority. They do not have a separate personal teaching office with the authority to make decisions about questions of faith. The teaching office can only be exercised through synods. The mere suggestion that there should be a body for authoritative pronouncements on dogma is regarded by some as very threatening to the involvement of the people of God as a whole in the development of ecclesiastical doctrine. They are afraid of a structuring of the church according to offices where the priesthood of all believers might be threatened.⁶⁷ The question about the means of the reception process of BEM is therefore bound up with one's understanding of the church's ministry. There is also, however, an opinion that the request for an official response from the highest level of authority should be an incentive for the churches of the Reformation to reflect about possibilities and structures for authoritative teaching within the church.⁶⁸

This study is intended as a contribution to the reception process of a section of BEM within the churches of the Calvinist tradition.

⁶⁶ During the synod in Dordrecht (1618–1619), rules about this were drawn up. See also H.H. Kuyper, *De katholiciteit der Gereformeerde Kerken. Afscheidscollege 1 juni 1937* (Kampen: Kok, 1937).

⁶⁷ For this reason, H. Fischer, "Rezeption. II. Systematisch-theologisch," *Theologische Realenzyklopedie* Bd. 29 (Berlin/New-York: W. de Gruyter, 1998³), 143–149, has a very critical approach to the request for reception of ecumenical convergence texts. The response from E. Fahlbusch in *Einheit der Kirche—eine kritische Betrachtung des ökumenischen Dialogs. Zur reception der Lima-Erklärung über Taufe, Eucharistie und Amt* (Theologische Existenz heute, nr. 21) (München: Kaiser, 1983) is completely negative. From his dialectic-theological background he does not see any prospect for unity between the churches on the basis of reception of ecumenical dialogue texts, which are, in his opinion, of a very elitist character.

⁶⁸ Kuhn, "Rezeption," 165 and M. Seils, "Die Problematik der Rezeption aus der Sicht evangelischer Kirchenleitung" in Lengsfeld and Stobbe, *Theologischer Konsens und Kirchenspaltung*, 110–114.

ONGOING ECUMENICAL HERMENEUTICAL STUDY

The response to BEM exceeded, by far, all responses to ecumenical reports up to then. By 1990, 186 churches had sent an official response. These answers were collected and published for further study.⁶⁹ In its turn, *Faith and Order* processed these responses⁷⁰ by summarizing them and by drawing up a draft reply that consisted of two parts:

1. Clarifications and comments to the text. These elements will be analyzed when studying the individual paragraphs of the text.
2. Description of a number of fundamental subjects that need further study in the development of an ecumenical ecclesiology; namely, in the first place, scripture and tradition; in the second place, sacrament and sacramentality; and, in the third place, ecclesiology. The third point will be dealt with when the ecclesiological basis in the first part of the section about ministry in the Lima text is discussed, and suggestions for the second point will be made when discussing the fifth part in connection with ordination. We shall now deal with scripture and tradition because they follow on from the hermeneutical basic principles of the foreword.⁷¹

The hermeneutical concept of Montreal was not only the basis on which the convergence text of Lima was developed, but in two places it appears in the text itself:⁷² in the *Introduction*, in the first question to the churches regarding the faith of the church throughout the ages, and—in the second place—in the development of the concept of ‘apostolic tradition’ in the section about ministry in the Lima text (20–25). We will return to that when discussing the paragraphs concerned.

The churches’ responses to BEM showed that there is still much that is unclear about the relationship between scripture, tradition, and traditions. The commission conceded that there was insufficient familiarity with the hermeneutical convergence of Montreal, or that it had not been sufficiently assimilated by the confessional and ecclesiastical traditions. Questions were repeatedly asked about the normativity of the

⁶⁹ They were published in six volumes and edited by M. Thurian under the title *Churches respond to BEM. Official Responses to the ‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’ text*, vol. I–VI.

⁷⁰ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990. Report on the Process and Responses.*

⁷¹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990. Report on the Process and Responses.*

⁷² *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 131–142. The figures in brackets refer to the numbered paragraphs on these pages.

specific texts and of certain traditions, certainly with regard to the question about the recognition of the faith of the church throughout the ages (1–2). The analysis of the churches' answers produced at least six⁷³ different hermeneutical positions (4–9):

1. Scripture as the only authority for the church's life and faith.
2. The tradition of the early church has authority together with scripture.
3. Later confessions of faith are invested with authority in addition to scripture and ancient creeds.
4. In addition to scripture and tradition, the authority of a teaching body within the church is recognized.
5. In addition to scripture and tradition, the importance of reason is recognized as a valid criterion.
6. Scripture and the traditions are part of the living tradition. This is the Montreal option.

Faith and Order again explained the double gain of this final position:

1. Ecumenical convergence in the field of hermeneutics. By accepting the tradition as the foundation, in a process of receiving and passing on—*paradosis*, a dynamic, eschatological model is developed that places the classical hermeneutical points of view into perspective and causes them to approach each other more closely (17).
2. This model creates space for the results of the historical-critical, literary-critical, semiotic and sociological study of the Bible and the writings of the early churches, in their diversity and unity (17–19).

And yet, this common, hermeneutical basis created great problems for the churches. In our opinion, this is mainly due to the sender, *Faith and Order*, itself. The commission was too eager to base itself on the convergence of Montreal. What was presented there was indeed promising, but had it developed sufficiently? The text of Montreal shows that the hermeneutical problems had not really been solved. If it is a question

⁷³ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 132–135. A. Houtepen in “The Faith of the Church through the Ages. Christian Tradition and Postmodern Challenges” in idem (ed.), *The Living Tradition. Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutics of the Christian Tradition* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1995), 49–56 refines the hermeneutical positions in the responses to BEM to seven possibilities.

of standing in that dynamic tradition, then we must ask whether this tradition can be identified. What is the reference point to measure it against? In the church after the time of the apostles, the criterion for the tradition was the link with the apostles. When the apostolic witness had been determined in the canon, the demand for the correct interpretation of the texts that had been written down moved to ever new contexts (49–51). Different traditions respond differently to the demand for a hermeneutic principle (53). This means that the hermeneutical question about the relationship between scripture and tradition(s) becomes a question about the correct interpretation of scripture.⁷⁴ The analysis of the responses from the churches illustrated this perfectly: when evaluating BEM, most churches returned to their various hermeneutical base positions. G. Gassmann called Lima a child of Montreal,⁷⁵ but we must have the courage to ask whether the convergence—with regard to scripture and tradition—was ready to bear BEM as a child. In saying this, we do not want to state that a convergence statement about baptism, eucharist, and ministry had to wait until the hermeneutical convergence had developed further, but that too much emphasis on the mother-child relationship between the two convergences made the reception of BEM too complicated. To keep the same imagery, the convergences will have to grow up together as ‘children’ of the ecumenical dialogues.

In their foreword, *Faith and Order* not only emphasized the link between Montreal and Lima, but the commission also drew the churches’ attention to this by asking—as their first question—to what extent the churches can recognize the faith of the church through the ages in this text. Many churches did not know how to answer this question. The question is so unclear because there is no reference point. Even if our church traditions as expression of the Tradition are of a temporary nature because we are human, it is very difficult to do anything else but hold on to those traditions. In their answer, the commission agree that

⁷⁴ This shift of the problem can be seen in the final paragraphs of the Montreal text about scripture and tradition. Citing scripture as the benchmark for the tradition (§49) leads to the question about the correct interpretation of scripture (§51). To read scripture through the eyes of one’s own tradition does in itself not solve the problem (§54). In the final paragraph the cautious decision is taken to express the expectation that the only way forward is to read scripture, the church fathers, and their scripture interpretation together, and for each to re-evaluate their own specific tradition (§55).

⁷⁵ G. Gassmann, “Scripture, Tradition, and the Church: the Ecumenical Nexus in Faith and Order Work,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 28 (1991) 3, 444.

they should have been much more explicit in stating the real intention of the question; namely, “to challenge the churches to look beyond their own tradition.”⁷⁶ The following suggestion might be helpful: would it not have been much clearer if they had just asked for the positive points that are contributed by BEM as addition to or correction of the church’s own tradition?

The churches, on the other hand, have a few questions to answer as well. The commission may have been too quick, but we are of the opinion that after about twenty years many churches were very slow in incorporating the hermeneutical profit of Montreal.⁷⁷ This is demonstrated in the ease with which many churches slide back into the classical hermeneutical positions. A number of churches of the Reformed tradition make generous use of the battle cry, *Sola Scriptura*, as if scripture and tradition were on opposite sides; whereas, Montreal made it clear that they are inextricably linked. Because of the realization that tradition—as the process of handing on the faith—has an ecclesiastical character, further reflection in the framework of the classical Reformed hermeneutics is needed.⁷⁸

In the past ten years the ecumenical reflection on hermeneutics has continued unabated⁷⁹ and resulted in a new study⁸⁰ that was published late 1998. In particular, the third chapter, “The Church as a Hermeneutical Community,” is important in connection with the question we are asking. Three dimensions of the ecclesiastical interpretation process are explored: actively discerning the Word of God, exercising authority, and the requirement of reception.

⁷⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 32.

⁷⁷ More information about this can be found in point “II.4. Discerning our common faith” of the preparatory discussion text for the Fifth World Conference in 1993 in T.F. Best and G. Gassmann (ed.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia. Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), 281–282. At the triennial Plenary Commission meeting of 1996 it was one of the four main programs, as can be seen in Falconer, *Faith and Order in Moshi*, 115–140.

⁷⁸ Brinkman, *Progress in Unity*, 50, draws attention to the stimulating work in this field by the Dutch reformed theologian E. Flesseman-van Leer.

⁷⁹ A report about this can be found in point “II.4. Discerning our common faith” of the preparatory discussion text for the Fifth World Conference in 1993 in T.F. Best and G. Gassmann (ed.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia. Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), 281–282. At the triennial Plenary Commission meeting of 1996 it was one of the four main programs, as can be seen in Falconer, *Faith and Order in Moshi*, 115–140.

⁸⁰ *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels. An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics* (Faith and Order Paper 182) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998).

BEM AS FRUIT OF A PAST, MODERN ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Will there ever be a sequel to BEM? If so, it is very unlikely that it will take the form of an attempt to achieve a joint, ecclesiastical agreement about such a wide-ranging subject as the ecclesiastical ministry with mutual recognition of ministry as its aim. With hindsight, BEM appears to be the fruit and high point of the work of *Faith and Order* as a movement that tried to achieve organizational church unity through dogmatic unity. In 1989 the then secretary general of the World Council of Churches, K. Raiser, analyzed the crisis in the ecumenical movement and came to the conclusion that this was caused by the fact that, as a child of modernity, it had come to a halt. It appears that as a product of modernity with its theological paradigm of ‘Christ-centred universalism,’ it had tried in vain to get a dogmatic and organizational grip on the totality of Christian faith experiences and social questions. In his analysis K. Raiser refers to BEM:

The determinative presupposition behind this goal is the effectiveness of the so-called Christological method, i.e. the belief that a common reference back to Jesus Christ and the convergence of all churches to him will so relativize and ‘soften’ their differences and opposing viewpoints in doctrine, order and life that they will move to a position where they can make their fellowship ever more comprehensively visible. If historic differences are viewed and interpreted from this reference point, the value placed on them changes. This is the intrinsic assumption of the so-called Lima text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, (...).⁸¹

He advocated letting go of the attempt to universalize and asked that more attention be given to the contingent, contextual aspects of faith and life experiences.

Within the ecumenical world postmodernism has led to the realisation that the attempt to achieve consensus-ecumenism is one of the big dreams of modernity. This form of unity as a modern ‘big story’ has been unmasked as a form of ideology and dogma, which has lost its plausibility.⁸²

⁸¹ K. Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 5. The book is a translation of a German original published in 1989.

⁸² Because during the reception of BEM the convergence process did not lead to consensus, L. Leijssen, “Oecumene en postmoderniteit. Hermeneutische reflecties over de receptie van het BEM-Rapport,” in J. Haers, T. Merrigan & P. de Mey (red.), *Volk van God en gemeenschap van de gelovigen.* “Pleidooien voor een zorgzame kerkopbouw (Averbode:

This study is not an attempt to reverse the post-modern attitude to life. The aim is not to try and rush the Reformed tradition into accepting a joint theology of ministry and a future united church. People are too aware of the diversity and the contextual differences of the way in which they experience their faith for this to be a possibility. What this study does aim to do is to encourage people to reflect on the Reformed theology of ministry, to save it from ossification and fossilization, to keep it flexible and able to support the Reformed churches in their attempt to speak about God, and to open themselves up to God's voice in different places and at different times. To do this, all the Reformed churches have to do is to uphold their tradition of confessing *in loco et in tempore* and to adhere to the rule *ecclesia semper reformanda*.⁸³

MINISTRY TOGETHER WITH BAPTISM AND EUCHARIST

The minutes of the commission meeting held in Lima contains the following sentence: "Prof. Lazareth observed that 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' was not three separate texts but one coherent document. The commission, in other words, would not vote separately on each of the three sections, but on the document as a whole."⁸⁴ Houtepen confirms that the text is intended to be read as a whole, but he does admit that it is bit risky to speak about the text as one text because it has not been possible to get rid of all contradictions and seams due to the long and complex development history and the character of the components. This is not surprising in a text to which so many authors contributed and that is based on concepts and amendments in different languages.⁸⁵

Despite this fact, he perceives a greater cohesion between the components in comparison with the 1974 Accra version—thanks to a more streamlined theological framework that is characterized by a stronger

Altoria, 1999), 483–498, attempts to draw the contours of another ecumenical model on the basis of iconicity and transparency of symbols.

⁸³ About the contextual definition of the reformed identity, see also M.E. Brinkman, "The Will to Common Confession. The Contribution of Calvinist Protestantism to the World Council of Churches Study Project 'Confessing the One Faith'," *Louvain Studies* 19 (1994) 2, 118–137 and id., "Onwil en onmacht tot het formuleren van een gereformeerde identiteit," *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 95 (1995) 2, 59–68.

⁸⁴ Kinnamon, *Towards Visible Unity*, 83.

⁸⁵ Houtepen, "Naar een gemeenschappelijk verstaan," 255.

expression of the presence of grace and salvation, by the strengthened Christological foundation, by the development of the missionary and diaconal focus of the church, and by a broader hermeneutical foundation of scripture and tradition.

Faith and Order has always discussed baptism, eucharist, and ministry together. They formed a joint item on the agenda of the First World Conference in Lausanne in 1927. Each of these three is a primary structure element of the church that prevents the church from growing towards visible unity. They are interconnected because for some churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the validity of the sacraments—except for baptism—depends on the person administering the sacrament. Particularly in respect to the Lord's Supper, this is a very sensitive issue. The fact that it is not possible to celebrate Communion together is a painful reminder of the lack of unity. This is connected with the fact that in many traditions this sacrament and the ministry are seen as expression of the unity of the body of Christ. While the title of the 1974 Accra text referred to *Three Agreed Statements*, in the Lima text it has become one statement with three chapters. In the Lima text the connection between the three chapters is no longer mentioned.⁸⁶

For the Reformed tradition it is not self-evident that ministry must be discussed in conjunction with baptism and eucharist in one statement. The pure proclamation of the gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments are the classic *notae ecclesiae*, but to what extent the ministry itself is a *sine qua non* for the church is much more controversial. In addition, to discuss the ministry in conjunction with the sacraments of baptism and communion gives too strong a suggestion that the ordination of ministers has a sacramental character. The terminology for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a separate problem. The word 'eucharist' has a Catholic connotation. During the discussion of this ecumenical text, we shall use this term in parallel to the choice made by *Faith and Order*. We intend to use the term 'Lord's Supper' only when we mean to refer to the sacrament in its Protestant interpretation.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The provisional version of the ministry text, dating back to January 1980, is the only instance where there is a realization that it is necessary to link the ministry with baptism and eucharist: "1. The considerations on baptism and the eucharist inevitably lead to the issue of the ministry in the Church." in C.T. Gromada, *The Theology of the Ministry in the 'Lima Document'. A Roman Catholic Critique*, (San Francisco/London: International Scholars Publishing, 1995), 174.

⁸⁷ About the difficulty to translate the word 'eucharist' into Dutch and about the

Is the structure of the three sections similar? For the sections on baptism and eucharist the similarity is instantly noticeable. In both cases the institution of the two sacraments is connected to salvation in Christ, followed by a point-for-point explanation of current theological aspects, and, in conclusion, elements of practice and liturgy. In the section about ministry, an attempt is made to follow the same pattern, but this proves to be less transparent. There are no words in scripture that trace the ministry back to Jesus. In the case of the ministry there is a more general foundation in the relationship between Jesus and his first disciples. Due to the effort involved in using a similar structure, it turns out to be less natural to discuss the three structure elements in the same statement.⁸⁸ It is also noticeable that the section about ministry is nearly as long as those for baptism and eucharist together. Because there is less convergence, more words are needed. The need for added comments indicating the different positions is much greater than in the other two sections.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE STUDY AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE LIMA MINISTRY TEXT

The structure of this chapter will follow the division into chapters of the Lima ministry text. The study of each chapter of the document will consist of four sections. First, a description will be presented of the development history of that chapter within the work of the commission from its first conference in 1927. For this aspect of the study, we have been able to make use of G.H. Vischer's dissertation that was defended in Basle in 1980 and published under the title *Apostolischer Dienst: Fünfzig Jahre Diskussion über das kirchliche Amt in Glauben und Kirchenverfassung*⁸⁹—an excellent historic study from a Lutheran perspective about the development of thinking about the ministry in the ecumenical movement up to and including the Accra text.

meaning of 'eucharist' in the Lima report, see the answer from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 101.

⁸⁸ In our opinion, A. Houtepen in "Naar een gemeenschappelijk verstaan," 255–256 implies more similarity in structure than actually exists.

⁸⁹ G.H. Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst: Fünfzig Jahre Diskussion über das kirchliche Amt in Glauben und Kirchenverfassung* (Frankfurt am Main: Otto Lembeck, 1982).

Then there will be a second section in which we intend to carry out a text analysis, text section by text section, paragraph by paragraph. Thanks to the research carried out by C.T. Gromada, we had the text of the various draft versions between Accra in 1974 and Lima in 1982 at our disposal.⁹⁰ The Lima ministry text will be tested for its internal consistency.

A third section will give an analysis of the Reformed responses, from churches as well as from theologians. For the responses from the churches, we consulted the collected official responses in the series *Churches respond to BEM* Vol. I–IV;⁹¹ with the exception of a few doubtful cases, it was not difficult to select the churches of the Reformed tradition. During the collection of the responses from Reformed theologians, we were able to use the published material of the *Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica* (IIMO) from Utrecht–Leiden, such as the BEM bibliography and the study about ministry by M. Gosker.⁹²

In the fourth and final section, we intend to evaluate each chapter and look for the elements that, from an ecumenical point of view, can enrich the Reformed theology of ministry.

What is the structure of the Lima ministry text? It consists of 6 chapters. The introductory chapter entitled *The Calling of the Whole People of God* gives an ecclesiological foundation. Then there is a chapter about a number of core aspects of the ordained ministry, among other things its origin and its authority, entitled *The Church and the Ordained Ministry*. The next three chapters deal with three well-known problem points in the theology of ministry; namely, the structuring, the apostolic succession and the significance of the ordination. The concluding chapter searches for the way to mutual recognition of ministry.

⁹⁰ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document.'* The title of this work does not quite cover the contents. It is much more than a Roman Catholic reflection on the third part of the Lima report. For that reason, this dissertation, defended at *Duquesne University*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, is a very accurate and detailed study into the various stages, transitions, and influences that led to the definitive version of Lima 1982. The author used both published and not published sources.

⁹¹ Thurian, *Churches respond to BEM*. vol. 1 (FO Paper 129), vol. 2 (FO Paper 132), vol. 3 (FO Paper 135), vol. 4 (FO Paper 137), vol. 5. (FO Paper 143), vol. 6 (FO Paper 144).

⁹² A. Houtepen, C. van Ligtenberg, B. Veldhorst, *Bibliography on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982–1987*, (Leiden–Utrecht: IIMO, 1988) and Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*.

The official English text, published by the commission itself in the series *Faith and Order Papers*, forms the basic text for this study. Where necessary, references will be made to the official German, French, and Dutch translations.⁹³

⁹³ *Taufe, Eucharistie und Amt*, Paderborn–Frankfurt 1982 and *Baptême, Eucharistie, Ministère* (Taizé: Le Centurion, 1982) for the German and French translations. The Dutch translation can be found in *Archief van de Kerken* 1982, 948–984. At the request from the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, the text was published separately in a brochure with the title *Doop, Eucharistie en Ambt. Verklaringen van de Commissie voor Geloof en Kerkorde van de Wereldraad van Kerken* (Amersfoort: De Horstink/Voorburg: Protestantse Stichting tot bevordering van het bibliotheekwezen en de leatuurvoorziening in Nederland/Leuven: Acco, 1982). In 1983 the translation was altered slightly in a second edition.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CALLING OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD (ART. 1–6)

This introductory chapter is not about ministry itself, but gives the theological context within which the ordained ministry is discussed.

PRECEDING HISTORY

Since the origins of *Faith and Order*, the search has been on for a common basis to discuss ministry. Over the years much has changed in this field, but there has been no change in the preference to discuss ministry in conjunction with the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. The text about ministry from the First World Conference in Lausanne in 1927 was not presented with an introduction. The document has a comparative approach to ecclesiology that is aimed at the realization of an institutional and organizational unity; it immediately presents the reader with the points on which the participating churches agree and those on which they differ.¹ The Second World Conference in Edinburgh, held in 1937, follows the same methodology, but does mention the royal priesthood of all believers as a common presupposition for ministry (Ed 92).² At the Third World Conference in Lund in 1952, ministry was not discussed separately, but was given a place in the chapter about continuity. As a consequence of changes in methodology, there is a growing awareness that ecclesiological disagreements are caused by differences in Christological approach. For this reason, the method of comparative ecclesiology and of approaching ministry as a problem in isolation

¹ H.N. Bate, *Faith and Order, Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 3–21, 1927* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), 467–472 (Report of section V, received by the full Conference, nem con., August 20th, 1927 “The Ministry of the church”).

² Vischer, *A Documentary History*, 58–61 for Final Report, V. The church of Christ: Ministry and Sacraments, (vii) *Ministry*. From now on the paragraphs from the Edinburgh conference in 1937 will be indicated by Ed and the number of the paragraph.

are abandoned in favor of studying ministry in the light of a deepened Christology and eschatological understanding of the church. This leads to an approach that is based on salvation history and Christology, which was prepared by the theology of K. Barth as well as by central themes from the Anglican and Orthodox traditions.

The results of this new working method became apparent at the Fourth World Conference in Montreal in 1963; again, ministry is the subject of its own section report, "The redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of his Church."³ This is the first time that ministry has its own separate introduction (Mo 77–82) with two theological points of departure. The first one, "the biblical teaching about the royal priesthood of the whole people of God" (Mo 77–78), is based on the trailblazing study, *Christ's Ministry and the Ministry of the church*,⁴ from the World Council of Churches' Laity Department. This report reflects on the significance of the laity's own responsibility for the church in detail; it led to new emphases in the approach to ordained ministry. The second one opts for an approach to ministry from the perspective of Christology (Mo 79–82) and consists of the following sections: "The work of Christ and the mission of the church" (Mo 83–87) and "Christ, the church and the ministry" (Mo 88–91) that provide a description of the Christological foundation of church and ministry.

The 1974 Accra text⁵ contains a more detailed introduction to the problems regarding ministry. In the preamble (Ac 1), the character of ministry as service is emphasized, and then the first chapter discusses ministry in the framework of the Christian community. The first two sections of this chapter will later be incorporated in the introductory chapter to the Lima text. The first section gives a twofold description of the church as the community that has its origin in the work of the triune God (Ac 3–6), and as historical-contingent social community (Ac 7–10). Thus the Christological foundation is widened to encompass the

³ P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer (ed.), *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order Montreal 1963* (Faith and Order Paper 42) (London: SCM Press, 1964), 61–69 (section III "The redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of his Church"). This concerns paragraphs 77–104, indicated with the abbreviation Mo followed by the paragraph number.

⁴ *Christ's Ministry and the Ministry of the church*, Laity Bulletin No 15 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1963).

⁵ *One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry*. References to paragraphs from this text that was laid down in Accra in 1974 will be indicated with Ac and the number of the paragraph.

Trinity. The second section places ordained ministry in the context of the service of the whole people of God and the multiplicity of gifts of grace in their midst (Ac 11–12).

Although the first six paragraphs of the Lima text did not receive their definitive structure until quite late,⁶ this does not mean that they were written as an introduction with hindsight after the text had been completed. Some people and churches from the Protestant tradition think that this is what happened; they are of the opinion that the basic points in the first chapter are not sufficiently worked out in the rest of the text. They think that the introductory chapter was added later.⁷ This description does not do justice to the development history of this section. The preceding history shows the gradual development of a common basis for discussing ministry during the preceding decades. A number of expressions originate from the early seventies, and, together with the rest of the text in its successive preliminary versions, they were further refined.⁸ The decision to reshape the preamble and part of the Accra text into a complete first chapter strengthened its significance and its integration in the rest of the text.

DISCUSSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL PARAGRAPHS

Paragraph One. In a broken world God calls the whole of humanity to become God's people. For this purpose God chose Israel and then spoke in a unique and decisive way in Jesus Christ, God's Son. Jesus made his own the nature, condition and cause of the whole human race, giving himself as a sacrifice for all. Jesus' life of service, his death and resurrection, are the foundation of a new community which is built up continually by the good news of the Gospel and the gifts of the sacraments. The Holy Spirit unites in a single body those who follow Jesus Christ and sends them as witnesses into the world. Belonging to the church means living in communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

This first paragraph places the existence of the church in the framework of all that God has said and done:

⁶ That happened during the meeting of the *Steering Committee* on 3–7 June 1980 in Geneva. See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document'*, 53–56.

⁷ This is the opinion of Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 73.

⁸ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document'*, 66–71, 165–180 and 300–309.

1. God is referred to in three different ways. The final sentence is a Trinitarian phrase that summarizes what it means to belong to the church. This widens the origin of the church: everything does not stem from the actions of the Son but from the work of God.
2. In earlier introductions the focus of God's activities was on the church, but now it is the whole of humankind. Christ's work for the church no longer takes center stage, but the *missio Dei* that is aimed at the whole of humankind does. After all, God's aim is not to promote church membership, but to make the whole human race into his people. Thus this ministry document is characterized by a missionary tone right from the start.
3. God works through instrumental election in history that, in this way, becomes a history of salvation. First Israel is called, then Jesus, and finally the church.
4. Israel's role is only a modest one. Although, in the usage of words in scripture, Israel could lay claim to it, only Jesus Christ is given the title, 'Son of God.' Israel is not included in this first paragraph until one of the last preliminary versions.⁹
5. The calling of Jesus Christ is the only one that is of vital importance. God spoke in a unique and decisive way in Jesus. The election task of the historical Jesus is expressed in incarnational and sacrificial terminology.¹⁰ His identification and solidarity includes the whole of humankind.
6. After this wide screen start, there is a closer focus on the church. Jesus' life of service, and his death and resurrection are the foundation of a new community that is continually built up by the good news of the gospel and the gifts of the sacraments. This phrase avoids all clerical emphasis.¹¹ When no one speaks about 'the proclamation' of the gospel, then no one will ask about the preacher. When there is no mention of 'administering the sacraments,' the question about the one who administers them also remains unspoken.
7. The Holy Spirit builds on the work of Jesus Christ and works on the church. Two activities are mentioned: uniting the followers of

⁹ The first time this happens is in the version of October 1980 in Rome. Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 307 reminds us of the work done by W. Pannenberg to achieve this.

¹⁰ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 179.

¹¹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 177.

Jesus in one body and sending them as witnesses into the world. These activities of the Spirit clarify that the church is the aim and means of God's calling activity. Uniting the followers of Jesus Christ makes them into God's people. In being sent into the world, the church becomes a third instrument of the *missio Dei*, next to Israel and Jesus Christ. The paragraph is concluded with a three-fold summary of what it means to belong to the church: living in communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Paragraph Two. *The life of the church is based on Christ's victory over the powers of evil and death, accomplished once for all. Christ offers forgiveness, invites to repentance and delivers from destruction. Through Christ, people are enabled to turn in praise to God and in service to their neighbours. In Christ they find the source of new life in freedom, mutual forgiveness and love. Through Christ their hearts and minds are directed to the consummation of the Kingdom where Christ's victory will become manifest and all things made new. God's purpose is that, in Jesus Christ, all people should share in this fellowship.*

While the first paragraph indicated that the life of service, the cross, and the resurrection are the foundation of the church, the second paragraph gives a more detailed explanation of the Christological basis of the church. Now we can harvest the fruit of the theological work that had been carried out since the conference in Lund in 1952.¹² The second paragraph gives an answer to the question why the church without Christ is unthinkable:

1. The resurrection means Christ's *hapax* victory over evil and death.
 2. This is why Christ has the power to offer forgiveness and delivery from destruction.
 3. This opens the way to a new life in freedom and love.
 4. The existence of humankind is given an eschatological dimension.
 5. It is God's purpose that all people should share in this fellowship.
- In this context, it is not quite clear which fellowship is referred to—with God through Christ or with the church as community of the faithful.

¹² After Lund, a theological committee was formed to draw up a report about Christ and the church. This committee consisted of a North American and a European section and delivered two studies, which were summarized in *Report on Christ and the church* (Faith and Order Paper 38) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1963). Both have a very strong Northern Atlantic, Protestant flavor and emphasize the mission of Christ and the church to the world. The reports are discussed in Vischer, *Apostolische Dienst*, 66–75.

Paragraph Three. *The church lives through the liberating and renewing power of the Holy Spirit. That the Holy Spirit was upon Jesus is evidenced in his baptism, and after the resurrection that same Spirit was given to those who believed in the Risen Lord in order to recreate them as the body of Christ. The Spirit calls people to faith, sanctifies them through many gifts, gives them strength to witness to the Gospel, and empowers them to serve in hope and love. The Spirit keeps the church in the truth and guides it despite the frailty of its members.*

After the initial Christological foundation, this paragraph provides us with a pneumatological analysis of the church. A separate paragraph for the work of the Holy Spirit in his relation to the church was not completed until much later in the development history of the Lima text.¹³ It is evidence of a slowly emerging realization about how important the Holy Spirit is for the understanding of the church. In the first paragraph, with its Trinitarian accent, the Holy Spirit had already been introduced as the one who gathers and sends out. The third paragraph elaborates this idea further:

1. Grammatically the Spirit is the subject and not the church. The church does not have the Spirit at its disposal, but the Spirit makes instrumental use of the church. The church is dependent on the liberating and renewing power of the Spirit.
2. The Spirit that is received by the believers is identified as the Spirit that was also upon Jesus, as is evidenced in his baptism and his resurrection.
3. The Spirit recreates the believers as the body of Christ. No more mention is made of a possibility that the Spirit might also be at work outside the church.
4. The work of the Spirit becomes visible in calling the people to faith, in sanctifying them, and in witness and service. The missionary tone of the first paragraph can also be heard here.
5. The eschatological perspective remains open because the Spirit keeps the church in the truth and guides it despite the frailty of its members.¹⁴

¹³ There is not a separate pneumatological paragraph until the version of June 1980. See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 178, 180 and 303.

¹⁴ Initially, the last sentence ended thus: "despite the error and failures of its members." As a result of the intervention by E. Flesseman-van Leer the impression that there was a contrast between a church without failures that was led by the Spirit and the sinful members was avoided. For this reason, the phrase "error and failures" was replaced by the word "frailty." See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 308–309.

Paragraph Four. *The church is called to proclaim and prefigure the Kingdom of God. It accomplishes this by announcing the Gospel to the world and by its very existence as the body of Christ. In Jesus the Kingdom of God came among us. He offered salvation to sinners. He preached good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, liberation to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Christ established a new access to the Father. Living in this communion with God, all members of the church are called to confess their faith and to give account of their hope. They are to identify with the joys and sufferings of all people as they seek to witness in caring love. The members of Christ's body are to struggle with the oppressed towards that freedom and dignity promised with the coming of the Kingdom. This mission needs to be carried out in varying political, social and cultural contexts. In order to fulfil this mission faithfully, they will seek relevant forms of witness and service in each situation. In so doing they bring to the world a foretaste of the joy and glory of God's Kingdom.*

In this paragraph the church takes center stage:

1. It is the calling of the church to be the expression of the Kingdom of God, and to proclaim and to prefigure it. By maintaining both the instrumentality and the sign character of the church, space is created for a more prophetic eschatological approach by the church and also for a more sacramental ontological view.
2. The terminology of the kingdom for the church is based on the task given to Jesus, which can be found in Luke 4:18–19.¹⁵ In Jesus, the Kingdom of God has come among us. During the concluding meeting in Lima in 1982, the short phrase, “He offered salvation to sinners,” was not added until the very last moment. It stands there a little forlornly, among all that ‘kingdom’ terminology. It is quite likely that the sentence was intended to appeal to churches with a classically soteriological terminology about salvation and sinners in order to encourage them to accept a terminology that expresses the significance of the gospel in terms of the kingdom of God.
3. The church also has a task in the framework of the kingdom of God. In Jesus, the kingdom of God has come among us. The believers are called to confess their faith and to witness, to express solidarity and to struggle for freedom and dignity as fruits of the kingdom.

¹⁵ The English text refers only to v. 18, the Dutch translation only to v. 19.

4. This mission constantly requires new forms of witness in ever changing political, social, and cultural contexts. This summary nearly replaces the whole of the fourth chapter of the 1974 Accra text entitled “IV. The ministry in practice today.”¹⁶
5. The ‘Kingdom of God’ takes center stage in this description of the church. In the tradition of the World Council of Churches, understanding of this concept has developed to include social welfare, orientation towards the liberation of the oppressed, and the renewal of the politico-economic world order. In this theology of the kingdom of God, communion with God and with our neighbors together serves the liberating witness and exemplary life. The phraseology is imperative.¹⁷

Paragraph Five. *The Holy Spirit bestows on the community diverse and complementary gifts. These are for the common good of the whole people and are manifested in acts of service within the community and to the world. They may be gifts of communicating the Gospel in word and deed, gifts of healing, gifts of praying, gifts of teaching and learning, gifts of serving, gifts of guiding and following, gifts of inspiration and vision. All members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and to use them for the building up of the church and for the service of the world to which the church is sent.*

In the fifth paragraph the church takes center stage once more—this time from the point of view of pneumatology, as a charismatic community on which the Holy Spirit bestows diverse and complementary gifts:

1. The Spirit’s gifts are intended to benefit the whole people and are manifested in acts of service within the community and to the world. What is noticeable is the widening of the scope of the gifts. While in the 1979 version the text said “his people,” from 1980 this becomes “the whole people.” This trend is in accordance with the widening of the focus of God’s activity as encountered in the first paragraph.¹⁸
2. The list of gifts is not exhaustive.
3. All members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and to use them to build up the

¹⁶ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 177–178.

¹⁷ Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument,* 82.

¹⁸ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 173.

church and to serve the world. Without specifically mentioning the term,¹⁹ this is one of the interpretations of ‘the general priesthood of all believers.’

When the *Faith and Order* ministry texts introduced the concept of *charismata*, an important shift took place. In the Montreal texts of 1963, “the special ministries” are still regarded as belonging to these gifts bestowed by the Spirit (Mo 92–93). In the 1974 Accra text, this approach is no longer found. In the paragraph about the *charismata*, it does say that the ordained ministry cannot be seen in isolation from the “general ministry of the whole people” (Ac 12).²⁰ The ministry is no longer seen as a direct or indirect consequence of the gifts bestowed by the Spirit. In the Lima text all reference to the ordained ministry has been omitted from the paragraph about gifts of the Spirit.

Paragraph Six. *Though the churches are agreed in their general understanding of the calling of the people of God, they differ in their understanding of how the life of the church is to be ordered. In particular, there are differences concerning the place and forms of the ordained ministry. As they engage in the effort to overcome these differences, the churches need to work from the perspective of the calling of the whole people of God. A common answer needs to be found to the following question: How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?*

The sixth and last paragraph of this introductory chapter has a pivotal function between the questions about the understanding of the church and the questions about the understanding of ministry:

1. The consensus about the calling of the people of God contrasts with the dissension over how the life of the church is to be ordered.
2. The core question here is about the place and forms of the ordained ministry.
3. The answer to this question needs to be sought from the perspective of the calling of the whole people of God.

¹⁹ In the text, “The ordained ministry,” drawn up at the *Faith and Order Commission* meeting in Louvain in 1971, the gifts bestowed by the Spirit are referred to in the framework of the priesthood of all. See also in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 119.

²⁰ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 70.

4. There is consensus about the specific theological question that must be answered in connection with the ministry.
5. The development of this question's terminology demonstrates that there are many different sides to it. There is a very clear change in emphasis in comparison with the 1974 Accra text, which spoke of taking a starting point for speaking about the ordained ministry in the Christian community (Ac 2). The version of January 1980 formulates a question for all churches with regard to ordering the ministry of the church in accordance with the will of Christ. The next version, that of June 1980, adds the broad perspective of spreading the gospel and building up the community.²¹ The Rome version, dated November 1981, no longer speaks of ordering the ministry, but ordering the church itself.²² Therefore, the ministry is involved in ordering the life of the church with a view to the external missionary task and the internal building up of the community. In carrying out these tasks, the will of God must be taken into account as well as the creativity of the Spirit in a number of different contexts.
6. This question is not asked in a vacuum; it is connected with the theological concept that was developed in the first five paragraphs. The Trinitarian and missionary opening leads to a mainly instrumental view of the understanding of the church that is called to witness and serve in the world in the framework of the *missio Dei*. To this end, all members receive special gifts. The church and the ministry are part of God's missionary universal salvation aim.
7. There is, however, a good deal of uncertainty regarding the exact meaning of the expression "the calling of the whole people of God." This expression can be given an inclusive as well as an exclusive meaning. Does it mean that all people in the world are called to be the people of God, or does it mean that all believers—the whole church community—is called? Does the consensus refer to the *missio Dei* that is aimed at all humankind, or does the consensus relate to the salvation of all members of the church? The tone of the first paragraph gives us cause to think inclusively, but the paragraphs about the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church and about the significance of the charismata for the faith community make the exclusive meaning the more likely one.

²¹ For these versions, see Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 174.

²² Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 306.

The concluding question seems to indicate that the two interpretations are meant to co-exist. The exclusive aspect is expressed in the fact that the question is concerned with understanding and ordering the life of the church, among other things, so that the community may be built up. The inclusive aspect comes to the fore in the aim to spread the gospel to people outside the church.

RESPONSES FROM THE REFORMED TRADITION

1. *Positive responses from the Reformed tradition*

In its summarizing report, *Faith and Order* writes that nearly all churches, including the Protestant ones, responded positively to this first chapter. Many comments referred to the basic outlines of an ecclesiology on a Trinitarian basis, the fact that the ministry was discussed in the framework of the calling of the whole people of God, and the core question in paragraph 6.²³ The connection between an open Trinity that focuses on the world and an open ecclesiology that focuses on the world is in agreement with the Trinitarian view of the ecclesiology as it is unfolded by the Reformed theologian J. Moltmann in his book, *Kirche und die Kraft des Geistes*.²⁴

2. *The connection with the priesthood of all believers*

The calling of the whole people of God is seen as fitting in with the Reformed tradition. It is often emphasized that this is typically a Reformation concept. In this context there are many references to the doctrine of the general priesthood of believers. A number of churches, mainly those of Lutheran origin,²⁵ miss the specific expression or would have liked to have seen the baptismal basis of the universal priesthood

²³ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 75.

²⁴ Gosker is right when she draws attention to this in *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 80–81. J. Moltmann's elaboration can be found in *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes* (Munich: Kaiser, 1975), 66–82. The Trinity cannot be seen in isolation from God's involvement with the world, it forms the basis of the Christian Trinitarian way of speaking about God. The knowledge of God's searching and sending love leads to a Trinity which is not shut away in itself, but is open to communication with the world.

²⁵ M. Seils, *Lutheran Convergence? An Analysis of the Lutheran Responses to the Convergence Document 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission* (Lutheran World Federation Report 25) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1988), 99–100.

included. Some churches of the Reformed tradition realize that they cannot just appropriate this basis of the section about ministry because in every-day church life their ministers also fail to cooperate sufficiently with other office bearers or non-office bearers.²⁶

3. *Criticism because of the lack of continuity of the ecclesiological outlines*

This introductory chapter was so greatly appreciated that there were many disappointed responses because the relation between the calling of the whole people of God and the ministry was not continued in the next section of the Lima text. A number of Reformed churches felt “betrayed.”²⁷ The dogmatic introduction to the problems of ministry appears to be very general and does not offer further help.²⁸ The commission’s response to this criticism is that they did not intend to provide a completely worked out ecclesiology, but wanted to concentrate on controversial issues relating to ministry. There are many references to the relationship between the ministry and the gifts and responsibilities of the whole people of God. They do admit, however, that there could have been more detail; in particular, with regard to involvement in the liturgy, leadership, and the continuity in the apostolic tradition.²⁹

H.M. Barth goes even further in this negative judgement. He comes to the conclusion that the chapter about the calling of the whole people of God has no influence at all on the discussion of apostolicity and succession that comes later. He does not rate this chapter and comes to the conclusion that the ecclesiology of this document does not see the church as *creatura verbi*, but as “(heils-) geschichtliche Grösse mit eigenem geistlichem Gewicht.”³⁰ What is in the first chapter leaves that possibility open; in particular, in paragraph 4, where it says that the church is called to prefigure the kingdom of God. However, the text does not allow itself to be tied down to this because there are also elements that point in a different direction. In our opinion, the value of this remark by Barth lies in the fact that it highlights the limitations of the ecclesiological foundations of this theology of ministry. A greater

²⁶ See the response of The Uniting Church of Australia in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 161, and the response from the Swiss Protestant Church Federation in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. VI, 85.

²⁷ A.P.F. Sell, “Some Reformed Responses to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,” *The Reformed World* 39 (1986) 3, 559.

²⁸ Frieling, “Amt,” 113–114.

²⁹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 120–121.

³⁰ Barth, “Apostolizität’ und ‘Sukzession’,” 352.

convergence in the field of the ministry also demands a more developed theology of the church. In its answer, the commission confirms that ecclesiology needs further study. The commission suggests that this be based on the concept of *koinonia*. Four complementary approaches are suggested: the church as *creatura verbi*, the church as sacrament of God's love for the world, the church as the people of God, and the church as serving and prophetic sign of God's coming Kingdom.³¹

LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION

1. *Confusion with the Protestant 'priesthood of all believers'*

The supposition that the purpose of the theme 'the calling of the whole people of God' is to take the discussion to what is called in the Protestant tradition 'the general priesthood of the believers'³² is not accurate. In the first place, this concept has acquired a number of different meanings in the Protestant tradition. While at the time of the Reformation it was used mainly to indicate that it was possible to approach God without intervention by a minister, these days it is more often used to refer to the responsibility of all believers together with the office bearers for building up the church and spreading the gospel.³³ Second, BEM finds its point of departure not only in the involvement of all believers, but above all in the broad missionary involvement with its strong outward direction, inspired as it is by the *missio Dei*. All the same, the basis for the calling of the people of God is in accordance with the Reformed approach to ministry. God's merciful initiative is given the emphasis it deserves, and the discussion is not based on a church that distributes means of grace.

2. *The not specifically Protestant response to 'the calling of the whole people of God'*

The Catholic traditions are also in agreement with the principle of the calling of the whole people of God. This introduction to the issue of

³¹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 147–151.

³² Gosker writes in *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 72–73 that the first six paragraphs function as a sort of introduction, and that it seems that they are intended to take the Lima Ministry report to a particular pitch, which the Protestants call the general priesthood of the believers.

³³ Barth discusses this in detail in: *Einander Priester sein: Allgemeines Priestertum in ökumenischer Perspektive Kirche und Konfession* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

ministry is similar to the way in which this issue is introduced into the dogmatic constitution of Vatican II about the church, *Lumen gentium*; namely, after a chapter about the people of God. Elements that at this time are particularly experienced as fundamental within the Reformed tradition function in a similar way within the Catholic traditions: the church in the context of the *missio Dei*, the Trinitarian foundation, the eschatological perspective, the ethical implications of the church as foretaste of the kingdom of God, and the church as charismatic community. They also approach the ministry from the question of how the life of the church is to be ordered in view of the external mission task and the internal building up, taking into account the revealed will of God and the creativity of the Holy Spirit in a number of different contexts. This conclusion is not only hopeful from an ecumenical point of view, it is also a warning against perceiving the ecumenical partners in a negative way.

3. *The similarities between the general approach to ministry in Lima and in Calvin's work*

There are similarities with the way that Calvin approaches ministry. He introduces the ministry question in the framework of his reflections about the significance of the church in the first two chapters of the fourth book of the *Institutes*, which deals with the means used by the Spirit to keep us in communion with Christ. The first sentence of the third chapter about the ministry begins with the sentence: "Iam de ordine dicendum est quo Ecclesiam suam gubernari voluit Dominus." The ministry is discussed in the framework of the ordering of the church in view of the governing of the church in accordance with God's will. The church is the place where the Lord alone should reign through his word. But because he does not dwell among people in visible presence, he makes use of the services of humans—ministers. Two parallels with Lima come to mind. Calvin also speaks about ministry in terms of ordering the life of the church, and he also regards God as the subject of the church. Calvin has his own Trinitarian approach because, as far as he is concerned, church and ministry are covered by the activities of the Spirit and aimed at Christ's reign.

4. *The differences in the approach to ministry in Lima and in Calvin*

There are also differences between Lima and Calvin. Calvin does not have the missionary approach that sets the tone of the Lima text right

from the first sentence. This is due to the social context in which he worked. The church was more or less the equivalent with Christian society. There is also a difference in emphasis between the two approaches. Calvin directs his attention primarily towards the protection of the reign of Christ in the church through his Word, while Lima's primary intention in the first chapter is to take ministry out of its isolation and to place it in the calling of the whole people of God.³⁴ For Calvin, the purity of the link between the individual believer and Christ is the most important issue, not building up community. This explains why Calvin does not pay much attention to the gifts of grace, which are distributed among the believers, or to the idea of 'general priesthood of the believers.'

5. *A theology of ministry in a missionary context*

In our opinion, a Reformed theology of ministry can profit in two ways from the manner in which the ministry is introduced here. In the first place, through the missionary point of departure that starts from the *missio Dei*. In that perspective of God in his calling and sending activities, a community is born that we call church. As a result, the ministry takes on a dynamic and outward looking perspective. The second point of departure is formed by the community of believers as the people of God. The service carried out by the ministry is characterized by equipping the community to become what it is; namely, the people of God. The aim of the work of the ministers must be to stimulate the gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes among the people of God.

³⁴ The official response from the Lippische Landeskirche in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. VI, 72 shows that it has not quoted Calvin quite correctly: "The governing of his community is the work of Christ himself; it is the ministry of all Christians to communicate his gospel in word and deed. This central biblical idea is expressly comprehended in the declaration under I, which gives a decisive hint to the methodology of the ecumenical discussion of ministry when the starting point of all questioning is termed the 'calling of the whole people of God' (§6). Thus Christians in their service of the gospel depend on Christ and on each other. We learn from Calvin: '... If everybody were left to his own resources and nobody needed the service of someone else (how arrogant is human nature) everybody would despise the others and be despised by them himself.'" This quotation from Calvin stands in the context of the discussion about the question whether the church must be governed by ministries or whether the leadership must be charismatic and not carried out by ministries. In this passage Calvin does not want to discuss the calling of all believers.

CHAPTER TEN

THE CHURCH AND THE ORDAINED MINISTRY (ART. 7–18)

The second chapter contains an introductory paragraph (§7) and then consists of four parts: ordained ministry (§8–14), ordained ministry and authority (§15–16), ordained ministry and the priesthood (§17), and the service by men and women in the church (§18).

INTRODUCTORY AND EXPLANATORY LIST OF DEFINITIONS (ART. 7)

Paragraph 7 gives a number of definitions in order to avoid confusion as to the meaning of the core concepts within this text because, up to now, differences in terminology have made the discussions between the churches more difficult. The concepts that are explained here are “charism,” “ministry,” “ordained ministry,” and “priest.”

Preceding History

The 1974 Accra text did not have an explanatory list of definitions. The orthodox theologians were the ones who asked for such a list in order to avoid confusion; in particular, because they always refer to an ordained minister as “priest.”¹

Discussion of the Paragraph

Paragraph Seven. *Differences in terminology are part of the matter under debate. In order to avoid confusion in the discussions on the ordained ministry of the church, it is necessary to delineate clearly how various terms are used in the following paragraphs.*

¹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 46 and 184.

- a. *The word ‘charism’ denotes the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit on any member of the body of Christ for the building up of the community and the fulfilment of its calling.*
- b. *The word ministry in its broadest sense denotes the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal Church. Ministry or ministries can also denote the particular institutional forms which this service may take.*
- c. *The term ordained ministry refers to persons who have received a charism and whom the church appoints for service by ordination through the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands.*
- d. *Many churches use the word priest to denote certain ordained ministers. Because this usage is not universal, this document will discuss the substantive questions in paragraph 17.*

The definition of “charism” is in agreement with paragraph 5 about the church endowed with gifts bestowed by the Spirit, although the term *charism* is not mentioned there. The purpose of the gifts—namely, to build up the church and fulfill the calling—corresponds with the aim of building up the community and for the service of the world to which the church is sent (§5).

The English concept of ‘ministry’ incorporates two different aspects, which in other Germanic languages, e.g., German and Dutch, are expressed by two separate words. Ministry, first of all, refers to willingness to serve, to which the whole people of God are called. It is more a state of mind than an indication of a specific task.² In the second place, the English word ‘ministry’ refers to a specific institutional form that can take on this willingness to serve. For this second meaning the German and the Dutch languages use *Amt* and *ambt* respectively.

The third concept, ‘ordained ministry,’ refers to people who have received a charism and whom the church appoints by ordination for ministry while appealing to the Holy Spirit and through laying on of hands. It is not clear what is meant with charism. If it refers to the gifts bestowed by the Spirit that each believer receives as indicated in the definition of charism, then it is not clear why it is mentioned

² That is confirmed by the evolution of the text proofs. In the June 1980 version we read: “The word *ministry* in its broadest sense refers to the service which the whole people of God is called to perform.” In the November 1981 text, the final two words have been omitted. Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 313, gives the following comment on this alteration: “... acknowledging the importance of forms of ministry in which *being* is considered at least as important as *doing*.”

separately here. If it is a special charism with a view to carrying out the ordained ministry, then it seems that a choice has already been made in the theological discussion about the recognition or receiving of gifts from the Spirit at ordination. The second option seems to be more logical. It is confirmed in the evolution of the draft versions. The first version of 1979 speaks of "a permanent service of the church in response to a special call from God." The following versions omit this phrase. The concept of charism is not introduced until the last version, that of 1981. It is likely that this was done in order to prevent the definition of the ordained ministry from being given only a ritual, formalistic interpretation.³

The definition of 'ordained ministry' is not quite consistent with the other definitions of this paragraph because it refers to persons instead of to services, as had been done in the definition of 'ministry.' The definition given really belongs to the concept of 'ordained ministers.'⁴ This shift is unavoidable because ordination is only applicable to people, not to services.

The last concept to be described is the word 'priest.' In many churches this word is used to describe particular ordained ministers. Because this usage is not universal, the conceptual questions connected with it are described in paragraph 17. The fact that the churches from the Reformation consciously avoid the term 'priesthood' in this context is noted in the January 1980 draft version, but after that it was removed.⁵

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY (ART. 8–14)

Articles 8 to 14 are of prime importance in the third section of the Lima document. They are based on the idea that the ministry of the church has been a *sine qua non* for the proclamation of the gospel through the ages. The following elements are discussed: ordained ministry as a constitutive element within the church (§8), the New Testament foundation

³ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 182 and 311.

⁴ The shift from services to persons takes place in the November 1980 version. See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 311. R. Frieling, "Amt" in Konfessionskundliches Institut (Hg.), *Kommentar zu den Lima-Erklärungen über Taufe, Eucharistie und Amt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 116, also notices this shift.

⁵ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 183.

in the Twelve (§9) and ‘the apostles’ (§10), Christ’s continued calling and sending of people with authority and responsibility in the post-apostolic time (§11), the warning not to attribute concrete ecclesiastical forms of ordained ministry directly to Christ (§11 commentary), the interrelatedness of faith community and ministers (§12), the functions (§13), the non-exclusive and representative way of carrying out tasks (§13, commentary), celebrating the eucharist as visible sign of communion with Christ (§14), and the foundation in church history and its connection with the task of oversight (§14 commentary).

The Preceding History

Because the first two world conferences had a very strong organizational and institutional attitude to a future united church, they looked for elements that would be essential for the ministry of the church that was to be formed. The First World Conference in Lausanne listed five aspects: (1) The ministry is an essential gift from God, (2) effected by Christ and the Spirit, (3) aimed at distributing Christ’s mercy in pastoral ministry, proclamation, and administering the sacraments, (4) thus to give leadership in the church, (5) to which ministers are called by the Holy Spirit and accepted by the church with prayer and laying on of hands (La 34). The Second World Conference in Edinburgh (1937) reduced this to four elements (Ed. 91–94): (1) The ministry is instituted by Christ and is a gift from God to the church in the administration of the Word and the sacraments. (2) The ministry presupposes the royal priesthood of all believers. (3) Ordination takes place with laying on of hands and prayer. (4) A universally recognized ministry will be essential for an united church. The two conferences have different emphases, but the same aims.

The Third World Conference in Lund (1952) also observes that, in most churches, one or other form of ministry is regarded as essential for the continuity of Christian life (Lu. 36), but now they opt for a study which places ministry in a wider Christological and eschatological framework (Lu. 38). At the Fourth World Conference in Montreal (1963) this realization is worked out for the first time: the church and “the special ministry” are discussed in a Christological and pneumatological framework. All ministry of the church is founded upon God’s salvation work in Christ. The ministry of the church is a continuation of the mission of the apostles (Mo. 85). This ministry is a matter for the whole church, as well as the special ministry (Mo. 87). All ministries are

rooted in the ministry of Christ and reflect his three-fold ministry (Mo. 88–89). The special ministry is a gift from the Spirit (Mo. 93.c). For the first time the election and sending of the apostles are discussed as the origin of the ministry of the church.

In the Accra declaration of 1974, we notice that the formulation of the essence of the ministry is becoming ever more structured. Chapter 1c “The basis and function of the ordained ministry” describes how Christ still calls people to the special ministry in the same way as the apostles were called; on the basis of this the conclusion is drawn that this ministry is essential for all times and places. Nonetheless, in some respects the function of the apostles is unique and laid the foundation for the ministry in our time (Ac. 13). The presence of this special ministry points to the priority of the divine initiative and authority in the life of the church. The specific task of the ordained ministers lies in pointing to the fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ (Ac. 14). The aim of this function is to build up the faith community by proclaiming the Word, and by leading worship and the sacramental life (Ac. 15). In ordination the church recognizes that the calling comes from God (Ac. 16).

Discussion per Paragraph

Paragraph Eight. *In order to fulfil its mission, the church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus of its unity. The ministry of such persons, who since very early times have been ordained, is constitutive for the life and witness of the church.*

This paragraph explains why the ordained ministry is constitutive for the church. The following elements can be distinguished:

1. It literally says that a ministry, a task therefore, is constitutive for the church and not a person, but, in practice, task and person coincide because the task requires a personalized execution.
2. The argument for indispensability is a functional one. In carrying out its mission the church needs persons who are publicly and permanently responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ. ‘Needs,’ in this context, is used in the strict sense of ‘cannot do without.’ The next step is the one from indispensable to constitutive. This line of argument has traveled a long way. At the time of Montreal in 1963 the approach was

still historical-descriptive: Christ chose apostles who proclaimed his salvation work, and their mission was continued by the church and its offices (Mo 84–85). The 1972 Marseille version was the first one in which it was emphatically stated that there has to be continuity in the ministry, and that, for that reason, this ministry is essential for the church of all times and circumstances.⁶ In this way a normative conclusion is attached to the historic approach. The Lima text retains the normative conclusion, but adopts a functional approach instead of the historic one.

3. One historic element remains in this way of arguing. Because the persons who were given this task were ordained ‘practically from the beginning’ of the church, the ministry that is constitutive is specified further as the ordained ministry.
4. The function definition is kept general; namely, publicly and continually pointing to the fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ.
5. The need for a person who keeps reminding the community that its missionary calling is centered on Christ leads to a central place for this person in the middle of the community on which God has bestowed his gifts of grace. Because of his function, he is given a central role. The person who points to Jesus Christ, the source of unity, becomes the focal point of unity. It is striking how, in this first general description of the task and the significance of the ordained ministry, its unifying role is emphasized.
6. The missionary framework is clearly present in this central paragraph about the significance of the ordained ministry of the church, as is evidenced by the first and last words.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize two aspects of this paragraph in historical perspective:

1. The unambiguous nature of the formulation: a specific ministry task in personalized execution is essential or—stronger yet—constitutive for the church. Without this ordained ministry the church cannot fully carry out its mission. In this way the line that had been only been penciled in since Lausanne in 1927 has been

⁶ “... In so far as they bore special, but not exclusive responsibility for proclaiming the message of reconciliation, establishing churches, and building them up in the apostolic faith, their ministry had to be continued. Such a ministry is essential to the church in all times and circumstances ...” This text is quoted in Ac 13. See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 74.

reinforced. There it said “essential to the being and well-being of the church” (La 34.1). Even in 1974 Accra did not state it more strongly than the word, “essential” (Ac 13).

2. With this pronouncement, the Lima declaration stands fully within the tradition which has determined the modern ecumenical movement;⁷ in particular, regarding the conviction that ordained ministry must not be minimalized or avoided as an age-old stumbling block, but that it must, on the contrary, be taken up as an opportunity to promote unity between the churches and to return to the churches a new missionary *élan*. Consensus about the ministry is promising for the unity between the churches, and such ministry as focus of unity will be able to help the churches much better to fulfil their mission.

Paragraph Nine. *The church has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility. Jesus chose and sent the disciples to be witnesses of the Kingdom (Matt. 10:1–8). The Twelve were promised that they would ‘sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel’ (Luke 22:30). A particular role is attributed to the Twelve within the communities of the first generation. They are witnesses of the Lord’s life and resurrection (Acts 1:21–26). They lead the community in prayer, teaching, the breaking of bread, proclamation and service (Acts 2:42–47; 6:2–6, etc.). The very existence of the Twelve and the other apostles shows that, from the beginning, there were differentiated roles in the community.*

This paragraph searches for a New Testament foundation for the statement in the previous paragraph. For the first time it no longer speaks of the apostles in general, but of the Twelve.⁸ In other words, an exegetical discovery—namely, that the Twelve is not identical with apostles—is incorporated and ecumenically made fruitful.

1. By referring to the fact that the Twelve were chosen and sent, the text proves that right from the earliest beginnings of the church people were given specific authority and responsibility.

⁷ The first unity concept from 1888, of Anglican origin, had been laid down in the four points of the so-called Lambeth-Quadrilateral. It referred to “the historic episcopate” as one of the four essential conditions for the reunification of churches. (Resolution 11 in R. Coleman (ed.), *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences 1867–1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), 14.).

⁸ In the draft version of January 1980 a separate paragraph about the Twelve is inserted, see Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 186–187.

2. Luke 22:30 explains the significance of the Twelve;⁹ namely, the connection with the twelve tribes of Israel and their eschatological importance.
3. The first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles tell us that after the resurrection the Twelve, as privileged witnesses of the Lord's life and resurrection, had a special set of tasks within the communities of the first generation: to lead the community in prayer, teaching, breaking the bread, proclamation, and service.
4. In a concluding remark, the term 'apostles' is used for the first time. The mere fact of the existence of the Twelve and the other apostles proves that from the beginning there were differentiated tasks within the community.
5. By choosing the words carefully, an attempt is made to avoid a hierarchical connotation. In the final version, the word "special" has been replaced twice by "specific" and "particular."¹⁰

Commentary (9). *In the New Testament the term 'apostle' is variously employed. It is used for the Twelve but also for a wider circle of disciples. It is applied to Paul and to others as they are sent out by the risen Christ to proclaim the Gospel. The roles of the apostles cover both foundation and mission.*

Paragraph 9 is the first place where we come across a separate commentary. This is an exegetical remark in connection with the different ways in which the word 'apostle' is used in the New Testament:

1. Specifically for the Twelve,
2. For a wider circle of disciples,
3. For Paul and for others who were sent by the risen Lord.

The task of the apostles is related to being a foundation as well as to having a mission.¹¹ This last remark is correct, but for the sake of clarity it could have been elaborated in more detail.¹²

⁹ Please note the capital letter, which can be found in the English original as well as in the Dutch translation.

¹⁰ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document'*, 316 and 325.

¹¹ For the different aspects of the various uses of the word 'apostle' in the New Testament, see J. Roloff, "Apostel/Apostolat/Apostolizität I. Neues Testament," 430–455.

¹² Very critical with regard to this point is H.-M. Barth, "'Apostolizität' und 'Sukzession' in den Konvergenz-Erklärungen von Lima," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 33 (1984) 3, 342. His questions relate to the fact that it is assumed to be self-evident that the role of the apostles is foundational. Foundation of what and on the basis of what?

Paragraph Ten. *Jesus called the Twelve to be representatives of the renewed Israel. At that moment they represent the whole people of God and at the same time exercise a special role in the midst of that community. After the resurrection they are among the leaders of the community. It can be said that the apostles prefigure both the church as a whole and the persons within it who are entrusted with the specific authority and responsibility. The role of the apostles as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ is unique and unrepeatable. There is therefore a difference between the apostles and the ordained ministers whose ministries are founded on theirs.*

The separate position of the Twelve/apostles with regard to the ordained ministers that come after them takes center stage in this paragraph:

1. After the differentiations in the previous paragraph between the Twelve and the apostles as leaders of the faith community, they are implicitly declared to be identical with each other in this paragraph in that before the resurrection they are called the Twelve and after the resurrection 'the apostles.' This transition is not explained in any more detail.¹³
2. The Twelve/apostles represent both the people of God and the leaders of the faith community.
3. As leaders of the community with their own authority and responsibility, the Twelve/apostles prefigure the ministers who are to follow them. As the witnesses of the life and resurrection of Jesus, they are unique and irreplaceable.
4. This unique and irreplaceable role of the apostles is connected with the fact that they function as "witnesses to the resurrection of Christ." This expression has been the subject of many changes. They are not "eyewitnesses of the risen Lord," as formulated in the 1972 Marseille text,¹⁴ nor "witnesses of the risen Christ," as formulated in June 1980,¹⁵ but "witnesses to the resurrection of Christ." C.T. Gromada assumes that this formulation about the resurrection witness has been subjected to so many changes to indicate that this is not an "eye-witnesses of the event of the resurrection but rather, the situation of a faith encounter the exact nature of which cannot be determined."¹⁶ In paragraph 9, the

¹³ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 326–327.

¹⁴ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 74.

¹⁵ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 318.

¹⁶ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 327.

Twelve are said to have been “witnesses *of*¹⁷ the Lord’s life and resurrection.” What they witnessed as the Twelve, they proclaim later as apostles.

5. The two successive paragraphs 9 and 10 both make a connection between the Twelve and Israel. While paragraph 9 emphasizes the important role of the Twelve as eschatological judges of Israel, paragraph 10 emphasizes their representative role for the renewed Israel. It is not clear to whom this ‘renewed Israel’ refers. Does this include the old covenant people? Or is there still a shadow of the substitution theology in which the church takes the place of the old Israel? The only other place in this ministry statement where there is a reference to Israel is paragraph 1, which refers to the calling of Israel in the framework of salvation history. There has not been any further theological elaboration of this theme—an observation that also applies to the rest of this statement.

Paragraph Eleven. *As Christ chose and sent the apostles, Christ continues through the Holy Spirit to choose and call persons into the ordained ministry. As heralds and ambassadors, ordained ministers are representatives of Jesus Christ to the community, and proclaim his message of reconciliation. As leaders and teachers they call the community to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, the teacher and prophet, in whom the law and the prophets were fulfilled. As pastors, under Jesus Christ the chief shepherd, they assemble and guide the dispersed people of God, in anticipation of the coming Kingdom.*

Whereas paragraph 10 emphasized the unrepeatable nature of the apostles, paragraph 11 indicates what is being continued from apostle to ordained minister:

1. Christ continues to choose people and to call them to the ordained ministry through the Holy Spirit.
2. Why are they being called and sent? Three elements are listed in biblical symbolic language: herald-ambassador, leader-teacher, and pastor.
3. There is an emphasis on the parallels between the work of Christ and of the sent ambassador. They proclaim his message; they teach like he did; and they nurture God’s people like he did. In this continuation of the work of Christ, the ordained ministry

¹⁷ The author’s italics.

appears to be more Christologically than apostolically orientated. It is therefore not surprising that in this text we do not find the Roman Catholic view that ministers are the successors of the apostles. There appears to be no reflection of the classical three functions of Christ, the *munus triplex*: priest, prophet, and king. The priestly task is missing. It was included in the 1980 and 1981 versions where Christ's priestly role as servant or intercessor is mentioned,¹⁸ but in the final version of Lima 1982 the priestly role of the ordained ministry has been moved to paragraph 17. The 1980 and 1981 versions have four aspects of the calling, which indicates that the original intention of this section had not been to draw comparisons with Christ's ministries.

4. It is not quite clear why it is specifically these three aspects of calling that are mentioned. Leadership is linked with learning to submit to the authority of Christ, while that aspect might just as well have been linked with being a pastor. In this context, being a pastor only refers to one aspect; namely, 'gathering' or 'bringing together.'
5. This is the paragraph where it is explicitly said for the first time that the ordained ministers represent Christ to the community because they proclaim his message. Here speaking in terms of 'representing' has replaced speaking in terms of 'signifying the priority of the divine initiative,' as can be found in the 1974 Accra text.¹⁹

Commentary (11). *The basic reality of an ordained ministry was present from the beginning (cf. para. 8). The actual forms of ordination and of the ordained ministry, however, have evolved in complex historical developments (cf. para 19). The churches, therefore, need to avoid attributing their particular forms of the ordained ministry directly to the will and institution of Jesus Christ.*

Since paragraph 11 so strongly emphasizes that the ordained ministry, like the apostles' ministry, goes back to a calling and sending by Jesus Christ himself, a commentary warns that the historically developed ways of ordaining and forms of the ordained ministry cannot be directly attributed to Christ himself. This commentary distinguishes

¹⁸ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 318.

¹⁹ "... The presence of this ministry in the community signifies the priority of divine initiative and authority in the church's existence." (Accra § 14).

between the principle of people who have been singled out—which has been the practice since the beginning of the church—and the concrete forms of ministry which the churches now employ as a result of a process of historical development. The inclusion of this brief but important commentary after Accra 1974 proves that historical and biblical awareness has grown.

Paragraph Twelve. *All members of the believing community, ordained and lay, are interrelated. On the one hand, the community needs ordained ministers. Their presence reminds the community of the divine initiative, and of the dependence of the church on Jesus Christ, who is the source of its mission and the foundation of its unity. They serve to build up the community in Christ and to strengthen its witness. In them the church seeks an example of holiness and loving concern. On the other hand, the ordained ministry has no existence apart from the community. Ordained ministers can fulfil their calling only in and for the community. They cannot dispense with the recognition, the support and the encouragement of the community.*

Paragraph 12 deals with a new aspect; namely, the interdependence of the ordained ministers and the community. The faith community needs its ministers, but the reverse is true as well: the minister cannot exist without the congregation. This part of the theology of ministry is in accordance with the ecumenical tradition and the concrete intention of the Lima ministry text to deal with the ministry from a broader ecclesiological foundation, which is evidenced in particular by paragraphs 3, 5, and 6.

1. Ordained ministers cannot exist without the community because their calling is to serve the community; for that reason, they can fulfil their calling only in and with the community.²⁰
2. Conversely, the faith community needs ministers. Here the parallel expression for “no existence apart from” has not been used because there is a restricted number of Christian communities that do manage without ordained ministers, such as the Quakers.
3. The need for ministers is connected with the role they fulfil within the community. Their presence in the community is a constant reminder of the divine initiative and our dependence on Jesus

²⁰ The 1973 draft version expresses it differently, but not less concretely in these words: “... the minister does not exist in isolation, nor for himself, and that he cannot deal arbitrarily with the Christian people.” See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 79.

Christ. The phrase “reminder of the divine initiative,” which had been cut out to indicate the continuity in the tasks of apostles and ordained ministers, is now used to describe the role of the minister with regard to the congregation. In comparison with paragraph 11, the minister represents Christ, no longer in his function, but in his being there—by his presence. The expression “dependence on Jesus Christ” can be found as primary task in paragraph 8.²¹

4. This description of Christ as the source of mission and unity is in accordance with the missionary and united accents of the ecumenical movement. It is, therefore, self-evident that the role of the minister in building up the community and strengthening the witness to the faith must be developed.
5. If ordained ministers want to play that role, their life must be exemplary. In them the members of the church seek an example of holiness and loving concern for the community. These quality requirements for ministers—to give them credibility—are an innovation in comparison with the 1974 Accra text.
6. The classically Protestant emphasis on the fact that the minister must not dominate the Word and the sacraments, and that Christ only and not the minister is the source of faith, hope, and unity has been omitted when compared with the Accra text (Ac 15).

Paragraph Thirteen. *The chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry.*

Paragraph 13 focuses on the functions of the ordained ministry:

1. These functions are collected under the general task of assembling and building up the body of Christ. This agrees with the description of the first part of the ministry in paragraph 12, building up the congregation. The second part—strengthening the witness—

²¹ In the draft versions of January and June 1980, there is still mention of the reminder of “the priority of the apostolic message in the life of the community,” but due to, among others, a critical remark made by E. Flesseman-van Leer, this expression is dropped because the Bible itself reminds us of the priority of the message. She says that it is not the apostolic message that is represented, but Christ himself. See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 324.

has not been left out, but has become a part of building up the congregation.

2. This building up is made possible by carrying out three functions:
 - a. The proclamation and teaching of the Word of God,
 - b. Celebrating the sacraments,
 - c. Giving leadership to the life of the community in its liturgical, missionary and diaconal aspects.

The formulation of the second task, in particular, is not very specific because celebrating the sacraments is a task to which all believers are called.

Commentary (13). *These tasks are not exercised by the ordained ministry in an exclusive way. Since the ordained ministry and the community are inextricably related, all members participate in fulfilling these functions. In fact, every charism serves to assemble and build up the body of Christ. Any member of the body may share in proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, may contribute to the sacramental life of that body. The ordained ministry fulfils these functions in a representative way, providing the focus of unity of the life and the witness of the community.*

In this commentary, the exclusivity of the task of the ordained ministry is given more nuance. This commentary paragraph is new in comparison with the 1974 Accra declaration.

1. All members participate in building up the congregation with their gifts of grace, as had already been stated in the section about charism in paragraph 7. All contribute to proclaiming the word and to the sacramental life. What strikes us is the fact that giving leadership has been omitted. In the draft versions of January and June 1980, the non-ministers still shared in giving leadership, but not in the sacramental functions.²²
2. What then is special about the way in which the ordained ministers carry out these functions? It happens in a representative way. It is not entirely clear what is meant by this. Is Christ being represented or is it the community?
3. Because of the representative character, the ordained ministry functions as a focus for the unity of life and witness of the community. This last thought agrees with the formulation of paragraph 8

²² Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 322 and 329.

because there the ministry is also a focus of unity in the midst of the many gifts.

Paragraph Fourteen. *It is especially in the eucharistic celebration that the ordained ministry is the visible focus of the deep and all-embracing communion between Christ and the members of his body. In the celebration of the eucharist, Christ gathers, teaches and nourishes the church. It is Christ who invites to the meal and who presides at it. In most churches this presidency is signified and represented by an ordained minister.*

The role of the ordained ministry in the celebration of the eucharist determines the contents of this paragraph.

1. It is especially in the eucharistic celebration that the ordained ministry is the visible focus of the deep and all-embracing communion between Christ and the members of his body. The formulation is similar to that of paragraph 8, but it is more intense here: the ordained ministry not only points to the dependence on and the communion with Christ, but represents Christ himself as the one who gives the invitation to and presides at the feast. And the unifying function is not only concerned with the gifts and activities of the members, but deals also with the relation between Christ and the members of his body.

2. This paragraph must also be read in the light of paragraph 29 of the section about the eucharist; after stating that it is Christ who gives the invitation to the meal and is host at it, the role of the minister is explained in great detail as follows:

In most churches, this presidency is signified by an ordained minister. The one who presides at the eucharistic celebration in the name of Christ makes clear that the rite is not the assemblies' own creation or possession; the eucharist is received as a gift from Christ living in his Church. The minister of the eucharist is the ambassador who represents the divine initiative and expresses the connection of the local community with other local communities in the universal Church.

This representation sets out to show the divine initiative and the connection with the wider community of the church. Presiding at the Table sounds less functional in paragraph 14 of the ministry section because here it is set in the framework of the fact that the ordained minister is the visible focus of the communion between Christ and the members of his body.

3. The text indicates that not all churches accept this point of view. The Dutch Reformed theologian E. Flesseman-van Leer expressed her reservation, and the Lutheran G. Gassmann indicated that not all Lutherans shared this standpoint.²³ The fear of sacerdotal priesthood is palpable. This paragraph about the function of the ordained ministry when celebrating the eucharist is new in comparison with the 1974 Accra text. In the successive draft versions the attention for the eucharistic theme increases.²⁴

Commentary (14). *The New Testament says very little about the ordering of the eucharist. There is no explicit evidence about who presided at the eucharist. Very soon however it is clear that an ordained ministry presides over the celebration. If the ordained ministry is to provide a focus for the unity of the life and witness of the church, it is appropriate that an ordained minister should be given this task. It is intimately related to the task of guiding the community, i.e. supervising its life (episkopé) and strengthening its vigilance in relation to the truth of the apostolic message and the coming of the Kingdom.*

In the commentary to paragraph 14, the role of the ordained ministry at the celebration of the eucharist is tested exegetically and in terms of church history.

1. The New Testament says very little about the ordering of the eucharist, and nothing at all about who presides at the eucharist.
2. Evidence from church history makes it clear that before long²⁵ this function is carried out by an ordained minister.
3. The recommendation that an ordained minister should preside over the celebration cannot be founded on the New Testament, but is based on the developments in the early church.
4. The relation between the function and the role changes in comparison with paragraphs 8 and 14. In paragraph 8, the specific function of the ordained minister—namely, a permanent reminder

²³ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 326, footnotes 56 and 57.

²⁴ In the version of November 1980, the breaking of the bread is added to the role of the Twelve in the first congregation for the first time. In the same version the role of Christ in the eucharist is explained for the first time. See also Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 316, 323, and 326.

²⁵ The draft versions of January and June 1980 were more careful with the time indication. They use the phrase “in later times,” which—in the first place—more clearly indicates that, at the beginning, this was not the case, and—second—is a more neutral expression with regard to the speed in which this change took place. See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 196.

of the dependence on the basis of unity, Jesus Christ—is the catalyst to the role of focus of unity. The person who reminds the church of the basis of unity becomes himself sign of unity, as a result of the function. In other words, the function leads to the role. In the commentary of paragraph 14, the focus of unity is not the result, but the point of departure; namely, the ordained ministry aims at being the focus of unity. And this is the reason why it is deemed appropriate that this ministry presides at the eucharist. The role leads to the function.

5. The function at the Lord's Table, which originates in the role as focus of unity, is connected with the function of giving leadership in the community. This is explained as supervising and strengthening the vigilance in relation to the truth of the apostolic message and the coming of the kingdom. This demonstrates a shift in emphasis in comparison with paragraph 13, which regarded carrying out leadership as the third main task of the ordained ministry. In paragraph 13 the carrying out of leadership is seen as being representative for the community in its worship, its mission, and its service. In the commentary to paragraph 14, leadership is seen more as standing before the community, as representative of the Lord, so that the flock entrusted to this minister may continue on the way of the Lord. In this standing before the community on behalf of the Lord, the functions of presiding during worship and giving leadership to the community are closely related.
6. When explaining the supervisory task, reference is made to the New Testament word *episcopo*, from which the word 'bishop' is derived. Later on in this document, the office of bishop will play an important part. It is not by chance that the discussion of the functions and roles of the ordained ministry is based on a New Testament root.
7. BEM gives four connected, but partly separate arguments why an ordained minister should preside at the Lord's table:
 - a. It is appropriate for an ordained minister, who represents Christ, to preside at the table of the Lord to ensure that we do not forget that Christ is the host (§E29 and §M14).
 - b. Because the ordained minister is the appropriate person to express the link with other local churches at the Lord's Table (§E29).
 - c. Because the ordained ministers, as visible center of the communion between Christ and the members, and as focus of the

unity of the life and witness of the church, are best placed to preside at the Table of the Lord (§M14 and §M14c).

- d. Because of their leadership task, the ordained ministers are called to preside at the table of the Lord (§M14c).

The symbolic function carried out by the ordained minister consists of three different elements:

1. Representing Christ vis-à-vis the community,
2. Representing the unity of the body of Christ in the local faith community,
3. And representing the unity of the local faith community in a wider ecclesiastical context.

Below we give a summary of what the Lima text says about the functions and the role of the ordained ministry of the church:

1. Of all ecumenical texts about the ministry, the Lima declaration is the one that states most unambiguously that the ordained ministry is constitutive for the church because the function description of this ministry is in itself the foundation of its necessity. This conclusion is reached more strongly than from the church's historical practice.
2. This indispensable task—aimed at ensuring the continuity of the Christian church—consists of watching over the church's Christological orientation. The actions of the ministers as called and sent persons remind the faith community, as a whole, of the divine initiative on which the community is founded. It is their central task to remind the church of its dependence on Christ as the source of its mission and the foundation of its unity.
3. They build up the community around Christ as his body by undertaking the following tasks: proclaiming and teaching the Word, celebrating the sacraments, and giving leadership.
4. In carrying out these tasks, they take on the role of representing Christ. They are identified with the person to whom they refer. Because they represent him, the faithful will look to them as examples of holiness and loving concern.
5. In their representative way of life, they are distinct from other members of the congregation with their various charisms.
6. From their function as representatives of Christ, they play a unifying role in the community. Because they constantly point to Christ, the ministers themselves become a center of unity for

the life and witness of the community and for the union with Christ.

7. Their referring and unifying function becomes most visible when they preside at the table of the Lord. More than at any other time, this is when it becomes clear that the ordained minister represents Christ.
8. Because of what their task consists of, it is logical for them to give leadership by supervision and to watch over the purity of the apostolic message and the eschatological focus.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. *Concerning the use of the qualification "constitutive"*

A number of churches stumbled over the qualification "constitutive" with regard to the place of the ordained ministry of the church.²⁶ *Faith and Order* explained in their answer what they understood 'constitutive' to mean. They did not mean that the ordained ministers form the foundation of the church, and that they replace Jesus Christ or the apostles and the prophets. Nor did they want to suggest that the ordained ministers come first and then the faith community. No, it is the continuous presence of Christ in Word and sacrament, through the Holy Spirit, which is constitutive for the church.

This implies, however, that for the sake of the ongoing life and mission of the church there must be persons, called by God, sent by Christ, assisted by the Holy Spirit and recognized by the people of God, to preach the word, to celebrate the sacraments, to bring together and guide the Christian community in faith, hope and love (cf. M. 13). In terms of this service of Christ and of the community the ordained ministry is therefore constitutive or essential.²⁷

²⁶ See, among other things, the response from the Presbyterian Church of Ireland in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 216: "The church is constituted by the Word and sacraments and these are administered primarily by the ordained ministry. Only in this derivative and relative sense is the ministry constitutive of the church," or the response from the Evangelical-Reformed Church of North-West Germany in *idem*, vol. IV, 97: "Christ himself is, according to his promise, present by word and spirit in the assembled congregation. Where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there among them (Matt. 18:20). He himself gathers, protects and preserves the congregation chosen from the whole human race for eternal life through his spirit and word (Heidelberg Catechism, Qu. 54)."

²⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990*, 121.

The last words demonstrate that, for the commission, constitutive means the same as essential. This explanation shows that the commission does not intend to give the ordained ministry a significance that is separate from the Word, separate from Christ, or separate from the congregation. The general description of the significance of the ordained minister as someone who points to Christ in paragraph 8 is a guarantee against the minister taking the place of Christ.

This opinion is in accord with the viewpoint of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, after their confrontation with the Anabaptist tradition. The ministry belongs to the *esse* of the church, and, for that reason, it is essential and indispensable for the church of Christ. The fact that they did not include the ministry in the list of classic marks of the true church—namely, pure preaching of the Word and administering the sacraments in accordance with Christ’s institution—does not mean that, as far as they were concerned, the ministry might be dispensed with.

All the same, in our opinion, the use of the word ‘essential’ would have caused less misunderstanding than the word “constitutive” did. We agree that the work of called and sent ministers should be regarded as fundamental, essential, and indispensable for the life and witness of the church. The use of the concept ‘constitutive,’ however, tends to lead to misunderstandings. It suggests an independent significance that the ministry does not have. At best it might be possible to speak of a derived ‘constitutivity’ because the ministry merely consists of serving what is really constitutive; namely, the presence of the living Lord, who continually speaks to his people through the prophetic and apostolic Word. In addition, the expression carries with it the suggestion that the minister precedes the faith community, both in time and in position. In short, what is essential need not necessarily be regarded as constitutive. In our opinion, this use of the word is of no benefit to the ecumenical discussion about the ordained ministry. The churches of the Reformation can point to the many negative experiences from the past in order to exercise caution with regard to this point.

2. *Concerning the link between the ordained ministry and unity*

In paragraph 8, a second element is introduced that is not a matter of course for the Reformed tradition. In this fundamental paragraph, the ordained ministry is given the function of focus for unity. The expression “focus for unity” also occurs in the commentary to paragraph 13,

and in paragraph 14 and its commentary. Does this not mean that the ordained ministry is given a function that belongs to Christ alone, and should not the Lord's Supper be seen as the focus for the communion between Christ and the members of his body?²⁸ To these questions that come mainly from Protestant churches, the commission responds that they created a problem by using the definite article twice; namely, in the commentary to paragraph 13 and in paragraph 14, as well as using the indefinite article twice; namely, in paragraph 8 and in the commentary to paragraph 14. This created the impression that only the ordained ministry fulfilled the role of focus for unity, while—in fact—unity can be made visible and safeguarded in different ways. This does not mean, however, that among all these instruments of unity the ordained ministry does not fulfil a special responsibility and service for safeguarding and renewing unity.²⁹ This is a result of its role as a representative of the *regional* level in the local community.

3. *Concerning the relation between the apostles and ministers in later times*

H.-M. Barth³⁰ is of the opinion that too many uncritical statements have been made about the relationship between the apostles and ministers in later times. When we read in paragraph 9 that the apostles form the foundation, he wonders what they are the foundation of and why. Paragraph 10 states that the apostles prefigure ministers of later times. How should we interpret this? Historically? Eschatologically? Barth is also of the opinion that the multi-faceted nature of the New Testament apostle concept has not been fully appreciated. In his opinion, this is due to a dogmatic prejudice that is expressed in the commentary to paragraph 11; namely, that the basic reality of the ordained ministry was present from the beginning. It seems accurate to us that questions from the Reformed tradition are continuously raised about the lack of foundation from the New Testament of some statements. Especially in relation to the link between the apostles and later ministers.

²⁸ See also the response from the Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 121: "The ordained ministry cannot be the 'focus for the unity of the life and witness of the community' (Comm. 13), because the only possible 'focus' is Jesus Christ."

²⁹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 122.

³⁰ H.-M. Barth, "'Apostolizität' und 'Sukzession' in den Konvergenz-Erklärungen von Lima," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 33 (1984) 3, 342–343.

4. *Concerning the representation of Christ by the ordained ministry*

When paragraph 11 states that ordained ministers represent Christ to the faith community in their function as herald-ambassadors of Jesus Christ, then this statement causes responses from all traditions of the church. The Orthodox find this way of speaking much too functionalistic and prefer the expression ‘icon of Christ.’ The Vatican magisterium is of the opinion that the concept of representation requires greater depth by adding the formula *in persona Christi*, while many responses from the Reformed tradition show great reluctance to use this concept. The fear is that, in this way, the minister will take the place of Christ.³¹ This fear of making the minister’s status ontological is very deep.³²

We are reminded of the way Calvin struggled with words like *vicaris*, ‘instrument,’ and ‘representative’ to describe the relation between Christ and the minister. What is important is that the sovereignty of Christ remains guaranteed, and that the representation is seen in a functional sense. The minister represents Christ only when he carries out his function of preaching the Word.³³ In its answer, the commission emphasizes the biblical roots of the representation in texts like Luke 10:16 and 2 Cor. 5:20.³⁴

5. *Concerning the ordained minister presiding at the Lord’s Table*

The connection between being Christ’s representative and presiding at the eucharist has always been treated with great circumspection by the Reformed churches because they feared that the Lord’s Table and the ordained ministry might be viewed from a sacerdotal viewpoint. The formulation that in the eucharist the ordained minister represents the deep union between Christ and the congregation (§14) especially causes much resistance. When, in addition, recourse has to be taken to non-

³¹ See among others the response from the Presbyterian Church in Canada in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 157: “We believe that human ministers share in the offices of Christ rather than represent or substitute for him ...”

³² See the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 175: “We are in agreement with the intention to describe the ministry in *functional* (§8) rather than classical, ontological sacramental terms (*repraesentatio*),” and the response from the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland in *idem*, vol. V, 85: “Thus the making present (representation) and realisation of Christ occurs in the exercise of the ministry. But the holders of office do not become Christ’s representatives. We cannot agree to any independent status for the ministry vis-à-vis word and sacrament.”

³³ *Institutes* IV,3,1.

³⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 122.

biblical, early church developments, as is seen from the commentary to paragraph 14, the reservation becomes even stronger.

In its answer, the commission explains how it sees this representative character of the minister at the table: "Not these persons in their own right, but precisely their public function (presidency) in the proclamation of the word and at the table of the Lord is an effective sign of the presence of Christ in the community. In this way they express the *koinonia* of all the baptized with the one body of Christ of all times and places, in which Christ himself is the one who presides in the Eucharist."³⁵ This explanation will be able to remove much reservation because no sacerdotal language is used here, and because the explanation says that the representation function is not bound to the person as such, but to the public function of proclaiming the Word and presiding at the Table. It is also significant that here proclamation of the Word and presiding at the Table are linked. This is the reason why the Reformers regarded the ordained minister who proclaimed the Word as the right person to also administer the sacraments because they perceived an inseparable link between Word and sacraments.

The qualifying adjective 'effective' to the word 'sign,' however, sounds far too sacramental to many Reformed Christians in connection with the representation of Christ by the minister. The commission goes on to explicitly say that paragraph 14 has to be read in the light of paragraph 29 of the section about the eucharist: "Accordingly the last sentence of M.15³⁶ has to be read in the light of E.29, so that the following understanding could emerge: it is the ordained minister who, in presiding at the Lord's supper, publicly represents the divine initiative and the *koinonia* with the church of all times and places." In particular, the second argument is in accordance with seeing ministry as the focal point for unity. In particular, the diachronic link gives the ministry a function in the framework of continuity. This element will take center stage in the fourth chapter of this section about ministry.

The responses from churches from the Reformed tradition demonstrate that—in principle—they also opt for an ordained minister as the one who presides at the Lord's table, but some also indicate that there may be exceptional circumstances in which such persons are not available.³⁷

³⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 123.

³⁶ This has to be a typing error. It should say M.14.

³⁷ See, among others, the response from the United Reformed Church in the United

6. *Concerning the place of Israel*

A number of Reformed churches express their disappointment at the lack of attention given to Israel in this section about ministry.³⁸ In her study about this declaration, M. Gosker comes to the conclusion that Israel and the Old Testament appear to be regarded as representatives of a closed era, an intermediate stage in the history of salvation, which came to an end when Christ came among us, thus fulfilling the law and the prophets.³⁹

The lack of clarity with regard to the significance of Israel and the lack of references to the Jewish people at the time of Jesus is undoubtedly a shortcoming in the ecclesiology and the theology of ministry that is developed in this declaration. It is possible that the concepts of ‘covenant’ and ‘remembrance,’ and the ordination and the structure of ministry as they appear in the Old Testament are fruitful for the theology of ministry. We are convinced that M. Gosker⁴⁰ and a number of other Dutch theologians are right when they speak of an omission in the Lima report. In the 20th century, thinking about Israel in a theological framework has been one of the most important contributions of Dutch theologians who followed in the footsteps of A.A. van Ruler and K.H. Miskotte. Statements made by a number of leading theologians that the Old Testament and Jewish leadership

Kingdom in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 107: “Our church provides that in certain circumstances particular lay persons may be authorized to preside at the baptismal and communion services. This does not minimize the significance of ordination, but asserts the primacy of meeting the pastoral needs of the people of God. This needs to be noted when the ordained ministry is discussed (e.g. M14), and may assume greater importance if weekly celebration of the eucharist increases, especially in those pastorates where one ordained minister serves several congregations.”

³⁸ See, among others, the joint response from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 101–102: “In the reading and studying of the Lima documents, the question could arise as to whether justice has been done to the unity of scripture. Biblical arguments are taken exclusively from the New Testament and as a result no special theological attention is given to the continuity of God’s people in the Old and New Covenant. Those who take the Old Testament seriously and as a result of the dialogue with Israel are prepared to read the New Testament as having its origin in the Old Testament, will begin to see interconnections which were previously hidden and will encounter questions which, in the light of the BEM report, cannot be ignored. One could imagine, for instance, that (...) the offices of prophet, priest and king used in the Old Testament could be looked at when dealing with the structure of the church’s ministry.”

³⁹ Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 54.

⁴⁰ Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 54–57.

are not very relevant for the Christian ministry prove that much needs to be done to pass on to the ecumenical community what had such a clarifying influence in the Netherlands.

7. *Concerning the ordained ministry with respect to building up the congregation*

In general terms, it is right to say that the function description of the ordained ministry in paragraph 13 has a familiar ring for Christians from a Reformed background. But even here, there has been a shift with regard to the Reformed approach. Like the Accra text, the Lima text states that the main objective of the ministry is to serve and build up the faith community, while the Reformation redefined the service given by the minister as service to the Word. The faith community as *creatura verbi*⁴¹ is then created on the basis of the service to the Word. G.H. Vischer's acute words about the Accra text apply equally to the Lima text:

All the same, we are of the opinion that in this instance things are turned upside down, when the community is given pride of place as *material* object of ministry, whilst Word and Sacrament are only described as the *formal* object of ministry: ministry is in essence service to the community, but this service is carried out through Word and sacrament. In our opinion it should be the other way around. In essence ministry is to be seen as service to Word and sacrament. This service, when it is carried out in the right way is always given in the community, so far as the Word creates the church. It may seem only a subtle difference, but it is a very important one. Because this is the only way to save the community from a mystifying and excessive demand and to expect from the Word of God alone the things that it alone can carry out.

This is an important contribution to the ecumenical dialogue about the ministry from Reformation theology. By regarding the minister first and foremost as a servant to the Word and only secondly as a servant

⁴¹ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 188–189: “Dennoch meinen wir, dass hier die Dinge auf den Kopf gestellt sind, wenn die Gemeinschaft an erste Stelle rückt als *materiale* Bestimmung des Amtes, während Wort und Sakrament nur dessen *formale* Bestimmung abgeben: Wesentlich ist das Amt Dienst an der Gemeinschaft, dieser Dienst aber geschieht durch Wort und Sakrament. U.E. muss es umgekehrt heissen: Wesentlich, material ist das Amt Dienst an Wort und Sakrament. Es wird aber dieser Dienst, recht getan, immer in der Gemeinschaft geschehen, sofern eben das Wort Kirche schafft. Der Unterschied mag allzu subtil erscheinen. Er ist aber entscheidend. Denn nur so wird die Gemeinschaft vor einer mystifizierenden Überforderung bewahrt und dem Wort Gottes allein zugemutet, was auch allein es zu tragen vermag.”

to the church, the danger is avoided of making the ordained minister into a servant of an institute or just someone who is involved in group processes.

Lessons and Questions for the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the formulation in symbolic language of what is particular to the ordained ministry

What is special about this ministry is expressed in two different ways. It is done in such a way that the two formulations can only pin down what is special about the ordained ministry when they are put together. So paragraph 13 and the commentary upon it are very clear about that point. What, according to the Lima text, is special about the ordained ministry? Paragraph 13 answers this question by giving a list of three interrelated tasks: proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and giving leadership to build up the faith community. In this paragraph a number of functions express what is special about the ordained ministry. This functional approach is complemented in the commentary to paragraph 13. The premise on which it is based is that all members of the faith community take part in these ministry functions. Yet, if these tasks are not carried out exclusively by the ordained ministers, what is special about their office? The commentary says that the ordained ministry is special because of the representative way in which the ordained ministers carry out their ministry. Whether or not a function is a ministry task is determined not only by the specific task involved, but also the representative way in which it is carried out. Therefore the ecumenical theology of ministry needs two aspects to express what is special about the ordained ministry; namely, a functional and a representative element. The ordained ministry is responsible for a specific task that is carried out in a representative way.

When we look more closely at paragraphs 8 to 14, we see that both of these two elements abound in these paragraphs. First of all, ministers carry out a number of functions. The minister points to Christ (§8), the Twelve were the first witnesses of the life and resurrection of the Lord and led the congregation during worship (§9), the apostles exercised leadership in the faith community (§10), as teachers, prophets, and pastors—just like the ordained ministers who came after them (§11). Finally, the ordained minister carried out a specific liturgical function at the table of the Lord (§14), and he is responsible for the leadership of

the faith community (§ 14 commentary). On closer inspection, however, these tasks, functions, and responsibilities are carried out in a representative way. We are struck by the fact that the term ‘representative’ turns up time and time again. The Twelve represent the new Israel—all God’s eschatological people (§ 10), and the ordained ministers represent Jesus Christ (§ 11)—who receives the faithful at his table (§ 14). The representative character is explained in more detail in paragraph 12. The presence of the ordained ministry reminds the community of the divine initiative and the dependence of the church on Jesus Christ. It is not only the representation terminology, but also the metaphoric language that emphasizes the symbolic character of the functions. In the first place, we read the expressions “providing a focus for unity” and “being a focus for unity.” To say that the minister points to Christ is not adequate. By taking up this task, he provides a focus of unity (§ 8). We also find this expression in the commentaries to paragraphs 13 and 14 and in paragraph 14 in an amended version; namely, “is a visible focus of the communion.” We encounter the next example of symbolic use of language in paragraph 10, where it says of the apostles that they prefigure both the church as a whole and the persons within it who are entrusted with specific responsibilities. The expression ‘accepting a role’ has a symbolic element, too. In fulfilling or playing the role, a function is given a symbolic added value. The Twelve fulfilled a special role (§ 9 and § 10), and the apostles carried out a unique role (§ 10). In conclusion, the insistence on exemplary character in the ministers (§ 12) can be understood only on the basis of their representative character. All these examples demonstrate that, in addition to functional use of language, this symbolic use of language is very characteristic for the ecumenical discussions about the ministry. A minister is not only somebody who fulfils a function but also someone who acts as a symbol. It is obvious that purely functional language is not adequate.

The Reformation chose to express what was specific for the ministry of the church in functional terms. In particular, Luther re-formed the ministry as service to the Word. The Reformation churches were to continue in this track because they wanted to prevent church and ministry from obtaining independent status and power independently from the Word of the Lord. For this reason, they abandoned the ontological language of the medieval church of the West. As a result of this use of language, God, church, and ministry were brought under one common denominator. The renovating, functional interpretation proved to be a great asset. The question was no longer what and who the minister

was, but what the church was called to do and say, and what the minister was called to do and say. Functional language use was in keeping with an instrumental approach to church and ministry. The ministry of the church was firmly defined as service to the Word and administration of the sacraments. All concrete tasks are connected with these core functions. It turned out, however, that a functional approach did not satisfy the Reformation's theology of ministry. In Section 2 we were told how Calvin struggled with it, and—in the end—he had to admit that he had no choice but to use a word such as “vicarius.”⁴² With this cautious, metaphorical use of language, he indicated that the person in carrying out the function becomes a living sign—a living symbol of the one whose Word he proclaims. This is classically expressed as ‘representation of Christ.’

All believers are called to be witnesses to the Lord during their life, to proclaim the Word, to take part in formulating the policy of the church, to take part in celebrating the sacraments, to learn and then to pass on what they have learned in a variety of ways, and yet nobody calls that ministry. They take on these functions, but they do not speak and act as ordained ministers. What is the difference? BEM says that this has to do with the representative manner in which the ordained ministers carry out these tasks. Such ministers know that they have been called personally, and this calling is recognized and acknowledged in the ordination. In their functioning they represent the Lord and the community. Or to put it differently: they function in a representative way. This ecumenical ministry text asks the Reformed tradition to make a conscious choice for symbolic language when formulating the theology of ordained ministry.

2. *Concerning the ordained ministry as service and sign of unity*

According to the ministry section of the Lima text, the ordained ministry is service to and expression of the unity of the church. The ordained ministry functions as a focal point of unity. The person who points to Christ as the center, and who in doing so creates unity, becomes *himself* a center of unity because the communion with Christ is symbolized personally.

The Reformers were familiar with the theme of unity in connection with the ministry of the church. The third reason that Calvin gives as

⁴² *Institutes* IV, III, 1.

to why God makes use of the service of humans in the leadership of the church is that a human being can function perfectly well as a unifying sign of unity.⁴³ Unity, however, was not usually directly linked with the ministry of the church. The Reformers linked the unity—which the minister symbolizes as a person—with the function carried out as the proclaimer of the Word. The guarantee for real Christian unity lay in the pure preaching of the Word and the pure administration of the sacraments, and not in the mere presence of an ordained minister. Also, they realized that that unity became real primarily in a collegial way. All in all, it is fair to say that there was a certain degree of reluctance on the part of the Reformers to introduce the unity function of the ministry of the church as a theme. The context of the sixteenth century plays an important part here. This is because the Roman Catholic bishops used the unity function as an excuse to brand the Reformers as schismatics and to urge them to return to the mother church. The dispute the Reformers had with Rome about the bishop's office as sign of unity made it difficult and delicate to develop the unity function of ministry further at that particular time. Later on, however, this theme was not really worked out either. Thinking about ministry from the point of view of unity has always been marred by the controversy with Rome.

Looking back on nearly five hundred years of Reformed Christianity, one cannot escape the conclusion that church unity is a problematic aspect of this tradition. The battle for the truth was often fought at the expense of church unity. Undoubtedly this is because the ministry of the church does not function strongly enough as sign of unity in the church. For this reason, the Reformed churches will have to do their best to define the ministry functions and structures more clearly in order to make it possible to achieve unity. When listing the tasks of the ministry of the church, there should be more emphasis on safeguarding the communion with Christ and with each other, both in the individual and in the collegial ministry. If the task of safeguarding unity is expressed more clearly and taken more seriously, the ordained ministry of the church will be able to develop into a sign and symbol of unity.

⁴³ *Institutes* IV.III.1.

3. *Concerning the missionary task of the ordained ministry*

From the first paragraph, the missionary point of departure determines the ecclesiological introduction. This missionary framework and consciousness are also present in the first section about the ordained ministry. This section is based on the premise that the church needs ordained ministers because of its mission (§8). The missionary interpretation can also be found in the pastoral task of the apostles; namely, to assemble and guide the dispersed people of God (§11). The aim of the service carried out by the ordained ministers is to build up the community and strengthen its witness (§12). One of the concrete tasks is to give leadership to the mission of the community (§13). In short, in the Lima text the ministry is seen in a missionary, ecclesiological framework, and its aim is to enable mission by giving leadership to the missionary activities of the church. This means that the ordained ministry serves the *missio Dei*.

This missionary awareness does not have a very strong presence in the theology of ministry of the Reformed tradition. Its roots can be traced back to Calvin, who developed his theology against the background of a Christianized society in which there was not much interest in the communication with the non-believers. In the non-Western world the communication with non-Christians is an important theme. Many churches from these regions have a very strong missionary frame of mind. Because the missionary movement stood at the cradle of the modern ecumenical movement, it is not surprising that this *Faith and Order* text has a strong missionary awareness. The Reformed tradition would do well to take note and learn from this. Its theology of ministry will have to be developed more strongly in the context of a church that is aware again of its mission in the world—with its task to proclaim the gospel to this world. The *missio Dei* must be the foundation on which the Reformed tradition bases its theology of the ordained ministry.

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY AND AUTHORITY (ART. 15 AND 16)

In the previous paragraphs, the concept ‘specific authority and responsibility’ of the first disciples, the Twelve (§9), and—after the resurrection—the apostles (§10) is mentioned a number of times. The church has never been without persons with specific authority and responsibil-

ity (§9). When mentioning responsibility, a number of questions arise about the authority of the ordained ministers. What is the content of their authority? Where do they get it from? How do they receive it? How do they exercise it? These questions are discussed in paragraphs 15 and 16.

Preceding History

At the first World Conferences of Lausanne, Edinburgh, and Lund, authority was not yet separately discussed, unless it was in the framework of the question about the usefulness of an episcopal church order. Even after the change of direction in Montreal towards a Christ-centered ecclesiology, there was still no separate discussion about authority. This did not happen until the Accra text, which has a separate subsection in the first chapter entitled “Ministry and authority,” in which the authority of the ministry is discussed. The starting point is the observation that setting apart ministers for this special service also implies dedication to the ministry and authority to enable them to carry it out. The Lima text will turn out to be very dependent on that of Accra.

Discussion per Paragraph

Paragraph 15. *The authority of the ordained minister is rooted in Jesus Christ, who has received it from the Father (Matt. 28:18), and who confers it by the Holy Spirit through the act of ordination. This act takes place within a community which accords public recognition to a particular person. Because Jesus came as one who serves (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27), to be set apart means to be consecrated to service. Since ordination is essentially a setting apart with prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the ordained ministry is not to be understood as the possession of the ordained person but as a gift for the continuing edification of the body in and for which the minister has been ordained. Authority has the character of responsibility before God and is exercised with the cooperation of the whole community.*

In this paragraph the following aspects of the authority of the ordained minister are dealt with:

1. Who gives the authority? The authority comes from Jesus Christ. In a Trinitarian setting, the text explains that Jesus himself received his authority from the Father and passes it on via the Holy Spirit. In other words, the authority is not granted by the community. This had not been entirely clear in the Accra text up

to and including that of June 1980.⁴⁴ This means that the minister is, in the first place, answerable to God in respect of this gift.

2. When does the authorization take place? That happens formally in the act of ordination.
3. What are the consequences for the manner in which the authority is exercised? Because it remains a gift before all else, it can never be claimed as a personal possession, and because the gift comes from Christ, the authority can be exercised only in the way Jesus did; namely, as a servant.
4. What is the role of the faith community? Because ordination takes place within the faith community, the community publicly recognizes the ordained person as having been given authority by God. On the other hand, this authority can be exercised only with the cooperation of the faith community.

Paragraph Sixteen. *Therefore, ordained ministers must not be autocrats or impersonal functionaries. Although called to exercise wise and loving leadership on the basis of the Word of God, they are bound to the faithful in interdependence and reciprocity. Only when they seek the response and acknowledgment of the community can their authority be protected from the distortions of isolation and domination. They manifest and exercise the authority of Christ in the way Christ himself revealed God's authority to the world, by committing their life to the community. Christ's authority is unique. 'He spoke as one who has authority (exousia), not as the scribes' (Matt. 7:29). This authority is an authority governed by love for the 'sheep who have no shepherd' (Matt. 9:36). It is confirmed by his life of service and, supremely, by his death and resurrection. Authority in the church can only be authentic as it seeks to conform to this model.*

Paragraph 16 further explains how authority is to be exercised in relation to the community:

1. Two types of attitude are emphatically rejected: autocracy and acting like an impersonal functionary. They are marks of domination and isolation vis-à-vis the community. Wise and loving leadership is exercised on the basis of the Word of God, but not without a sense of mutual dependence and reciprocity.

⁴⁴ In that version we still read: "At the same time, authority stems from the recognition given to the ordained minister by the community." See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 331.

2. Christ has given the example by giving his life for the community. In this he distinguished himself from the scribes. His authority was characterized by love for ‘the sheep who have no shepherd,’ as is demonstrated by his life of service, but above all by his death and resurrection.

Commentary (16). *Here two dangers must be avoided. Authority cannot be exercised without regard for the community. The apostles paid heed to the experience and the judgement of the faithful. On the other hand, the authority of ordained ministers must not be so reduced as to make them dependent on the common opinion of the community. Their authority lies in their responsibility to express the will of God in the community.*

In a commentary⁴⁵ a conclusion is drawn with regard to the correct way to exercise authority in the Christian community by reminding the reader of two dangers that must be avoided:

1. Exercising authority without regard for the community. Here the apostles are cited as examples. There are no references to concrete situations.
2. Exercising authority that is made dependent on the general opinion of the community. The authority is ultimately based on the responsibility to express the will of God. In the version of June 1980, it said the “Word of God” instead of the “will of God.” It is doubtful whether the change from “Word of God” to the broader expression “will of God”⁴⁶ is an improvement. It seems to us that by making this alteration a point is lost that had always been emphasized by the Reformers; namely, that the authority of the ordained ministers is limited and determined by the Word of God as it comes to us in the words of scripture.

⁴⁵ We do not understand why this section is called a commentary. With regard to the content, it constitutes a good conclusion to the subject of paragraph 16—exercising authority in relation to the community. See also Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 334.

⁴⁶ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 335.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. *Positive responses to the description of the relation between ministry and authority*

On the whole, the responses from the churches show great appreciation for the way in which this subject is discussed. The Reformed churches also responded positively. The Protestant churches have always been critical of the way in which the Roman Catholic Church exercised authority. This has been an important point of all the Reformer's theology. The fear that ministers might misuse their power has remained. Ministers can only speak with authority on the basis of the Word and not in isolation from the faith community. These elements are given equal prominence in these paragraphs, and, what is even more important, the other churches can agree with the conclusion. This means that the other churches are influenced by and appreciate a fundamental aspect of the Protestant theology of ministry.

Lessons and Questions for the Reformed Tradition

1. *Concerning the nature of the authority of the ordained ministry*

The authority of the ordained ministry in the Lima text does not have a legal, but a spiritual nature. For this reason, the mark of authority is not a signature on a document with rights and obligations, but the ordination. This is because in their ordination the ordinands are assured that they will receive the gifts that are needed to shoulder the responsibility for building up the faith community from God. The ordained ministers give pastoral leadership by proclaiming the Word of the Lord in all its forms. Their authority is connected with recognition as representatives of Christ to the congregation and as sign of unity.

2. *Concerning the way in which the doctrinal authority functions within the Reformed churches*

The Lutheran W. Pannenberg⁴⁷ refers here to a Lutheran doctrinal point, which, in our opinion, is also applicable to the Reformed tradition. When the symbolic basis for authority, consisting of the repre-

⁴⁷ W. Pannenberg, "Herausforderung der Amtstheologie. Die Lima-Texte und die Diskussion um das Amt," *Lutherische Monatshefte* 22 (1983) 9, 411–412.

sensation of Christ and the focus for unity, is eliminated, it becomes possible for authority to be exercised in a bureaucratic way within the church. Unfortunately—even in the Reformed churches—leadership has all too often been strongly bureaucratic; in particular, beyond the local level, whereby spiritual content and authority are often conspicuous through their absence.⁴⁸ Not enough room is left for spiritual doctrinal authority of the ordained ministers on the basis of their symbolic function. There were protests against the doctrinal authority of the ministers in the church of the Middle Ages and quite rightly so. To prevent the misuse of power, the churches of the Reformed tradition have placed a collegial and communal ministry, but this in itself could not save this authority. Their *potestas* was reduced, but this did not mean that their *auctoritas* was guaranteed.

A number of non-Reformed churches asked if the commission could carry out a further study about doctrinal authority in the church.⁴⁹ In our opinion, many Reformed churches would have done better to agree to this. Authority has acquired a very legalistic character, and—as a result—there are now many ordained ministers who operate too much like “impersonal functionaries” (§16). Because of this wrong understanding of authority, there is a lack of spiritual authority. This spiritual doctrinal authority is connected directly with their symbolic function as representative of Christ and as sign of unity.

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY AND PRIESTHOOD (ART. 17)

In paragraph 7 an attempt was made to prevent a number of misunderstandings by giving definitions to a number of terms that are used for the ordained ministry in the Lima text; the last word on the list was the term ‘priest.’ There it referred to this paragraph for a more detailed discussion. The reason was that the use of the concept is not universal because a question of content is also involved here. There is more at

⁴⁸ A. van de Beek, “Kerk en macht,” in J. Haers, T. Merrigan & P. de Mey (red.), *‘Volk van God en gemeenschap van de gelovigen’ Pleidooien voor een zorgzame kerkopbouw* (Averbode: Altoria, 1999), 499–511, comes to the conclusion that even within the Protestant churches the relation between ministry and authority is problematic. His analyses show how until now it has been impossible to transform the Protestant interpretation of the authority of scripture, which does not depend on any humans, into inspirational structures, and argues that instead it has become bogged down in bureaucracy.

⁴⁹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 77–78.

stake here than just terminological confusion. These more substantive issues will now be given attention.

Preceding History

In the Accra text of 1974 (Ac 20–22), this question is tackled for the first time as a separate problem. Before that the only priesthood that was mentioned was the priesthood of all believers.⁵⁰ The three priest-paragraphs clearly demonstrate that there is difference of opinion about the content, but the initial approach is a cover-up. It is alleged that this is only a question of terminology. Right from the start, the Lima text analyzes this question much more thoroughly. The fear that existed in the churches of the Reformation that the ordained minister might be regarded as a sacerdotal priest is no longer avoided.

Discussion per Paragraph

Paragraph Seventeen. *Jesus Christ is the unique priest of the new covenant. Christ's life was given as a sacrifice for all. Derivatively, the church as a whole can be described as a priesthood. All members are called to offer their being 'as a living sacrifice' and to intercede for the church and the salvation of the world. Ordained ministers are related, as are all Christians, both to the priesthood of Christ, and to the priesthood of the church. But they may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments, through their prayers of intercession, and through their pastoral guidance of the community.*

The text distinguishes three different usages of the concept 'priest—priesthood':

1. Jesus Christ is the unique priest of the new covenant because he gave his life as a sacrifice for all.
2. The whole church is priesthood, derived from the priesthood of Christ. This connection is not explained any further. Also, there is mention of 'sacrifice'; namely, a living sacrifice to God. Another function of this priesthood is to intercede for church and world.
3. The ordained ministers can also be called priests. This is because of their specific priestly service; namely, the support of the priest-

⁵⁰ Cf. the text of Montreal in 1963 (Mo 86) and of Louvain in 1971. See also Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 90.

hood of believers through Word and sacraments and through intercession and pastoral leadership. Sacerdotal terminology is avoided. Here the priestly aspect does not sound sacerdotal, but pastoral. Because of the use of the word ‘appropriate,’ the text adopts a normative instead of a descriptive approach. It is not entirely clear why that use should be appropriate here; in particular, because there is no definition of the word priesthood.⁵¹

Commentary (17). *The New Testament never uses the term ‘priesthood’ or ‘priest’ (hiereus) to designate the ordained ministry of the ordained minister. In the New Testament, the term is reserved, on the one hand, for the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ and, on the other hand, for the royal and prophetic priesthood of all baptized. The priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the baptized have in their respective ways the function of sacrifice and intercession. As Christ has offered himself, Christians offer their whole being ‘as a living sacrifice’. As Christ intercedes before the Father, Christians intercede for the church and the salvation of the world. Nevertheless, the differences between these two kinds of priesthood cannot be overlooked. While Christ offered himself as a sacrifice once and for all for the salvation of the world, believers need to receive continually as a gift of God that which Christ has done for them.*

In the early Church the terms ‘priesthood’ and ‘priest’ came to be used to designate the ordained ministry and minister as presiding at the eucharist. They underline the fact that the ordained ministry is related to the priestly reality of Jesus Christ and the whole community. When the terms are used in connection with the ordained ministry, their meaning differs in appropriate ways from the sacrificial priesthood of the Old Testament, from the unique redemptive priesthood of Christ and from the corporate priesthood of the people of God. St Paul could call his ministry ‘a priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable by the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 15:16).

The commentary to paragraph 17 consists of an exegetical and a church-historical explanation:

1. The New Testament uses ‘priest—priesthood’ both for Christ and for the priesthood of all the baptized, but not for the ordained ministry. There is a link between the priesthood of Christ and that

⁵¹ E. Flesseman-van Leer responded as follows: “(...) it is not clear what point exactly is intended to be made in this paragraph—or is it merely to argue that the word ‘priesthood’, though not biblical, is acceptable.” See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 340.

of all believers that is related to their sacrificial character and their task of intercession; but there are also differences. The unique significance of Christ's own sacrifice consists in its validity for all times and for all humankind; this unique sacrifice is contrasted with the much more limited significance of the sacrifice of the believers, who themselves remain permanently dependent on the sacrifice of Christ.

2. The use of the word 'priest' for ordained ministers can be explained only against the background of church history. The 1980 Rome draft version mentions for the first time that this increased use in the early church points to his role as presiding at the eucharist. What mechanisms have played a part here—whether the model function of the Old Testament priesthood or the sacerdotalizing of the theology of the eucharist—is not explained further. The text does not go further than stating in general that there is a link between this usage and the priestly reality of Jesus Christ and the whole community.
3. The priesthood of the ordained ministry differs from the sacrificial priesthood of the Old Testament, the unique redemptive priesthood of Christ, and the corporate priesthood of the people of God. Together these differences in meaning are characterized as "in appropriate ways." This formulation replaces the description "in nature" from the Accra text. In that text (Ac 22), it only applies to the difference in meaning from the sacrificial priesthood of the Old Testament. In the June 1980 draft version in Geneva, this difference in nature is also applied to the unique redemptive priesthood of Christ.⁵² In the June 1980 version in Rome, the difference with the priesthood of all God's people is added, and "in nature" is changed to "in appropriate ways."⁵³ The difference with the usage for the people of God is added after intervention by M. Thurian, who pointed to *Lumen gentium* 10 and the *ARCIC* dialogue as examples of growing ecumenical consensus on this point.⁵⁴ It is a pity that no further explanation is provided over the nature of the difference between the two.

⁵² Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 208.

⁵³ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 239.

⁵⁴ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 241.

4. The commentary concludes with a quotation from the letter to the Romans in which Paul describes his own service as “a priestly service of the gospel of God” (Rom. 15:16). It is obvious what the intention of this quotation is. Despite all the differences between the three other forms of priesthood, it is possible to call the ordained ministry a sort of priesthood as well because Paul describes his own work as a priestly service. Although the most common translation of the Greek word, ἱερωσύνη, is ‘holy,’ the translation ‘priestly’ is another possible translation because this adjective refers to the temple, which means that there is a priestly connotation.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. Gratitude for giving the themes content

From an ecumenical point of view it is a step forward that the priesthood of the ordained ministry is being increasingly elevated to a theme because this is an important, ecumenical stumbling block for the interpretation of the office.

2. Fear of sacerdotalization and clericalization

While the commentary provoked many positive responses, the main text had a more mixed reception. The fear that the unique priesthood of Christ is endangered by this approach is not removed.⁵⁵ The Dutch professor of ecclesiastical law, A.J. Bronkhorst, repeatedly and strongly objected to calling ministers ‘priests.’⁵⁶ Then there is the constant fear that this terminology will lead again to the clericalization of the ministry.

3. Concerning the relation between scripture and tradition

It is quite telling that the commentary indicates that the use of ‘priest-priesthood’ in the New Testament is restricted to Christ and to the

⁵⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* 1982–1990, 78 and 123.

⁵⁶ A.J. Bronkhorst, *Kerk en Theologie* 33 (1982) 4, 327–328, in which he quotes from the then recently published work by E. Schillebeeckx, *Kerkelijk ambt*, in which the latter indicated how in the early church the sacerdotalization of the terminology developed. In *Kerk en Theologie* 36 (1985) 1, 48–49, Bronkhorst again referred to the difference between sacerdotium and ministerium.

people of God, while the main text has no problems at all with calling the use of the word ‘priest’ for the ordained ministers ‘appropriate.’ Here the hermeneutical question with regard to the relation between scripture and tradition also presents itself.

Lessons and Questions for the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the meaning of the word ‘priest’ in the Lima text

The Reformed tradition chooses not to call its ministers ‘priests.’ In the first instance, this is because of the sacerdotal connotation of the term. The Lima ministry text avoids ‘sacrifice’ terminology and opts for a different interpretation of the priestly element. In the Lima text, priesthood of the ordained ministry refers to ‘presiding,’ as is evidenced by the three tasks the ministers are given; namely, presiding at Word and sacraments, leading in intercession, and giving pastoral leadership. This leadership culminates liturgically in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. This particular interpretation of the priesthood as ‘presiding,’ with its liturgical culmination at the Lord’s table, is therefore decidedly liturgical and not sacerdotal. The ordained minister has a liturgical-priestly task, but not a sacerdotal-priestly one. On the basis of this interpretation, the ordained ministry can be regarded as a fundamentally priestly ministry. This insight must not be regarded as a plea for the use of the term ‘priest’ to indicate ministers in the Reformed churches. It is in our opinion, it is better to avoid this term because of the ‘sacrifice’ connotation.

2. Concerning the ordained ministry as a primarily liturgical function

In the Lima text about the eucharist, the term ‘eucharist’ is given a wider interpretation because it also encompasses the proclamation of the Word (Lima, Eucharist, §27). This is, in fact, in accordance with the Reformation viewpoint. The ordained ministry exists for the purpose of proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments. This means that the ordained ministry is primarily rooted in the liturgy. In addition, the eucharist is seen as an *epikletic* event, during which those present invoke the Holy Spirit (Lima Eucharist, §§14–18). The ordained ministry is therefore a particular structure element that serves to facilitate the encounter of the faith community with the living Lord in Word and Spirit. This does not mean that the ministry can mediate this encounter: all it can do is to keep alive the relationship of constitu-

tive tension in which the congregation is constantly dependent on the Lord.⁵⁷ In short, the ordained ministry is rooted in liturgy.

3. *Concerning the importance of the priestly element in Reformed theology*

In the everyday life of the ministry of Word and sacrament, the priestly element plays an important part. Many people regard the minister first and foremost as the one who leads worship. The services are the central moment during which the people *as* a faith community open themselves to the Lord. The minister who is a servant of the Word has an important role to fulfil as the one who leads worship. This service is more than preaching a sound sermon. It is our opinion that this priestly-liturgical aspect of the service to the Word is not receiving sufficient systematic attention, although it is an important element of the ministry. If this aspect were to be given more targeted attention during theological training, it could have very positive results for the practical preparation for the ministry. More attention could be paid to the liturgy, the theology, and the practice of the sacraments. But there is more involved than some shifts of emphasis in practical theology. The minister's role as leader of worship ought to be given a much more important place in systematic reflection about the theology of the ordained ministry. In our opinion, it is not enough to merely give leading worship a more prominent place in the theology of ordained ministry. Here there is also a need for symbolic use of language that speaks of the ministry not only functionally but also symbolically. The priestly-liturgical aspect will only receive a more prominent place when the representation of Christ and of the faith community becomes a central notion in our thinking about the ministry.

THE MINISTRY OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH (ART. 18)

Preceding History

In the past four decades, the demand for the ordination of women has played an increasingly prominent role in theological thinking about the ministry of the church. The ecumenical movement cannot avoid this

⁵⁷ The formulation is by L.J. Koffeman, *Gestalte en gehalte. Inaugurale rede Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken Kampen* (Kampen: Kok, 1994), 20–21.

question because it had the potential of becoming a new stumbling block in any mutual recognition of ministry. In the 1963 Montreal text, the subject was only mentioned in a footnote (Mo 93 (b)),⁵⁸ but as early as 1970 in Cartigny, *Faith and Order* organized a separate consultation about this subject entitled “What is Ordination Coming To?”⁵⁹ In the 1971 Louvain text, “the ordination of women” has already become the title of a sub-section. In this document, the resistance in many churches to the ordination of women is placed against the background of the general social discrimination against women. The tone is not neutrally descriptive, but very sympathetic to the demand by women to be given access to the ordained ministry.⁶⁰

In the 1974 Accra text, the ordination of women has expanded into a large, fourth sub-section of the chapter about ordination. Six paragraphs deal with the following subjects: a call to discover which contribution to the service of Christ can be made by both men and women (64); a call to the churches not to avoid the demand for the ordination of women (65); a call to have a fresh look at any church’s individual theological tradition regarding this point against the background of texts such as Gen. 1:27 and Gal. 3:28 (66); identifying conceptual patterns of male domination in society that influence theological thinking (67); a call to the churches not to be influenced by the feelings men have that they are being threatened, nor by feelings of frustration in women, but by the desire to be obedient to the gospel (68); a call from an ecumenical standpoint to encourage open discussion about this issue between the churches (69). The arguments are reminiscent of the comparative ecclesiology from the first period of *Faith and Order*, and we are reminded of the fact that the discussion is still new, and that we have not progressed much beyond comparing different points of view. It is

⁵⁸ In the framework of the work of the Spirit, who distributes a variety of gifts with a view to serving our neighbors and the church’s mission, a footnote is added: “We propose that the question of the diaconate and that of the ordination of women receive further attention in Faith and Order.” (Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 97) It does not go further than a recommendation for further study.

⁵⁹ The results of this conference were published under the title B. Bam, (ed.), *What is Ordination Coming To? Report on a Consultation on the Ordination of Women, Cartigny, Switzerland, Sept. 21–26, 1970*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971).

⁶⁰ In this context, the following conclusion to the paragraph speaks volumes: “The force of nineteen centuries of tradition against the ordination of women cannot be lightly ignored. But traditions have been changed in the church. This question must be faced, and the time to face it is now.” See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 96.

also striking that in the Accra text the subject is included in the wrong place; namely, under the section about ordination. This leads to the wrong question being asked. The question is not in which way women can be ordained, but whether it belongs to the essence of the ordained ministry that this should be the preserve of men only.

After Accra the main opposition comes from Orthodox theologians.⁶¹ They do not want to hear of any text that appears to encourage the ordination of women. What they want is for the debate about this subject to only be mentioned in a commentary, while the main text, in their opinion, should encourage both men and women to give their services to the church. This does not happen, however. The main text of Lima will most certainly refer to the ordination of women and the differences of opinion that exist between the churches.

Discussion per Paragraph

In comparison with the Accra text, two things catch our attention. In the first place, the subject has become less important, if we are to judge by the number of paragraphs devoted to it: in the Lima text there is only one with commentary, while there are six paragraphs in the Accra text. Second, the change in the title reflects the change in the approach: it is no longer the demand for the ordination of women that takes center stage, but the services that both women and men can carry out in the church. In its wide, general approach, it seems as if this paragraph is more about a call to make the priesthood of all believers a reality in the churches. This priesthood is expressed in all kinds of services that are taken up by both men and women.

Paragraph Eighteen. *Where Christ is present, human barriers are being broken. The church is called to convey to the world the image of a new humanity. There is in Christ no male or female (Gal. 3:28). Both women and men must discover together their contributions to the service of Christ in the church. The church must discover the ministry which can be provided by women as well as that which can be provided by men. A deeper understanding of the comprehensiveness of ministry which reflects the interdependence of men and women needs to be more widely manifested in the life of the church.*

⁶¹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 216.

Though they agree on this need, the churches draw different conclusions as to the admission of women to the ordained ministry. An increasing number of churches have decided that there is no biblical or theological reason against ordaining women, and many of them have subsequently proceeded to do so. Yet many churches hold that the tradition of the church in this regard must not be changed.

1. Theologically this question is approached from Christology, with Gal. 3:28 as its main text, where we read that in Christ there is no difference between male and female. The approach from a theology of creation with as text Gen. 1:27—about man and woman being created in the image of God—has been dropped.
2. C. Halkes speaks about a “deficient anthropology” when a difference is made between the service carried out by women and the service contributed by men.⁶²
3. The second paragraph makes the transition from the work of general ministry to the ordained ministry and indicates that the churches are not in agreement about this. Although an increasing number of churches ordain women on the basis of biblical and theological considerations, on the other hand, there are many churches which do not allow this on the basis of their tradition.

Commentary (18). *Those churches which practise the ordination of women do so because of their understanding of the Gospel and of the ministry. It rests for them on the deeply held theological conviction that the ordained ministry of the church lacks fullness when it is limited to one sex. This theological conviction has been reinforced by their experience during the years in which they have included women in their ordained ministries. They have found that women’s gifts are as wide and varied as men’s and that their ministry is as fully blessed by the Holy Spirit as the ministry of men. None has found reason to reconsider its decision.*

Those churches which do not practise the ordination of women consider that the force of nineteen centuries of tradition against the ordination of women must not be set aside. They believe that such a tradition cannot be dismissed as a lack of respect for the participation of women in the church. They believe that there are theological issues concerning the nature of humanity and concerning Christology which lie at the heart of their convictions and understanding of the role of women in the church.

The discussion of these practical and theological questions within the various churches and Christian traditions should be complemented by joint study and reflection within the ecumenical fellowship of all churches.

⁶² Quoted by Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 96.

An added commentary lists the points of view of the churches that ordain women and compares them with the points of view of the churches that do not, and concludes with a call:

1. Churches that ordain women do so on the basis of two arguments. First of all, the theology of ordained ministry is in danger because a unisex ministry is incomplete.⁶³ Experience offers a second argument because the ordained ministry of women appears to be blessed by the Holy Spirit to the same degree as that of men. M. Gosker regards this as a weak argument because it is not very critical.⁶⁴
2. Churches that do not ordain women are of the opinion that tradition cannot be set aside because in this tradition they hear counter-arguments from the theology of creation and from Christology that cannot be ignored.
3. A brief call to further joint study within the ecumenical community concludes this subject. It appears that the commission did not manage to get beyond comparing the different points of view and the call to further joint study. The text of this paragraph does not offer any new elements to help the discussion on its way.

Responses from Churches and their Analysis

There were many and heated responses to this subject. Very often they are characterized by a feeling of disappointment about the lack of depth with which the subject was treated. The responses vary widely. In its answer the commission admits that this point had not been developed sufficiently.⁶⁵

A.M. May⁶⁶ analyzed the responses from the churches and discovered a number of patterns. There appears to be a strong correlation between resistance to the ordination of women and sacramental understanding of ordination. Also, churches with a strong sacramen-

⁶³ This expression is reminiscent of the way in which *Lumen gentium* 21 states that the bishops have the fullness of the consecration sacrament at their disposal and of *Unitatis redintegratio* the decree about ecumenism, in which there is mention of a deficiency (*defectus*) of the Reformed ministry (§ 22)!

⁶⁴ Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 172–173, footnote 110.

⁶⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 123. A more detailed summary can be found on pages 78–80 and the commission's reflections on pages 123–125.

⁶⁶ A.M. May, "The Ordination of Women: the churches" responses to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989) 2, 251–269.

tal understanding of ordination do not agree that the Holy Spirit can speak through the insights of others. The churches that have a more functional approach to the ordained ministry are of the opinion that the subject has not been discussed sufficiently from the standpoint of the service of the whole people of God. May compares the way in which the commission dealt with the other sensitive subject, the 'episcopal succession' with the approach to the subject of the ordination of women. The former subject is dealt with in great depth. Both episcopal and non-episcopal churches are given advice and are called on to take steps towards mutual recognition of ministry. None of this happens when the subject is the ordination of women.

As a result of their functional interpretation of the ministry, the churches in the Reformed tradition came to realize that their earlier opposition to the ordination of women was connected with culturally determined expectation patterns as to how women functioned and not with what the ordained ministry itself would mean. To refuse women access to the ordained ministry proves, in our opinion, that there is a poor understanding of the significance of ordained ministry. For this reason, we are of the opinion that the churches from the Reformed tradition must not be tempted to renege on the ordination of women for the sake of trying to achieve unity and mutual recognition of ministry, or to give the discussion about this subject secondary importance. May's analysis shows that the attitude towards the ordination of women is directly connected with the importance that is attached to the ordained ministry. From our understanding of ordained ministry, women should in no way be prevented from taking part in the ordained ministry. In the framework of this study we have to leave this subject at this point.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FORMS OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY (ART. 19–33)

In the previous chapter we clarified the specifics of ordained ministry, and now we ask if it is possible to have an ecumenical debate about how to structure this ministry. This part consists of four sections: the first one deals with the historic growth towards the three-fold bishop-presbyter-deacon combination (art. 19–25), the second section asks the question of what the guiding principles are for exercising the ordained ministry in the church (art. 26–27), the third one discusses the specific functions of bishops, presbyters, and deacons (art. 28–31), and the fourth one places the church's ministry in the context of a variety of charisms (art. 32–33).

The three-fold structure, bishop-presbyter-deacon, that forms the central part of this chapter of the Lima text can be traced back to a precursor from the early church. These three offices should not be confused with the three classical Reformed offices of minister, elder, and deacon.

BISHOPS, PRESBYTERS, AND DEACONS (ART. 19–25)

The Preceding History

This chapter is very detailed in comparison with the 1974 Accra text, where it was presented under the title “The diversity of ministry” and contained only four paragraphs (Acc. 23–26). The great break-through in the formulation came about after a consultation in Geneva in August 1979 about the supervisor's function and the office of bishop.¹ On the basis of the findings of this conference, Lukas Vischer wrote a new draft version for this section that formed the basis for the steering committee

¹ The report about this can be found in *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective* (Faith and Order Paper 102) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980). This *Faith and Order* study is the result of a consultation in Geneva held from 13 to 16 August 1979 about forms of ministry; in particular, the episcopate. A memorandum forms the core of this text.

meeting in Geneva that was held from 16 to 19 January 1980.² After this, the text was further amended in the draft versions that followed.

The original title of this subsection was “Historical beginnings and developments.” The changed title is an indication of the changed working method, from a historical description to a normative approach.

Discussion per Paragraph

Chapter Nineteen. *The New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministries in the church. In the New Testament there appears rather a variety of forms which existed at different places and times. As the Holy Spirit continued to lead the church in life, worship and mission, certain elements from this early variety were further developed and became settled into a more universal pattern of ministry. During the second and third centuries, a threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon became established as the pattern of ordained ministry throughout the church. In succeeding centuries, the ministry by bishop, presbyter and deacon underwent considerable changes in its practical exercise. At some points of crisis in the history of the church, the continuing functions of ministry were in some places and communities distributed according to structures other than the predominant threefold pattern. Sometimes appeal was made to the New Testament in justification of these other patterns. In other cases, the restructuring of ministry was held to lie within the competence of the church as it adapted to changed circumstances.*

In the search for a form of ministry that might be a determining factor for the church of the future, paragraph 19 looks back to the history of the church through the ages.

1. The first question that has to be answered is whether scripture itself gives us directions. There is not a single mention of Old Testament structures of ministry, and—when it comes to the New Testament structures—the paragraph states that there is no uniformity, but a variety of structures that depend on place and time. This means that scripture itself does not give us a blueprint or a basic model.

The 1963 Montreal text is the first version to admit that scripture does not give us a norm for the structure of ministry.³ At this point, the

² Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 48–53 and 225.

³ That happens while mentioning the search by churches to new forms of ministry in a rapidly changing social context: “101. Churches faced with rapidly changing situations are struggling to find forms of ministry relevant to their situation, and this

ecumenical theological explanations start to adopt the results of exegetical research into the structures of ministry in the New Testament.⁴ The 1963 Montreal text is influenced not only by dialectic theology—which places the significance of scripture as the Word of God at the center of theological thinking—but also by the *formgeschichtliche* and *traditionsgeschichtliche* approaches as complement to historical-critical Bible research, and as a result of which the awareness of the structural variety in the Bible has grown.⁵

What conclusions have to be drawn from the recognition of this New Testament variety for the study of these structures in our own time? Montreal uses this diversity as an argument for the acceptance of the diversity of ministry structures for different ecclesiastical traditions and as an encouragement to be flexible in our dealings with structures of ministry in a rapidly changing social context. This conclusion is emphatically confirmed in the 1971 Louvain text.⁶ It is in keeping with the strong emphasis on the church's missionary calling in the world and the sociological approach in this text, as a result of which the central aim is no longer the unity of the church and its offices, but the renewal of the offices to make it possible to be church in the world. After Louvain 1971 the stronger emphasis was once more on unity. This

not by abandoning traditional forms of the special ministry, *but by seeking to give a diversity and flexibility such as we recognize in the New Testament* and in the church of the first centuries." The basis for this opinion can be found in the contribution made by E. Käsemann to this conference, "Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?", later published in his collection, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 86–95.

⁴ About this see J. Roloff, "Amt/Ämter/Ämterverständnis IV Im Neuen Testament," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Bd. 2, 509–533; in particular, 510, where we read: "Es gibt im Neuen Testament weder eine einheitliche Lehre vom 'Amt', noch ein allgemeingültiges Strukturmodell von Ämtern bzw. Diensten. Der heutige Stand der Erforschung der Geschichte des Urchristentums schliesst jede vorschnelle Systematisierung aus und nötigt zunächst dazu, die Pluralität der Phänomene zur Kenntnis zu nehmen."

⁵ Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 28, and Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 102.

⁶ In the framework of chapter "II. Tradition and Change," the first point states: "1. There is today a greater awareness of the historical character of the patterns of ministry within the New Testament. Biblical scholarship has come to the conclusion that it is not possible to ground *one* conception of Church order in the New Testament to the exclusion of others. It appears that in the New Testament times differing forms co-existed and differing forms developed simultaneously in various geographical areas. Furthermore, it is increasingly realized that the forms of ministry in the apostolic period were historically, socially, and culturally conditioned and that it is, therefore, justifiable and even necessary in the present time to seek to adopt the patterns of ministry to the needs of the current situation."

can be seen in the 1974 Accra declaration, which does still mention many diverse structures of ministry, but only within the framework of unity.⁷ For this reason, Accra says nothing about the New Testament diversity of structures of ministry.

The Lima text again refers to the variety of ministry structures in the New Testament. Just like the Montreal text, it concludes that we do not find a blueprint for these structures in scripture, but—in contrast to that version—this is not seen as a justification for the structural diversity of the various churches in our time. The background to this change can be found in the important preparatory study to the ministry section of the Lima text, *Episkopé and episcopate in ecumenical perspective*, which says:

It has been argued that the variety of church structures in the New Testament justifies the diversity of structures which exists today in the separate churches. But this view has been rejected by others for good reasons. The situation of the nascent Church was different from that of the separate churches today. In the early Church unity could only be preserved by developing common structures. The issue is therefore what kind of common structure of ministry is required today to express the unity of the church.⁸

The early church needed community and unity. As a result, a search began for a common structure of ministry that could be the expression of church unity. In the early church, this search for common structures of ministry was also determined by the rejection of heresy that threatened the church from within. The attempt to achieve common structures of ministry within the ecumenical movement, however, has a primarily missionary purpose.

2. This paragraph of the Lima text then goes on to argue that if scripture does not offer us a norm, we have to rely on the experiences of the church throughout the centuries. Here we see that one ministry form appears to have gained the upper hand; namely, the three-fold

⁷ See “24. When the diversity of ordained ministry among the various churches is examined, it is evident that this diversity is bound up with the history and cultural particularity of those churches. (...) But the limits of ministerial diversity are determined by the apostolic commission, the action of the Holy Spirit and the fact that major patterns of leadership in society are not infinitely variable.” and “26. There is unity in the diversity of ministerial structures, in that the essential elements of ministry can always be identified in the very plurality and multiformity of essential styles and structures. (...)”.

⁸ *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective*, 4

pattern of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Before long a more universal structure quickly developed from the initial diversity; we see that in the whole church this three-fold structure developed into one pattern of ordained ministry during the second and third centuries.

The opinion that church history points in the direction of one prevailing structure of ministry is new. Up to the 1963 Montreal text, no church-historical arguments were used in connection with structuring the church's ministry. The first time that happens is in the 1971 Louvain text,⁹ but there the historical argument points in the opposite direction. The diversity in church structures of today is justified by the historical diversity of ministry structures. Elsewhere in the same text, the three-fold pattern¹⁰ is mentioned, but without a normative value.¹¹ The 1974 Accra text is the first one to state: "Among the various structures of ministry the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter-priest and deacon predominates" (Acc 25), but does not draw the conclusion that this is now the one and only model for others.

⁹ Chapter VII "Mutual Acceptance of Ministry," in particular, is hopeful when pointing to the differences in attitude of in particular Roman Catholic theologians after Vatican II on the basis of new biblical, historical, and systematic studies. The second example that is cited is: "2. Furthermore, there is ever-greater agreement that the New Testament presents diverse types and even several principles of organization of the Christian communities, according to the difference of authors, places and times. On this basis, there have been developed, in the course of history, multiple forms of church order, each with its own advantages and disadvantages: papal, patriarchal, conciliar, among others. Such diversity suggests the need and freedom to respect and pursue diversity and complementarity in church structures." See "The Ordained Ministry (1971)" in G. Gassman (ed.), *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993* (Faith and Order Paper 159) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993), 132.

¹⁰ In chapter II "Tradition and Change," the fourth point consists of the demand for continuity from changing churches with the church of the apostles. There is a difference of opinion about the role of the ministry in preserving this continuity. Three viewpoints are referred to. The first viewpoint to be described is the one in which the threefold pattern of ministry plays a preserving role: "a) The threefold pattern of ministry, though it developed historically, is to be regarded as divinely given and is, therefore, indispensable for the existence of the church. It is required for the building up of the communion, or at least as a sign that the People of God are one and the same People in all places and ages. The laying on of hands gives visible expression to this continuity." See "The ordained ministry (1971)" in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993*, 122-123.

¹¹ Gromada misinterpreted this passage. He is convinced that the Louvain declaration indicates that the threefold ministry is instituted by God. See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 101. The text does not give this as an opinion about which there is consensus, but merely as one of the viewpoints about the role of ministers with regard to the continuity with the apostolic church.

3. According to paragraph 19 of the Lima ministry text, the origin of this historical predominance can be found in the second and third centuries; this conclusion was reached by the consultation about *episkopé* and episcopate in August 1979.¹²

4. How should we interpret this historical development in the early church? This paragraph is saying, in a very cautious way, that the Holy Spirit is at work here. Cautious, because there is no mention of direct intervention by the Holy Spirit in the development of the structures of ministry. The Spirit is involved in the church, in its life, worship and mission, and in that framework there is a need for new structures of ministry. In the early church that led to more generally accepted structures of ministry. This was the process in which the threefold pattern developed in the second and third centuries. This pneumatological foundation for the historical developments in the structures of ministry is intended to prevent these forms from being regarded as purely human institutions. In the consultation about the bishop's office, we are told to be cautious when interpreting this guidance by the Holy Spirit:

Often, particularly since the Reformation, the question has been debated whether such a threefold structure is a matter of *ius divinum* (specifically determined by the will of God) or of *ius humanum* (a product of human discovery). To a large extent, this question does not seem, in our opinion, to do justice to the issue. In the development of various types of ministry during the New Testament period and, *a fortiori*, of the threefold ministry, the Holy Spirit was at work, but so were historical and sociological factors. There is no need to see an either/or and a conflict between divine and human influences. In the development which resulted in the threefold ministry, then, there is no need to think either of a blueprint by Jesus or of the mere response to sociological laws.¹³

Therefore, "guided by the Holy Spirit" does not mean a denial that human factors play a part, nor does it mean that the development of other structures of ministry cannot have been the result of guidance by the Spirit. It is important not to forget this, particularly in an ecumenical study. This is borne out by what follows a little later in this text: "The acceptance of a threefold ministry may come easier to the churches which for various reasons have hitherto resisted it

¹² "In the second and third centuries, the threefold structure of bishop, presbyter and deacon became dominant.", *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective*, 3.

¹³ *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective*, 3.

precisely when those who accept that ministry acknowledge that in New Testament times the Spirit also worked through other forms of ministry.”¹⁴

Despite all relativization of the influence of the Holy Spirit in the development of the threefold structure, the fact remains that this process is regarded as one in which the guidance of the Spirit plays a part. This connection between the work of the Spirit in history and this development is a new premise. The 1974 Accra text repeatedly speaks of the role played by the Spirit in the development of the diversity of structures of ministry. “The church’s response in the Spirit” to changing patterns in the social environment is, on the one hand, one of the three factors that play a part in the creation of ministerial diversity (Ac 23), while, on the other hand, the work of the Holy Spirit is one of the factors that prevents this variation from carrying on endlessly (Ac 24). Although the Accra text identifies the historical preponderance of the threefold ministry, it does not say anything about guidance by the Spirit. This is linked with the idea that other structures should not be excluded (Ac 25).

Paragraph 19 emphasizes growth and continuity of the threefold structure of ministry; it sets the tone for the following paragraphs as the threefold ministry is put forward as a structure for the church of the future. This thought is expressed in paragraph 22. From the start of the modern ecumenical movement, the Orthodox churches have justified the continued use of this structure because of its habitual use within the early church. The Orthodox delegate’s reservation regarding the text that was approved in Lausanne in 1927 reads: “The Orthodox Church (...) believing that the ministry in its threefold form of bishops, presbyters, and deacons can only be based on the unbroken apostolic succession, (...)”¹⁵ As early as Lausanne, the threefold ministry was the only legitimate form of ministry for the Orthodox churches. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the basis of the first draft versions of this part of the Lima text was created in January 1980, five months after a consultation in Geneva in August 1979 about the bishop’s office; in turn, this consultation was thoroughly prepared during a separate consultation in June 1979 by the *Faith and Order* secretariat and Ortho-

¹⁴ *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective*, 4.

¹⁵ Bate, *Faith and Order. Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 3–21, 1927*, 470.

dox theologians with a view to the revision of the Accra text.¹⁶ The Anglicans can also be regarded as advocates of the threefold structure of ministry. It is likely that they are the ones who introduced the term ‘threefold ministry’ to the vocabulary of the ecumenical movement.¹⁷

5. Finally, paragraph 19 indicates that history also teaches us to be flexible in dealing with the threefold structure of ministry—not only because its practical implementation continued to develop after the third century, but also because there were moments of crisis in the church’s history when the threefold pattern was abandoned. At such times reference was made to other patterns in the New Testament, and the competence of the church to adapt to changing circumstances.

6. Summarizing, we come to the following conclusions:

- a. The New Testament does not present us with a clear structure of ministry.
- b. During the first centuries, the threefold pattern emerges as a reasonably generally accepted structure of ministry.
- c. The process is regarded as one which owes its development in part to the guidance by the Holy Spirit.
- d. In the course of history this model has been dealt with flexibly, and—when the need arose—it was abandoned in times of crisis.

The conclusion of this paragraph is unambiguous: throughout the history of the church, the threefold ministry has been regarded as the most important structure of ministry.

This paragraph leads to a number of questions—first of all, about the changes in that threefold pattern. The next paragraphs give an answer to that question. After paragraph 20 has given a description of the original form of the threefold ministry, paragraph 21 describes, in brief, the development this pattern went through in the early church.

¹⁶ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 46–49, and 225–229.

¹⁷ J.K.S. Reid, “Reformed Responses to Baptism, eucharist and Ministry: A Commentary,” *The Reformed World* 39 (1987) 5, 690, suspects that the term became part of the Anglican vocabulary with the advent of ‘The Oxford Movement,’ and that it became prominent when the Anglicans protested against Leo XIII’s *Apostolicae Curae* in 1896. With this concept they indicated that their ministry was not without significance and that it was as valid as that of Rome.

Paragraph Twenty. *It is important to be aware of the changes the threefold ministry has undergone in the history of the church. In the earliest instances, where threefold ministry is mentioned, the reference is to the local eucharistic community. The bishop is the leader of the community. He was ordained and installed to proclaim the Word and preside over the celebration of the eucharist. He was surrounded by a college of presbyters and by deacons who assisted in his tasks. In this context the bishop's ministry was a focus of unity within the whole community.*

Paragraph 20 describes the original situation in which the threefold ministry functioned in the context of a local eucharistic community:

1. The bishop is the leader of the community; he proclaims the Word and presides over the celebration of the eucharist.
2. He is surrounded by presbyters and deacons who assist him in carrying out these tasks.
3. It is clear that, right from the start, the bishop fulfilled a central role. Presbyters and deacons are only assistants. The faith community gathered around him so that he is a focus of unity.

Two things strike us in the evolution of the text of this paragraph. First, there is growing uncertainty about the role of deacons. In the version of November 1980 in Rome, the deacon becomes an assistant of the bishop next to the presbyter, and in all but the last version of Annecy in 1981, the specific function of the deacon—the promotion of the *diakonia* of the community—is dropped. Second, in the final version of Lima in 1982 the emphasis on the unity function of the bishop is added.¹⁸

Paragraph Twenty-One. *Soon, however, the functions were modified. Bishops began increasingly to exercise episkopé over several local communities at the same time. In the first generation, apostles had exercised episkopé in the wider Church. Later Timothy and Titus are recorded to have fulfilled a function of episkopé in a given area. Later again this apostolic task is carried out in a new way by bishops. They provide a focus for unity in life and witness within areas comprising several eucharistic communities. As a consequence, presbyters and deacons are assigned new roles. The presbyters become leaders of the local eucharistic community, and as assistants of the bishops, deacons receive responsibilities in the larger area.*

Paragraph 21 describes how this situation began to change when bishops became responsible for regions rather than local communities:

¹⁸ About all these changes, see Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 351.

1. Bishops accept an *episkopé* task over a number of local communities at the same time. In doing so, they take on a task in a particular region that had been initially fulfilled by the apostles and, later, by figures like Timothy and Titus. They now become a focus for unity in life and witness in a wider area.
2. The presbyters become the leaders of the local eucharistic community.
3. The deacons, as the bishops' assistants, take responsibilities in the wider area.

The description of this evolution leads to the following conclusions and questions:

1. The description of the historical development of the threefold pattern, bishop-presbyter-deacon, is strongly focused on the bishop.
2. There may have been many changes, but what remains constant is the symbolic unity function; in particular, that of the bishop. This interpretation of the historical development is consistent with the description of the significance of ministry as focus of unity in the second chapter (§ 8 and § 14 and the commentaries for § 13 and § 14).
3. The local Christian community is described as 'eucharistic community.' This description is consistent with the liturgical function description of the bishop as the one who proclaims the Word and presides at the celebration of the eucharist. The unity function of the bishop is most concretely visible and symbolized when he presides at the celebration of the eucharist. The formulation is consistent with the previous chapter; in particular, with paragraph 14, and its commentary about the central function of the ordained minister in the celebration of the eucharist.
4. During a later phase the bishops accept an *episkopé* function for a larger area. By formulating it in this way, it is made clear that the term 'bishop' derives its significance from its function. The June 1980 version in Geneva still described the task as "a function of oversight."¹⁹ The later versions opted for the Greek original, the better to emphasize the New Testament origin and to leave the concrete translation and interpretation open.

¹⁹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 352.

5. The text says that the apostles originally carried out this supervisory function over a wider area. This does not contradict the contents of paragraphs 9 and 10, but neither is it mentioned there in so many words.
6. In comparison with this clear interpretation of the bishops' task in the early church, the function of presbyters and deacons is not as clearly described. Is that due to historical uncertainty? In particular, the deacon's function remains very unclear. Deacons are called bishops' assistants. But do presbyters not have that same function? And what does it mean to 'receive responsibilities in the larger area'? What are these 'responsibilities'? What is this 'larger area'?
7. In a later phase, the area for which the bishop is responsible is larger. As a result, there is a change in the presbyters' and deacons' tasks as well. At the local level, the presbyter takes the bishop's place. It is now his turn to become leader of the local congregation.

Paragraph 21 is accompanied by a detailed exegetical commentary.

Commentary (21). *The earliest Church knew both the travelling ministry of such missionaries as Paul and the local ministry of leadership in places where the Gospel was received. At local level, organizational patterns appear to have varied according to circumstances. The Acts of the Apostles mention for Jerusalem the Twelve and the Seven, and later James and the elders; and for Antioch, prophets and teachers (Acts 6:1–6; 15:13–22; 13:1). The letters to Corinth speak of apostles, prophets and teachers (1 Cor. 12:28); so too does the letter to the Romans, which also speaks of deacons or assistants (Rom. 16:1). In Philippi, the secular terms episkopoi and diakonoi were together used for Christian ministers (Phil. 1:1). Several of these ministries are ascribed to both women and men. While some were appointed by the laying on of hands, there is no indication of this procedure in other cases. Whatever their names, the purposes of these ministries was to proclaim the Word of God, to transmit and safeguard the original content of the Gospel, to feed and strengthen the faith, discipline and service of the Christian communities, and to protect and foster unity within and among them. These have been the constant duties of ministry throughout the developments and crises of Christian history.*

This paragraph gives an overview of the differences in terminology for the New Testament ministry patterns and also an indication of what remains constant:

1. First of all, there is the difference between traveling and local ministries.²⁰
2. In addition, the organization pattern varies according to the situation.²¹ Hence, the differences between Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Rome, and Philippi.
3. A number of these ministries are entrusted to both men and women.
4. Sometimes there is laying on of hands; sometimes this procedure is omitted.
5. In conclusion, mention is made of the duties of ministry that have remained the same throughout the ages. These are the tasks that are referred to in the second chapter of the Lima text.

It is strange that this exegetical paragraph is only a commentary. This overview gives both the differences and what remains constant. Might it not have been more convincing if this paragraph with scriptural variations and constants had been taken as basis for this sub-section?

Paragraph Twenty-Two. *Although there is no single New Testament pattern, although the Spirit has many times led the church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs, and although other forms of the ordained ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it. Historically, it is true to say, the threefold ministry became the generally accepted pattern in the church of the early centuries and is still retained today by many churches. In the fulfilment of their mission and service the churches need people who in different ways express and perform the tasks of the ordained ministry in its diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal aspects and functions.*

²⁰ The first versions of January 1980 still speak of the contrast between the two groups: "The New Testament reflects a certain tension between the local church leaders and missionaries like Paul, sent out to the Greek-Roman world." See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 221.

²¹ In the versions of January 1980 these differences are described only in terms of 'Hellenist and Jewish circumstances.' The reason why this limited difference has been omitted is quite likely because there were more local situations that played a part than just the difference between Jewish and Hellenist backgrounds. To omit this difference has not been an advantage in every respect because in the historical studies about the different ministry patterns this difference turns up time and time again as a fundamental difference because it is based on Jewish traditions or pagan forms of government. If this difference is omitted, the possibility to ask questions about the significance of Old Testament ministry patterns for New Testament ministry and its later developments also disappears.

Paragraph 22 suggests that history might be able to teach us something useful for our own time:

1. Whereas, up to now, the tone of this chapter has been descriptive, this changes in paragraph 22. Despite all exegetical and church-historical relativization, the commission is convinced that the threefold ministerial pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon in this time might serve as an expression of the unity that we are looking for, and as a means to achieve it.
2. The commission regards it as the best model to promote visible church unity. When trying to find unity, we should not primarily search for a joint structure of ministry, but for a ministerial pattern that is aimed at promoting this unity.
3. The paragraph gives two more reasons to underpin the recommendation for threefold ministry. In the first place, there are the current experiences of many churches that use this pattern. Second, the flexibility of this model is able to accommodate a variety of ministerial functions and aspects. The churches always need people who can express and carry out the diaconal, presbyterial, and episcopal tasks of the ordained ministry in different ways.
4. In this paragraph, the approach is functional as well as symbolic. There are not only diaconal, presbyterial, and episcopal functions, but also diaconal, presbyterial, and episcopal 'aspects.' These various tasks must not only be carried out, they must also be 'expressed.'²² A.H.C. van Eijk says that this formulation is reminiscent of the classical definition of a sacrament as sign and instrument.²³
5. What these tasks involve remains unclear. Up to this paragraph they have not been defined. It was only in the case of the bishop's function that the description of the historical growth of this ministry made it more or less clear what it entailed.

Paragraph Twenty-Three. *The church as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God is constituted by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts*

²² See the commentary by Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 358: "And these people 'express' as well as 'perform' the tasks of the ordained ministry in its diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal *aspects* and functions." Thus 'being' as well as 'doing' or 'functioning' is deemed important and sacramentality is emphasized.

²³ A.H.C. van Eijk, "Ecumenical Convergence on Episcopal Ministry," *Bijdragen. Tijdschrift voor filosofie and theologie* 47 (1986) 3, 239.

or ministries. Among these gifts a ministry of episkopé is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every Church needs this ministry of unity in some form in order to be the church of God, the one body of Christ, a sign of the unity of all in the Kingdom.

This paragraph speaks about the indispensability of the *episkopé* function within the threefold ordained ministry pattern. The foundation is formed by the church as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God. The motto ‘unity in diversity’ is applicable to both images. The diversity is expressed through a diversity of gifts and ministries; one particular ministry is needed to express and safeguard the unity in the one body of Christ, as symbol of the unity of all in the Kingdom of God. This service/ministry of unity points to the future. How can we now become what we are as church in Christ? How can we now become that to which we are called as church by Christ?

The paragraph did not receive its definitive form until the meeting in Lima in 1982. In all but the last version this paragraph started with the question: “How can this threefold form be adapted for the church today?” This paragraph asked what the lasting importance was of the threefold ministry. Different arguments were used here. Initially, the calling of the church to be an effective witness in the world had been given central significance,²⁴ but now the definitive version focuses on a ministry of *episkopé*, whose prime function is to safeguard unity. This meant that during the final meeting in Lima another new paragraph was created. This is yet more proof that the whole subsection is mainly about safeguarding unity.

Paragraph Twenty-Four. *The threefold pattern stands evidently in need of reform. In some churches the collegial dimension of leadership in the eucharistic community has suffered diminution. In others, the function of deacons has been reduced to an assistant role in the celebration of the liturgy: they have ceased to fulfil any function with regard to the diaconal witness of the church. In general, the relation of the presbyterate to the episcopal ministry has been discussed throughout the centuries, and the degree of the presbyter’s participation in the episcopal ministry is still for many an unresolved question of far-reaching ecumenical importance. In*

²⁴ “The primary issue is not that some churches, for the sake of unity, should return to the traditional pattern but rather that all churches are called upon to give the fullest possible expression to its potential with a view to a more effective witness of the church in the world.” Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 355.

some cases, churches which have not formally kept the threefold form have, in fact, maintained certain of its original patterns.

Paragraph 24 once more directs our attention to the threefold pattern of ministry, and the obvious need to reform it. Originally, this paragraph had been a commentary on the previous paragraph, but it was given additional importance by including it in the main text as a separate paragraph in the definitive version of the Lima text in 1982.²⁵

Three issues are described, all three of which depend on the way the church is structured:

1. The collegial dimension of the leadership in the eucharistic community.²⁶
2. The reduction of the function of deacon to liturgical assistant, at the expense of the diaconal, social task.
3. The relationship between presbyters and bishops; in particular, the extent to which presbyters participate in oversight or episcopal ministry.²⁷ This third issue was not added until the definitive version of Lima in 1982. This sentence was added after intervention by Protestant theologians. They feared that the choice of the threefold pattern of ministry would open up the controversy concerning the relationship between bishops and presbyters.²⁸ The final sentence informs us that, in some cases, churches that have not formally kept the threefold pattern still adhere to some of the original aspects.²⁹

²⁵ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 355.

²⁶ We are struck by the fact that the search continues for an ever more adequate formulation of the lack of the collegiality in the way the churches function. In the June 1980 Geneva version, we read: "In some, the college of elders in the local eucharistic community has disappeared." The disadvantage of this formulation was that it focused too much on one form of ministry and not enough on that which it seeks to express, i.e., the collegial governance of the local church.

²⁷ It is not clear whether the expression "episcopal ministry" refers to the function of *episkopé* or to the bishop's office. The official Dutch translation opts for "episcopal ministry." This is reminiscent of a formulation of the Second Vatican Council, which mentions in PO 7 that priests participate in the bishop's ministry, "(...) participatione ministerii episcopalis, quae Presbyteris per sacramentum Ordinis et missionem canonice confertur." It is also possible to translate this so that the function is emphasized, however. In that case, the question is to which extent the presbyters participate in the task, the supervisory function.

²⁸ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 372, which refers to responses from W. Pannenberg, G. Gassmann, and F. Torrance.

²⁹ L.S. Mudge, in "A Reformed Theologian Views the BEM Documents," *The Reformed World* 37 (1983) 5, 136, is of the opinion that the Reformed Churches with their

Paragraph Twenty-Five. *The traditional threefold pattern thus raises questions for all the churches. Churches maintaining the threefold pattern will need to ask how its potential can be fully developed for the most effective witness of the church in this world. In this task churches not having the threefold pattern should also participate. They will further need to ask themselves whether the threefold pattern as developed does not have a powerful claim to be accepted by them.*

Paragraph 25 forms the conclusion of this section. The arguments which led to the choice of the dominant, threefold structure of ministry of the early church now leads to a task for all churches. This paragraph was added at the last moment, when the definitive version of 1982 was being finalized.

1. Churches that have maintained the threefold ministry are asked to optimize the potential of this structure with a view to their witness in the world. Churches without the threefold pattern of ministry can be of assistance in this.
2. Churches without this order are asked to consider whether this pattern, as developed, is not worthy of acceptance by them.³⁰

While the previous paragraphs argued in favor of the threefold ministry—mainly because of its potential to strengthen unity within the churches—here the main emphasis lies on the possibility of offering the world a more effective witness. There is one problem, however: although according to the World Council's theology there is a close link between unity between the churches and effective witness, they are not the same. This final paragraph contains some of the missionary zeal of the introductory chapter.

Summarizing, we come to the conclusion that the Lima report contains a plea for the threefold pattern of bishop-presbyter-deacon that developed in the early church. The central argument is the conviction that this structure and personalization is the greatest encouragement for unity in the framework of the church's mission.

threefold pattern of ministry have retained aspects of the historical threefold ministry at the level of the local congregations.

³⁰ It is not absolutely clear what is meant with "as developed." Does this refer to the historical process in which the threefold pattern has developed, or does it refer to the way it is explained in this text? The official Dutch translation opts for the first possibility. In our opinion, the second option is equally feasible. The way in which the threefold pattern can influence churches without this order can be caused by the way in which the Lima declaration presents new possibilities in this ordering.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

It has become clear that, in particular, the churches of the Reformation and the free churches have problems with this section. There are obvious differences in emphasis, depending on the tradition from which they come. We do not want to restrict ourselves to criticisms from the Reformed tradition, and—for that reason—we have also more widely consulted other churches with roots in the continental Reformation. In this way, the specifically Reformed criticism will stand out more clearly. In some churches there is a willingness to consider this threefold structure of ministry, while other churches are much more critical and sometimes unambiguously dismiss this proposal. Where are the problems?

1. *Concerning the importance of ministerial structures*

Some people do not understand why this structure proposal is included in an ecumenical text about ministry. Structures are not matters that belong to the *esse* of ministry, but only to the *bene esse*. They are, after all, only *adiaphora*—order matters. From a functional point of view, carrying out the functions is what is essential and not the contingent structures.³¹

The Lutheran churches are the ones that find it difficult to understand that there is a need to think about diversifying the structure of the ministry, while the Reformed churches understand this need better. This is partly because in the Reformed tradition more attention had been paid to pluriform ministerial structure, as is proved by the detailed discussion about this subject in Calvin's *Institutes* book IV.

³¹ See, among other things, the response from the (Lutheran) Church of Norway in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 120: "(...) a corresponding structuring of the pastoral and diaconal ministry of the church rest, however, in our view, primarily on the basis of practical-theological considerations. We therefore cannot see that the threefold division of the office of ministry can be described any principal theological importance. It is not intrinsic to the nature of the church that its ministry be divided into the three categories of bishop, presbyter, and deacon." See also the response from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 138–139, and the American Lutheran Church in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 83. The Evangelic Church of Westphalia, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 147 expresses this as follows: "(...) one should make a clear distinction between the theological and the structural levels. We are one in the 'ministry of reconciliation'. Freedom, on the other hand, should be allowed to reign where structures are concerned. If the apostolic tradition in the sense of a succession of word and sacrament is the common basis (§34), it should be possible for the churches to recognize each other independently of the structure of their ministries (...)."

On closer inspection, we find that the Lima declaration does not give a verdict about the need for threefold ministry. The text goes no further than mentioning, in passing, the Holy Spirit as having led the church in the structure developments of the second and third centuries. The addition of an extra chapter about the structure of ministry appears to have been prompted by purely functional considerations because the structures give the presbyterial and diaconal functions of the offices more opportunities to grow, and—in particular—to safeguard and promote the church's task to achieve unity.

2. *Concerning the capacity of the structures of ministry to promote unity*

Is the unifying capacity of the threefold structure and, in particular, that of the bishop not being overestimated? A number of churches point out that, as far as they are concerned, a specific pattern of ministry is not a *sine qua non* for church unity.³² In addition, according to the lesson from Reformation history, the bishop's office can be a stumbling block for the development of church unity. This painful experience has not been forgotten. This structure, and—in particular—the failure on the part of bishops to function adequately can prevent the Word from being proclaimed, and—as a result—undermine church unity. Others add that safeguarding unity is the responsibility of the faith community as a whole.³³ There is a different opinion according to which a bishop's office could be a valuable asset for the Reformed churches, which are often much divided.³⁴

In its answer, the commission explained that to possess or accept the threefold pattern of ministry is not an absolute necessity for unity, but only a means to achieve it.³⁵ Later, when the proposal for mutual recognition of ministry is made, the proposal for threefold ministry is not a *conditio sine qua non*. Referring to paragraph 24, the commission emphasized that it realized that even the existing threefold structures of ministry need to be reformed.

³² See the response from the Federation of Evangelic churches in the GDR in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. V, 141.

³³ See the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 176.

³⁴ See the response from the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 146–147.

³⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 125.

3. *Concerning the lack of structural pluriformity and the omission of the elder*

Some churches fear that opting for the threefold pattern of ministry could undermine the rich variety of institutional ministries that have existed from the time of New Testament witness to the present time.³⁶ In particular, the churches and a number of theologians from the Reformed tradition are very disappointed that the ‘elder’ from their synodal-presbyterial church order has not been given a place.³⁷

The commission’s answer to this is that their plea for the threefold ministry is not an attack on the institutional variety of ministry. This opinion is underpinned by a reference to paragraph 7b and paragraphs 32–33 where other charisms and institutional forms are mentioned. There is no fundamental difference of opinion between the churches over the need to make room for other forms of ministry. After all, they are a gift from God and are suitable expressions of the multiple apostolic mission of the whole people of God.

The commission admit: “Attention should have been given in BEM to the ministerial functions of, e.g., elders in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition, which express the participation of the community in the preaching of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and the lead-

³⁶ See among others the response from the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. V, 141: “Another ground for our misgivings about the concept of a basic threefold pattern of ministry is in particular that this concept can lead to a curtailment and limitation of the variety of ministries. This can happen, too, both as to the wealth of gifts and services referred to in the New Testament (Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12) and the variety of services and ministries found today in our own and other churches (for example, catechists and others in the ministry of preaching, church musicians, women parish assistants, etc.).” See also the response from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 79.

³⁷ See, among others, the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 107, the Church of Scotland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 96, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 157. H. Berkhof, “De lacune in het ambtsrapport van Lima,” *In de Waagschaal* new edition 12 (1983–1984) 22, 674–678, characterizes the omission of the elder as the great gap. Berkhof is indignant. On the one hand, he wonders if the Reformed members of *Faith and Order* had been asleep during the meetings. On the other hand, he admits that the position of the elder had never been clear and that there had never been unanimity about it. See also A.J. Bronkhorst, “Kroniek,” *Kerk en Theologie* 36 (1985) 1, 45–50. After the omission of the Reformed elder from the Lima report, he once more pleads for keeping the elder under the inspiration of Calvin’s biblical arguments and the confessions of faith. On the basis of our own analysis in the previous section of our study, we doubt whether Bronkhorst is right to appeal to Calvin and the confessions. It is a pity that he does not really enter into dialogue with the Lima text itself.

ership of the church (cf. M.27).”³⁸ This is, in fact, an admission by the commission that it made a mistake—a strategic mistake. Elders were given a place in all but the last draft version before the definitive Lima text. With hindsight, the commission regrets that this specific Reformed ministerial function is not mentioned anywhere in the section about ministry. They then explain why they decided not to include the elders in this section: “The position of such ministers, however, with regard to the ordained ministry is unclear, as it is evidenced in the responses, precisely in those churches, which have introduced those functions at or after the Reformation.”³⁹ There follows an additional admission that this problem also applies to deacons, who are not ordained.

The ambiguous status of the elder’s office within the Reformed tradition explains why the commission decided to omit this office. If they had mentioned this problem in the Lima text, it would have been possible to avoid the conviction in many Reformed churches that the office of elder, which they regard as a valid office next to that of minister of the Word, is not taken seriously in the ecumenical forum. This is another instance that shows the fundamental importance of having opted for discussing a ministry on which ordination bestows qualification. The Reformed tradition ought to have been warned—not by the omission of the elder, but by the choice on principle for a catholic view of ministry.

4. *Concerning one or more forms of the ordained ministry*

The commission must also answer the question whether there should be one or more forms of ordained ministry. Within the Lutheran tradition, there is only the ‘public ministry of Word and Sacrament.’⁴⁰ Also in the Reformed tradition and free churches, there is sometimes only one ordained ministry recognized. They accept a certain degree of differentiation in this one ministry, and many churches are willing to accept the threefold pattern for the sake of unity, but on condition that the ordination of bishops is not regarded as being on a higher level, and that the function of deacons is explained in more detail. In their

³⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 125.

³⁹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 125–126.

⁴⁰ The church of Sweden, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 138; the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 123; and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. V, 22 are some of the churches that make specific reference to this point.

response, the commission points out that this viewpoint is not very different from that of the churches who still have the threefold ministry, and where there is only one sacrament of ordination and one *ordo ministerii* with a number of rites and functions. They point, in particular, to the Second Vatican Council where the *plenitudo*—fullness of the ordination of bishops—does not diminish the *perfectio*—completeness of the ordinations to other ministries.⁴¹

Most churches in the Reformed tradition do not have any problem with making a distinction between different ministries, even the threefold pattern of ministry.⁴² This is one of the innovations that Calvin, following in Bucer's footsteps, introduced into the thinking about ministry in the context of the Reformation of the church. Different functions lead to different offices. In this differentiation between offices, Calvin regarded himself as having been inspired by scripture. He understood this variety as one model with various offices. What is more, in the *Institutes* IV, IV Calvin discusses the threefold pattern of ministry in the early church in great detail. He does his utmost to prove that the way he structured ministry in Geneva is in accordance with the structure of ministry in the early church. Less than we do in our time, he saw differences between the biblical witness and the evolution in the church in the first centuries.

5. *Concerning the relationship between scripture and Tradition*

In the development of the arguments around the threefold pattern of ministry, the Lima text bases itself on the historical evolutions in the second and third centuries that resulted in a threefold pattern. Many churches from the Reformed tradition have a problem with this approach. They are of the opinion that in this way a particular period in church history is given a normative status.⁴³ Why is this

⁴¹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 126.

⁴² See, among others, the response from the Swiss Protestant Church Federation, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. VI, 84: "The threefold form of the ministry such as is known locally in Reformed tradition and practice is one of the possible ways of expressing the diversity that exists here. It leads to recognition of a diversity of ministries which is necessary for the life of the churches."

⁴³ In this respect, see the negative opinion in the joint response from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 107: "The most important reason is that the historical development towards a generally more acceptable pattern of ministries, in particular towards the threefold office of bishop, presbyter and deacon, gains a normative influence which a historical development should not be given. As a result, the suggestion that the

period given greater importance than the sixteenth century, the time of the Reformation in Europe?⁴⁴ They also discover a contradiction between the New Testament approach of paragraph 19 about variety in patterns of ministry and the proposal in paragraph 22 to adopt a joint threefold structure of ministry for historical reasons.⁴⁵ Should not scripture be ranked above the Tradition? Should these later developments not always be tested against scripture?⁴⁶ Some churches question the uncritical description in paragraph 20 and 21 of the changes in the model of the threefold ministry in the second and third centuries.⁴⁷ These responses show how the ecumenical hermeneutics that had been arrived at in Montreal 1963 around scripture, Tradition, and traditions have not silenced the traditional hermeneutical controversy.

Lessons and Questions for the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the reasons why the threefold ministry is not convincing

Many churches with their roots in the Reformation, and—in particular—churches from the Reformed tradition appear willing to adopt a favorable attitude towards the proposal for a joint threefold structure of ministry to promote church unity. They are not convinced by the

threefold ministry be accepted as an ‘expression of the unity we seek and also as a means of achieving it’ (§22), takes on a surplus value which then makes its acceptance more difficult. (...) the dominant thought behind the recognition of ministry remains the communal bond with a historical fact.” See also the response from the Swiss Protestant Church Federation in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 85: “The way BEM appeals to history in order to present the traditional threefold ministry as normative seems to us to limit unduly the range of possibilities in this field.”

⁴⁴ See the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 104: “Thus is it not clear why the Spirit might not have been as much at work in the breakdown of the threefold pattern in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as in the creation of it in the second and third.”

⁴⁵ See the response from the church of Sweden, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 137; the response from the Evangelic Lutheran Church in Oldenburg, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 79; and the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 175, where there is mention of a contradiction between paragraphs 19 and 22 which is “completely illogical.”

⁴⁶ See for a detailed discussion of these questions in connection with the section about ministry, the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 215–216, and also the response from the River Plate Waldensian Church (Uruguay), *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 125.

⁴⁷ See the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 175, where mention is made of the influence of the power structures of the Roman Empire; the concluding remark in the response from the Evangelical

arguments brought forward, however: there is no adequate biblical evidence for them, no theological foundation, and they are insufficient in keeping with the challenges of the present day.⁴⁸

In our opinion, their judgment is correct. The threefold pattern of ministry does not offer any answer to the questions and needs of Reformed theology of ministry for our time. Our arguments are as follows:

a. The historical argument is weak because in the second century the threefold pattern of ministry is something quite different from what it was in the fourth century. In the second century it was a structure pattern for the community worshipping locally, but in the fourth century it is an organizational form of the regional church structures. There is a historical link between the two forms, but they are completely different entities; namely, structural patterns at different levels with different functions. The structural pattern at the first level is not copied to a second level, but it has extended to cover a second level, which meant that the structure of the first level had to change. When studying the history of the churches of the first centuries, we do not see uniformity when it comes to the threefold ministry, but creativity—which responds to ever changing situations, levels, and contexts.

There is a second reason why the historical argument is dubious. In paragraph 21 and 22, the evolution of the threefold ministry of the second century to that of the fourth century is described in neutral and/or positive terms. This evolution within the churches must, however, have been influenced by the changes in social context in which Christianity developed. In this context, we must mention the evolution towards Christianity under the rule of Constantine, which gave the authorities greater control over the way the church was governed and how its min-

Church of the Czech Brethren, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 117; and the critical reflection by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 216.

⁴⁸ See, among others, the response from The Church of Scotland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 96: "The significance of the three-fold pattern of ministry both as work of the Spirit and as unitive is overstated and the case for it is not made; ambiguities of terminology and diversities of practice over time and space are elided." Then there is the response from The Union of Welsh Independents, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 279 about the arguments in paragraphs 19 to 25: "Here theological argument is abandoned and there is no attempt to discuss the biblical evidence. The only reason given here for commending the threefold ministry is that it could promote the unity of the church. Of course it could—provided everyone accepts it! But on what theological grounds should they accept it?"

istry was structured. This political factor and other possible influences and manipulations are not mentioned; there is no critical assessment of the ideology, and, therefore, the formulation of this evolution is naively positive.

b. The central argument is that the threefold structure is the best way to express and promote the unity of the church. In our opinion, it seems that the commission drew the wrong conclusion from church history. No clear picture is given of the contributions made to the unity of the church by the presbyterial and diaconal tasks. Later the bishop's office—and not the threefold ministry—will prove to be the strongest expression of the churches' unity. The *episkopé* function does not result in the threefold ministry, but specifically in the bishop's office. For this reason, the question we need to ask the churches from the Reformed tradition is not whether they would like to consider a threefold pattern of ministry, but whether they would be prepared, for the sake of the gospel, to consider the bishop's office as a personal expression and promotion of communality and unity at the regional level. We shall return to that question later.

c. The threefold pattern of ministry was a creative solution in the past by a church that was very much aware of its missionary calling. The danger is that structures and forms that provided good service at a particular moment in history can ossify and become rigid, which means that for the future they can become a hindrance rather than an advantage. It is quite possible that this applies to the threefold pattern of ministry, but it can also apply to the classic Reformed pattern of ministry. In our opinion, it is dangerous to regard a system that served the church well in the past as the solution for the future. God's Spirit speaks to us from the biblical witness and the history of the church; this Spirit is flexible, always looking for new forms. In our opinion, *Faith and Order* was too ready to be convinced—in particular, by the Orthodox tradition—and, in this respect, they did not carry out their dialogue thoroughly enough. The future does not lie in accepting old forms in order to achieve unity, but in looking for the way in which the churches can jointly shape their missionary calling in very different situations. In doing so, the search for a joint form must not be regarded as a priority. When jointly theologizing about ministry, we must speak about indispensable aspects, elements, meanings, and functions. Looking in our fragmented world for a uniform structure seems fruitless.

2. *Concerning the importance of the Holy Spirit's guidance for the church's structure of ministry*

The appeal to the Spirit in history cannot be dismissed as an exclusively Roman Catholic argument. The texts, confessions of faith, and church structures from the early Reformation period have a large degree of authority within the Reformed tradition. They do not speak the last or deepest word—because that is the preserve of the scriptures in which the Word of God comes to us through the Spirit—but they are highly regarded. The reason for this is the realization that the Spirit exercised a renewing and correcting influence at a moment of crisis in the history of the Western church in the 16th century. People realized that fundamental elements of the gospel were heard again, and that this had consequences for the way the church was structured. This whole process began to be regarded as working and guidance by the Spirit in history. There were other events that happened later, which also gained a special significance within the Reformed tradition. Sometimes movements have a tendency to justify their own development history by referring to God's special providence.⁴⁹

What is even more important, in the churches of the Reformation there have been many decisions taken by the early church that their members did not want to see reversed because at a deep level they recognized in them the guidance of the Spirit—issues such as the canon of the scriptures, and the doctrines of Christology and the Trinity. It is therefore not surprising that the churches from the Catholic tradition regard the decisions about structure of ministry that were taken in those days as having been taken under special guidance by the Holy Spirit, and that for that reason they value them and want to hold on to them. This leads to a pertinent question for the churches of the Reformation: why are doctrinal, liturgical, and hermeneutical decisions taken in those days still regarded as normative and binding, while the decisions regarding church structure that were taken in connection with

⁴⁹ In his inaugural speech about the new church order of the SOW Churches when accepting the appointment as professor of ecclesiastical law in Kampen in 1994, the Reformed theologian L.J. Koffeman spoke about the way some groups in the Dutch Reformed Church referred to “the national church” in a way that implied that it had been “planted by God himself.” He recognizes the same circular argument as in the Roman Catholic appeal to history, in which reference to scripture and to history are combined to justify the historical development of church structures. See L.J. Koffeman, *Gestalte en gehalte* (Kampen: Kok, 1994), 15.

them are not⁵⁰ The only possible conclusion is that the presence of the Holy Spirit in history—which as a result of this presence becomes history of salvation—remains an open question for the churches of the Reformation. Is there nothing that can be said about the church's visible structure from a pneumatological point of view?

From history, the churches that were formed during the Reformation know how the structure of ministry, as it existed in those days under the leadership of pope and bishops, prevented the church from being reformed. And they know from scripture itself how the structures of ministry within Israel—consisting of kings, priests, and prophets—became problematic. In the uncertainty and chaos that are created when it seems as if there is no longer any leadership through the channels that had originally been created by the Spirit, it sometimes appears as if the Spirit turns away from these given forms in order to make a new start with new forms. This happens time and time again through history. It shows how relative the historical forms are. They always seem to be slightly provisional and vulnerable. But do these new forms always constitute a complete *tabula rasa*, or is there a fundamental core that is permanent and keeps returning behind all these changing forms throughout history? It is our opinion that—however open, dynamic, multiform, and focused on the current challenges and the future our pneumatological approach to the structures of the church is—in the unavoidable structure of the church, we do not have to and cannot ignore the structures from the past because they were also guided by the Spirit.

We should now apply this sort of consideration to the example of the threefold structure of ministry. The commission was of the opinion that this structure was such a fundamental, permanent, structural core. In the paragraph above, we gave our reasons why we are not convinced by this argument. There is, however—in our opinion—a permanent, ministerial, structure element in paragraph 19–25, and this is the personal structure of the *episkopé* function as a focus of unity. We intend to return to that element later.

⁵⁰ See also A.H.J. van Eijk, “Kerkstructuur als historisch gegeven. Overwegingen bij enkele oecumenische teksten en de antwoorden erop vanuit de rooms-katholieke kerk,” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 33 (1993) 3, 219–240, and Koffeman, *Gestalte en gehalte*, 16.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE EXERCISE OF THE
ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH (ART. 26–27)

The Preceding History

This whole subsection is new in comparison with the 1974 Accra text. It deals with the way *episkopé* should be exercised in the church. This section was inspired by a text by Lukas Vischer for the meeting of the steering committee, held in January 1980, on the basis of the results of the consultation about the bishop's office in the summer of 1979. For this section, Vischer drew heavily on the text of that consultation.⁵¹ He extended the personal, collegial, and communal way of exercising *episkopé* to the whole threefold structure of the ordained ministry.

Discussion per Paragraph

Paragraph Twenty-Six. *Three considerations are important in this respect. The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be personal because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.*

Paragraph 26 indicates that the ordained ministry should be exercised in a way that is personal, collegial, and communal.

1. Ministry should be exercised in a way that is personal. There is a link between Christ being a person, and a form of representation that is personal and individual. This is connected with the role of the minister as being a representative of Christ. Who is most suited for this task? The text of the 1979 consultation takes, as its point of departure, "the authority and the commitment of single

⁵¹ See, in particular, "Question III: How is *episkopé* to be exercised in the church?" and the answer to this question in *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980), 6–7.

persons within the community.”⁵² The draft versions of the first half of 1980⁵³ refer to the person whose task it is to proclaim the gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord. The definitive formulation is based on the person who has been ordained to carry out these tasks, so that it is possible to make the point that “public appointment and accountability is important.”⁵⁴ The answer initially points to the individual commitment of the minister personally, and—later—a functional approach is attempted, but in the end a more formal approach is used that is based on ordination.

2. Exercise of ministry must be collegial. When there is a college of ordained ministers, they can jointly look after the interests of the community. The consultation about the bishop’s office in 1979 based the need for such a college on the need to have a counterbalance for the individual minister: “The authority of the one to provide the focus of the community needs to be tested by a group. The discovery of the will of God requires the insights and interaction of several people.”⁵⁵
3. Finally, ministry requires a communal component. If the function of the ordained ministry is to be rooted in the life of the community, then the community must participate actively in seeking the will of God and the guidance of the Spirit.

Commentary (26). *These three aspects need to be kept together. In various churches, one or another has been over-emphasized at the expense of the others. In some churches, the personal dimension of the ordained ministry tends to diminish the collegial and communal dimensions. In other churches, the collegial or communal dimension takes so much importance that the ordained ministry loses its personal dimension. Each church needs to ask itself in what way its exercise of the ordained ministry has suffered in the course of history.*

An appreciation of these dimensions lies behind a recommendation made by the first World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927: ‘In view of (i) the place which the episcopate, the council of presbyters and the congregation of the faithful, respectively, had in the constitution of the early Church, and (ii) the fact that

⁵² *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective*, 6.

⁵³ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 231.

⁵⁴ A formulation coined by G. Moede and recorded in Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 365.

⁵⁵ *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective*, 6.

the episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems of government are each today, and have been for centuries, accepted by great communions in Christendom, and (iii) the fact that episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems are each believed by many to be essential to the good order of the church, we therefore recognize that these several elements must all, under conditions which require further study, have an appropriate place in the order of life of a reunited Church ...'

This commentary places paragraph 26 in an ecclesiastical and historical perspective:

1. First of all, churches are asked to critically look at their own tradition. To what extent has one of these aspects been allowed to lose its importance?
2. The second section consists of a reference to a passage from the First World Conference of *Faith and Order* in Lausanne in 1927. This is to indicate the ecumenical importance of all three dimensions. In 1927 the three dimensions were expressed in terms of the three classical ecclesiastical orders. The thought behind it is that the personal aspect was safeguarded best in the episcopal churches, the collegial aspect in the presbyterial-synodal churches, and the communal in the congregationalist churches. Although this recommendation is presented in a very schematic way, it is still meaningful and very enlightening.

Paragraph Twenty-Seven. *The ordained ministry needs to be constitutionally or canonically ordered and exercised in the church in such a way that each of these three dimensions can find adequate expression. At the level of the local eucharistic community there is need for an ordained minister acting within a collegial body. Strong emphasis should be placed on the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community. At the regional level there is again need for an ordained minister exercising a service of unity. The collegial and communal dimensions will find expression in regular representative synodal gatherings.*

Paragraph 27 deals with the levels at which these three aspects of the ministry are exercised:

1. The three ways in which the ministry is exercised require a sound, ecclesiastical foundation—both locally and regionally.
2. At the level of the local eucharistic community, the minister needs to work within a collegial body. It is not made clear who the members of this body are. Are they perhaps people who could be the equivalent of Reformed elders? There is no mention of them

anywhere in the text! Because they are not ordained, they are not really qualified for this type of collegiality because the explanation speaks of ordained ministers. This problem does not only occur in the Reformed tradition. Many local faith communities of most traditions have one ordained minister in the sense that the Lima text refers to them. It is, therefore, not clear how this collegiality of ordained ministers has to be experienced at the level of the local faith community. Another possibility is to regard the word ‘local’ in the Roman Catholic sense of the word—as a diocese. In that context, collegiality of ordained ministers would refer to the joint council of the bishop with his ordained priests and deacons. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not agree with the rest of this declaration where ‘local’ is seen as opposed to ‘regional.’ Therefore, it must be assumed that local does refer to the basic faith community under the leadership of a minister at local level. How collegiality of ordained ministers can function at this level is therefore unclear, unless one allows it to include other office bearers who have not been ordained.

3. At the local level the need for active participation by all members in the life and decision making of the community is also emphasized. In contrast to the commentary on paragraph 13, where the participation in decision making by ordinary members had not been mentioned, it is emphasized strongly here.
4. The need for personal, collegial, and communal exercise of ministry through representative synod meetings is emphasized in this paragraph. This is the first time the word “synod” is mentioned in the text. It is again unclear who will take part in these synodal bodies. Does the collegiality here apply to other bishops when it is a region with several dioceses, or to the presbyters of the diocese as the pastors of the local Reformed eucharistic communities, or to the elders of the Reformed tradition? And does the communal aspect of exercising ministry here refer to the elders as members of a ‘lay pastorate’ or to the lay members who as baptized members of the people of God have co-responsibility for the decisions taken in the church on a level beyond the local?

*Responses from the Reformed Tradition**1. Concerning the complementary nature of the aspects of exercising ministry*

There is nearly unanimous praise for the formulation of the complementary nature of the personal, collegial, and communal aspects of the church's ministry.

2. Concerning the personal aspect of exercising ministry

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is the only church to refer specifically to the personal aspect of exercising ministry in this sub-section. They would have preferred if, in addition to the representation of Christ, there had been mention of the representation of the people of God. Because the representation of Christ is the only argument given for the personal exercise of ministry, they fear that this opens the door to clericalism.⁵⁶

This is an important element of theology of ministry. In exercising ministry in the church, the representation of the people of God is indispensable. The second chapter of the Lima ministry text does pay attention to this aspect; in particular, in paragraph 12 and 16. But the question here is whether in the theological reason for the personal exercise of ministry the representation of the people of God should be mentioned. We are of the opinion that it should not because the important theological point here is that the personal element of exercising ministry is an expression of the personal representation of Christ by the minister. This account is in accordance with Calvin's approach in the *Institutes* IV.III.1. He is in favor of individual people being involved in governing the church because, in this way, God grants some of them an opportunity to be his representatives in the world.

3. Concerning the weaknesses in the outworking of the collegial way of exercising ministry

Some churches are of the opinion that *Faith and Order* themselves can learn something from the Lausanne recommendations in paragraph 27; in particular, because in the Lima report not enough attention has been given to the presbyterial-synodal church model.⁵⁷ Because of the strong

⁵⁶ *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 200.

⁵⁷ See the response from the Church of Scotland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 95;

emphasis on the personal way of exercising *episkopé*, the importance of the joint consultation of ordained and non-ordained office bearers—both locally and regionally—is not given enough attention.

In their response, the commission defended themselves by saying that synodal structures are important as concrete expressions of fundamental conciliarity of the church, and of its links across the boundaries of the local community and its world-wide identity. They also indicate that lay people can be members of a council of ordained ministers, who can be involved in the decision making process.⁵⁸

The collegial form of governing the church has not been strongly defined in the Lima text. In our opinion, this is the reason why there was no room for the Reformed elder. Due to the weak emphasis on collegiality and communality, the elder remained in the shade.

4. *Concerning the silence regarding the exercise of ministry at a universal level*

A number of churches regret that, when discussing the different levels of exercising ministry in paragraph 27, no attention was given to exercising ministry at a universal level.⁵⁹ This could apply both to a Petrine ministry and to councils. In their answer, the commission admitted that a discussion about the primacy has to be developed further.⁶⁰ In our opinion, it would be fair to come to the conclusion that the commission left out this very sensitive subject for strategic reasons.

Lessons and Questions for the Reformed Tradition

1. *Concerning the extent to which the personal, collegial, and communal aspects of the exercise of ministry have been developed fully in the Reformed tradition*

1.1. *Concerning the personal exercise of ministry*

BEM demands that the ordained ministry be exercised in a personal way. It does not say anywhere what exactly is meant by “in a personal way.” A. Houtepen tries to provide a more detailed explanation of

the response from the Evangelical-Reformed Church in North-West Germany, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 98; and the joint response from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 107.

⁵⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 127.

⁵⁹ See the response from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 108, which regret that there is no mention of a universal Petrine ministry.

⁶⁰ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 127.

this expression in ecumenical texts. He writes that in the Lima text “personally exercised” has the double meaning of “personal” (i.e., not exercised ‘ad hoc’), “entrusted to one person” (i.e., not entrusted to a council as such, although collegiality is emphasized), and “exercised in a personal manner” (i.e., not business-like or like a civil servant, but in a pastoral manner). (...) It is important that somebody “stands up for this ministry”; someone who is clearly recognizable and has a clear responsibility.⁶¹ Houtepen says that he distinguishes two meanings, but in reality there are three. This is because even ‘personal’ as opposed to ‘ad hoc’ has a different nuance of meaning from ‘entrusted to one person’ in contrast to ‘entrusted to a council.’ We now want to discover how far the Reformed ministers personally exercise ministry in accordance with the meanings that A. Houtepen distinguished. First of all, we shall examine ministry at the level of the local community.

Personal ministry on the local level

In the Presbyterian churches it is the minister who has prime responsibility for the personal aspect of the exercise of ministry. Those who proclaim the Word exercise their ministry in a personal way as pastors and teachers of the local congregation. According to the first meaning that A. Houtepen attaches to this expression, this means that they do not exercise their ministry ‘ad hoc.’ That is correct as far as ministers are concerned. They do not exercise their ministry as if it was a one-off job that has to be carried out. The ordained ministry is a permanent responsibility. Houtepen calls this ‘personal.’ This description causes us to hesitate because here we enter the problem of whether the ordained ministry is a vocation and/or a profession. According to the Reformed tradition, the ordained ministry is not—in the first place—a profession. There has always been a strong emphasis on the *vocatio interna* and *externa*. Ordained ministry is a function that involves the whole person—heart, mind, and soul. This personal character is in agreement with the symbolic role that the minister fulfils in pointing to Christ. Ordained ministry is not only a vocation; it is also a profession. It is true that the person functions on the basis of the vocation, but the person is not limited to that vocation. For that reason, the ordained ministry is also to be regarded a profession. The description of exercis-

⁶¹ A. Houtepen, “De oecumenische gestalte van het bisschopsambt” in M. Brinkman and A. Houtepen (red.), *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1997), 83, footnote 6.

ing ministry as ‘personal’ tends to leave too little room for the approach to exercising ministry in professional terms. There is another reason why it is risky to use the expression ‘personal.’ It is not the person as such who points to Christ, but only in so far as that person exercises ministry. It is important here not to reverse the correction of the Reformation. The person of the minister can gain credibility and has authority only in so far as the task of service to the Word is accepted and carried out.

Second, Houtepen says, ministry is not entrusted to a council, but to one person—to an individual. This is also in accordance with the practice of Reformed ministry, exercised by ministers in the local congregation. Exercising ministry is not covered by presidency and/or moderatorship of a church council or any other collegiate body. It may be a functional part of it, but it is more because the ministers’ words and actions are, in the final analysis, not determined by what the majority decides, but by the personal calling to proclaim the Word of God and to make it relevant for the time we live in.

Finally, the ministry is exercised in a personal way—pastorally, not business-like, not in a distanced way, and not in an impersonal fashion. The minister’s words and actions are concerned with his fellow human beings in order to open their minds to the encounter with the Lord.

To what extent is the ministry of elders and deacons personal? It is as personal as that of the minister in the sense that it is exercised in a personal, pastoral way. In another sense, it is less clearly personal because the elders’ and deacons’ ministry is usually limited to one or more functions, which—in their turn—are time-limited. In addition, their ministry is not entrusted to one person because they act mainly as representatives of a collective; namely, the presbytery. The functions of elders and deacons have a much more limited personal content because of the absence of the symbolic aspects of ministry which characterize the ordained ministry. Because of the absence of the element of the representation of Christ, there is less need for personalized actions. The ministry exercised by elders and deacons does have one personal aspect, but it is first and foremost connected with carrying out concrete tasks. The lack of the symbolic element in the elders’ and deacons’ ministry is not only the cause of the less personal character of the way they carry out their ministry: the main result is that, according to the Lima text’s ecumenical theology of ministry, these Reformed offices cannot be qualified as ordained ministry.

Personal ministry beyond the local level

At the level beyond the local, most churches with a presbyterial-synodal structure only have a collegial way of exercising ministry. The Church of Scotland, in particular, has noted this problem in its response. It added the following response about functioning at the regional level:

21. Many in the church of Scotland find that discharge of the personal dimension at congregational level alone is inadequate: the life of the church is impoverished by the lack of a *pastor pastorum*; the mission of the church is debilitated by lack of the drive, initiative, and vision that one person in permanent official position can impart. If these are real defects, they are not made good by 'Moderators' as presently operating. At Presbytery level, the personal oversight discharged by a Moderator is terminated after (usually) one year; at national level, it lasts for only one week in the year, and for fifty-one weeks personal authority in the church as a whole is in suspense. This leaves some areas of church life unattended.⁶²

The fact that a personal way of exercising ministry at the level beyond the local is lacking is seen as a deficiency. The Church of Scotland experiences this deficiency at two levels: one, in the lack of personal pastoral oversight of ministers, and, two, in a lack of continuity in policy making and follow-up at the level beyond the local. Each Reformed church is, of course, structured slightly differently, but on the whole the same problems at the level beyond the local turn up time and time again. For this reason, the Church of Scotland wondered if they should consider the introduction of an episcopal figure to aid the church's functioning at the level beyond the local. We shall return to this question after the description of the tasks of the bishop in the next sub-section of the Lima text. For the moment, we observe a problem with exercising ministry in a personal way at a level beyond the local in the churches of the Reformed tradition.

1.2. Concerning the collegial way of exercising ministry

At the level of the local congregation, the collegial way of exercising ministry is strongly developed within the Reformed tradition, and also at the level beyond the local. This is where the heart of the Reformed theology of ministry beats. Leadership is usually given jointly in order to guard against derailed exercise of power by individual ministers who think they are empowered to act instead of Christ. This vision goes

⁶² See *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 92.

hand in hand with an age-long experience in ecclesiastical practice. In their joint search for God's guidance, ministers, by opening themselves up to the Word and the Spirit, have received wisdom for adequate joint leadership of the faith community for which they were responsible. This is why people from the Reformed tradition like to refer to this collegial element in ecumenical dialogues about ministry. On the part of the Reformed, the reason for the reserve towards the Lima text on ministry is partly caused by their disappointment at the limited amount of attention paid to collegiality in exercising ministry.

Despite our gratitude for the long collegial traditions regarding this point, we must add some notes here.

- In practice, providing collegial leadership can be a difficult process. The many—seemingly endless—hours spent in meetings sometimes have only limited results. This leads to a certain meeting fatigue within the Reformed tradition.⁶³ Holding meetings is not an end in itself, and any course decided on is not necessarily the right one just because there has been a meeting about it. In short, collegiality in the exercise of ministry is in itself not a guarantee for good pastoral leadership.
- In the Lima report, the exercise of ministry is very much seen as a means of maintaining and promoting unity. For the Reformed tradition, this leads to the question whether its ministerial meetings are convincing in the way they give form and content to the unity function. In our opinion, church councils tend to function reasonably well in this respect. Because they have been elected by the local faith community, they feel jointly responsible to maintain unity and cohesion within the local faith community. At the level beyond the local, however, it appears to be much less easy to get the members of the meetings to think in terms of the common interest. All too often delegates regard themselves exclusively as representing the interests and opinions of the local congregation.
- Strictly speaking, ministerial collegiality in the Lima text refers to the collegiality between ordained ministers. Bishops' synods and

⁶³ The increase in the number of hours spent in meetings may be a cultural phenomenon. These days collegial church governance appears to be an ever more difficult task because the necessary corporative unity is being eroded. Collegiality presupposes a much greater degree of unity than is present in many meetings held these days, which often consists of a collection of individuals.

councils spring to mind, but not Reformed office bearers' meetings because the ordained status of elders and deacons is unclear. If we accept that elders and deacons are not ordained office bearers in accordance with the Lima text, we have to describe the collegiality in the Reformed tradition as a collegiality between ordained and non-ordained office bearers. In accordance with the Lima text's principles, this specifically Reformed collegiality is, in fact, a communal form of exercising ministry rather than a collegial one. Through elected representatives who represent the local community, the wider faith community is involved in giving leadership.

- Collegial bodies of ministers do exist, but they usually have an informal and voluntary character. Because of fear of clerical domination in the church, they are not policy making bodies. One could ask if it would make sense to give such bodies a more official status as an advisory body. This was normal practice in the Reformed Church in Geneva in the sixteenth century. The church's policy was laid down by the ministers in joint consultation in the *Vénérable Compagnie*. Organizationally and functionally, this makes some sense. In practice, the people—with their specialized ministerial training—are the ones who are better able to take in the whole picture; in particular, when it concerns matters that go beyond the local level. Can this be justified from a theological point of view? Is it possible to build up an argument from their function as preachers of the Word, as pastors and teachers, and on the basis of their representative acting? Very cautiously, we want to give a positive answer to this. In doing so they are given the opportunity to carry out a task that goes beyond the level of the local church. They are more than representatives of the local congregation. Even if they are nearly always attached to a local congregation, they are first and foremost ministers of the wider church, and they represent the Lord in the whole society. As a council of ministers, they can work in the field of policy preparation: because of their specific calling and task, it is their responsibility to ensure that the church can function at the level beyond the local. The definitive policy choices will have to be made jointly with elders and deacons and the whole faith community.

1.3. *Concerning the communal exercise of ministry*

The Reformed churches also have a tradition in the field of the communal exercise of ministry. When crucial decisions have to be made, the church meeting's choice is the decisive factor. The elders and deacons who were elected by the congregation and represent the faith community are permanently involved in policy making through the church council. It cannot be denied, however, that the Reformed church structure is heir to the sixteenth century governors' culture. In many places there are still aristocratic traits as a legacy from the past. The Reformed tradition must face the challenge of how it can optimize the communal exercise of ministry because ministers are not the only ones who have received the Spirit. Some of the aspects of this challenge are how to involve all members in policy making and better communication between the church council and the whole faith community.

2. *Concerning the exercise of ministry at the regional level*

Paragraph 27 deals with the different forms of exercise of ministry at two levels, the local faith community and the regional level. The problems with exercise of ministry at the level beyond the local are connected with the problems posed by the structure of the Reformed churches at the level beyond the local.

2.1. *The Reformed tradition places a very strong emphasis on the local congregation*

Historically, that is not a matter of principle. Calvin did not opt for a ministry of building up the church in a personal way at the level beyond the local because he never gave up the hope that the Catholic bishops would join the Reformation. Later this emergency situation became the norm in most cases because there was much fear of domination by ministers at a higher level. The autonomy of the local congregation became a prized asset. In those days, people did not like the idea of a local congregation as branch of a diocese, or as branch of a church that is regionally or nationally structured. As a result, links at levels beyond the local often have the appearance of emergency links. This makes one wonder to what extent the church exists at these levels beyond the local. In our mobile and individualized Western society, the concept of the faith community that is determined by a particular territory is increasingly being undermined. In our opinion, it is important to pay more attention to the structure of the church at the level beyond the local, not least because of the church's missionary calling.

2.2. *Reformed churches often have a national structure*

This can be a problematic issue if the church is identified with a nation state or with a particular people. The church must belong to the Lord.

FUNCTIONS OF BISHOPS, PRESBYTERS, AND DEACONS (ART. 28–31)

The Preceding History

The first sub-section of this chapter failed to fulfill the demand for a function description for the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. The functions of presbyters and deacons, in particular, are in need of a clear task description. These articles will now meet this demand. The discussion is new in comparison with earlier ecumenical texts because they were not so clearly in favor of the threefold ministry as this one. Paragraph 26 in the Accra text began by giving a brief outline of the functions of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. According to C.T. Gromada, this was due to the influence exercised by the consultation of Orthodox theologians in May/June 1979 that called for an extensive discussion on the traditional ministries of bishops, presbyters, and deacons.⁶⁴ The meeting of the steering committee that was held in Geneva in June 1980 supplied—for the first time—a text with a separate description of the functions of the three offices. In comparison with the 1974 Accra text, not only is the description of the tasks much more extensive, but the actual subject has been changed. This time the subject is no longer the episcopal, presbyterial, and diaconal functions, but the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon with their separate functions.

Discussion per Paragraph

Paragraph Twenty-Eight. *What can then be said about the functions and even the titles of bishops, presbyters and deacons? A uniform answer to this question is not required for the mutual recognition of the ordained ministry. The following considerations on functions are, however, offered in a tentative way.*

⁶⁴ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 240.

By way of introduction, it is said that no attempt will be made to give a uniform answer to the question of what the functions of bishops, presbyters, and deacons are. Differences in interpretation of the functions and titles are not a problem, provided they do not hinder mutual recognition of ministry. The descriptions provide the churches with opportunities to grow closer together and to learn from each other's experiences.

Paragraph Twenty-Nine. *Bishops preach the Word, preside at the sacraments, and administer discipline in such a way as to be representative pastoral ministers of oversight, continuity and unity in the church. They have pastoral oversight of the area to which they are called. They serve the apostolicity and unity of the church's teaching, worship and sacramental life. They have responsibility for leadership in the church's mission. They relate the Christian community in their area to the wider Church, and the universal Church to their community. They, in communion with the presbyters and deacons and the whole community, are responsible for the orderly transfer of ministerial authority in the church.*

Article 29 describes the task of bishops, and it becomes immediately clear that this is given a strong emphasis. This should not surprise us. The bishop's importance became clear as soon as the historical approach to the threefold ministry in paragraph 20 and 21 was described. The following elements are given:

1. What do they actually do? Five elements are listed. First of all, there is the 'classical' threesome of proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and exercising discipline. In addition, they are responsible for leadership in the church's mission and for the orderly transfer of ministerial authority in the church.
2. How do they fulfill these tasks? Pastorally and representatively.
3. What is the aim? Oversight, maintaining continuity/apostolicity, and unity in the church.
4. At what level? The level beyond the local.
5. Representation is not only of Christ in the church, but also of the church in the region in the context of wider church relations—and also the representation of the universal church in the community for which the bishop has specific responsibility.

The bishop's task encompasses quite a number of elements that have already been mentioned, and also some additional ones. The tasks of the Twelve/apostles included proclaiming the Word, administering the

sacraments (§9), and giving leadership (§10). The normal apostolic tasks of the ordained minister are preaching, teaching, giving leadership, and being a pastor (§11). The tasks of the ordained ministers are proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and giving leadership (§13). Leading worship and oversight are strongly linked (§14 commentary). Bishops in the early church were responsible for proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and giving leadership (§20). From this overview of tasks that have already been mentioned, we can see that one task is mentioned for the first time; namely, transfer of ministerial authority. This responsibility is executed in communion with the presbyters and deacons and the whole faith community. This formulation is in accordance with the way in which the ministry has to be exercised according to paragraphs 15 and 16. In the fifth chapter about ordination, the responsibility for transfer of ministry will be discussed in greater detail, but now it appears that the *potestas ordinis* is regarded as a responsibility specifically for bishops.

Representation in its various aspects has played a prominent part since the second chapter. The commentary to paragraph 13, in particular, cites representation as the specific characteristic of the ordained ministry in comparison with the contribution made by other members of the faith community. Up to now, the pastoral element had been less prominent or explicit. It is mentioned in the list of permanent apostolic tasks in paragraph 11.

Of the three aims of the bishop's task, unity—in particular—has received special attention until now. We have become familiar with this aim because of the emphasis on the role of the ordained minister as focus of unity (§8), and on the advantages of the threefold ministry because it promotes unity (§23). The oversight aspect has also been mentioned several times (§14, §21, and §23). The element of continuity with the normative past (apostolicity) is new. This will take center stage in the next chapter.

We note that again the report bases itself on the catholic church model, whereby local eucharistic communities form a local church under the leadership of a bishop, who represents his church in the wider, universal context. In this context, there is no mention of the papacy, possibly as the result of a recommendation from the consultation with Orthodox theologians in May/June 1979.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 370.

Paragraph Thirty. *Presbyters serve as pastoral ministers of Word and sacraments in a local eucharistic community. They are preachers and teachers of the faith, exercise pastoral care, and bear responsibility for the discipline of the congregation to the end that the world may believe and that the entire membership of the church may be renewed, strengthened and equipped in ministry. Presbyters have particular responsibility for the preparation of members for Christian life and ministry.*

Article 30 describes the task of the presbyters:

1. What do they actually do? Proclaim the Word, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline.
2. In which way? Pastorally.
3. What is the aim? Equipping the members for life and service as Christians, and building up the community to be witnesses in the world.
4. At what level? At the level of the local eucharistic community.

Paragraph 24 indicated that the relationship between the presbyterial and the episcopal service is an unsolved problem. With these related but different tasks, an attempt is made to find an ecumenical consensus. What are the differences?

1. When we look at the actual tasks, both have the threefold pattern of proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and exercising discipline, but there is no mention about who will give leadership to the mission of the church and of ordination. If this specific task has to be read in the light of the general task specification of paragraph 13, then giving leadership is one of the tasks of the presbyter at the level of the local congregation. The responsibility for the transfer of the authority of the ordained ministry is therefore not one of the presbyter's functions.
2. Both presbyters and bishops must act in a pastoral way, but nothing is said about the representative character of the presbyters' task. In the light of the general tasks for the ordained ministry (§ 13), the presbyter's office must at the local level and be exercised in a representative way. If this is the case, then there appears to be no difference in the way the office is carried out. Both bishops and presbyters represent Christ, represent the level beyond the diocesan in their diocese (in the case of the bishop) or the level beyond the local in their local faith community (in the case of the presbyter), and they represent their diocese (in the case of the bishop) in a collegial community of bishops or their local faith community

(in the case of the presbyter) in a collegial community under the leadership of the bishop.

3. Oversight and preserving continuity and unity are not referred to as aims of the work of the presbyters. On the basis of the explanation of the meaning of the ordained ministry in the second chapter, the conclusion can be drawn that presbyters as ordained office bearers at the local level do express and promote the unity of the church and are responsible for exercising supervision. Watching over the continuity is not mentioned as one of the tasks of ordained office bearers. The discrepancy between function description in paragraphs 13 and 30 can lead to a degree of uncertainty. Perhaps we can regard exercising supervision and maintaining unity (and continuity?) as general aims that are not specifically mentioned and building up the congregation as concrete, operational aims.
4. We started with the presupposition that, in the case of the presbyters, the concrete roles and aims must be understood in the context of what paragraph 13 generally said about the ordained ministry. We realize that the proposed interpretation already includes a degree of harmonization. We regard this interpretation as the most natural one, but it is also possible to look at the function of the presbyters without reference to the general explanation of the functions of the ordained ministry. In that case, the difference between bishops and presbyters becomes much more significant. Because all these elements from paragraph 13 are explicitly mentioned in the paragraph about the bishop and not in the one about the presbyter, the impression is created that, in the same way as in the theology of the Church of Rome, the bishop's office must be understood as the fullness of the consecration ministry in which the other ministries share, without possessing that fullness. This creates a certain degree of ambiguity and tension in the text.
5. There is a very clear difference with regard to the level at which the work is done. For the presbyters, this is the local eucharistic community; for the bishop, it is the level beyond the local.

In conclusion, we can say that this consensus text places the difference between presbyter and bishop almost exclusively at the level at which they operate; namely, the local faith community or the region.⁶⁶ In

⁶⁶ A.H.C. van Eijk, "Ecumenical Convergence on Episcopal Ministry," *Bijdragen. Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 47 (1986) 3, 241, comes to the same conclusion.

addition, the bishop is given one responsibility that does not belong to the presbyter; namely, the *potestas ordinis*. But the bishop does undertake this responsibility together with the presbyters. In the BEM text, it is not oversight but regional responsibility that is the specific element that characterizes the bishop.

On the basis of the Catholic Church model and the task description of the presbyter, it is obvious that this does not refer to the Reformed senior or elder, but to the local presiding minister of the faith community. The elder is not mentioned. Research into the text history reveals that at a particular stage an attempt was made to give this specifically Reformed office bearer a place. In the June 1980 version in Geneva, a comment was added to the paragraph about the function of the presbyter: "As stated above, at the level of the local eucharistic community the collegial dimension will find expression in a group of elders exercising, together with the presbyter, oversight and pastoral guidance. Elders may be ordained to their ministry." In the subsequent version, this comment is deleted, as is other references to elders.⁶⁷ This happened after remarks had been made about the introduction of the word 'elder' without any introduction or explanation. This would lead to discussions about the relation between presbyter and elder, and the question as to whether elders were ordained or not. For this reason, the remarks about elders were deleted or replaced by formulations with a reference to the collegial conduct of the ordained office bearers. This does capture the collegiality of a presbyterial-synodal church model, but not the involvement of non-ordained members in the leadership of the church.

The text history of this paragraph also reveals that the actual task description of the presbyters caused some problems. The draft version of June 1980 states: "They preside at acts of the church such as marriage, declaration of the forgiveness of sin, anointing of the sick and dying, and announcing God's blessing and other rites of the church."

⁶⁷ The definitive text in paragraph 24 says "In some churches the collegial dimension of leadership in the eucharistic community has suffered diminution," while the June 1980 version reads as follows: "In some, the college of elders in the local eucharistic community has disappeared." That draft version also contained the following sentence: "At the level of the local eucharistic community there is need for an ordained minister acting within the college of elders," which finally became "At the level of the local eucharistic community there is need for an ordained minister acting within a collegial body." See Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 355 and 364.

The omission of these specific pastoral and liturgical tasks indicates that, at a later stage, it was deemed wise to leave the task description of presbyters open.

Paragraph Thirty-One. *Deacons represent to the church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad of needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the church's life. They exercise responsibility in the worship of the congregation: for example by reading the scriptures, preaching and leading the people in prayer. They help in the teaching of the congregation. They exercise a ministry of love within the community. They fulfil certain administrative tasks and may be elected to responsibilities for governance.*

Paragraph 31 gives a task description of the deacon's office. This constitutes the first unambiguous option for an independent deacon's office. This is new in comparison with paragraph 26 of the 1974 Accra text:

Both the episcopal and the presbyteral functions of the church must be understood as sharing in the *diakonia*, that is, as costly service to the community of the church and to the world through the proclamation and actualization of the Gospel. In the course of history, the function of *diakonia* has found expression in the office of deacon and the deaconess. For about 20 years now, many churches, independently from one another, have been giving attention to the possible renewal of this office.

In two places there had been uncertainty about the deacon's office. The description of the development of the threefold ministry in the early church (§ 20 and § 21) did not proceed beyond a vague description: "assistants of bishops." Paragraph 24 pointed out that the office of deacon needs to be reformed because, in many cases, it has been reduced to providing liturgical assistance.

What are the tasks actually assigned to deacons?

1. A social task aimed at the world. In the name of Christ, they battle with an endless series of social and personal needs. The symbolic use of language is striking here. They represent the church in its *diakonia* in the world and are symbols of the interaction between worship and service in the church.
2. A liturgical task. Some examples are given: reading scripture, preaching, and leading in prayer.
3. A wide variety of ecclesiastical tasks, such as teaching, charitable work, administrative and leadership tasks. This list gives a some-

what unstructured and arbitrary impression. Probably the intention was to enable churches to recognize the practices in their own church.

Commentary (31). *In many churches there is today considerable uncertainty about the need, the rationale, the status and the functions of deacons. In what sense can the diaconate be considered part of the ordained ministry? What is it that distinguishes it from other ministries in the church (catechists, musicians, etc.)? Why should deacons be ordained while these other ministries do not receive ordination? If they are ordained, do they receive ordination in the full sense of the word or is their ordination only the first step towards ordination as presbyters? Today, there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life. As the churches move closer together there may be united in this office ministries now existing in a variety of forms and under a variety of names. Differences in ordering the diaconal ministry should not be regarded as a hindrance for the mutual recognition of the ordained ministries.*

The commentary to paragraph 31 asks a number of fundamental questions about the status of the deacon's office as ordained office. Why should deacons be ordained? What is the difference from other ministries without ordination? If there is ordination of deacons, does this mean a full ordination or is it only a preparatory ordination? These questions may be more recognizable to some churches than to others.

The commission's answer consists of three parts:

1. The recognition that in many churches there is a tendency to restore the diaconate as ordained ministry with its own finality.
2. This office may encompass services that in the different churches currently function under different forms and names.
3. The differences in the way that the diaconal service is organized in the churches must not be an obstacle to mutual recognition of ordained ministries.

The description of the office of deacon is kept very broad so that many traditions can assign one of their offices to it. This breadth is kept at the expense of clarity. What is the specific nature of the office of deacon? The problem is deeper than this, however. In the previous chapter, the specific nature of the ordained ministry had been identified as the execution of particular tasks in a representative way. What is the specific nature of the office of deacon? We found what the core tasks are in the offices of bishop and presbyter, but there is nothing as

specific as that in the office of deacon. Where is the link between the office of bishop and presbyter, on the one hand, and that of deacon, on the other hand? Why are they linked with each other as ordained ministries? Also, according to the description of the development of the threefold pattern of ministry (§21), the office of deacon, as giving assistance to the bishop, seemed to have evolved into an office at the regional level. The description in paragraph 31 does not make it clear whether the office of deacon is situated at the local or the regional level.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the threefold structure of ministry of Lima and the Reformed tradition

Some Presbyterian churches try to fashion their threefold structure of ministry like the Catholic model suggested by Lima. The bishop's office will then correspond with that of the minister of the local congregation. The description of the deacon's office in the Lima text makes it possible to accommodate the Reformed deacon in this system, but when it comes to a comparison between presbyter, and elder—things go wrong.⁶⁸ Again, regrets are expressed that there is no room for the Reformed elder within this structure.

Other churches do not even want to start such an exercise. They fear that with the given task descriptions of bishops, presbyters, and deacons an internal hierarchy is being set up as a result of which the equality between the offices is lost.⁶⁹ Talking about ministerial authority reinforces this impression, as do the formulations in a previous subsection—which spoke of the presbyter's participation in the bishop's

⁶⁸ See the response from the Presbyterian Church of Korea, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 163–164.

⁶⁹ See, among others, the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 176; or the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 217: "A threefold ministry can so easily degenerate into a three grade ministry."; or the response from the Evangelical Reformed Church of Northwest Germany, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 98. In the joint response from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, we see that for them this was also one of the reasons to reject the threefold ministry, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 107: "(...) that is because a hierarchical ordering becomes apparent in the development of the threefold model of bishop-presbyter-deacon, especially where the tasks of ministry are described (§§28–31)." See also the response from the episcopally structured Reformed Church in Hungary, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. V, 163, which misses the Calvinist structure.

office.⁷⁰ They regard these opinions as contrary to the New Testament witness where the terms of bishop and presbyter are used interchangeably.⁷¹

2. *Concerning the possible structure of a Reformed bishop's office*

There is some hesitation to take the step from the necessary function of *episkopé* to a separate ordained bishop's office. In so far as such an office is to be introduced, its scope will need to be very functional. The Church of Scotland can respond to the low-key approach to the episcopate in the Lima text. The Reformed Church of America thinks in terms of the 'administrative' bishops of the Reformed Church in Hungary.⁷² In most cases, however, the responses demonstrate that the churches are still not convinced by the description of the bishop's office. They find the bishop's profile too concise. During the course of church history, many bishops' models have been reviewed. What is the model the Lima text has in mind?⁷³ The suspicion grows when one reads that one of the bishop's responsibilities is the legitimate transfer of the ministerial authority. Are bishops the only ones who can transfer ministerial authority? Is this not the path to episcopal succession?⁷⁴

In its answer, the commission emphasizes that it does differentiate between the *episkopé* function of pastoral leadership, supervision, and coordination with a view to expressing and preserving unity, on the one hand, and an episcopal church structure in which a church is led by bishops, on the other hand. The episcopal function can be carried out personally, collegially, and communally, and at different levels in the life of the church. The differences of opinion between the churches revolve around the question whether *episkopé* without episcopate complies fully with the criteria of the apostolic tradition. In particular, the Roman

⁷⁰ See the answer from the Evangelical Church in Westphalia, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 148.

⁷¹ See among others the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 176.

⁷² For the response from the Church of Scotland, see *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 92, and from the Reformed Church of America, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 149–150.

⁷³ See the response from Bronkhorst, "Kroniek," 328–330.

⁷⁴ See, among others, the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 217–218.

Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches say that *episkopé* is not just a function like any other functions, but a sacramental sign of integration and a focus of unity.⁷⁵

3. *Concerning the scope of the deacon's office*

The recognition of the value of the deacon's office is welcomed by most respondents. The different functions deacons can carry out are evaluated positively. They form an encouragement to probe more deeply into the Reformed assessment of the deacon's office.⁷⁶ Are deacons ordained in the Reformed churches? How can we more successfully link the social content with a liturgical content?

There are also critical questions, however. If there is so much ecumenical uncertainty about the status and the functions of the deacon's office, would it not be preferable to continue the discussion about this and to exchange experiences without linking it to the concept of the threefold structure of ministry?⁷⁷

4. *Concerning the way to grow towards greater ministerial cohesion*

The commission admits that many churches find the description of the functions of bishops, presbyters, and deacons in the threefold pattern of ministry unsatisfactory. There are so many culture and time-related differences in the tasks that a uniform description is practically impossible. Some suggest that it might be good only to indicate what the specific tasks of each office are—beginning with the deacon, then the presbyter, and finally the bishop.⁷⁸

In our opinion, these attempts to lay down concrete structures of ministry are doomed to fail within the context of a pre-supposed threefold structure of ministry. In the Reformed tradition there is a preference for a different approach. Instead of looking for specific functions in existing offices, we propose beginning with the fundamental tasks of office bearers. These tasks all revolve around the one specific function; namely, service to the Word. Starting from this function with its ancil-

⁷⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 83, and 126–127.

⁷⁶ See, among others, the response from the Presbyterian Church in Canada, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 156, and the response from the Evangelical Church in Westphalia, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 146.

⁷⁷ See, among others, the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 108.

⁷⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 127–128.

lary tasks, we can begin looking for a contextually adjusted structure. Flexibility must be the watchword here. Different cultures and different times ask for structures that have been adjusted. We must keep searching for the actual structures and receive them as gifts from the Spirit.

Lessons and Questions for the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the possible added value of a bishop's ministry

The task description of presbyters and deacons in the Lima text is such that the task package of the Reformed ministers and deacons could fit in here. The specific tasks of the bishops in BEM; namely, giving leadership in the church's mission and, in particular, the responsibility for the orderly transfer of ministerial authority, are part of the minister's task in the Reformed tradition. The majority of the questions in connection with this section about different tasks are about the bishop's office. Would the Reformed tradition benefit from having bishops? Does the task description of the bishop contain elements that would help the church to function better?

- (a) The first thing that strikes us is that in principle the bishop carries out the same core tasks as the presbyter: proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and responsibility for discipline. Like ministers, bishops have a liturgical task as a result of which, or in addition to which, they give leadership in the church. The bishop in the Lima text is characterized by the same principles as the Protestant minister: their ministry entails service to the Word.
- (b) What is specific to the Lima bishops is that they accept personal ministerial authority at the level beyond the local. The bishop gives leadership to the church's mission at regional level. Within the Reformed tradition, this is usually perceived as a threat. Lima bases itself on a separate ecclesiastical level that goes beyond the local. At that level there is a degree of personal responsibility for ministers. Does this not widely open the doors for the introduction of ministerial hierarchy? Not necessarily, because in the Lima text exercising ministry takes place not only at the personal level, but also at the collegial and communal level.
- (c) Although this is not expressed in so many words, the Lima text offers other possibilities for giving leadership than along the hierarchical route. Because the bishop is also essentially a servant of the Word, his leadership at the level beyond the local must have

strong liturgical and pastoral aspects. If the bishop's office is seen and exercised primarily as a governing and management function or an administrative or judicial task, then this office is not seen in the light of its fundamental significance as ordained ministry with its aim as service to the Word. We then have to ask ourselves if the examples of bishops from the Reformed tradition are such a good idea, and whether we call them bishop, moderator, or superintendent. Very often, these are administrative functions with a high power content that is often hidden. The BEM bishop is of a different caliber. This minister is a spiritual supervisor, who visits, encourages, strengthens in the faith, and leads his flock on the road of the Lord.⁷⁹

- (d) Under the leadership of the BEM bishop, the transfer of ministerial authority takes place within her or his region. It is logical for bishops to undertake this responsibility because at the level beyond the local they have responsibility for personal exercise of ministry. This point is discussed in more detail in the next chapter about the apostolic succession.
- (e) At the level beyond the local, the bishop represents the unity of the church. He not only works for the unity of the church, he symbolizes it in the same way as the presbyter does at the local level.
- (f) The task of *pastor pastorum* is not mentioned. It can be incorporated under giving pastoral leadership.

What is unique to the bishop's office? Bishops give spiritual leadership at the regional level; they carry out their ministry personally and representatively. For this reason, the bishop stands for the unity of the church and continuity throughout the ages. As an ordained ministry, he carries out fundamentally the same liturgical task that is carried out by the presbyter at local level. Proclamation of the Word takes center stage.

In our opinion, an office that is structured in this way and is exercised personally at the regional level could benefit the Reformed tradition, which only has a collegial structure at this level. There does not need to be fear of centralism or hierarchy because of the collegial and communal framework. Hierarchy is prevented because there is no question of more or less, unlike the situation in the Roman Catholic

⁷⁹ About this see A. Houtepen's inspirational ideas, "De oecumenische gestalte van het bisschopsambt" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?*, 87–89.

Church, where the bishop has the fullness of the consecration office in contrast to the priests. The bishop does not have a higher, fuller, deeper, or more fundamental form of personal ministry.

Anyone who fears that the Lima bishop is the same as the Roman Catholic bishop would do well to remember the three basic differences cited by A.H.C. van Eijk:⁸⁰

- I. The geographical, regional church under the leadership of the bishop is, according to the Roman Catholic point of view, a local church around the bishop who is represented by his presbyters. A church can only be church in the full sense of the word at the diocesan level under the leadership of a bishop, whose office has the fullness of ordained ministry. In the Reformation, the primary level of being the church was again placed at the level of the local congregation under the leadership of a presbyter/minister.
- II. In the Roman Catholic interpretation, the bishop's office has both the regional and the universal aspects of being the church. The bishop represents his local church in the world church where, together with other bishops and under the leadership of the pope, he has responsibility for the universal church in a collegial body.
- III. The bishop's office in the Roman Catholic Church is more than a supervisory function. The bishop is a sacramental symbol of internal cohesion and a center of communion and, therefore, a guarantee for continuity and unity in the church.

2. Concerning the consequences of the task package of the elder for his status as office bearer

The text history of BEM shows how the Reformed elder was eliminated before the definitive version was published. This specific office of the Reformed tradition could not be maintained in the text about the ordained ministry because neither the Reformed churches themselves nor the commission were sure whether the Reformed *senior* fulfils an ordained ministry. In our opinion, the commission was right in its decision not to include the elder among the ordained office bearers in this report about the ordained ministry. The presbyter of the Reformed tradition was not given the tasks that the presbyter of BEM

⁸⁰ See A.H.C. van Eijk, "Oecumenische dialogen over *episkopé* en het bisschopsambt" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?*, 73–75.

undertakes; namely, proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments. This is connected with the fact that he does not represent Christ in the same way. He represents the church, more specifically the local congregation, in the church's policy. He acts personally, but less clearly so than the minister because, as Reformed presbyter, his primary function is to represent the congregation. We describe the elder's office as a Reformed contribution to the collegial and communal aspect of church leadership and identify it as one of the non-ordained offices. Because of the ecumenical discussion about ministry, it is important that the Reformed tradition itself indicates more clearly what status it gives the elder's office.

3. *Concerning the consequences of the task package of the deacon for his status as office bearer*

It appears that there are fewer problems for the Reformed deacon's office in this ecumenical report. The task description is so wide that it is easy for it to cover the Reformed deacon. This comfortable position is misleading, however, due to the lack of clarity about the status and functions of the deacon's office within the Lima text. The core function of the ordained ministry that we recognize in the task description of bishops and presbyters in the Lima text and in the task of the Reformed minister is not found in the deacons' task description within the Lima text, or in that of the Reformed deacon. Just as the elders, the Reformed deacons are representative and personal in carrying out their office in a different way from the minister. We describe the deacon's office as a Reformed contribution to the exercise of the diaconal aspect of being the church and classify it under the non-ordained offices of the church—just like the elder's office. The Reformed tradition will have to create some clarity so that it can better contribute to the ecumenical discussion about this issue.

VARIETY OF CHARISMS (ART. 32–33)

The Preceding History

The concluding sub-section of this chapter about the threefold structure of ministry ensures that this structure remains embedded in the wider work of the Spirit through all kinds of gifts of grace, of which

the ordained ministry is one. For this section there are no precursors in previous official ecumenical texts.

Discussion per Paragraph.

Paragraph Thirty-Two. *The community which lives in the power of the Spirit will be characterized by a variety of charisms. The Spirit is the giver of diverse gifts which enrich the life of the community. In order to enhance their effectiveness, the community will recognize publicly certain of these charisms. While some serve permanent needs in the life of the community, others will be temporary. Men and women in the communities of religious orders fulfil a service which is of particular importance for the life of the church. The ordained ministry, which is itself a charism, must not become a hindrance for the variety of these charisms. On the contrary, it will help the community to discover the gifts bestowed on it by the Holy Spirit and will equip members of the body to serve in a variety of ways.*

Paragraph 32 discusses the relationship between the ordained ministry and the “charisms” in the line of paragraphs 5 and 7a. What are “charisms” in this context? This becomes clear when we look at the draft versions of 1980, which spoke of “readers, catechists, musicians, church wardens.” This paragraph does not discuss the gifts of grace in general, but a crystallization in concrete ‘ministries’—services in the life of the church. This paragraph speaks about the relation between the ordained ministry and a number of different ministries.

First of all a number of aspects of these charisms are listed:

1. These ministries are a gift from the Spirit to enrich and build up the community.
2. Each faith community is characterized by a variety of charisms.
3. These gifts require public recognition to make them more effective.
4. Some charisms will be needed permanently, others will be temporary.
5. The services of men and women in religious orders are mentioned specially. Their service is of particular importance for the life of the church.

The second section of the paragraph discusses the relation between ordained ministry and charisms:

1. The ordained ministry must not become a hindrance to the charisms, but must stimulate them.

2. The ordained ministry is itself a charism, but it is distinctive from the other services. To avoid any misunderstanding, the word 'ministries,' which was used in the draft version of 1980 to describe these charisms, was dropped.⁸¹

Paragraph Thirty-Three. *In the history of the church there have been times when the truth of the Gospel could only be preserved through prophetic and charismatic leaders. Often new impulses could find their way into the life of the church only in unusual ways. At times reforms required a special ministry. The ordained ministers and the whole community will need to be attentive to the challenge of such special ministries.*

Article 33 speaks of extraordinary ministries:

1. These are needed in times of crisis, when the truth of the gospel can no longer penetrate through the regular structure of ordained ministries. This is when prophetic and charismatic leaders come to the fore.
2. They may be needed to place new emphases and disclose new aspects.
3. Sometimes reformation of the church needs a special charism.
4. The ordained ministers and the whole faith community must not reject these charisms on sight, but be attentive and open to the challenge of such special ministries.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the connection with the Reformed approach to the faith community

The emphases that are placed on the charisms that are present in the faith community and the forms they take in all sorts of ministries can count on support from the Reformed tradition, which emphasizes the importance of the gifts that are distributed to the whole people of God.

2. Concerning the fear of clericalism and formation of hierarchy

Although it is not said in so many words, the Lima report restricts the ordination to the three ministries of the threefold pattern of ministry. Why should it be limited to these three? Would it not be possible

⁸¹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 379.

that a community discovers a gift in one of its members and wants to publicly recognize it and seal it with an ordination?⁸² In the case of these gifts/ministries, there is a need of public recognition, but not of ordination. Because in the Lima report there is a strong link between leadership and ordination, and because the synodal element is not very strong and the eldership is missing, it is uncertain to what extent those who have not been ordained are involved in the decision making process of the church.⁸³ As a result of the separation between ordained ministers and the rest of the faith community, some churches fear the reintroduction of the old form of hierarchical difference between clergy and laity, in other words a fear of clericalism.⁸⁴

A Question for the Reformed Tradition

This section of the Lima text asks what the place should be of a variety of gifts of grace within the church. These gifts are different from the ordained ministry, but this does not mean that they are unimportant.

⁸² See, among others, the response from the United Reformed Church of the United Kingdom, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 107: "But despite the reference to the gifts exercised by the laity (M5), there is no suggestion there that lay people may be called by a congregation and ordained to exercise a particular ministry, which is a charism in the same sense as that term is used for the ministry of word and sacraments."

⁸³ See, among others, the response from the church of Scotland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 96: "The stated importance of the ministry of the whole church and of the integration of ordained ministry with the ministry of the *laos* is not followed through to its implications for structured 'lay' participation in ministry and government, i.e., in pastoring, liturgy, decision-making and 'spiritual' functions generally. This may be because of a lack of emphasis on the royal priesthood of the whole church as a necessary consequence of its union with Christ as Great High Priest, who in himself offers humankind to the Father." And also the response from the Presbyterian Church in Canada, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 157: "Our doctrine of eldership reflects the shared ministry of clergy and laity which the 'threefold ministry' and historic episcopate ignore." The response from the Presbyterian Church of Wales, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 172: "(...) it fails to acknowledge the Reformed expression of lay participation in the ministry as expressed in the eldership." The United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 179 refers to the situation in the Roman Catholic Church where lay people only have a consultative role and are only involved in taking decisions of secondary importance. A comment from this church states as follows: "In the presbyterial-synodal system, alongside ministers ordained for the conduct of worship, lay people also take part in management of the congregation—in the session, presbytery, synod and general assembly. It is our conviction that this is the best way of expressing the calling of the whole people of God."

⁸⁴ See, among others, the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 177, and the response from the Evangelical Church in Hesse and Nassau, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 136.

They are an essential part of a Christian faith community that knows it is led and supported by the Spirit. The letters of the New Testament show us how important these charisms were for the work of the church. It makes one wonder how much space there was within the churches of the Reformed tradition for these gifts and ministries.

For a number of decades the churches in the Reformed tradition have felt that there is a need for renewal within the ministry. Many tasks that are undertaken by people on behalf of the church require some sort of official recognition. This does not just involve employment agreements and salaries, but also questions about the status of this type of work. We think in this context of people who undertake missionary tasks on behalf of the church, such as missionaries, evangelists, church-related community workers, chaplains in care institutes, in prisons or in the army, people who work in the teaching profession or people who carry out liturgical tasks within the church, such as those who are responsible for the musical leadership of the faith community, or those who carry out support tasks within the local congregations or in the wider church, such as youth workers, administrators, and so on. We could add people who, at the community level, try to preserve sources of Christian inspiration and to keep them updated. This list is far from complete, but by giving a number of examples we hope to give a clearer idea of the problems involved. The examples will vary according to the context. These are often people who want to serve the church, and who know they are encouraged by the church. None of these important services can be classified among the three classical offices of minister, elder, or deacon. Sometimes people try to classify them in that way, but the result remains unsatisfactory because these offices have been given a historic interpretation that is too specific, which means that they are not flexible enough to accommodate all these new services. Sometimes persons are ordained, although there is no intention to entrust them with spiritual leadership and to have them act as ministers of Word and sacrament, but only to give them a certain status within the church.

This section of the Lima text is an invitation to the Reformed tradition to look at these services with an open mind and to carefully consider what their status should be. In our opinion, there is indeed a difference between these charisms and the ordained ministry, which has the specific task of giving spiritual leadership in a representative way through the ministry of Word and sacraments. This does not mean, however, that they cannot be given the status of an office within the church. Here the differentiation between ordained ministry and local

ministries could be a solution. It is also important to remember that the offices of elder and deacon were originally far different from their later atrophied forms. At that time, they were creative attempts to understand—as an office—the contribution by non-ordained persons to the collegial and communal leadership within the church. It is quite possible that following in the footsteps of the Reformers has less to do with grimly hanging on to the creative solutions that had been found in the past and more with the ability to restructure the ministry of the church in our own time in accordance with the demands of our time under the leadership of the Spirit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SUCCESION IN THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION (ART. 34–38)

Nobody will dispute the fact that the church needs to be apostolic. We find this characteristic in the broadest ecumenical creed of the early church—the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. But whether or not the ordained ministry has to play a role in this, and what that role should be has been a subject of disagreement for centuries—particularly in the Western churches. It is therefore not surprising that a separate chapter is devoted to this subject in this ecumenical discussion about ministry. In fact, it appears to be the most difficult element in the ecumenical discussion about ministry. Because this discussion about the apostolic succession has dragged on for such a long time, this chapter is longer than the others. It offers an opportunity to become better acquainted with the most important ecumenical documents about ministry in the 20th century.

THE PRECEDING HISTORY

The Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888

From the beginning of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century, the theme of apostolicity was one of the most important aspects of the discussion about the ordained ministry. The first indication of this can be found in *the Lambeth Quadrilateral* of 1888, which cites the four pillars upon which, according to the Anglican understanding of unity, the unity of the church of the future would have to be founded. These four are the normative character of the scripture, the established formula of the rule of the faith as laid down in the Apostolic Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the celebration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and as fourth point 'the historic episcopate.' This view of the church as an institution is strongly influenced by Anglican incarnational theology. Because it is defined by the normative tradition in scripture and the creeds and by the normative structure of the

sacramental actions and of the ministry, the church can—in a certain sense—be regarded as a continuation of the incarnation of Christ. As a result, a great emphasis on continuity in the history of the church from the beginning is characteristic for Anglican theology. In the historic episcopate, the ministry is approached from the point of view of continuity—from an authority passed on from generation to generation from the beginning. Difference of opinion remained over the question of whether the episcopal ministry should be ‘historical’ or ‘apostolic,’ but in the end the first formulation was chosen because in this way it would be possible to have a discussion with non-episcopal churches about the episcopal ministry as a leadership instrument in the church.¹

The First World Conference of Faith and Order in Lausanne in 1927

Paragraph 36 of section V, “The Ministry of the church,” sums up the following points about which there is still difference of opinion: “These differences concern the nature of the ministry (whether consisting of one or several orders), the nature of ordination and of the grace conferred thereby, the function and authority of bishops, and the nature of apostolic succession.”² Lausanne makes a clear distinction between the episcopal ministry with its authority and the apostolic succession, and—in doing so—it goes further than *the Lambeth Quadrilateral*. But what does not change is the strategy; namely, to make it possible to have discussion between the episcopal and the non-episcopal churches about leadership offices.³ For the Orthodox participants of the conference, for whom the apostolic succession is part of the essence of the episcopal ministry, this separation of points proved to be unacceptable. For this reason, they refused to approve the text about ministry and gave as their reason: “The Orthodox Church, ... believing that the ministry in its threefold form of bishop, presbyters and deacons *can only be based on the unbroken apostolic succession*, regrets that it is unable to come in regard to the ministry into some measure of agreement with many of the churches represented at this Conference.”⁴ Within Western Christendom, comparative ecclesiology is used to identify differences of opin-

¹ See also Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 11–13, and Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 21–22.

² Bate, *Faith and Order, Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 3–21, 1927*, 468.

³ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 51.

⁴ Bate, *Faith and Order. Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne*, 470–471, italics mine.

ion about the apostolic succession. The Roman Catholic point of view about the bishop and the apostolic succession (points 3 and 4 of § 36) is: “(...) (c) that bishops who have received their office by succession from the apostles are necessary ministers of ordination; (d) that the apostolic succession so understood is necessary for the authority of the ministry, the visible unity of the church, and the validity of the Sacraments.” In this point of view, the authority of the episcopal ministry is directly connected with the apostolic succession. The Protestant viewpoint is: “(...) (c) that no particular form of ministry is necessary to be received as a matter of faith; (d) that the grace which fits men for the ministry is immediately given by God, and is recognised, not conferred, in ordination.”⁵ This shows that the Protestants in Lausanne did not attach any importance to the concept of ‘apostolic succession’ in their theology of ministry. Lausanne couples the doctrine of the apostolic succession to the theology of the episcopal ministry, but at the same time it distinguishes between them.

The Second World Conference of Faith and Order in Edinburgh in 1937

The strategy of Lausanne opened the door to future developments. It appears that at the conference in Edinburgh⁶ a number of churches were prepared to use the concept of ‘apostolic succession’ in the sense of holding on to the apostolic witness.⁷ In addition, the different traditions give a more nuanced viewpoint about this subject (Ed 98–102). The Orthodox confirm that they see the double succession—apostolic and episcopal—as a guarantee of the transfer of the pure apostolic doctrine. The Old Catholics regard the episcopal ministry as essential for the church because of its apostolic origin. They are of the opinion that the apostolic succession is important for all office bearers and for the relation between church and ministry. The Anglicans regard the apostolic succession as a transfer of responsibility for ministerial oversight from generation to generation. The Presbyterians feel the need to justify the apostolicity of their ministers’ functioning in a rather legalistic way. They declare:

⁵ Bate, *Faith and Order. Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne*, 471.

⁶ The text of the section about ministry of the conference in Edinburgh can be found in Vischer, *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927–1963*, 52–61.

⁷ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 52; in particular, footnote 163.

In communions of the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition the view is held that the true Apostolic Succession is manifested in a succession of ordination by presbyteries duly constituted and exercising episcopal functions, and in the succession of presbyters in charge of parishes, with special emphasis on the true preaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments. Thus the following statement was presented by Presbyterian delegates: "Presbyterian delegates desire to have it noted that the conception of the ministry held by their Churches is founded on the identity of 'bishops' and 'presbyters' in the New Testament; that the ordination is not by individual presbyter, nor by groups of presbyters, but only by 'presbyters orderly associated' in courts exercising episcopal functions; that a presbyterian succession in orders has been maintained unbroken; and that the functions of diaconate in the New Testament have been performed not only by those named deacons, but also in some measure by the lay eldership, which in addition to a responsible share in government and discipline of the church in all its courts, assists in the dispensing of charity, the visitation of the people, and the distribution of the elements at Holy Communion." (Ed 101)

Because of the supposed equality between bishops and presbyters, they are convinced that they have preserved the apostolic succession in an uninterrupted ordination of presbyters by presbyteries that carry out this episcopal task. After all, a church tradition is described which is not familiar with the concept of apostolic succession, and which sees this only as maintaining the apostolic witness in correct proclamation of the Word, administering the sacraments, and the continuation of Christian practice.

The Third World Conference of Faith and Order in Lund in 1952

In Edinburgh the best possible use was made of the comparative method, but it did not offer any other perspectives. Lund opts for a new approach. Ministry is no longer discussed as a separate point, but is given a place in an ecclesiological study with the title, "III Continuity and unity." At the second point the essence of the continuity is discussed. It turns out that the vast majority of Christians are convinced that ministry exists to maintain continuity, but that there are problems in connection with the question of whether there are specific forms of ministerial order that are essential for the continuity of the church (Lu 36). The next paragraphs remind us of the special importance that some churches attach to the historical episcopate in apostolic succession. How much this is valued depends on the tradition itself (Lu 37). In conclusion, the conference observed that the differences between

the churches' approaches were getting smaller. On the one hand, the churches that in the past had not paid much attention to this continuity started to realize that the idea of continuity is important, while, on the other hand, those churches that had attached great importance to continuity started to realize that specific forms of continuity have to be integrated into a broader picture (Lu 38).⁸

Three Documents as Preparation for the Conference in Montreal

Up to now, an ecumenical discussion about apostolic succession had not really started because the Protestant discussion partners were not ready to accept the concept. First, they refused to use the expression 'apostolic succession' in connection with ministry (Lausanne). Later on they thought they could avoid the problem by means of a legal, formal approach (Edinburgh). In Lund, another appeal is made to think about apostolic succession in the framework of theologizing about the continuity. After Lund, Protestant theologians really started constructively thinking about the concept.

1. The German Lutheran theologian E. Schlink carried out trailblazing work in his article, *Die apostolische Sukzession*.⁹ First of all, he pleads for regarding the apostolic succession of the church and the apostolic succession of the ministry as complementary concepts. Second, he regards the apostolic succession of the ministry as a sign. It is not essential for the church, and the *signum* does not replace the *res*; namely, the action of passing on the apostolic doctrine itself. Yet the laying on of hands by the bishop during ordination must be regarded as an important sign for the apostolicity, the unity, and the catholicity of the church.¹⁰ G.H. Vischer wonders if the terminology of the sign may be

⁸ The Lund text can be found in Vischer, *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, 94-95, and for a brief assessment, see G.Gassmann, "Die Entwicklung der ökumenischen Diskussion über das Amt," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 22 (1973) 4, 458.

⁹ E. Schlink, "Die apostolische Sukzession," *Kerygma und Dogma* 7 (1961) 2, 79-114.

¹⁰ "Wohl aber ist die Folge der bischöflichen ordnierenden Handauflegungen zu achten als ein *Zeichen* für die apostolische Sukzession der Ämter und der Kirche. Sie ist ein Zeichen, durch das zur Darstellung gebracht wird, dass die Kirche nur dann die Kirche Christi ist, wenn sie sich auf die Apostel gegründet weiss. Die Folge bischöflicher Handauflegung ist damit zugleich ein Zeichen für die Einheit und Katholizität der Kirche. Denn nur die *ecclesia apostolica* ist die *una sancta catholica*. Als *Zeichen* der apostolischen Sukzession ist die Ordination in der durch die Kirchengeschichte

only a false solution in order to escape the impasse concerning the apostolic succession. The concept of the *signum* is found in Augustine's theology of the sacraments and has a long history of interpretation in the framework of the controversy around the Lord's Supper. Is 'sign' here a sacramental sign that is simultaneously expression and effect, or does it just point to an object?¹¹ The author is of the opinion that Schlink favors the second interpretation.

2. In preparation for the Fourth World Conference of *Faith and Order* in Montreal in 1963, a report was written entitled *Christ and the church*. It consists of two parts; one written by a commission of North American theologians and one by a commission of European theologians.¹² Both commissions mainly consist of Protestant theologians, and one of them is E. Schlink. The title immediately gives away the approach; namely, a Christological focus on ecclesiological problems and questions about ministry. The European section, in particular, becomes very involved in the apostolic succession, especially when in the chapter about the church's characteristics its apostolicity is discussed. The apostolic succession is seen first and foremost as a gift and a task for the whole church. "It is the continuity of the redeemed life of the church in Christ which is the heart of the apostolic succession, or continuity in the apostolically founded Church. Hence all members through baptism partake in the apostolic succession, all share in the one apostolic mission and are called to take part in the ministry of the gospel." A one-sided, legal interpretation—in the sense of uninterruptedly passing on authority via episcopal succession—is rejected. Ministerial succession must be connected with handing on the canon of scripture and adhering to the apostolic doctrine or rule of faith.

(...) we may properly speak of an apostolic succession. This does not mean that new apostles arise from generation to generation in the seat of the apostles, continuing their inspiration of exercising their juridical authority. But it does imply that there is a continuous mission and ministry in the church, dependent on that of the apostles, through which the historic Church continues to be schooled in the apostolic witness to the gospel, and to be obedient to this witness, as it is transmitted through the apostolic tradition of the New Testament. The handing on

hindurch sich fortsetzenden Folge der bischöflichen Handauflegungen zu begrüßen (...)," in Schlink, "Die apostolische Sukzession," 113.

¹¹ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 77–78.

¹² *Report on Christ and the church*, 54.

of the Canon of Scriptures, the persistence of the apostolic doctrine or rule of faith, the succession of a ministry dependent on its apostolic foundations, are interconnected. If the ministerial succession is separated from the apostolic word in the scriptures, from subordination to it, or from sound doctrine as attested in the rule of faith, it is a false succession, even though the links may be historically unbroken. But it may also be true that if ministerial succession is broken here and there, its defects may be amply made up in coherent succession of the whole apostolic tradition, (...) ¹³

The text of *Christ and the church* goes further than the Schlink text, which did not go beyond making a distinction between two forms of apostolic succession that were complementary. *Christ and the church* makes a closer connection by replacing the equality in rank by a subordination of the ministerial apostolic succession.

In the next chapter, "The one Lord and the manifold ministry," the authors return to the notion of the continuity in the ministerial succession. Episcopal ordination as *conditio sine qua non* in the apostolic ministry is rejected. The non-episcopal churches are asked to consider the value of episcopal ordination as a sign of continuity of ministries instituted by the Mediator in his church through all generations.

One mode of continuity among the 'pastoral stewards' for which special claims have been made is that of episcopal ordination. There is formidable support in Christian tradition and in the practice of a large part of the church today for the view that such ordination is the *sine qua non* of succession in the apostolic ministry. In face, however, of the supreme significance of the one abiding ministry of Christ, exercised through all ministries of the church, this may be questioned; more positively, the fact and the nature of the ministry of Christ through his servants render void sweeping judgements on the non-episcopal ministries exercised in the church. On the other hand, it is a question that should be pondered by all non-episcopal churches whether episcopal ordination is not valuable as a *sign* of the continuance of the ministries set by the Mediator in his Church through all generations; a sign that may fairly be claimed to express historical continuity in the ministry, unity with other contemporary ministries in the church, and the apostolicity of the ministry. If episcopal succession were interpreted in this light, elements in it which have caused offence in many quarters would in large measure disappear and an opportunity would be afforded for its reconsideration by churches which do not possess it. ¹⁴

¹³ *Report on Christ and the church.*

¹⁴ *Report on Christ and the church*, 58–59.

Schlink's influence is unmistakable. This is the first attempt by Protestants to go beyond their own classical points of view and respond to the most difficult and deepest ecumenical problems concerning ministry.¹⁵ Non-episcopal churches are asked to regard episcopal ordination as a valuable sign of continuity.

3. The document, *Christ's ministry and the ministry of the church*, by the *Department of Laity*¹⁶ of the World Council of Churches demonstrates a different, but also very creative train of thought. This text will be an important stimulus to deal with ministry at the conference in Montreal. This study also spares some thought for the apostolic succession. The second chapter, "An Apostolic Life," explains what the consequences are for the life of all Christians who are being sent with regard to the view that the whole church is being called in baptism. The word 'apostolic' is derived etymologically from its Greek root *apostellein*, which literally means 'to send out.'¹⁷ Christ is the first apostle, and he allows the whole world to share in his apostolic ministry to proclaim in word and deed the reconciliation through Jesus Christ. 'Apostolicity' is not regarded legalistically as a characteristic of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which possesses the authority and dignity transferred by Christ through lawful succession, thus guaranteeing the church's continuity and legitimacy. 'Apostolicity' is a much more dynamic concept and refers here to the whole church's calling and task of witness and service to Christ. Therefore, this document goes much further than Schlink and the report *Christ and the church*, which spoke of an apostolic basis of the whole church. To them 'apostolic' was still a historically legitimating indication of the connection with the apostles, and did not speak of the apostleship of the church and its members.¹⁸

After referring to the unique and non-transferable aspect of the apostles' ministry, two aspects of apostolic ministry are mentioned that need

¹⁵ See Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 74, and his opinion of this document: "Schliesslich ist hier die Entschlossenheit zu nennen, mit der vor allem von der europäischen Sektion der harte Kern der Amtsfrage, die Lehre von der apostolischen Sukzession, aufgegriffen wurde mit dem Versuch, im fortdauernden Dienst des erhöhten Herrn, dem tragenden Grund aller Dienste in der Kirche, im Sendungscharakter der ganzen Kirche und in der Treue zum apostolischen Zeugnis die Basis einer allgemeinen Apostolizität zu finden, von der aus man sich näherkommen könnte."

¹⁶ M. Barot, R.C. Young (ed.), "Christ's Ministry and the Ministry of the church" in *Laity Bulletin* 15 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1963).

¹⁷ Here we unmistakably recognize the tones of H. Kraemer's apostolate theology.

¹⁸ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 82.

to be explained in more detail: mission into the world and mission to the church. These are the two ‘apostolic successions.’ The first calling and mission applies to all Christians; the second calling and mission is taken up by the church’s special ministers. After listing three apostolic tasks—namely, representation, authoritative teaching, and pastoral oversight with a view to unity—the document explains how the whole church community can be involved in these apostolic tasks with regard to the world. Only then is attention given to the special ministers of the apostolic church who have a task with regard to the church. Before the three apostolic tasks for this special group are explained in more detail—namely, missionary pioneer work, building up existing communities, and watching over the unity—attention is given to the classic apostolic succession:

Throughout the centuries the second function of the apostles, namely their mission to the church, was continued through the work of the ministers of the church. Since very early in church history the continuity of this function has by many been related to episcopal ordination. Such episcopal ordination throughout the centuries is indeed a valuable sign for the continuance of the second apostolic function, but it does not guarantee either the basic apostolic succession of the whole church or the special apostolic succession of the ministers of the church. Only Christ, his presence and his ministry, can guarantee continuance.¹⁹

The concept of the ‘sign’ stems from E. Schlink and from *Christ and the church*, but this is the first time we hear the addition of ‘no guarantee,’ which also appears in the Lima text.

The Fourth World Conference of Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963

Despite the decision at Lund to work together in forming a theology of ministry based on a joint Christology and ecclesiology, and despite the preparatory studies,²⁰ the result of the conference in Montreal was disappointing.²¹ The causes can be found in the poor general preparation and the presence of new participants; in particular, Eastern

¹⁹ Barot and Young, “Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the church,” 26–27.

²⁰ The three studies discussed here were part of the preparatory material for the third section of the conference with the title, “The redemptive work of Christ and the ministry of his Church.” See Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 104. In the introductory paragraph, 77, the importance of the report of the lay department of the World Council of Churches *Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the church* is emphasized.

²¹ Rodger and Vischer, *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order Montreal 1963*.

Orthodox and Roman Catholic observers. Apostolic succession itself is only mentioned in passing. The continuity of the apostolic ministry is mentioned for the first time in the framework of the church's mission. The apostles' mission is continued by the church and the church's ministers (Mo 87). Then it is touched on in the paragraph about ordination. "The orderly transmission of authority in ordination is normally an essential part of the means by which the church is kept from generation to generation in the apostolic faith." (Mo 95) How can we explain that no progress was made regarding the point about apostolic succession, despite the promising starts in the documents referred to? The cause must be found in the strategy that was used. The aim of all these studies was to detach the core of apostolic succession—namely, loyalty to the apostolic witness—from the classic form—the formalized approach in episcopal succession. In particular, from the Protestant viewpoint an attempt was made to build a bridge between the churches that regard the succession as a special ministry and the churches that have not maintained such a succession. In Montreal, 36 years after Lausanne, it again became clear that the Orthodox could not take this step. They regarded the uninterrupted succession of episcopal ordination from the apostles as an essential guarantee for a valid ministry and a safeguard of the true faith (Mo 95). The ecumenical discussions about the apostolic succession had come to a halt.

The Study, The Meaning of Ordination, dated 1968

It took a few years to get over the disappointment of Montreal and to start talking again. The first time the apostolic succession is discussed again is in the study, *The Meaning of Ordination*, dated 1968.²² Under the influence of the much more active participation of the Orthodox and Roman Catholics, the general tone is much more ontological. This classic approach to the apostolic succession is justified by the personal way in which God works. God uses people to pass on his gospel news—starting with Jesus himself and the apostles.

Christ by calling the Twelve made clear what his people is to be. Apparently the new relationship with God which Jesus embodied would be most meaningfully communicable and demonstrable by subsequent

²² This can be found in *Study Encounter* 1968 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), 166–193.

transmission through *persons*. The apostles were to become visible and personal representatives of Christ, instruments through whom, by life and word, the resurrection would be witnessed, the church founded, and the ministry of reconciliation continued. Their ministry, though unique and necessarily not repeatable, definitively began and demonstrated the *personal* nature of the Christian Gospel and ministry; the good news came to earth in the form of a person, and its transmission and communication to others would depend upon the Holy Spirit working through other persons!²³

These arguments are very reminiscent of Calvin when he explains to the Anabaptists why God works through individual ministers (Inst. IV.3.1). Another argument is that the *successio apostolica* was developed in the framework of the battle against heresy. This means that the Protestant churches have to ask themselves some questions. Why did they adopt the scriptural canon and the early church's confessions of faith as means against heresy, but not the third instrument—the apostolic succession? These three instruments were referred to together in the report, *Christ and the church*, but here it was argued that ministerial succession must be subordinate to the canon of scriptures and the confessions of faith.²⁴

Then the apostolic succession is described as the authoritative and normative continuation of the apostolic ministry.

To sum up then, it came to be believed that the corporate ministry of the whole people of God was to be uniquely expressed in the person of certain individuals with particular gifts who were called and ordained to special tasks. These special tasks, exercised *within* the church, came to be regarded as the authoritative and normative continuation of the apostolic ministry, by and through which the Holy Spirit had worked and would still work. This special commission witnesses to and opens the channel through which the unique apostolic work and witness are continued. Since the apostolic commission of preaching and service to the whole world was not and could not be completed before the death of its original recipients, it was intended to be continued by those called and commissioned subsequently in the church. Thus special commissions had to be essentially an extension of the commission of the apostles.²⁵

²³ "The Meaning of Ordination," *Study Encounter* 1968, 173–174.

²⁴ See *Report on Christ and the church*, 54: "The handing on of the Canon of Scriptures, the persistence of the apostolic doctrine or rule of faith, the succession of a ministry dependent on its apostolic foundation, are interconnected. If the ministerial succession is separated from the apostolic word in the scriptures, *from subordination to it* (EVDB's italics), or from sound doctrine as attested in the rule of faith, it is a false succession, even though the links may be historically unbroken."

²⁵ "The Meaning of Ordination," 174.

Again, we note the difference from the report, *Christ and the church*, in which the apostolicity of the church was given as a sound foundation which cannot be transmitted through any on-going process.²⁶ This leads one to ask what exactly is being passed on. G.H. Vischer points out that in the personal character of the apostolic succession and in the emphasis on the continuation of the authoritative and normative apostolic ministry, the structure principle of Roman Catholic ecclesiology comes to the fore; namely, representation in personal continuation of Christ's historic mission.²⁷

*The Study, "The Ordained Ministry,"
of the Faith and Order Meeting in Louvain in 1971*

The study, *The ordained Ministry*,²⁸ follows a different path. This study's main theme is the renewal of ordained ministry in a changing society. Despite the strong sociological slant, a number of insights from the previous studies are kept. The personal character of the gospel and ministry are discussed. The ordained ministry, as a set-apart ministry, is connected with the 'scandal of the particularity,' the principle of election as God's *modus operandi*.

Throughout the Bible the concept of God's selectivity clearly emerges. There is a 'scandal' of particularity—God called particular people for particular tasks and set them apart to serve the fellowship in distinct ways. Israel's history, its everdeepening awareness of having been selected by God for particular service, the selection of prophets, priests and kings by God, the Incarnation itself, witness to selectivity and election. (...) the selection of apostles continued this tradition, and opened the door to the conception of a called and set-apart ministry. That is to say, the existence of a set-apart ministry is fully consistent with God's *modus operandi* in calling, sending, and empowering individuals for special responsibilities.²⁹

²⁶ See *Report on Christ and the church*, 54: "The apostolic Church means that it is grounded on an unrepeatable foundation. There can be no more laying of the foundation, any more than there can be other incarnations or further crucifixions of Christ. In this sense the apostolate cannot be extended in time on the stage of this world. It is not the initial stage of some continuous process, but the persisting foundation of the church. In this sense there can be no talk of apostolic succession, for the apostolate cannot be transmitted."

²⁷ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 145–150.

²⁸ See "The Ordained Ministry" in G. Gassmann (ed.), *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993* (Faith and Order Paper 159) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993), 116–136.

²⁹ "The Ordained Ministry," 119.

The final chapter, "VII. Mutual Acceptance of Ministry," deals with the points that still need to be resolved before there can be mutual recognition of ministry. The tenth point describes the problem of the apostolic succession as follows:

10. The importance of the historic episcopate has not been diminished by the above findings. The only thing that is incompatible with contemporary historical and theological research is the notion that the *episcopal succession* is identical with and embraces the *apostolic succession* of the whole church. Indeed, more and more Churches are expressing willingness to see episcopacy as a pre-eminent sign of the apostolic succession of the whole church in faith, life and doctrine, and as such, something that ought to be striven for if absent.³⁰

Before Montreal, the difference between ministerial, apostolic succession—in particular, episcopal succession—and the apostolic succession of the whole people of God had been pointed out, and this difference is retained. Another element that dates back to the years before Montreal is the viewpoint that the episcopal succession should be regarded as a sign of the apostolic succession.

The Study, "Pour une réconciliation des ministères," by Groupe des Dombes dated 1972

Before we turn our attention to the two milestones in ecumenical thinking about ordained ministry, the Accra and Lima texts, we have to reflect on the preparatory work that was provided by the *group des Dombes*.³¹ Max Thurian, a brother of the Taizé community and chairman of the BEM steering group, was a member of this group. In connection with the apostolic succession, we find material in the text, *Pour une réconciliation des ministères. Éléments d'accord entre catholiques et protestants*.³² The introduction to the text declares that in the ecumenical

³⁰ "The Ordained Ministry," 134.

³¹ The *Groupe des Dombes* exists of forty French-speaking theologians, half of them Roman Catholics and the other half Protestants—a mixture of Lutherans and Reformed people—from France and Switzerland, who from 1937 met annually in the Cistercian abbey of Dombes. Their intention was to serve the world-wide church both spiritually and doctrinally through their meetings and the resulting texts. When their 1971 document about the eucharist was published in 1972, their texts began to assume a more public character. From then on each section about the state of doctrinal agreement was complemented by a pastoral section that concluded with a double ecclesiastical repentance, which both parties put before their own churches.

³² This text is the result of a meeting of the group that took place in September 1972.

investigation into the church's ministry "The fundamental criterium must be apostolicity, both as the roots and mission."³³ The first section, the doctrinal one, differentiates between the apostolic succession of the whole church, which is based on the faithfulness of Christ and the promise of the Holy Spirit, and the apostolic succession in the ministry that is instituted by the Lord. The relation between the two forms of succession is described as follows:

In the apostolic succession of ministers in the context of the apostolic succession of the church, Christ attests to his initiative of grace through the sending of the apostles as ambassadors through the apostolic ministers after them.³⁴

This means that within the apostolic succession of the whole church there is a need for a ministerial, apostolic succession to emphasize the fact that it is Christ who took the initiative, and that it is not based on human desire.³⁵ The use of the word *garantir* is striking, even if in the first instance it is applied to the apostles themselves. The fullness of the ministerial, apostolic succession includes continuity in the transfer of the ministerial task, proclaiming the Word in accordance with the apostles' teaching, and living in accordance with the gospel and the demands of the mission (§13). This paragraph concludes with an indication of the importance of this form of succession for the apostolic succession within the whole church.³⁶

It was published in 1973 and can be found in the collection *Pour la communion des Eglises. L'apport du Groupe des Dombes 1937-1987* (Paris: Centurion, 1988), 55-80.

³³ "le critère fondamental doit être l'*apostolicité*, comme enracinement et comme envoi." *Pour la communion des Eglises*, 56.

³⁴ "11. Mais au sein de cette succession apostolique, le Christ, pour attester son initiative de grâce, garantir la transcendance du message évangélique et assurer l'accomplissement de la mission ecclésiale, a envoyé les apôtres comme ses ambassadeurs, grâce au don de l'Esprit. Après les apôtres, le ministère apostolique se poursuit toujours dans l'Eglise sur le fondement qu'ils constituent et doit rester pleinement fidèle au message transmis par eux. Ce ministère, don de Dieu pour le service de toute l'Eglise, appartient à la structure de celle-ci." *Pour la communion des Eglises*, 58.

³⁵ About this see also the added comment: "Leur ministère, au sein de la continuité de toute l'Eglise, est de manifester que le Christ a toujours l'initiative de la mission dans le monde, que sa parole reste distincte des désirs de la communauté chrétienne et libre de toute pression humaine; ils stimulent aussi leurs frères dans l'oeuvre du ministère global de toute l'Eglise (...)" in *Pour la communion des Eglises*, 70-71.

³⁶ "En effet, cette succession, en tant que signe ministériel, atteste le caractère apostolique de l'Eglise et ouvre la communauté à la venue et à l'action du Seigneur lui-même."

In the second part, a proposal is made for mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries. In the framework of our study, we examine paragraphs 43 to 45, where the consequences for the Protestant churches are explained. Paragraph 43 calls for recognition of a ministry of Word and sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church; and then the Protestant churches are called upon to recognize the lack of fullness of the succession and the loss of awareness of the universal unity of the church in time and place.³⁷

The next article, 44, contains a proposal to re-evaluate the episcopal ministry as a sign of unity. The comment on this paragraph clearly demonstrates that the absence of the fullness of the sign of the ministerial succession refers to the absence of the episcopal ministry.³⁸

Therefore, the incompleteness of the ministerial, apostolic sign refers to the absence of the historic episcopate, which indicates the continuity in the ministerial apostolic succession and preserves the unity of the church.

The 1974 Faith and Order Accra Text

In the 1974 Accra text, the apostolic succession has grown into a separate chapter (Ac 27–37). This is one of the reasons why the Accra text is a milestone in the dialogue about ordained ministry. The 1968 ordination study contained a number of basic ideas, but this text is the first one with a separate chapter dedicated to the apostolic succession

³⁷ “En raison de la situation créée par la rupture du XVI^e siècle, nous reconnaissons que nous sommes privés non de la succession apostolique mais de la plénitude du signe de cette succession. Il en résulte un émiettement, la constitution de diverses Eglises nationales, la perte du sens de l’unité universelle de l’Eglise dans le temps et dans l’espace. En vue de l’unité de l’Eglise et de ses ministères, nous reconnaissons qu’il est nécessaire de rejoindre la plénitude du signe de la succession apostolique.” *Pour la communion des Eglises*, 67.

³⁸ “Même si les Eglises issues de la Réforme ont la conviction de bénéficier de la succession apostolique, elles doivent reconnaître qu’il leur manque la plénitude du signe de cette succession. En effet, elles peuvent avoir la certitude de proclamer la Parole de Dieu conformément au témoignage apostolique, de célébrer les sacrements du baptême et de la cène conformément à l’institution du Seigneur, d’assurer, par l’imposition des mains invoquant l’Esprit Saint, une succession ministérielle, il n’empêche que les circonstances historiques les ont privées de la continuité traditionnellement reconnue dans l’épiscopat historique. Il est normal qu’elles cherchent à redécouvrir cette plénitude du signe de la succession apostolique, à la fois pour retrouver une dimension universelle de leurs ministères et pour permettre la recomposition de l’unité visible de l’Eglise.” *Pour la communion des Eglises*, 78.

in a broad ecumenical framework. We shall follow the development of this train of thought closely in these paragraphs.

Paragraph 27 takes the apostolic succession of the church as a whole as its starting point. At this moment, it is regarded as ecumenically sound to begin a discussion about the apostolic succession in this way. The church is 'apostolic' in two senses; namely, as a sent community (§5), and as a community in permanent connection and continuity with its origin in Christ and the apostles' witness and service (§6). Paragraph 27 contains a further outworking of this second path. The primary manifestation of the continuity of Christ's mission can be found in the life of the church. The participation of the church in Christ's mission is rooted in the gift of the Spirit, the mission of the apostles and their successors, and will be completed when God's Kingdom comes. The church's apostolic succession therefore contains a pneumatological, a historical, and an eschatological aspect.

By way of introduction of the list of characteristics of the apostolic succession of the whole church, paragraph 28 introduces the concept of 'fullness' in the same way as it was introduced in the Dombes group's text:³⁹ "The fullness of the apostolic succession of the whole church involves continuity in the permanent characteristics of the church of the apostles (...)." ⁴⁰ G.H. Vischer refers to *Lumen Gentium* to point out that the concept of 'fullness' within Roman Catholic theology includes the connotation of divine fullness and that this is made visible, in the first instance, in the apostolic succession in ministry. He wonders if this concept is the route along which this Roman Catholic connotation is brought in. Max Thurian denied that this was the intention and formally explained that the concept was the sum of the elements of apostolicity. Vischer still has his doubts and points out that the churches' responses to the Accra text contain a similar reservation in the use of the word. The list of characteristics itself appears to have been inspired by the group of Dombes' text⁴¹ "(...) witness to the apostolic faith,

³⁹ "12. La plénitude de la succession apostolique de toute l'Eglise implique une continuité dans les caractères essentiels de l'Eglise des apôtres: le témoignage de la foi, la communion fraternelle, la vie sacramentelle, le service des hommes, le dialogue avec le monde et le partage des dons que le Seigneur fait à chacun. 13. La plénitude de la succession apostolique dans le ministère implique la continuité dans la transmission de la charge ministérielle, la fidélité de la prédication à l'enseignement apostolique et la conformité de la vie à l'Evangile et aux exigences de la mission.", *Pour la communion des Eglises*, 58.

⁴⁰ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 191–192.

⁴¹ Characteristics of the fullness of the apostolic succession of the whole church (§12)

proclamation and fresh interpretation of the apostolic gospel, transmission of ministerial responsibility, sacramental life, community in love, service for the needy, unity among local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.” This summary contains all the elements that are regarded as essential for apostolic succession. Everyone can find in it what they regard as necessary. Churches that are rooted in the Reformation find an emphasis on the continuity of proclaiming the gospel; Roman Catholics see in this passage a confirmation of orderly transmission of ministerial responsibility; Congregationalists recognize an emphasis on continual charismatic gifts to all Christians, and the Orthodox find their postulate of unity among local churches.

In paragraph 29 the task of the ordained ministry with regard to the apostolic succession of the whole church is explained. There is no mention of a ministerial, apostolic succession in addition to the apostolic succession of the whole church, unlike Schlink or the Dombes group. Paragraph 28 had already indicated that the transmission of ministerial responsibility is one of the elements of the church’s apostolic succession. Ministry is “an authorized and responsible instrument for their preservation and actualization,” but there is a sacramental connotation as is demonstrated by what follows: “The orderly transmission of the ministry is, therefore, both a visible sign of the continuity of the whole church and of the effective participation of the ministry in it and contribution to it.” The churches that do not have this orderly transmission must wonder if they have retained apostolicity in all its fullness; those churches, on the other hand, that do know an ordered transmission of ministry, but whose ministry does not adequately serve the church’s apostolicity, must wonder if their ministerial structures need to be changed. This means that all churches will have some work to do.

It is obvious that these three paragraphs were influenced by the Dombes group text. In its call to conversion, the Dombes group asks the Protestant churches to admit that the sign of apostolic succession is lacking in their churches; according to their suggestion, this could be solved by reintroducing the office of bishop. The next paragraphs of the Accra text give a description of the outworking of the ordered transmission of ministry in scripture and ecclesiastical tradition, but they are much more reticent. Paragraph 30 says that episcopal succession is one of the ways in which the apostolicity of the church is expressed. For

are combined with characteristics of the fullness of the apostolic succession in ministry (§13).

some Christian traditions, faith and community have been preserved only in this form of ministerial succession, but the interpretations they give vary.⁴² There is not only a variety of points of view with regard to the preservation of the apostolicity of the church, but also different forms of ministerial succession. Episcopal succession is only one of them, which in its turn is interpreted in different ways. According to paragraph 31, this variety is caused by the testimony of the New Testament itself. Church history resulted in a variety of ways to order the life of the church, which can be divided into three types: episcopal, presbyterial, and congregational. In the following paragraph, the ordination of ministers by the bishop is recognized as the one that is most commonly used in the early church. Yet it cannot be ascribed automatically to the early church or be seen as the one that was in universal use, not even in later times, when there is also mention of ordination by presbyters.

How is this variety to be judged? The most important factor is that “faithfulness to the basic task and structure can be combined with an openness to diverse and complementary expressions of this apostolic ministry” (§33). In that framework, we can recognize three developmental trends.

- (a) Within the churches that have retained the historical episcopate there is a tendency to interpret the episcopal succession as an effective sign, but not as a guarantee for the continuity of the church in the apostolic faith and mission. They hold on to the ministerial succession in the fullness of *episkopé* as a gift from God that must be preserved (§34). The expression “sign but not guarantee” from the 1963 World Council of Churches lay department text is included again, but here the adjective “effective” has been added. The question is to what extent episcopal churches will recognize themselves in this description in which the episcopal succession is characterized as *bene* or *plene esse*, but not as *esse* for the church.⁴³
- (b) There is a growing recognition of the continuity of the apostolic faith, mission, and ministry in churches that have not preserved a historic episcopacy. They preserved episcopal functions, and

⁴² Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 169, refers to the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Scandinavian-Lutheran interpretations.

⁴³ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 170.

ordination is carried out by persons whose authority to transfer the ministerial task is recognized by the church (§35).

- (c) There is a growing realization that the traditional way of transferring the ministerial task need not be seen as the only possible way to transfer this task. There are situations where a form of ministry comes to the fore in everyday life, while its formal official recognition takes place later. This understanding can regard the creation of new forms of ministry as a sign of the work of the Spirit (§36).

The final paragraph 37 draws the conclusion that this relativization does not necessary lead to a lower opinion of the historical episcopacy, but that it is exactly this relativization which will help non-episcopal churches to recognize the value of the historical episcopacy as a sign of continuity and unity of the church. This conclusion is an indication of the ambivalence towards the apostolic succession in the Accra text. Relativization alternates with confirmation.⁴⁴

G.H. Vischer, whose study included the Accra text, summarized the underlying fundamental ecclesiological differences as follows:

Either the Catholic view is right. If that is so, then Jesus Christ planted the church during his time on earth, but then he 'went away', i.e. he finished the time of his earthly-historical and personal presence and now is represented in the world through the church, i.e. through the church's faith, which is given form through sacrament, proclamation and service and which is expressed, spread and strengthened through ministry. Then the church must carry on his life through history; if this is so it means that the church in all its dubiousness, weakness, brokenness is the continuation of the incarnation, God's humanity which he embraced through the Spirit—not a repetition but a continuation, transmission, extension of the incarnation in Jesus Christ. If that is so then the 'apostolic succession' of the bishop's office is of the most essential importance for the church, then its existence will depend on this historical entitlement, that the authority that Christ gave to the apostles which takes centre stage in the church is preserved and passed on.

Or else: Christ did not 'go away'; on the contrary, as the One who was raised from the dead he is fully present in the Spirit in a thoroughly independent and personal way, as Lord over and over against the faith of the church. If this is the case, it is vitally important that the church remains open to this presence of Christ, that the church founds its existence *exclusively* on Christ and his Word and that it does not try to

⁴⁴ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 193: "Deutlich tritt uns also im Blick auf die apostolische Sukzession eine Ambivalenz von Abwertung und Aufwertung, Relativierung und Befestigung, Abwehr und Annehmbarmachen entgegen."

secure this in itself, either through a ministerial succession or through the formulation of fundamental dogmas. Then Christ's presence is neither determined by faith of the church nor by the faith of individual believers, it precedes both and is the foundation of both. Then the legitimate ministry is not the condition for the presence of Christ in Word and Sacrament, but this presence is the *sine qua non* for any legitimate and valid ministry.⁴⁵

Apostolic Succession in the Lima Text

The title of this chapter about the apostolic succession in the Lima text: namely, "Succession in the Apostolic tradition," indicates that there is a shift in the terminology. The subtitle in the Accra text, "Apostolic Succession," is replaced by a more exact description. The concept of 'apostolic tradition' now takes center stage. Since Montreal, the word 'tradition' has had a specific hermeneutical meaning to which a reference is given in the introduction to BEM. 'Apostolic tradition' covers all elements that are involved in the dynamic transmission process from the apostles to the present day with a view to the kingdom that is coming. The transfer of ministerial authority—i.e., the succession in the

⁴⁵ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 226–227. "Entweder stimmt die katholische Sicht. Dann hat Jesus Christus in der Zeit seiner irdischen Gegenwart die Kirche gepflanzt, ist dann 'weggegangen', d.h. hat die Zeit seiner irdisch-geschichtlichen, personalen Präsenz beendet und ist fürderhin in der Welt durch sein der Kirche eingegebenes Leben, d.h. durch deren Glauben, der in Sakrament, Verkündigung und Dienst Gestalt gewinnt und durch das Amt ausgedrückt, verbreitet und gestärkt wird, repräsentiert. Dann muss die Kirche sein Leben durch die Geschichte weitertragen, dann ist sie heute in all ihrer Fragwürdigkeit, Schwachheit und Gebrochenheit die Fortsetzung der Inkarnation, Gottes durch den Geist angenommene Menschheit—nicht in Wiederholung, aber in Fortführung, Weitergabe, Ausweitung der Inkarnation in Jesus Christus. Dann aber ist die 'apostolische Sukzession' des Bischofsamtes von vitalster Bedeutung für die Kirche, dann hängt ihr Sein an diesem historischen Rechtstitel, dass die von Christus den Aposteln übergebene Vollmacht in der Kirche an zentraler Stelle gehütet und weitergegeben worden ist.

Oder aber: Christus ist nicht 'weggegangen', vielmehr als der Erhöhte heute im Geist in umfassender, aber durchaus eigenständiger, personaler Weise gegenwärtig als Herr über den und gegenüber dem Glauben der Kirche. Dann kommt alles darauf an, dass die Kirche gegenüber dieser Gegenwart Christi offen bleibt, ihr Sein in Christus und seinem Wort *allein* gründet und nicht in sich selbst sichern will, sei es durch eine Amtssukzession, sei es durch die Formulierung fundamentaler Glaubenssätze. Die Gegenwart Christi im Geist ist dann weder im Glauben der Kirche noch im Glauben der einzelnen Gläubigen gegeben, sondern geht beidem in begründender Weise voran. Nicht das legitime Amt ist dann die Voraussetzung für die Gegenwart Christi in Wort und Sakrament, sondern diese Gegenwart ist die unverfügbare Voraussetzung für eine Ausübung des Amtes legitime und valide."

apostolic ministry—is just one element of this. As a result, complementarity between apostolic succession of the whole church and apostolic succession of the ministry is avoided. The chapter consists of two sections. The first section discusses the apostolic tradition in the church; the second one deals with the succession of the apostolic ministry.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that we had to wait until the second half of the twentieth century before all participants actively participated in the discussion about the apostolicity of the ordained ministry. Until that time, the Protestants and the Orthodox had prevented such discussions through steadfast refusal on the part of the former and dogmatic inflexibility on the part of the latter. Only after Lund and Montreal, in the Accra text, did the apostolic succession become the subject of joint theologizing in a broader ministerial framework. This is due to the differentiation between the apostolicity of the church and the apostolicity of ordained ministry and the description of the connection between these in terms of ‘being a sign of.’

DISCUSSING THE INDIVIDUAL PARAGRAPHS

Apostolic Tradition in the Church (Art. 34)

This is not the first reference to the apostles, or the first time the adjective ‘apostolic’ is used in the Lima text. The apostles were referred to in paragraphs 9, 10, and 11. The church has always had people with special authority and responsibility. The apostles were the first ones to have that special distinction of having been called and sent out by the historic Jesus. This sort of calling and mission continues after the crucifixion and the resurrection, but the role of the apostles as witnesses of Christ’s resurrection is unique and unrepeatable. The adjective ‘apostolic’ is used for the first time in the commentary to article 14. The ordained ministry is responsible for strengthening vigilance in relation to the truth of the ‘apostolic’ message. We encounter the adjective again in article 21, where there is reference to the apostolic task as a description of the *episkopé* function. Therefore, ‘apostolic’ can refer to the contents of the message which must be in accordance with the witness of the apostles, and to the supervisory task which the apostles were the first ones to carry out. In this context, ‘apostolic’ always refers to being faithful to the apostles and not to the etymological meaning of ‘being sent.’

Paragraph 34 explains what the church's apostolic tradition means. The commentary explains the place of the succession of the apostolic ministry within the apostolic tradition of the whole church.

Paragraph Thirty-Four. *In the Creed, the church confesses itself to be apostolic. the church lives in continuity with the apostles and their proclamation. The same Lord who sent the apostles continues to be present in the church. The Spirit keeps the church in the apostolic tradition until the fulfilment of history in the Kingdom of God. Apostolic tradition in the church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.*

Succession of the apostolic ministry does not need to be discussed in a vacuum. That is the advantage of fifty years of ecumenical discussion, as can be seen in the detailed historic overview. It is only a part of the broader process of transmission which ensures that the church remains apostolic. Paragraph 34 explains this apostolicity of the church:

1. What is new is that the starting point is a reference to the creed. Apostolicity is a fundamental aspect of being the church.
2. The most important word to indicate the apostolicity of the church is continuity. Continuity is a key concept for the 'apostolic tradition.' By declaring itself to be apostolic, the church indicates that it lives in continuity with the apostles and their message. The apostolic tradition in the church is the indication of its continuity with the characteristics of the church of the apostles.
3. In another section of the paragraph, it is revealed what the source is of the church's apostolic tradition: the same Lord who sent out the apostles is still present in the church, and the Spirit keeps the church in the apostolic tradition until the fulfillment of history in the Kingdom of God. Safeguarding the apostolic tradition of the church is a gift from the triune God.
4. In conclusion, a list of the permanent characteristics of the apostolic tradition is given. The concept of 'fullness' has disappeared. This is related to the Roman Catholic connotations of this term, as well as the temporary nature that characterizes such lists. Completeness is an illusion. The addition of elements from the vari-

ous proof versions illustrates this. The formulation is broader and more balanced.

Commentary (34). *The apostles, as witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ and sent by him, are the original transmitters of the gospel, of the tradition of the saving words and acts of Jesus Christ which constitute the life of the church. This apostolic tradition continues through history and links the church to its origins in Christ and in the college of the apostles. Within this apostolic tradition is an apostolic succession of the ministry which serves the continuity of the church in its life in Christ and its faithfulness to the words and acts of Jesus transmitted by the apostles. The ministers appointed by the apostles, and then the episkopoi of the churches, were the first guardians of this transmission of the apostolic tradition; they testified to the apostolic succession of the ministry which was continued through the bishops of the early church in collegial communion with the presbyters and deacons within the Christian community. A distinction should be made, therefore, between the apostolic tradition of the whole church and the succession of the apostolic ministry.*

In paragraph 27 of the Accra text, the continuity was linked with the work of the Spirit, the mission of the apostles and their successors, and the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom of God. The pneumatological and eschatological aspects were dealt with in paragraph 34 of the Lima text. In this commentary, the link with the apostles and their successors is explained:

1. Individuals stood at the cradle of the apostolic tradition: the apostles. In accordance with paragraph 9, they are described as witnesses of the life and the resurrection of Christ, and as people who were sent. They are the original transmitters of the gospel. In line with the ecumenical approach since Montreal 1963, the gospel itself is described as a tradition. This tradition, which goes back to the apostles and then continues throughout history, connects the church with its origin in Christ and the counsel of apostles.

2. The second section contains an explanation of what the apostolic succession of ministry means within the apostolic tradition. This succession serves the continuity of the church in its life in Christ and its faithfulness to the words and deeds of Jesus that were transmitted by the apostles. The word 'sign' in paragraph 29 of the Accra text with its sacramental connotation is deleted and a more functional approach is adopted.

3. Then follows an explanation how this principle of ministerial apostolic succession developed in the church since the time of the apostles. Three aspects can be distinguished:

- a. In the history of the church people were always guardians of the apostolic tradition: the apostles, and after them the office bearers they appointed, and later still the churches' *episkopoi*.
- b. Since the time of the apostles, the guardians of this tradition themselves made sure that new guardians were appointed each time to take on this responsibility.
- c. The apostolic tradition serves to guard the link with Christ and the college of the apostles, and likewise the transmission remained a collegial affair throughout history. The task was entrusted to people, but in a collegial framework—just as the bishop in the early church acted in collegial community with the presbyters and deacons.

Succession of the Apostolic Ministry (Art. 35–38)

After a description of the role of the ordination for the apostolic succession (§ 35), an explanation of the role the bishops had in this historical development (§ 36), and the theological interpretations (commentary § 36), two hopeful tendencies are described: an increasing willingness on the part of the episcopal churches to recognize the apostolicity of the non-episcopal churches (§ 37), and the fact that the non-episcopal churches appear to be more ready to appreciate episcopal succession as a positive sign of the apostolicity of the church (§ 38).

Paragraph Thirty-Five. *The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the church as a whole. The succession is an expression of the permanence and, therefore, of the continuity of Christ's own mission in which the church participates. Within the church the ordained ministry has a particular task of preserving and actualizing the apostolic faith. The orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is therefore a powerful expression of the continuity of the church throughout history; it also underlines the calling of the ordained minister as guardian of the faith. Where churches see little importance in orderly transmission, they should ask themselves whether they have not to change their conception of continuity in the apostolic tradition. On the other hand, where the ordained ministry does not adequately serve the proclamation of the apostolic faith, churches must ask themselves whether their ministerial structures are not in need of reform.*

This paragraph explains the importance of an orderly transmission of ordained ministry, or apostolic succession, for the apostolic tradition.

1. Apostolic succession is not primarily a characteristic of the ordained ministry, but of the whole apostolic tradition. It is the expression of Christ's ongoing mission in which the church takes part. This is yet another link with the missionary start of the introductory chapter. The orderly transmission of the ministry is a sign of the missionary calling of the church in the world.
2. The apostolic ministerial succession within the apostolic tradition is important because of the function of the ordained ministers, whose task is the preservation and actualization of the apostolic faith. The orderly transmission of the ordained ministry through ordination becomes a powerful expression of the continuity of the church throughout history. In this way, ordination obtains an additional dimension in the framework of the apostolicity of the church.
3. By placing ordination in this framework, the task of the ordained minister is given a specific importance: he is guardian of the faith.
4. Some churches are given homework:
 - a) The churches that do not attach much importance to the orderly transmission of ministry through ordination are asked to consider whether they ought to change their conception of 'continuity' in the apostolic tradition.
 - b) The churches where the ordained ministry does not sufficiently serve the proclamation of the apostolic faith are asked to consider whether their ministerial structures are in need of reform.

Paragraph Thirty-Six. *Under the particular historical circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries, the succession of bishops became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the church was expressed. This succession was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion.*

Paragraph 36 refers to the special importance that the episcopal succession obtained during the first centuries as an expression of succession in the apostolic tradition:

1. The text briefly refers to the special circumstance which led to the growth towards episcopal succession; namely, the growing church of the first centuries. It was exactly this growth and the problems associated with this expansion that demanded a structure that would guarantee the continuity of the church of the apostles.
2. The episcopal succession is meant as a service to, as a symbol of, and as guarding of the continuity of the apostolic faith and the community. Here, as in many other places in the Lima text, a combination of functional and symbolic language is found.
3. The apostolic succession is not the only way to express the church's apostolic tradition, but the transmission of the gospel and the life of the community play a role as well. The importance of episcopal succession is made relative by placing it in a wider context.

Commentary (36). *In the early church the bond between the episcopate and the apostolic community was understood in two ways. Clement of Rome linked the mission of the bishop with the sending of Christ by the Father and the sending of the apostles by Christ (Cor. 42:44). This made the bishop a successor of the apostles, ensuring the permanence of the apostolic mission in the church. Clement is primarily interested in the means whereby the historical continuity of Christ's presence is ensured in the church thanks to the apostolic succession. For Ignatius of Antioch (Mgn. 6:1, 3:1-2; Trall. 3:1), it is Christ surrounded by the Twelve who is permanently in the church in the person of the bishop in the midst of presbyters and deacons as the actual manifestation in the Spirit of the apostolic community. The sign of apostolic succession thus not only points to historical continuity; it also manifests an actual spiritual reality.*

This dogmatic-historic explanation focuses on the complementarity of two theological interpretations of episcopacy in the early church:

1. Clement of Rome linked the bishop's mission with its origin in the missionary movement, which took place in two stages: it started when Christ was sent by the Father and continued when Christ sent the apostles (Cor. 42:44). The bishop is the successor of the apostles, and thus ensures the permanence of the apostolic mission in the church. Clement sees the apostolic succession as the means to ensure the historical continuity of the presence of Christ.

The theologically controversial expression, “successors of the apostles,” to describe the bishops was not coined by Clement himself.⁴⁶ This expression is not used for bishops in the rest of the Lima text, and, on this occasion, it is placed in the context of a dogmatic-historic excursion.⁴⁷

2. Ignatius of Antioch develops his own concept: the bishop surrounded by presbyters is a symbol of Christ surrounded by the Twelve. The Christian community, gathered around the bishop in the midst of presbyters and deacons, is the present manifestation in the Spirit of the apostolic community. Ignatius regards the apostolic succession as a sacramental sign that signifies a current spiritual reality.

We find side by side a historic interpretation of episcopal succession—which is found more frequently in Western Christendom—and a pneumatological interpretation—which is more dominant in Eastern Christendom—both in the early fathers of the church. This shows that different visions of episcopal succession do not exclude each other, but have existed side by side since the early church; they complement each other. It removes the ambivalence which characterized the treatment of the apostolic succession in the Accra version. Catholic and Orthodox theology are brought together to support the episcopal succession, which is demonstrated by the remark in brackets “cf. réflexions des théologiens orthodoxes et catholiques ...” that can be found in the first version of this paragraph, dated 1979.⁴⁸ Gromada’s suggestion that this comment stems from the Dombes Group must be discounted.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ J. Liébaert, “La référence patristique dans le texte de Lima sur le ministère dans l’Eglise,” *Mélanges de science religieuse* 42 (1985) 1, 17.

⁴⁷ K. Blei, “Receptie van de Lima-tekst over doop, eucharistie en ambt in Nederland,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40 (1986) 1, 32.

⁴⁸ This is the 1979 Geneva version. see Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 257–257, and 262.

⁴⁹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 262. According to his vague description of the group, Gromada appears not have read their work. The section about the apostolic succession in the Accra text appears to have been influenced strongly by the group’s text from 1972, “Pour une réconciliation des ministères.” This document does not discuss any theologies of the episcopal succession, in contrast to their next text from 1976, “Le ministère épiscopal. Réflexions et propositions sur le ministère de vigilance en d’unité dans l’Eglise particulière,” in *Pour la communion des Eglises*, Paris 1988, 81–114. In the dogmatic section (§26–30), three different theological reflections about the episcopal ministry are listed that originated in the early church between 90 (Clement of Rome) and 180 (Irenaeus of Lyon); namely, the theology of mission, the theology of typology, and the succession theology. This classification

After paragraph 35 has described the role of the ordained ministry as ensuring the permanence of the apostolic tradition and paragraph 36 has explained the importance of the episcopal succession as an expression of continuity in the apostolic tradition throughout the history of the church, the final two paragraphs of this subsection attempt to clear the way for more closeness between the churches that have a historical episcopate and those that do not.

Paragraph Thirty-Seven. *In churches which practise the succession through the episcopate, it is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved in churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate. This recognition finds additional support in the fact that the reality and function of the episcopal ministry have been preserved in many of these churches, with or without the title 'bishop'. Ordination, for example, is always done in them by persons in whom the church recognizes the authority to transmit the ministerial commission.*

1. Churches with episcopal succession increasingly realize that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship, and mission has been preserved in churches without the historic episcopate.
2. This recognition is confirmed by the fact that the essence and function of the episcopal ministry have been preserved in many of these churches, with or without the title 'bishop.'
3. Ordination is given as a concrete example because in these churches ordination is always performed by persons in whom the church recognizes the authority to transmit the ministerial commission.
4. There is no mention of a reservation regarding the absence of complete apostolicity, or the absence of the orderly ministerial ordination. Traces can be found in the very first version of this text, the 1972 Marseille version, which says that the churches with episcopal succession often thought that "(...) the ministries of those churches which lack this episcopal succession are defective."⁵⁰ Probably this sentence was deleted because later it was

is different from that used in the commentary of the Lima ministry text. We must also not forget that these texts of the group are the fruit of discussions between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and not of discussions between Roman Catholics and Orthodox.

⁵⁰ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 119.

not thought fitting to include this sort of negative opinion of other churches, although many episcopal churches still think that non-episcopal churches are defective in this respect. A comparison with the predecessor to this text in paragraph 35 (b) of the Accra text demonstrates how subtly this is being indicated. In that paragraph, the recognized apostolicity refers to the continuity in “apostolic faith, mission and ministry.” In the Lima text, this has been changed to “apostolic faith, worship and mission.” Ordained ministry has been omitted as an element through which apostolicity is recognized. This shows that the conviction that in the field of ordained ministry the expression of apostolicity as defective is still alive.

5. Yet another subtle change in the Lima text in comparison with the Accra text is noted: the expression “function and reality of the episcopal ministry” has been changed to “reality and function of the episcopal ministry.” By placing reality before the function, the phrase has been made to sound more sacramental.

Paragraph Thirty-Eight. These considerations do not diminish the importance of the episcopal ministry. On the contrary, they enable churches which have not retained the episcopate to appreciate the episcopal succession as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the church. Today churches, including those engaged in union negotiations, are expressing willingness to accept episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole church. Yet, at the same time, they cannot accept any suggestion that the ministry exercised in their own tradition should be invalid until the moment that it enters into an existing line of episcopal succession. Their acceptance of the episcopal succession will best further the unity of the whole church if it is part of a wider process by which the episcopal churches themselves also regain their lost unity.

1. The positive evaluation by the episcopal churches for the non-episcopal churches with regard to the continuity in the apostolic faith does not alter the fact that the non-episcopal churches are called upon to recognize the added value contributed by the episcopal ministry. In comparison with the Accra text on this point, the call has become stronger and more consistent.
2. Episcopal succession is a sign of continuity and unity. The results of the previous chapters as well as this chapter are brought together: the episcopate as sign of unity and the episcopate as sign of apostolic continuity.

3. The expression “sign, but not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity” is crucial in this paragraph. The qualification of episcopal succession as ‘sign’ was coined by Schlink and adopted in the report *Christ and the church*. In its own preparatory text to the conference in Montreal, the World Council of Churches’ laity department adds the phrase “no guarantee.” The addition of the element of ‘unity’ comes from the Dombes group’s text,⁵¹ but the expression ‘fullness’ of the sign is omitted.
4. Theological convergence in the field of episcopal succession is aided by the willingness of a number of churches to see episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole church. They cannot accept the suggestion, however, that ministry—as it is carried out in their own tradition—is invalid until they join an existing line of episcopal succession. The episcopal churches are asked to drop a possible claim of full and exclusive apostolicity with regard to the non-episcopal churches. Finally, the text concludes that acceptance of the episcopal succession will best promote the unity of the church if it is part of a wider process in which the episcopal churches regain their lost unity. The text moves into the sphere of drawing up a strategy of mutual recognition of ministry between episcopal and non-episcopal churches.

RESPONSES FROM THE REFORMED TRADITION

1. *Concerning the relativization of the importance of the episcopal succession*

Nearly all churches, including those from the Reformed tradition, respond positively to the difference between ‘apostolic tradition’ and ‘succession in the apostolic ministry’ when discussing the difficult problem of the ‘apostolic succession.’⁵² The churches that are rooted in the Reformation appreciate a number of relativizations, such as those regarding the importance of the orderly transmission of ministry in the apostolic tradition, the recognition that episcopal succession is not the only possible form of orderly transmission of ministry, and the realization that episcopal succession offers no guarantee for continuity and unity of the church.

⁵¹ “Pour une réconciliation des ministères” in *Pour la communion des Eglises*, 67 and 78.

⁵² *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 83–84.

However, these points of view cannot rely on approval from the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches. To them the apostolic tradition is unthinkable without episcopal succession, which they regard as guarantee, effective sign, and condition for unity and recognition of ministry.⁵³

2. *Concerning the ongoing plea for the episcopal succession*

Many Reformed churches cannot understand that although the importance of episcopal succession is only relative, a plea is still being made for this specific form of succession as sign of continuity and unity of the church.⁵⁴ What, then, is the importance of the viewpoint about apostolic continuity that had been common up to now within the Reformed churches?⁵⁵ They find it difficult to come to terms with the demand made by some episcopal churches to make mutual recognition of ministry conditional on the prior introduction of episcopal succession.⁵⁶

3. *Concerning the failure to take note of a lesson from history*

A number of Reformed churches are of the opinion that their history is not taken into account when there are pleas for episcopal succession; this also applied to the arguments about the threefold pattern

⁵³ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 84.

⁵⁴ See, among other things, the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 219: “While the Report recognizes the validity, reality and function of other forms of ministry, at the same time it is tied to the historic episcopate and therefore to episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the whole church. This we question, since the norm here set out is the superiority of episcopal orders with the historic episcopate recognized and required as the badge and form of true union.”

⁵⁵ See, among other things, the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 108: “We welcome the recognition that churches which have not retained the historic episcopate have preserved continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission, particularly in ordination (M37). We believe that further work needs to be done on whether or how the sign of episcopal succession can be recovered (M38) in a way which does not in fact throw the existing continuity with apostolic faith, worship and mission into question.”

⁵⁶ See, among other things, the response from the Presbyterian Church of Wales in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 173: “Do episcopal churches accept the interpretation given in this text of apostolic succession as essentially a succession of apostolic tradition of which episcopal ordination is only a *sign*? This raises for us the question—why the insistence upon the reception of the sign before there can be a recognition of the substance? This again is relevant to the question of the mutual recognition of ministries.”

of ministry. During the Reformation, the truth of the apostolic witness could endure only in the face of resistance against the legitimate Roman Catholic bishops, who supposedly stood in the apostolic succession, and in the end the only option was to break away from them. Also, the new evangelical faith communities that did not have bishops were churches only by God's grace—by being faithful to the teachings of the apostles as can be found in scripture.⁵⁷ This led to a specific structure of the church whereby the task of safeguarding the apostolic content of the church through the ministerial functions was assigned to collegial meetings.⁵⁸

4. *Concerning the weak theological argument for the episcopal succession*

A number of Reformed churches find the theological argument to be slight. In their opinion, the most important touchstone of the apostolicity of church and the ordained ministry is the faithfulness to the apostolic witness, as we find it in scripture. The continuity is the result of adhering to that apostolic witness.⁵⁹ The Lima text does not clarify the normative importance of the apostolic witness of scripture for the apostolicity of the church.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ About this see also Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 226, and H. Meyer, "Apostolic Continuity, Ministry and Apostolic Succession from a Reformation Perspective," *Louvain Studies* 21 (1996) 2, 175. Meyer speaks about the Reformation as a "fait ecclésiologique," as Yves Congar did.

⁵⁸ See, among other things, the response from the Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 166–167: "The exercise of ministry is collegial, in the call addressed to the church in its entirety. It is through this vision that we understand the concept of apostolicity. The text of BEM tends to limit it too strictly to historical continuity." In the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 177, reference is made to the role that can be played by presbyters: "The absence of any theological distinction between 'episkopos' and 'presbyteros' amounts to no more than a highly doubtful 'argument from silence'. In its reference to Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, §38 seems to be claiming that only the bishop is Christ's representative and the successor of the apostles. Why not (for instance) the presbyter also?" For this reason the Reformed Church in Hungary, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. V, 163, regrets that the Calvinist church order is completely neglected in the BEM report.

⁵⁹ See, among other things, the response from the Church of Scotland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 96: "While the place of ordered succession in ministry for the sake of apostolic fidelity is rightly emphasised, the place of continuity of doctrine as distinct from that of order is underemphasised."

⁶⁰ See, among other things, the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 218: "Unfortunately, while it is implied that the apostolic witness is given in Holy Scripture, this is not explicitly stated. Again we question in the next (§35) whether it is correct to say that 'the primary manifestation

5. *Concerning the biblical foundation for the episcopal succession*

The scriptural foundation is a weak point in the section about ministry as a whole, but this applies, in particular, to this section. Not a single reference to scripture is made. In this context, the two references to church fathers are inadequate, and—without any scriptural foundation—they are suspect. As a Reformed Christian, one is bound to wonder why this dogma had not been probed more deeply, and why there had been no attempt to find the scriptural basis—particularly since the church is supposed to have been built on the foundation of prophets and apostles (Eph. 2:20).⁶¹

6. *Concerning the meaning of the adjective 'apostolic'*

An article by Hans-Martin Barth about the apostolic succession in the Lima report deserves special attention. His study is based on the analysis of the concepts 'apostolic' and 'succession.'⁶² In the Lima text, the word 'apostle' appears to function in two ways; namely, as basis of the ordained ministry (§9–11) and as basis for the apostolic tradition and succession. His comments about the first use have already been mentioned. With regard to the second use, the apostle is the 'transmitter' of the gospel that has to be transmitted further. As a result, the ordained ministers in the apostolic succession become the guardians of this tradition. The author is of the opinion that the limitations in the use of the term fail to take account of the many-sided use of the word 'apostle' in the New Testament, and that it is also questionable how far this interpretation finds its origin in scripture, or whether it should be seen as a 'clichéd retro-projection' into scripture. The explanation of the concept 'apostolic tradition' (§34 and 35 commentary), as a link with Christ and the college of apostles throughout history, should also be subjected to

of Apostolic Succession is to be found in the Apostolic tradition of the church as a whole'. Is it not rather in the testimony of the prophets and apostles to God's revelation in Jesus Christ as we find it in Holy Scripture? And is not this the authority and norm by which the church as a whole is to be judged?" In their commentary to §34 The Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate also expresses the fear that the evangelical purity of the church will be made subject to the ordained ministry instead of to the gospel when they hear the words "Within this apostolic tradition is an apostolic succession of the ministry ...," see *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 123.

⁶¹ Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*, 102.

⁶² Barth, "'Apostolizität' und 'Sukzession' in den Konvergenz-Erklärungen von Lima," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 33 (1984) 3, 339–357.

the same critical evaluation. No hard evidence of a historical link with a 'college of apostles' is produced. If the expression is to be seen as a theological statement, the question remains why a distinction has to be made between Christ and the apostles. Why is it not possible just to speak of the church of Christ? Apostolicity functions as a legitimization concept, in the same way it has done since the Didache and the Apostolic Creed. The church is apostolic if the ordained ministry of the apostles is continued. The use of the word 'apostolic' is so frequent and varied that it cannot fulfill the function of criterion. Even if the Lima text had managed to use it in an unambiguous way, it would still be doubtful if the word 'apostolic' itself could function as a criterion. According to the theology of the Reformation, the criterion for apostolicity is to be found in the agreement with the witness of scripture.

Barth discovers one concession to the Reformation's objections in the Lima text regarding the succession; namely, where the succession refers in the first instance to ordained ministry and not to episcopal ministry. As for the rest, he is of the opinion that the relation between succession and ordained ministry, and between succession and episcopal ministry is not made clear. This is why he is doubtful about the construction that leads from apostolic tradition to apostolic succession. Is it not succession which is regarded as the all-important concept? Is continuity not being given too much prominence—almost as an end in itself? Does continuity not follow in due course when the Lord is in the church's midst? Is it possible for orderly transmission of ordained ministry to afford protection for true continuity? When the argument finally encompasses episcopal succession, the reservations become even more pronounced. Should not theology warn about the potential dangers that are connected with such signs?

Barth is of the opinion that things started to go wrong beginning with the ecclesiological presuppositions. The church had been approached not as *creatura verbi*, but as a salvation history unit with its own spiritual importance. Therefore, it has become impossible to distinguish historic and theological assessment. This led to too much emphasis on static elements of the interpretation of ministry such as permanence, continuity, structural unity, and ordination in the church, as opposed to a more dynamic and functional approach that is aimed at eschatological engagement. In conclusion, he proposes to limit ordination to a specific period, a specific location and a specific concrete task and to spend more time on the development of the theology of general priesthood.

Hans-Martin Barth asks a number of pertinent questions when discussing the non-Reformation theme of apostolic succession in the Lima text. In asking these questions, he proves that he has studied the text closely and has found a number of hiatuses in the discourse. In particular, his analysis of the use of the words 'apostle' and 'apostolic' is very strong. He points to the lack of unambiguous definitions and the fact that there is no exegetical test of these concepts against the usage in scripture. He points out that there are insufficient arguments for the need to speak of 'the church of the apostles' in addition to 'the church of Christ.' Correctly, he comes to the conclusion that here 'apostolicity' is meant as a legitimization criterion. Thanks to this analysis, he succeeds—on the one hand—to formulate the experiences and insights of the Reformation regarding the apostolic succession more sharply.

On the other hand, one might ask if he does the text justice because he does not allow for the fact that the succession in ordained ministry is part of the apostolic tradition. He isolates the succession in ministry, sets it apart from the apostolic tradition, and then treats that apostolic succession as if it is in conflict with being faithful to scripture. This means that the nuanced viewpoint in the Lima text and the commission's intention are short-changed. He fails to see the dynamic elements that are present in the concept of 'apostolic tradition,' although their outworking could have been stronger. Barth is in danger of becoming a victim of his own methodological reproach of the text; namely, 'clichéed retro-projection.' Barth is honest enough to immediately state in the introduction to his text that he is doubly sceptical in his approach to the subject: as an evangelical theologian he approaches this un-Reformed subject with some trepidation, and he rejects the development of the ecumenical method. His scepticism has developed into a prejudice which prevents him from reading the text with an open mind.

Some of his premises are questionable. His viewpoint, that it is an unambiguously Reformed principle to base ministry in the church on the charismatic grace of all baptized people, is not tenable. Luther is not clear on this point, and Calvin avoids it. His description of the present-day ecumenical movement as a friendly *Alle-Eins Ökumenismus* aimed at integration, and of the convergence method as a political balancing act of equivalent concessions by all parties are caricatures. In taking this point of view, he follows the lead of a number of German Lutherans who were very negative about the ecumenical developments

in the context of their discussions about the Lima report.⁶³ He describes his own proposal to escape the impasse as an attempt to build a bridge between different positions. It demonstrates that he regards ecclesiastical traditions and theologies as fixed, static, and delineated points of view. This opinion fails to do justice to the nuances within the traditions or the dynamics and evolutions within the traditions, and it fails to understand the antithetical relations and blockages that are the result of history. In addition to this, his assessment of the use of scripture is one-sided. He is right when he says that the scriptural basis is weak, but when he finds that there is insufficient reflection on hermeneutical principles, we suspect that he is not familiar with the work carried out by *Faith and Order* in that field since Montreal 1963.

As a result of his prejudice, he fails to overcome his justified worries about an ordained ministry that, if it is isolated from the Word, becomes an entity with pretensions of salvation and power. He does not regard the legitimacy and continuity principle as a critical question to be addressed to his own tradition with a history of schisms behind it.

7. Concerning the fear of hierarchy

The reticence of churches of the Reformation with regard to episcopal succession is connected with the fear that its reintroduction may again lead to a hierarchical church, with the possible consequence that bishops are placed above other ordained ministers. Reference is often made to the Roman Catholic Church where the bishops have their own mandatory powers with regard to consecration, but also regarding doctrine and leadership.⁶⁴

⁶³ When the first issue of *Kerygma und Dogma* in 1985 was devoted to a discussion of BEM an intense controversy arose. Not only was E. Herms, in his "Stellungnahme zum dritten Teil des Lima-Dokumentes 'Amt'," *Kerygma und Dogma* 31 (1985) 1, 65–95, very negative about the ministry section of the Lima text, the convergence method was rejected by R. Slenczka, "Die Konvergenzerklärungen zu Taufe, Eucharistie, Amt und ihre Konsequenzen für Lehre und Gottesdienst," *Kerygma und Dogma* 31 (1985) 1, 2–19. Later issues were to regularly return to this.

⁶⁴ See, among other things, the response from the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 148: "However, at this point the critical remark is necessary that in those churches with the episcopal succession, the episcopate also embraces certain mandatory powers (consecration of bishops). Under these circumstances, the episcopal succession means introducing a new hierarchical element: the ordained ministry as such then has a hierarchical order (bishop, presbyter, deacon). It would not be possible for us to accept this type of pattern." See also Frieling, "Amt," 147.

8. *Concerning the feasibility of the proposed strategy*

As a consequence of this chapter, paragraph 53 will demand that steps be taken towards mutual recognition of ministry. Churches that have preserved episcopal succession are asked to recognize the apostolic content of ordained ministry in churches which have not maintained such succession, as well as the existence of a ministry of *episkopé* in these churches. Churches without the episcopal succession are asked to consider introducing episcopal succession as an expression of the church's continuity with the church of the apostles. The responses from some churches and theologians show that there is considerable doubt that this proposal is feasible.⁶⁵ For the churches with episcopal succession, fundamental historical and theological aspects come into play which the churches without episcopal succession do not want to take on board, even if they wanted to introduce the episcopal succession in the way suggested by Lima. For this reason, it is—in our opinion—quite right that in its answer to the churches, *Faith and Order* comes to this conclusion: “For many on both sides of the issue the question of episcopal succession remains the most difficult problem for further dialogue on ministry. Behind this issue lie significant ecclesiological questions. It can, therefore, only be tackled in the framework of a broader, more intensified discussion on ecclesiology in *Faith and Order*.”⁶⁶ This conclusion is in agreement with the ecumenically developed viewpoint that apostolicity is not, in the first instance, a matter of the ordained ministry, but of the church. In the final analysis, the discussion is about how to view the church. Since that time, *Faith and Order* has been involved in identifying the factors that determine the apostolicity of the church, and the way in which they are connected.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 178: “Here in fact we have the Roman Catholic and Orthodox idea that consecration of the bishop is essential for the episcopal succession tacitly underlying this context. The result is that thoughts about ordination, ministry and church, etc. are at once given ontological and hierarchical status. For this reason the compromise solution proposed in §53 will not work in practice: churches which already have bishops would pass over in silence the question of the historical and theological basis for the episcopal ministry, while those without bishops would accept the figure of the bishop, but without accepting its traditional theological implications.” See also Frieling, “Amt,” 146–148.

⁶⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 128.

⁶⁷ A report about this can be found in the second part of “The report of Section II: confessing the One Faith to God’s Glory” of the Fifth World Conference of *Faith and Order* (Santiago de Compostela, 3–14 August 1993). The title of this second part is “Recognizing Apostolicity” and can be found in T.F. Best and G. Gassmann (eds.),

LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION

1. *Concerning restricting the apostolic tradition to adhering to the witness in scripture*

Hans-Martin Barth doubted whether the adjective ‘apostolic’ in the Lima text could function as a criterion. This is because he shared the standpoint of the Reformed tradition according to which it was not the apostolicity, but the agreement with scripture which was the sole guarantee for remaining in the truth. The Reformed tradition realizes that the question about the apostolicity is in reality a hermeneutical question. The same applies to *Faith and Order*. When it refers to apostolicity in terms of ‘apostolic tradition,’ it places this problem in a hermeneutical framework. The word ‘tradition’ has been a key concept since the Montreal conference of 1963. The expression ‘apostolic tradition’ is the same concept that was referred to as the ‘Tradition’ in Montreal, as opposed to the traditions and scripture. Tradition or ‘apostolic tradition’ are names for receiving and transmitting the message, proclaimed and transmitted in and by the church through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In its answer to the churches, the commission takes up this point as part of its separate discussion of the hermeneutical questions regarding scripture and tradition.⁶⁸ Here an indication is given of what the hermeneutical criteria are for the evaluation of the first question from the introduction to the Lima text regarding the degree in which the church’s faith throughout the ages can be recognized in this text. In BEM, in the concept of ‘apostolic tradition,’ the hermeneutical ques-

On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Santiago de Compostella 1993—Official Report on the Fifth World Conference of Faith and Order (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), 239–240. For an overview of the theme ‘continuity in the church’ in the *Faith and Order* texts, see the article by S.P. Bergjan, “Ecclesiology in Faith and Order Texts,” *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994) 1, 45–77, especially 59–66. For an evaluation of the developments since that time, see W. Henn, “‘Apostolic Continuity of the church and Apostolic Succession’. Concluding Reflections to the Centro Pro Unione Symposium,” *Louvain Studies* 21 (1996) 2, 183–199. In its recent ecclesiological study, *The Nature and Purpose of the church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998), *Faith and Order* summarizes the consensus achieved up till that time, in particular in respect of the apostolicity of church and ministry. The commission does not introduce new elements.

⁶⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, 139–141. See also Houtepen, “The Faith of the church through the Ages. Christian Tradition and Postmodernist Challenges,” in *id.*, *The Living Tradition*, 47–49.

tions around scripture, Tradition, and traditions that took center stage in Montreal in 1963 are widened and focused on its ecclesiastical interpretation.

The commission provides the following key words of the apostolic tradition, as contained in paragraph 34:

a. *Apostolic continuity*. This element expresses the diachronic aspect of the apostolic tradition; namely, the continuity of the apostolic faith. They are the elements that are an expression of the *paradosis* of the *kerygma* and that support it. In paragraph 34 this apostolic continuity is characterized as follows: proclamation, mission, interpretation of the gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and transmission of ministerial responsibility. The theme of continuity is present in the introductory section about the calling of the whole people of God (§1–6), the section about the ordained ministry as a continuation of the task of the apostles (§8–12), the section about ministry and authority—where it is explained that this authority is rooted in the authority of Jesus Christ (§15), the section about the threefold ministerial pattern (§19–23) and the statements about the bishops as servants of the continuity (§29), about ordination to continue the mission of Jesus (§39), and the section about mutual recognition of ministry for the sake of the continuity with the apostles (§52–53). Continuity also comes through in words such as ‘rooted in,’ ‘delivered,’ ‘received,’ ‘gift,’ ‘continual,’ ‘continue,’ ‘inherit,’ and ‘inheritance.’

b. *Community*. This element expresses the synchronic aspect of the apostolic tradition. These elements express and promote the *koinonia*. In paragraph 34 the communal aspect of the apostolic tradition is expressed with the aspects: sharing the gifts from God in prayer, service, and unity. The theme of the community is also repeatedly expressed in the section about ministry—in particular, in the introduction (§1–6), the focus of unity (§8), assembling and guiding the dispersed people of God, building up the body of Christ (§13), *episkopé* as focus for unity (§21), safeguarding the unity of the body (§23), the communal aspect of ordained ministry (§26–27), the involvement of the local faith community in the wider church and the universal church (§29), unity among the local churches (§34), unity of the whole church (§38), and mutual recognition of ministry with a view to fellowship (§54–55). This theme is recognizable in words such as ‘unity,’ ‘solidarity,’ ‘sharing,’ ‘reconciliation,’ and ‘fellowship’.

c. *Fulfillment of history in the kingdom of God.* This is the eschatological aspect of the apostolic tradition. This element is referred to separately in paragraph 34, which speaks of the Spirit who keeps the church in the apostolic tradition until the fulfillment of history in the Kingdom of God. This theme is also referred to in the introduction (§ 1–6) in expressions such as “in order to fulfil its mission” (§ 8), and “in anticipation of the coming Kingdom” (§ 11).

As has already been mentioned, the demand to regard scriptural witness as norm is the classical contribution by the Reformed tradition to the hermeneutical debate. It must continue to repeat this demand. But in the hermeneutical debate, this tradition is not only the party making the demand, but also the receiving party, at least if the intention is to create a dialogue. In this dialogue, the discovery is made that there is more to adhering to the truth of the gospel than simply adhering to scriptural witness—however important and central this might be. It turns out that adhering to the witness of prophets and apostles as laid down in scripture is only one element of apostolic continuity. The question has to be asked if the Reformed tradition can see elements of apostolic continuity in the framework of the hermeneutical process in celebrating the sacraments and in the transmission of ministerial authority. In addition, apostolic tradition also acquires a synchronic aspect. This means that remaining in the truth is something that has to be striven for jointly in the wider community of the church. Instead of isolating ourselves in our partial truth, we must abide by the hermeneutical rule and hold on to the others, and allow them to hold on to us in the truth of the gospel by remaining part of a community of service, prayer, and unity. Does the Reformed tradition, with its history of schisms as a result of partial truths, recognize the need for this element, and does it feel an obligation to respond? True apostolicity does not only have a conserving and communal aspect, but also an eschatological aspect—although, unfortunately, this has not been worked out in much detail in the Lima text. We do not have the truth in our hands—not with an impeccable transfer of ordained ministry, but not in a Bible from cover to cover either. The full truth still lies ahead of us. This realization creates a sense of urgency in us—a spiritual unrest—of which the letter to the Philippians speaks (Phil. 3:12). Does the Reformed tradition recognize this element of the hermeneutical process and does it have the right attitude of humility that corresponds with it? In short, the concept ‘apostolic tradition’ covers a wide spectrum of hermeneuti-

cal aspects that challenge the Reformed tradition. The author is of the opinion that the history of the Reformed tradition shows that it has not paid sufficient attention to the synchronic and eschatological elements of remaining in the truth, and the diachronic element has concentrated too exclusively on holding on to the scriptural witness, and neglected the continuity in the celebration of the sacraments and the transmission of the ministerial responsibility.

2. *Concerning the missionary nature of the apostolic tradition*

The apostolic character of the ministry has everything to do with the apostolate. The etymology of the word 'apostle' reminds us of 'being sent.' The missionary focus of ministry was one of the prominent contributions of the study by the *Laiety Department* entitled *Christ's ministry and the ministry of the church*. In paragraph 35 apostolic succession is referred to as an expression of the continuity of Christ's mission in which the church participates. The outworking of this element of apostolicity is weak in the Lima text. It is kept too much in the background, while it should have been more prominent. Fortunately, it is not absent altogether. This missionary context also contains a question for the Reformed tradition. Does its apostolic ministry have a missionary aspect, in the sense that the way its ministers function is not limited to work within the church, but aims at proclaiming the gospel to the world in which the church functions? This point deserves special attention because missionary consciousness was weak when the Protestant churches were formed in a time in which church and Christian society more or less completely overlapped. The development of a theology of ordained ministry for these days requires reflection about the fundamentally missionary aspect of the task.

3. *Concerning continuity as an element of the discourse about apostolic succession*

The age-old controversy about the apostolic succession is about legitimacy. In principle, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches—to this day—claim to have truth and authority on their side, without too much antagonism. The legitimacy aspect of apostolicity need not surprise us because apostolic succession of ordained ministry developed in the church against the background of a growing movement in the early church that wanted to protect itself against schismatic movements. Paragraph 36 speaks of these special circumstances. The apostolicity of ministry is connected with claims of authenticity and

legitimate authority. This element of legitimacy can also be found in the adjective ‘orderly.’ Because the churches of the Reformation have had nasty experiences with this legitimacy claim in the discourse about apostolic succession, they have turned their backs on it. History has shown that it took a number of decades before the Reformed churches were prepared to make constructive contributions to the discussion.

The danger for the Reformed churches is that their understandable reticence on this point keeps them from realizing that the discussion about apostolicity is not just about authority claims. The Catholic churches are so insistent about the importance of the apostolic succession via ordination by bishops because they are conscious of the need for continuity with the church of the apostles: the realization that they are not the first, but that they are part of a long tradition of those who have gone before, the desire to live in continuity with the church of the apostles, to remain in the full breadth of the scriptural witness as laid down in the canon, protected in the confession of faith and safeguarded by a ministry that accompanies this ongoing process. The confession of apostolicity is an expression of the desire to continue the authentic ‘orthodoxy,’ the ‘mainstream’ in the midst of all sectarian claims from the past and now. Ordained ministry wants to serve this continuity with the salvation-bringing words of Jesus the Christ—words brought to us by the apostles and to be safeguarded and passed on throughout history. The structuring of ordained ministry in the apostolic succession is one formative element of this continuity principle.

By rejecting the concept of ‘apostolic succession,’ the possibility to formulate ministry in terms of continuity has been pushed into the background. The author is of the opinion that this constitutes a loss. Ordained ministry can be a service to the continuity. Ministry is service to the succession of the apostolic tradition. The essence of the ministerial function is scriptural exegesis, proclamation of the gospel, and celebration of the sacraments—not in isolation, but in continuity with the apostolic tradition. The question to be addressed to the Reformed tradition is to what extent it is aware of this aspect of continuity in ministry, and whether it realizes the relevance of safeguarding this continuity through ordained ministry.

4. Concerning the added value of ordination by a bishop

The orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is a powerful expression of the church’s continuity throughout the ages, says paragraph 35.

By not opting immediately for ordination by a bishop, but by speaking in more general terms of an orderly transmission, the possibility has been created to give legitimacy to the ordination by presbyters within the Reformed tradition. Paragraph 37 speaks of the ministry of *épiskopè* in non-episcopal churches and of reserving ordinations for persons in whom the church recognizes the authority to transmit the ministerial task. For this reason, most Reformed churches allow only ordained ministers to carry out ordinations because they are ministers of Word and sacrament.

Is it still worthwhile to consider an episcopal ordination for the Reformed churches? In the author's opinion it is. An illustration from every-day practice in the United Protestant Church in Belgium will make this clear. Although not a matter that is regulated by church order, it is common practice for the president of the synod council to be responsible for the ordination of new ministers to their office. This has not been laid down more clearly because there exists a certain ambiguity about what ordination means. It sometimes happens that controversy arises when new ministers are ordained by friends or by relatives. Sometimes this involves people who do not belong to the United Protestant Church in Belgium but to a foreign church. Often such events lead to an irritable response from the UPCB's Synod Council. In practice, reluctance exists to tackle the dispute because the matter is thereby drawn immediately into the sphere of power pretensions. The cries abound about the episcopal pretensions of the president of the synod council. That is a pity because there are good reasons to entrust someone with a supervisory function with the ordination. Ordination is not a family affair or a service to be carried out by a friend; it is not merely the business of a local congregation. It concerns the wider church that places itself in the continuity of the apostolic tradition.

In episcopal ordination somebody expresses that continuity and takes personal responsibility for it. Because ordination has supra-local importance, a person with a supra-local supervision task must preside over the ordination rite on behalf of the church and on behalf of the Lord as a personal representative at regional level. This personal aspect of the apostolic succession is expressed in the study "Meaning of Ordination" from 1968 and in the principle of 'the scandal of the particularity' from the study "The Ordained Ministry" from Louvain-1971. The personal expression of continuity constitutes an additional element that invites us to consider the episcopal ministry as expression of the personal element of the supervision task at supra-local level. In the responsibility for ordi-

nation such a supra-local person not only represents the unity of the church, but—what is even more important—the continuity with the church of the apostolic tradition. This bishop does not need to claim historic legitimacy. The way a bishop functions as a person has a symbolic character in the framework of the continuity of the apostolic tradition, yet it does not pretend to be a guarantee of apostolic succession. In short, episcopal ordination is not a matter of *esse*, but only of *bene esse* for the church.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ORDINATION (ART. 39–50)

The fact that a separate chapter is dedicated to ordination demonstrates how important this subject is for the study of ministry in an ecumenical framework. During the discussion of paragraph 7c, it became clear that the option for a ministry validated by ordination is of fundamental importance. It was ordination that demonstrated the difference from other gifts of grace and offices in the church. At that point, we established that in this the authors opted for a catholic view of ministry. Ordination regularly appeared in the following paragraphs and chapters. Paragraph 8 stated that in order to fulfil its mission the church needs people who publicly and constantly point to Jesus Christ, and that from the first days of the church these people were ordained. A commentary to paragraph 11 pointed out that the actual forms of ordination have evolved in complex historical developments. Not all elements of the manner of ordination are of equal importance. Paragraph 15 pointed out that the authority of the minister begins from the moment of ordination. The commentary to paragraph 31 asked in what sense the diaconate can be considered part of the ordained ministry. Paragraph 35 emphasized the importance of an orderly transmission of the ordained ministry as an expression of the apostolic continuity, and finally, paragraph 37 reminded us that even in non-episcopal churches ordination is always carried out by people whose authority to do this is recognized by the church.

The structure and contents of the ministry section of the Lima text placed ordination in the spotlight. The history of the *Faith and Order* texts also reveals the lasting importance of ordination. For this reason, we shall now give an overview of the commission's thoughts with regard to ordination so that we shall be better able to evaluate the Lima text.

THE PRECEDING HISTORY

The First Faith and Order World Conference in Lausanne in 1927

Since Lausanne, ordination has played an important role in ecumenical theological discussions about ministry, as can be seen from the section about “The ministry of the church.”¹ The first paragraph of this chapter about ministry lists five points of “substantial accord,” the last of which is: “Men gifted for the work of the ministry, called by the Spirit and accepted by the church, are commissioned through an act of ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands to exercise the function of this ministry” (La 34). From the beginning, both the *vocatio interna et externa* and the rite with prayer and laying on of hands have been regarded as permanent elements of ordination. It remains unclear whether “gifted for the work” refers to suitability or to charismatic gifts. G.H. Vischer² refers to the passive form of this construction, which makes it possible to avoid the question as to who carries out the ordination. The intentional result is that the ordained person takes center stage. The approach is not in accordance with the Catholic or with the Reformed³ tradition.

In a later paragraph (La 36), four fundamental differences in theology of ministry are listed—one of which turns out to be “the nature of ordination and of the grace conferred thereby.” Furthermore, these differences are first explained from a Roman Catholic and then from a Protestant point of view: “... ordination is a sacramental act of divine institution, and therefore indispensable, conveying the special *charisma* for the particular ministry ...” (La 45b) compared with “... the grace which fits men for the ministry is immediately given by God, and is recognised, not conferred, in ordination ...” (La 46d). Ordination is a very sensitive subject, which can be seen in the assumption that the form of ordination in a future unified church will not mean that the value of the existing forms of ordination will be made invalid (La 40).

With regard to this point, the Second World Conference of Edinburgh in 1937 does not progress beyond the results of the first conference.⁴

¹ Bate, *Faith and Order, Proceedings of the World*.

² Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 48–49.

³ G.H. Vischer refers to the *Institutes* IV.3.16, where the ordained person is subject to God, the congregation and ministry.

⁴ See the two statements below: “III. Ordination to the ministry, according to the

The Fourth Faith and Order World Conference in Montreal 1963 and After

Although after Edinburgh there is an attempt to leave the path of comparative ecclesiology, in Montreal⁵ the comparisons between the different ecclesiastical viewpoints with regard to ordination continue. Just as with apostolic succession, this conference does not make progress on ordination either.

This confirmation is given in ordination. According to the New Testament, this ordination consists in prayer with the laying on of hands. The orderly transmission of authority in ordination is normally an essential part of the means by which the church is kept from generation to generation in the apostolic faith. (...) Some believe that there is not sufficient authority in the New Testament to warrant the practice of ordination in the sense of setting men apart for a life-ministry in the church (...) (Mo 95).

The word "normally" in the quotation indicates that there is no generally accepted consensus about ordination. The questions regarding the life-long character of ordination are connected with the ambiguity of the meaning of ordination; namely, as an ecclesiastical task of limited duration or as a life-long gift of grace that sets the ordained person apart from the congregation from the moment of ordination.

In its meeting in Aarhus in 1964, *Faith and Order* tried to give the stranded study about ministry a new impetus by drawing up a new study program.⁶ The latter is no longer based on the different theologies of ministry, but on the fact that there is a structure of ministry in each church, which means that each church has room for a special ecclesiastical ministry.⁷ This phenomenological approach leads to a number of questions; in particular, with regard to ordination. The

New Testament teaching and the historic practice of the church, is by prayer and the laying-on of hands." (Ed. 93) and "Again, those who agree in accepting the lay-on of hands as the form of ordination differ on the meaning to be attached to the rite, or on the question by whom it should be administered." (Ed. 97) in Vischer, *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, 58.

⁵ See section III, "The redemptive work of Christ and the ministry of his church" in Rodger and Vischer, *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order*, 61-69.

⁶ See the section, "Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Ministry," in *Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission and Working Committee 1964 Aarhus, Denmark* (Faith and Order Paper 44) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1965), 47-53.

⁷ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 123, points out that this is a viewpoint that is not quite correct because there are Christian communities that do not have ministers. He refers to the Quakers. The Darbyites also belong to this category.

answers to these questions must be based on ministry and ordination practice, particularly because ordination is usually regulated on the basis of church order and liturgical formulas. Eight points are delineated for consideration: the required qualifications for ordained persons, the subject of the ordination rite, the involvement of the entire church, the elements of the ordination rite and its sacramental character, the meaning of ordination (recognition or transmission of grace), the terminology used and the underlying theology, the ordained person becoming part of a priesthood, and finally, the question whether or not ordination is time-limited. This catalogue of questions is based on a number of theological principles; namely, that “ordination is essentially the act of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in his Church” and that “ordination is essentially ordination to the ministry of the whole Church.”⁸

In 1967, when *Faith and Order* realized in Bristol that this study program was not progressing because the questions are too wide-ranging, the commission decided to select one problem that—in its judgement—played a central role; namely, ordination. This controversial, classic subject appears to be a regular point of conflict in negotiations about church re-unification.⁹ But G.H. Vischer¹⁰ identifies another cause for these shifts in emphasis in the *Faith and Order* studies about ministry; namely, the influx of Orthodox and Roman Catholic members into the commission. The Roman Catholics and Orthodox were unable to join in the attempted preparation to Montreal, and its follow-up to develop a new understanding of ministry based on Christ’s ministry and the mission task for the whole church. Instead, they concentrated on the points in the theology of ministry that were obstacles to further unity in the church. In doing so, the process returned to a classical point of conflict: ordination.

The 1968 Study, “The Meaning of Ordination”

In 1968 the commission published a study document entitled *The Meaning of Ordination*.¹¹ With this study, a new start was made with theolo-

⁸ *Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission and the Working Committee 1964 Aarhus, Denmark*, 51.

⁹ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 125–126.

¹⁰ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 126.

¹¹ “The Meaning of Ordination,” *Study Encounter* 1968, 173–174.

gizing about ministry. In the first place, the active involvement of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians ensured that there was a broad ecumenical base. In the second place, methodologically this study goes beyond the comparative approach and is the result of the first attempt at joint theologizing. As a consequence, it attempts to reach to beyond the old controversies. In the third place, ordination is not treated as an isolated problem; it is discussed in the broader framework of theology of ministry as a whole and in the context of the new questions of the time. The result of this study will encourage the discussion partners to make an attempt to jointly write a text about ordained ministry with a view to presenting it to the churches. The 1974 Accra text is to be the result of these dynamics.

We shall take a look at a number of important conclusions without making an attempt to summarize all of them. The introduction lists a number of new theological and biblical insights. This results in four ecclesiological emphases: the community of the faithful as people of God, the church in its mission to serve the world, the openness to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the realization that all churches struggle with the same problems. New exegetical studies show that the New Testament does not offer a ready-made concept of ordination. Even in the first congregation, sociological and psychological factors played a role in the development of the various ministries, and finally, that ordination cannot be regarded as being instituted directly by Jesus.

The first chapter contains a number of ecclesiological presuppositions.

1. Concerning the relation between ecclesiology and ordination: the differences in how the church is viewed have consequences for the way the nature and the functions of ordination are understood.
2. Concerning the origin of ministry: both church and ministry have their roots in the ministry of Christ and are called to represent Christ in the world. The twelve were the first ones to carry out this ministry. Their ministry was unique and laid the foundation for making Christ's work known to the world. Ordaining ministers demonstrate that, in a certain way, the work of the apostles is continued: "Thus it may be said that the church, in ordaining other men to ministry in Christ's name, is attempting to follow the example of the apostles and remain faithful to their teaching, always remembering that it is the Risen Lord who is the true Ordainer, who bestows the gift. The apostolic laying on of hands

could never *guarantee* the presence of the Spirit—but it was seen as “the apostolic sign witnessing to the connection of the church and its ministry to Christ,”¹²

3. Concerning the fundamental unity of the people of God: in baptism and confession of faith all become equal members, which undermines an ontological differentiation between lay and ordained members as well as clerical claims to power.
4. Concerning the content of the gift in ordination: what is being given? The New Testament concepts of *καθίστασθαι* and *χειροτονεῖν* refer to the fact that the ordained persons are set apart for a special task by the laying on of hands. These words obtain a legalistic flavor only when being fitted into a sacerdotal *ordo* through translating them with *ordinare*. In the New Testament, the concept of ordination—the original meaning of setting apart for a specific task—is consistent with the biblical witness about God’s *modus operandi*, which is to elect, call, send, and empower people. In that sense, ordination is the setting apart of people by the church, in the conviction that God has called these people in order to represent God in their lives, their words, and their deeds.
5. Concerning the evolution in the early church: over time ordination is restricted to the three ministries of the threefold ministerial pattern.

In the reflections that follow, attention is given to the apostolic succession and the ordination of women, ordained ministry as representation of Christ, ordination and the link with the church’s continuity and universality, and finally, ordination in connection with leadership with a view to the church’s mission in the world. This theoretical chapter concludes with a number of common problems that are presented in the form of questions. The tenth question is particularly interesting: “What is the relation of the sacramental to the jurisdictional in any *ordo* in the church?” This is a question about the *potestas*—the authority ordained ministry carries with it.

In the second chapter, a number of practical considerations are discussed: the necessary involvement of the people of God in the ordination of office bearers, the difference between the permanent basic task (namely, the representation of Christ) and the variety of functions and tasks in ecclesiastical and social contexts, the variety of church

¹² “The Meaning of Ordination,” 170.

order contexts, the professionalizing of ordained ministry, and finally, the roots of ordination in the church's worship. The study closes with a list of ecumenical problems surrounding ordination and a number of additional study questions.

The ordained person is described as Christ's representative—as successor of the apostles and invested with spiritual gifts. This is in accordance with the emphasis on the personal character of passing on the gospel and with the emphasis on the apostolic succession. This is the first time that *Faith and Order* has produced a study text about ordination and ministry with such a strong Catholic emphasis.¹³

The 1971 Louvain Study, "The Ordained Ministry by Faith and Order"

The Ordained Ministry,¹⁴ the new study that is dated 1971, also pays much attention to ordination. On the one hand, it builds on the text of the 1968 ordination text, but, on the other hand, the approach is much more sociological in keeping with the spirit concerning the time of social renewal. While in 1968 discussions about unity formed the immediate impetus, in 1971 it is the desire to remove ministry as stumbling block so that a renewed church can be an instrument of renewal in society.

In particular, the first chapter, *Source, Focus and Function of Ordained Ministry*, is strongly determined by the meaning of ordination. In the same way as in the 1968 study, the existence of a special ministry in addition to the priesthood of all believers is seen as rooted in God's special way of working through human beings. In ordination the church expresses its connection to the historical Jesus and his revelation. While referring to 2Cor. 5:20 and Rom. 15:16, the question is asked if this special ministry of reconciliation does not form a sacramental reality. The ordained person, invested with authority that comes from God to exercise such authority in the community, is sign and instrument of Christ in the community. Because ordination always takes place in the context of a real community, it also asks for dedication to that community. Ordination is three things at once: a call upon God to pour

¹³ See Vischer's detailed study, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 145–150. The author has a tendency to put too much emphasis on the controversy Rome-Reformation. The approach is generally catholic-friendly, but not specifically Roman Catholic.

¹⁴ "The ordained ministry" in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 116–136.

out his Spirit on the ordinand, a sign that this prayer is answered, and a presenting of the new ordained minister, who is consecrated to his ministry and to God by the church.

In chapter IV, *The Ordained Person and the Community*, a plea is made to carry out ordination within the framework of a liturgical service; specifically—eucharistic, as an expression of the mutual involvement of community and ordained person. Ordination is, after all, meant to be a service to the *koinonia* with God and fellow human beings. By carrying out the ordination in the context of the Lord's Supper, the church emphasizes that the ordained person is called to point to Christ's own ministry.

Chapter V, *Who is to be Ordained?*, demonstrates that this study places greater emphasis on the role of the church in ordination¹⁵ than the 1968 study. This chapter contains a call to stop avoiding the questions surrounding the ordination of women.

The 1974 Accra Text of Faith and Order

In the Accra text, ordination takes center stage to a greater degree than ever before. The third chapter, *Ordination*, consists of 22 paragraphs that are divided into 4 sub-sections, A through D.

The first section—A. *The meaning of ordination* is nearly identical to the corresponding section in the 1971 study. By ordaining ministers, the church attempts to follow the apostles' mission and to remain faithful to their teaching. In the act of ordination, the church proclaims its link with Jesus Christ and the apostolic witness and reminds us that the risen Lord is the true Ordainer. By ordaining ministers, the church—under the guidance of the Holy Spirit—provides the faithful proclamation of the gospel and humble service in Christ's name. The laying on of hands is a threefold sign of the gift of the Spirit, of an assurance that the church is anchored in the revelation of Christ, and of the

¹⁵ "The process of selecting and ordaining particular persons can be seen *both* as the church's 'natural' activity as a social organism, which must supply to itself the leadership and other roles which it needs for its purposes, *and* (more deeply) as the initiative of God at every point in the fulfilment of His plan for the salvation of the world. Seen in this theological perspective, the selecting of the right person for ordination is a matter of grace at every point." A bit later we read that it is the church's task to be an influence that promotes order: "By its very act of granting ordination the church as a body acknowledges the responsibility of the whole company of the faithful for the continuing guardianship of the apostolic testimony." See "The ordained ministry" in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 127–128.

commission from the Lord (Ac 38). The act of ordination thus has a double subject: God and the church, who inaugurate a permanent relationship whereby the ordained person receives strength from the Spirit and is supported by the prayers offered by the congregation (Ac 39). The following paragraph asserts that this basic insight has been worked out in a number of theological and liturgical ways in various cultural frameworks (Ac 40). This is explained with the help of the New Testament word *cheirotonein*; in its context it means ‘to appoint’—with or without laying on of hands—while the Latin *ordinare* leads to a judicial context of incorporation in a separate group (Ac 41). This observation had already been developed in the 1968 ordination study. After this, a number of other concepts from the terminology of ministry follow (Ac 42) that are relativized in specific cultural contexts (Ac 43).¹⁶

The first paragraph of the second section—*B. The act of ordination* begins with a definition: “The act of ordination is at one and the same time: invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiklesis*); sacramental sign; acknowledgement of gifts and commitment” (Ac 44). This description contains the three elements that had already been mentioned in the 1971 study. The Greek word to indicate the invocation, the qualification of the sign component of the rite as ‘sacramental,’ and the element of the prior acknowledgement of gifts at the commitment are additions.

The epiclesis shows that in its prayers and actions the church is dependent on the works of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit blows where it wills (John 3:8),¹⁷ and can put forces into motion that are far greater than all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20) (Ac. 45). This is a pneumatological way of indicating that the potential renewal is at the heart of the ordained ministry.

After this, ordination is called a ‘sacramental’ sign for the first time. “A sign of granting of this prayer by the Lord who gives the gift of ministry. Although the outcome of the church’s *epiclesis* depends on the freedom of God, the church ordains in confidence that God, being faithful to his promise in Christ, enters sacramentally into contingent, historical forms of human relationship and uses them for his purpose. Ordination

¹⁶ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 172, points out that this placing into perspective has a liberating effect on provincial theologians and churches that are caught within the borders of their confession of faith; at the same time, basic theological arguments play a part in the discussion about ordination, and they reach into the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity.

¹⁷ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 173, is right when he wonders whether it is exegetically correct to use John 3:8 in this ordination context.

is a sign performed in faith that the spiritual relationship signified is present in, with and through the words spoken, the gesture made and the ecclesiological forms employed.” (Ac 46) In the tradition of theologizing about the sacraments within *Faith and Order*, the adjective ‘sacramental’ is an attempt to do justice to God’s promise and faithfulness and to humankind’s faith in the act of ordination. In doing so, both the magical approach to God’s work in ordination as well as a completely symbolic act that gives a purely human act a religious dimension are rejected. G.H. Vischer¹⁸ views the sacramental aspect of ordination in the conviction that the church does not do its own work, but that in faith and obedience it aims to do God’s work because God acts through contingent, historical forms such as the ordination rite. Ordination is an effective sign because it is primarily epiclesis, which is founded in the certainty of being heard (Matth. 7:7).

The third element of ordination, the commitment, points to the recognition and the openness of the community with regard to the ordained minister and the commitment of the ordained person to the community (Ac 47). In the following two paragraphs, another two elements are added that had already been mentioned in the studies of 1968 and 1971; namely, the fact that ordination must take place with the active involvement of the faith community (Ac 48) in a eucharistic service (Ac 49).

The third subsection—*C. Conditions for ordination* differentiates between indispensable (Ac 50) and adaptable (Ac 56) conditions. To the first category belong: a recognition by the ordained person, the community, and its spiritual leaders that the ordained person has been called by God (Ac 51), the desire on the part of the ordained person to devote himself/herself to the task to which he/she is being called in the community (Ac 52), a sound training in biblical subjects, theology, and social skills (Ac 53), the possession of spiritual basic gifts—namely, dedication, dependability, faithfulness in prayer, patience, perseverance, courage, humility, and hope (Ac 54), and readiness to cooperate (Ac 55). Some of the adaptable aspects are: being celibate or not (Ac 57), the academic program (Ac 58), stipend (Ac 59), whether being an ordained minister is the main occupation or a part-time one (Ac 60), exercising ordained ministry within an ecclesiastical organization or in a worldly task (Ac 61), and life-long or interrupted exercise of ministry without

¹⁸ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 174.

re-ordination (Ac 62). The approach to the second group of conditions is set against the background of the fear of increasing professionalization of ministry, a problem that was identified for the first time in the study of the lay department, and that since then has been included in all drafts. In conclusion, the principle of equal standing of all ministries is emphasized (Ac 63).

The fourth subsection—*D. The ordination of women* (Ac 64–69) will not be discussed here. Two other problems are not dealt with; namely, who ordains and what is transferred during ordination.¹⁹

In conclusion, it can be said that ecumenical theologizing about ordination does not develop until the 1968 study, *The Meaning of Ordination*. This is not apart from the fact that Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians joined *Faith and Order*. The most important question becomes what is the meaning of this sign that has sacramental value within these traditions.

In the Lima declaration, ordination will retain a prominent position, but the subject is given less emphasis than in the Accra study. Ordination will still be given a separate chapter, but with a drastically reduced number of paragraphs. The subsection about the ordination of women disappears from the chapter about ordination because this matter is not related to the meaning or the practice of ordination. As we have seen, this section has become part of the second chapter about the church and the ordained ministry. In the fifth chapter of the Lima text, ordination is discussed in three subsections, just as it is in the Accra text: the meaning of ordination, the act of ordination, and the conditions for ordination.

THE MEANING OF ORDINATION (ART. 39–40)

Discussion per Paragraph

Here the different aspects of the meaning of ordination (§39), the special meaning of the episcopal ordination (commentary to §39), and the double subject of ordination (§40) are discussed, while the commentary to §40 gives an exegetical commentary.

¹⁹ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 194.

Paragraph Thirty-Nine. *The church ordains certain of its members for the ministry in the name of Christ by the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6); in so doing it seeks to continue the mission of the apostles and to remain faithful to their teaching. The act of ordination by those who are appointed for this ministry attests the bond of the church with Jesus Christ and the apostolic witness, recalling that it is the risen Lord who is the true ordainer and bestows the gift. In ordaining, the church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides for the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and humble service in the name of Christ. The laying on of hands is the sign of the gift of the Spirit, rendering visible the fact that ministry was instituted in the revelation accomplished in Christ, and reminding the church to look to him as the source of its commission. This ordination, however, can have different intentions according to the specific tasks of bishops, presbyters and deacons as indicated in the liturgies of ordination.*

In this first paragraph about the meaning of ordination the following elements are discussed:

1. This paragraph, first of all, states what the formal side of ordination to the ministry in the name of Christ entails. We recognize two traditional ecclesiastical categories—the invocation of the Spirit as the *forma*, and the laying of the hands as the *materia*.²⁰
2. The two scriptural references are meant to serve as explicit examples of the link between the laying on of hands and the minister's functioning, and—as such—they are intended to give the practice a biblical foundation from the start.
3. In the act of ordination, the church signifies the continuation of the mission of the apostles and the faithfulness to their teaching. This is consistent with what has been said about the transfer of ministerial responsibility as element of the apostolic tradition (§34), and with what is written about the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry as a powerful expression of the continuity of the church throughout the ages (§35).
4. To put it even more strongly—ordination is not just an expression of the continuity with the mission and teaching of the apostles, it

²⁰ After the Council of Trente, a controversy developed in Roman Catholic theology about the sign of (or matter, *materia*) of ordination. Only in 1947 did Pius XII conclude that laying on of hands is the proper sign and expressly stated that the handing over of the chalice and paten is not to be seen as essential part of the sacrament according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. (DS, 3858–3859) The accompanying words (the *forma*) did not arouse this kind of theological discussion. They all agreed on the *epiclesis*.

is also intended as a confirmation of the link the church has with Jesus Christ and the apostolic witness. Ordination is a reminder that the risen Lord is the true ordainer. He bestows the gift. This means that ordination has a strong Christological character.

5. When comparing the Lima text with the Accra text, we find that for the first time mention is made of the one who carries out the ordination on behalf of the church. Ordination should not be carried out by just anyone, but by those who are appointed by the church to do so.
6. In ordaining, the church demonstrates that it wants to take up its responsibility for the continued faithful proclamation (see point 3) and humble service in the name of Christ (see point 4) and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
7. Implied is a double subject for carrying out ordination; namely, the exalted Lord and the church.
8. The qualification “humble service” indicates that ordination is not intended as access to domination over a group of people.
9. The laying on of hands during ordination is a sign of the gift of the Spirit, rendering visible the fact that ministry is more than purely creating human order and making human choices within the church. Instead, ministry finds its institutional basis in Christ. In the laying on of hands the church is reminded to look to Christ as the source of its commission.
10. When comparing Lima with the Accra text, it appears that the formulation has become more cautious. Whereas Accra speaks of “(...) the laying on of hands (...) rendering visible the ordering of the ministry in the revelation accomplished by him (Christ), (...)” we see that in the Lima formulation the word ‘ordering’ has been omitted. In this way, the Lima text avoids an over-strong association of the concrete form with the historical Jesus. Here much more emphasis is placed on the process of equipping the faith community through ordained ministry, a process that was begun by Christ—without suggesting that it was determined in its final form at the time of the historical Jesus.²¹ This approach is more in keeping with what was said in paragraph 11, and the added commentary about not attributing existing forms of ministry and order directly to the historical Jesus.

²¹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the ‘Lima Document,’* 399.

11. It is possible for ordination to have different intentions according to the specific tasks of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. In comparison with the Accra text, this is a new element. This is, of course, connected with the option for the threefold structure of ministry in the Lima text.
12. To outline these specific tasks, we are invited to refer to the different ordination liturgies. This gives these liturgies different degrees of importance, and we hear an implicit invitation to look at them more closely with regard to the different ministerial tasks.²² The old ecclesiastical rule, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which gives the liturgy a normative value when formulating the content of the faith, is given more importance.
13. Especially in these types of texts, it is important to note what is not there. In the first place, the laying on of hands is referred to as a sign that 'renders visible' and 'reminds us,' but not as something that 'transmits the gift of the Spirit.' In the second place, no mention is made of the transmission of authority, *potestas*.

Commentary (39). *It is clear that churches have different practices of ordination, and that it would be wrong to single out one of those as exclusively valid. On the other hand, if churches are willing to recognize each other in the sign of apostolic succession, as described above, it would follow that the old tradition, according to which it is the bishop who ordains, with the participation of the community, will be recognized and respected as well.*

This commentary wants to even more specifically define who ordains on behalf of the church, and, in particular, to draw attention to the role played by the bishop. The commentary is a clear encouragement²³ to give the role of the bishop additional value in the framework of the episcopal succession as a particular expression of the apostolic succession. The first version of this commentary was only created²⁴ after a choice had been made for the threefold model of ministry. While the plea for the additional meaning of episcopal ordination in the previous

²² Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 270.

²³ On M. Thurian's instigation, the sentence "if churches are increasingly able to recognize" was changed to "if churches are willing to recognize" when the definitive text was compiled in Lima in 1982. About this see Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 396 and 400.

²⁴ The commentary does not make an appearance until the version of 19 January 1980 in Geneva. For more information about this see Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 264 and 270.

chapter had been formulated very tentatively, the tone has now become more direct.

Paragraph Forty. *Properly speaking, then, ordination denotes an action by God and the community by which the ordained are strengthened by the Spirit for their task and are upheld by the acknowledgement and prayers of the congregation.*

Article 40 explicitly formulates what had been implicitly indicated in article 39; namely, that ordination has a double subject: God and the church. This means that the subject of ordination that had been left open at the First World Conference of *Faith and Order*, has now been filled in. Fifty years of ecumenical theologizing has led to an ever clearer formulation of the subject of ordination.²⁵ This double subject means double support for the ordained person; namely, strengthening by the Spirit of God and support from the church in acknowledgment and prayer. This is a strong closing statement of what the meaning of ordination is. What the formulation does not yet make clear is whether the Spirit is bestowed or recognized in the ordination.

Commentary (40). *The original New Testament terms for ordination tend to be simple and descriptive. The fact of appointment is recorded. The laying on of hands is described. Prayer is made for the Spirit. Different traditions have built different interpretations on the basis of these data.*

It is evident that there is a certain difference between the unspoken cultural setting of the Greek cheirotonein and that of the Latin ordo or ordinare. The New Testament use of the former term borrows its basic secular meaning of 'appointment' (Acts 14:23; II Cor. 8:19), which is, in turn, derived from the original meaning of extending the hand, either to designate a person or to cast a vote. Some scholars see in cheirotonein a reference to the act of laying on of hands, in view of the literal

²⁵ The ordination study of 1968 was already pointing towards the double subject: "We further agree that God acts in the church, in setting apart this person, that the church intercedes for the gifts of the Spirit to the ordinand, but that it is Christ's action which affirms, authorizes and provides gifts and grace for each particular ministry." ("The Meaning of Ordination," 176) In the 1971 Louvain study, the two subjects are more clearly placed next to each other on the same level: "(...) ordination as an act attests the binding of the church to the historical Revelation, at the same time recalling that it is the Risen Lord who is the true Ordainer, who bestows the gift." ("The Ordained Ministry" in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order, 1963-1993*, 120) In the Accra document, we find the text that we also encounter as Lima number 40 under number 39. The only difference is that "which inaugurates a relationship in which the ordained" is changed to the more direct formulation "by which the ordained."

description of the action in such seemingly parallel instances as Acts 6:6, 8:17, 13:3, 19:6; I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6. Ordo and ordinare, on the other hand, are terms derived from Roman law where they convey the notion of the special status of a group distinct from the plebs, as in the term ordo clarissimus for the Roman senate. The starting point of any conceptual construction using these terms will strongly influence what is taken for granted in both the thought and action which result.

This detailed exegetical commentary explains the New Testament roots of ordination. The terminology is simple and descriptive. It refers to appointment, laying on of hands, and prayer for the Spirit. Since it is not elaborated much, it leaves much room for interpretation. Because of the different cultural backgrounds of the Greek original and the Latin translation, there is even more room for interpretation. This commentary preserves the exegetical notes that were introduced in the 1968 ordination study.

At this point, the ecumenical conversation about ordained ministry led to the realization that dogmatic formulations can hide a number of historical and cultural differences. This surfaced because of the ever more general acceptance of the results of scientific exegesis. For this reason, it is very important to indicate the exact nature of the differences in order to reduce the theological differences to their true proportions.

The cultural-historical connotations that over the course of church history had been attached to a number of concepts identifying office bearers (Ac 42), and the resulting call to remove possible barriers in the ecumenical discussions (Ac 43) have disappeared. The treatment in the Lima text is much less didactical and is restricted to the essential elements for a joint understanding of ordination.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the absence of a task description in the meaning of ordination

The churches that acknowledge the need of a separate ecclesiastical ministry also accept the need for a specific ordination rite. Most churches, including those from the Reformed tradition, can accept the description of ordination as an act by God and the church that consists of a prayer for the Holy Spirit and laying on of hands.²⁶ There is

²⁶ Only the Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 124 had difficulties with the double subject of ordination. It is of the

the occasional indication that something is missing. The Presbyterian Church of Wales²⁷ finds the approach too formal and not functional enough, without sufficient content. According to this church, the text should also have mentioned that the prayer for the Spirit and the laying on of hands are aimed at equipping the ordinand to carry out a ministry of teaching and leadership. This church is of the opinion that, because of the absence of the mentioning of a function, the sign of ordination runs the risk of being seen as transmission of a special status in a hierarchical framework. A similar criticism exists with respect to the fact that there is no detailed definition of the gift, its why and wherefore.²⁸

2. *Concerning the differences in the ordination rite for the different ministries*

There are a number of questions with regard to the relation between ordination and the variety of ministries.²⁹ Does ordination have to be repeated when the ordained person assumes a different ministry?³⁰ What is striking is that the churches from the Reformed tradition hardly ever ask questions about the status of the office of elder or deacon in their churches. Are they ordained when they assume their office?³¹

3. *Concerning episcopal ordination*

One Presbyterian church emphatically rejects the suggestion in the commentary to paragraph 39 to have a bishop carry out ordination as sign of the apostolic succession.³² The others remain silent. Most likely

opinion that there is too much emphasis on the role of the church in the ordination. It is true that the church prays, but it is the Spirit who provides and ordains and remains free at all times, without the church being able to control or orchestrate that work.

²⁷ In *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 173.

²⁸ See the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 178, and R. Frieling's analysis in the chapter "Amt" in *Kommentar zu den Lima-Erklärungen über Taufe, Eucharistie und Amt*, 149–153.

²⁹ An example is the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 107.

³⁰ For this see the response from the Evangelical Reformed Church in northwest Germany in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 97.

³¹ The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 84 states that its elders are not ordained but consecrated with a separate ceremony before they take on their task. In *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 85 the commission wrongly assumed that the Church of Scotland would ask this question.

³² See the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 219.

they have already voiced their reservations about this in their responses to the previous section about the episcopal succession.

4. *Concerning fundamental theological differences*

G.H. Vischer provided a commentary to the exegetical discourse from the Accra text that was later included in the commentary to paragraph 40 of the Lima text, which can be repeated for this paragraph from the Lima text. He is of the opinion that it is right to place the theological differences over ordination into perspective because of exegetical insights; however, this must not result in closing our eyes to fundamental theological differences that exist in our understanding of ordination. He warns that when some churches see ordination as consecration in a hierarchical order, while other churches regard it as being equipped to carry out a specific ministry, these different points of view are the result of different views of the church, which as a result of the concept 'representation' take us into the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity.³³

Questions and Lessons for the Reformed Tradition

1. *Concerning the ordination rite in the Reformed tradition*

The invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands is an invitation to the churches to reflect on the liturgical side of ordination. Traditionally, liturgy is not the strongest point of the Reformed tradition. This means that this ecumenical theological reflection on the ordained ministry is a valuable inspiration for the Reformed tradition to look afresh at its own ordination liturgies. It is important to ensure that the ordination service has a sound liturgical structure, particularly when it relates to the strongly liturgical task of the ordained minister. The Lima text states that two elements are indispensable in the ordination rite; namely, the *epiclesis* and the laying on of hands. The emphasis on these two elements forces some churches to reflect anew about their own rite and liturgy.³⁴ *Proeven voor de eredienst, aflevering 2. Bevestiging van*

³³ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 172, bases himself on the study about Roman Catholic ecclesiology and doctrine of ministry from the point of view of the concept of *repraesentatio Christi* by the Lutheran Per. E. Persson dated 1966.

³⁴ The Presbyterian Church of Wales in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 174 expresses its intention to look again at its ordination practice with "prayer and the right hand of

ambtsdraggers (Samples of orders of service 2, Ordination of ministers) represents an attempt by The Liturgy Commission of the Together on the Way churches in the Netherlands to process and absorb the Lima text.³⁵ Both the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands are referred to, but it remains unclear whether they are necessary when inducting elders and deacons in their ministry. This uncertainty is also apparent in the draft church order of the Together on the Way Churches in the Netherlands. Article V. 5 only mentions the invocation of the Holy Spirit and not the laying on of hands when office bearers are inducted. This is because this church order does not differentiate between a minister's ministry as ordained ministry and those of elders and deacons as non-ordained ministries.³⁶

The liturgical ambiguity of this church order is caused by uncertainties in the Reformed doctrine of ministry. The theology of ordination as it is explained in the Lima text hands the Reformed tradition a valuable instrument to think more carefully about its own ordination rites and liturgies and to formulate and use them accordingly.

2. *The ordination rite and the offices of elder and deacon*

The explanatory list of definitions (§7) contained a question for the Reformed tradition: do the tasks of elder and deacon belong to the ordained ministries as the joint ecclesiastical traditions interpret them in the Lima text? What follows demonstrates that these specific Reformed offices do not contain the functions BEM allocates to the ordained ministry; namely, proclamation of the Word and administering the sacraments—for they do not do this in the representative way as representatives of Christ in the way BEM describes. For this reason, it is not surprising that they have not been given a place within the threefold structure of the ordained ministry that BEM believed to be able to trace; they are not the keepers and symbols of unity and continuity in the church that are connected with the ordained ministry.

fellowship,” in the realization that its tradition in this field is more a question of habit than of conviction. The Evangelical Church of Westphalia in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 146 says that the text has persuaded her that it is important to pray for the gift of the Spirit, and intends to think about this more deeply.

³⁵ This edition was published in Leidschendam/Leusden in 1989, and in it the commission emphasize the importance of the BEM report in the foreword on p. 7.

³⁶ For other elements of ordination in churches with a presbyteral structure, see Houtepen, *Een asymmetrische dialoog*, 39.

We had already come to the conclusion that the offices of elder and deacon have an ecclesiastical, non-ordained status in this ecumenical context.

This judgment is confirmed in the description of the meaning of ordination. We had already established that there is uncertainty within the Reformed tradition about the need for *epiclesis* and laying on of hands when inducting elders and deacons. But even the meaning of the rite is not in keeping with the meaning of these two offices. According to paragraph 39, ordination is an expression of the continuity with the apostles' mission and teaching. Elders and deacons do represent the broad apostolic tradition of which each Reformed congregation wants to be part, but their task is not a continuation of the apostolic task of proclaiming the Word.

In his chapter about ministry in the church in the *Institutes* with the servants of the Word in mind, Calvin wrote the paragraphs about ordination. In these paragraphs he does mention the ordination of teachers and deacons in the early church, but in the church of his own time only the ordination of ministers is mentioned. Not once does he refer to ordination with laying on of hands of *seniors*. This begs the question of why he limited ordination to servants of the Word. Calvin does not give an explicit answer to this question. What he wanted to do was to emphasize that within the Reformed church ordination was not the same as in the Roman Catholic Church. Because at that time there was such a strong emphasis on the distance with regard to the rite in the Roman Catholic Church, and because superstition surrounding the laying on of hands had to be avoided at all cost, ordinations were dispensed with altogether in Geneva in the sixteenth century. Thanks to his functional approach to the offices, it is possible to arrive at an answer. Only the pastors who exercised oversight over the faith community by their Word ministry have to be ordained. They are the only ones to carry out the central, apostolic, core task without which a congregation is not a church. For this reason, we are of the opinion that the Reformed tradition offers enough indications to justify the differentiation between an ordained and a non-ordained ministry that is made in the Lima text.

THE ACT OF ORDINATION (ART. 41–44)

After the ordination has been described as a community event (§41), three aspects of ordination are explained; namely, the invocation of the Holy Spirit (§42), the sacramental sign (§43), and the mutual commitment (§44).

Discussion per Paragraph

Paragraph Forty-One. A long and early Christian tradition places ordination in the context of worship and especially of the eucharist. Such a place for the service of ordination preserves the understanding of ordination as an act of the whole community, and not of a certain order within it or of the individual ordained. The act of ordination by the laying on of hands of those appointed to do so is at one and the same time invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiklesis); sacramental sign; acknowledgement of gifts and commitment.

Article 41 says, first of all, that ordination is an act of the whole faith community and not of a particular group within this community, or of the ordained person alone. For this reason, the text mentions the long and old Christian tradition that has always given ordination a place in the context of a service; in particular, the celebration of the eucharist. This emphasis on the communal aspect of ordination can also be found in the 1971 Louvain text and in the Accra version of 1984, but there is a shift in addition. While in the earlier version the specifically eucharistic aspect of ordination had been emphasized, now the communal aspect of ordination takes center stage. This is evidenced, in particular, by the omission of two arguments from this version which were in agreement with this eucharistic setting; namely, ministry to the *koinonia* with God and the neighbor, and the commitment to the Servant who gave his life for all of us.

In the second place, this paragraph gives a threefold answer to the question regarding the meaning of ordination as a rite of laying on of hands by the persons who have been appointed to do so. Three separate, but inextricably linked significant elements are to be distinguished:

1. Invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*)
2. Sacramental sign
3. Acknowledgment of gifts and commitment.

As early as the 1971 Louvain text, *The Ordained Ministry*, we find these three different elements. The formulation was taken from the Accra version without alteration. The addition that ordination on behalf of the church can be carried out only by authorized persons is the only new element in this paragraph. This remark had also been added to paragraph 39. In the next three paragraphs, these three meaning aspects are explained in more detail.

Paragraph Forty-Two. (a) *Ordination is an invocation to God that the new minister be given the power of the Holy Spirit in the new relation which is established between this minister and the local Christian community and, by intention, the church universal. The otherness of God's initiative, of which the ordained ministry is a sign, is here acknowledged in the act of ordination itself. 'The Spirit blows where it wills' (John 3:3): the invocation of the Spirit implies the absolute dependence on God for the outcome of the church's prayer. This means that the Spirit may set new forces in motion and open new possibilities far more abundantly than all that we ask or think' (Eph. 3:20).*

Article 42 describes ordination as invocation of the Holy Spirit. The following elements can be distinguished:

1. Ordination is an invocation to God.
2. This invocation contains the prayer that the new minister be given the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. This confirmation is necessary with a view to the new relationship that is created between the minister and the local Christian community.
4. In principle, the ordained person also enters into a new relationship with the worldwide church. The expression "by intention" is a new addition since the Accra text. It expresses the realization that the commitment to the universal church is not something automatic—either in the personal experience of the ministers or in the consciousness of the local church—but something to be established in principle. In many cases it will only be possible for the new specific relationship with the worldwide church to be intentional only. The involvement with the universal church is connected with the minister's representative role as a focus of unity (§ 8, § 13 commentary and § 14 commentary), and as representative of the church beyond the local level at the local level (§ 29).
5. The opinion that the ordained person also assumes a new relationship with the world has been omitted since the Accra version.

As a result, ordination has been returned to its status as an ecclesiastical event.

6. In this invocation, the otherness of God's autonomous initiative in this ordination rite is recognized and acknowledged. The task itself of the ordained person had been described as a permanent reminder of the fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ (§8). The presence of the ordained person in the community was explained as a reminder of the divine initiative and the dependence on Jesus Christ. Therefore, it need not surprise us that the fundamental function and role are also fundamental aspects of the ordination rite. The ordinand will only be able to assume and carry out his function and role through the power of the Spirit.
7. The invocation of God as the Spirit, which—according to John 3:8—blows where it wills, implies that the church is completely dependent on God for the outcome of its prayers.
8. The reference to Eph. 3:20 reminds us of the innovating power of the Spirit.³⁷

To summarize, we describe the *epiclesis* as a prayer to God that asks for the innovating power of the Holy Spirit and realizes our dependence on God's initiative to confirm the ordinand, who, as a result of ordination, will enter into a new relationship with the faith community.

Paragraph Forty-Three. *(b) Ordination is a sign of the granting of this prayer by the Lord who gives the gift of the ordained ministry. Although the outcome of the church's epiklesis depends on the freedom of God, the church ordains in confidence that God, being faithful to his promise in Christ, enters sacramentally into contingent, historical forms of human relationship and uses them for his purpose. Ordination is a sign performed in faith that the spiritual relationship signified is present in, with and through the words spoken, the gestures made and the forms employed.*

Article 43 discusses ordination as a sacramental sign:

³⁷ The last two bible references were also included in the Accra version. Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 173 and 194, was right when he remarked that the idea expressed was important and correct, but that the exegetical basis was doubtful, and that the reduction of the meaning of the Spirit to independence or freedom of action is not what is at stake here. On page 194, he suggested not to base the working of the Spirit in the *epiklesis* on John 3:8 in connection with the unpredictability of the Spirit, but on Bible texts such as John 16–18 about the Counselor, on Acts 2, or on Pauline texts about the Spirit.

1. Ordination is a prayer to God to confirm the ordinand through the Spirit in a new relationship with the faith community, and it is at the same time a sign of the granting of this prayer by the Lord, who is the giver of the ordained ministry. In this way prayer and granting coincide. This is, thus, more than a pious wish whose realization primarily depends on the person who must realize it. Ordination reckons that the prayer is being granted because it trusts in God. Ordination is a fulfilled sign that expresses and accomplishes its content.
2. This trust in God is not the same as an automatic granting, whereby the vouchsafing is assured beforehand; the granting of the prayer remains dependent on the freedom of God. This means that the church cannot control or manipulate God's actions by magic or on its own authority. Since it is not based on human certainty, ordination is a sign performed in faith.
3. This counting on God means that during ordination the participants act in faith, trusting in God's promises in Christ, in the conviction that the church is not doing its own work, but in faith and obedience is doing God's work. This is a prayer that trusts that it will be granted because it is based on the Lord's words: "Ask and it will be given you." (Mathew 7:7).³⁸ Ordination is a sign performed in faith; namely, in the confidence that God will grant the prayer.
4. There is a shift in the formulation of prayer and granting. The prayer is about being placed in a new relationship. The granting points to the receiving of a gift. The gift of the Spirit is received to make it possible to realize the function and the role in the new relationship between the ordained person and the faith community.
5. As a result, the ordination that makes this new relationship possible obtains a sacramental character because God uses it to enter into contingent, historical forms of human relations, and uses them for his purpose. It is obvious that ordination is more than a purely human act that is interpreted in a religious way. Ordination is a faith sign, performed in the confidence that the spiritual relationship that is expressed in ordination is really present in, with and through the words spoken, the gestures made, and the forms employed during ordination.

³⁸ Vischer, *Apostolischer Dienst*, 174.

Paragraph Forty-Four. *(c) Ordination is an acknowledgement by the church of the gifts of the Spirit in the one ordained, and a commitment by both the church and the ordinand to the new relationship. By receiving the new minister in the act of ordination, the congregation acknowledges the minister's gifts and commits itself to be open towards these gifts. Likewise those ordained offer their gifts to the church and commit themselves to the burden and opportunity of new authority and responsibility. At the same time, they enter into a collegial relationship with other ordained ministers.*

This paragraph explains the third aspect of the meaning of ordination: the acknowledgment of gifts and the commitment.

1. Ordination is an acknowledgement by the church of the gifts of the Spirit that are present in the ordinand. In the classical discussion about the meaning of ordination as an acknowledgment or as a granting of the gifts of the Spirit, it is obvious that the former was chosen.
2. It is not clear whether these gifts—in the plural—must be seen as identical with the single gift of the Spirit (§39), and the gift of the ordained ministry that is given as a result of ordination (§43). Or is this about gifts of grace already present in the ordained person that will now start to function in a new way as a result of the new relationship between the ordained person and the community? Furthermore, we see that the word “charism” (§7a) is not used here. That is not an arbitrary omission. There is a difference between the gift of ministry and (other) charisms. In paragraph 48, the expression “charism of ministry” is used. The terminology does not seem to be completely unambiguous here.
3. Ordination is an expression of commitment, both for the ordained person and for the faith community.
4. For both parties, it is not direct commitment to God, but commitment to the new relationship that they have entered into.
5. For the faith community, this means that it concretely acknowledges the minister's gifts, that it will be receptive to them, and that it receives the ordinand as its new minister.
6. For the ordained person, commitment to the new relationship concretely means the readiness to share one's gifts with the church, the commitment to the burdens and new opportunities of the new authority, and the responsibility the new relationship entails.
7. As a result of ordination, the ordinand will also enter into a new, collegial relationship with other ordained ministers. This last

aspect is new in comparison with Accra 1974. This is another aspect that was influenced by the option for the threefold ministry.³⁹

This subsection of the chapter about ordination attempts to explain the laying on of hands by giving three aspects of its meaning. A number of central, traditional controversies surround the meaning of ordination connected with this section. An attempt is made to rise above the classic discussions. Instead of opting for ontological categories or for a purely functional use of language, the Lima text opts for expressing itself in relational terms of what happens in the ordination rite. The point of view that ordination changes the relationship between minister and faith community is the central idea. In view of this, prayers are offered for the gift of the Spirit. When the prayer is granted, the new relationship is given sacramental value; and in mutual acknowledgment and commitment the faith community and the ordained minister confirm the relationship.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the ordination as a community event

Paragraph 41 with its emphasis on the communal aspect of ordination evokes positive responses from the churches of the Reformed tradition, as could be expected.⁴⁰ The induction during worship is also underpinned by what happens in practice,⁴¹ while the proposal to place the ordination in the context of a Communion service is not immediately rejected, but requires more reflection.⁴²

³⁹ The formulation reminds one of the texts of the Second Vatican Council. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the decree about ministry and the life of priests, refers to the sacramental brotherhood that links all consecrated persons (PO 8), and *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution about the church, explains that, as a result of his consecration to bishop, the ordinand becomes a member of the body of bishops (LG 22).

⁴⁰ See the responses from the Korean Presbyterian Church in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 164, and from the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 188.

⁴¹ See the response from the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 146.

⁴² See the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 107.

2. *Concerning the sacramentality of ordination*

Most responses, and not only those from Reformed churches but also from Lutheran and Free churches,⁴³ are connected with the tendency to regard ordination as a sacrament.⁴⁴ The fear that this sacramental use of language opens the door to ontologically separate ordained ministries and a hierarchically structured church is always present, even if it is not always expressed.⁴⁵

This fear is increased even further as a result of the discussion about ordained ministry together with the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. For this reason, there have been requests from several quarters for a clearer description of what is meant with 'sacramental' and sacrament in the Lima report as a whole.⁴⁶ Because *Faith and Order* were encouraged by the Orthodox churches and Roman Catholic Church to state more unambiguously that ordination is a sacrament, the commission explained the formulation of the text in their answer.⁴⁷ They explained to the Protestant churches that discussing baptism, eucharist, and ministry in one document does not mean that all these three structure elements are regarded as sacraments in the same manner, but that they are discussed together because the commission was aware of the fact that all three are important elements in keeping the churches apart, while at the same time they are an essential element of community. To the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches they say that it had been decided not to call ordination a sacrament because different churches

⁴³ See *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 85.

⁴⁴ See, among others, the response from the Presbyterian Church in Canada in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 158: "We must admit that in sub-sections 42–43 we find it difficult to accept the sacramental language that is used in connection with ordination ..."; the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 219: "(...) we do not accept that ordination is to be given a sacramental status, to be regarded as a sacramental sign, in fact one of the sacraments of the church."; the response from the Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 124: "(...) we cannot accept the use of the term 'sacramental sign.' What does this mean? That the ordained ministry is raised to little less than the rank of a sacrament?"

⁴⁵ See, among other things, the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 178, and from the Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 126, and the analysis by Frieling in the chapter, "Amt," 150–153.

⁴⁶ See, among other things, the responses from the Church of Scotland in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 97, and from the United Reformed Church of the United Kingdom in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 103.

⁴⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 128–129.

have different views, stemming from the controversies of the time of the Reformation, of what constitutes a sacrament. All agree that ordination is more than a purely human and administrative act carried out by the church. Whether this sign is called a 'sacrament' or qualifies as 'sacramental' depends on what is understood by 'sacrament' or 'sacramental.' The commission realizes that much more dialogue and clarification are needed with regard to the concepts of 'sacrament' and 'sacramental.' In the third part of their answer to the responses from the churches, the commission responds in more detail to the questions raised.⁴⁸ In their deliberations, they choose a broad view of sacramentality from a sacramental understanding of the history of salvation as their starting point. During the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, this approach is confirmed,⁴⁹ but there is no further detail about what this might mean for ordination

Lessons and Questions for the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the compatibility of ordination as sacramental sign with the Reformed tradition

Is it possible to call ordination a sacrament? The initial response from most churches of the Reformed tradition is a categorical: 'No!' But if we return to the roots of the Reformation, we will find that this is not so clear-cut. Melancthon did not exclude the possibility of calling ordination a sacrament.⁵⁰ Calvin said that ordination to the true ministries with laying on of hands could be called a sacrament because this rite was carried out at the Lord's command and is truly a sign of spiritual grace. He did not count ordination among the regular sacraments, however, because it did not apply to all believers, and because the Roman Catholic Church misused it. H. Berkhof, who disliked all high-church officialdom, counted the ministry among the 'guiding means' that could be used by the Spirit, as a result of which ministry obtains sacramental value.⁵¹ In brief, in the Reformation churches and certainly

⁴⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990*, 143-147.

⁴⁹ See the section, "Sacrament and Sacramentality," in the report of section III, "Sharing a Common Life in Christ" in Best and Gassmann, *On the way to Fuller Koinonia*, 246-247.

⁵⁰ R. Frieling refers to his Apology to CA XIII, 11 f. in "Amt," 150.

⁵¹ H. Berkhof, *Christelijk geloof* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1985⁵), 372-373.

in the Reformed tradition, authoritative voices exist that would not dismiss the question regarding the sacramentality of ordination out of hand.

In its interpretation of ordination, the Lima text attaches crucial importance to the view that in ordination the ordained person enters into a new relationship with the other believers and with the other ordained ministers. This explanation leaves sufficient room for an ontological interpretation, according to which the person definitely becomes a different person when receiving the gifts of grace.⁵² But this change of relationship can also be interpreted differently, in a way that is in keeping with the Reformation's point of view. The Lima text does not elaborate on the nature of the change that is wrought in the persons who are ordained. Do they become different as a result of the gifts they have received or does their personality change? As far as the theologians of the Reformation are concerned, what matters to them is not a change in persons, but the calling upon ministers to proclaim the Word and to administer the sacraments. It is the calling to be the 'mouth of God' by the proclamation of the Word in the power of the gift of the Spirit that changes the relationship. In the language of faith, this calling can only be expressed in terms of election by the sovereign, autonomous Lord. According to H. Berkhof, the ministry as guiding sign expresses that salvation does not originate in our midst. If the calling receives external confirmation, it can lead to ordination and to the minister accepting his task as proclaimer of the Word. The function leads to a new role in the faith community, and therefore to a new relationship with the believers. In short, the Lima text, supported by voices from the Reformed tradition, encourages this tradition to be less reluctant to accept the description of ordination as a sacramental sign.

THE CONDITIONS FOR ORDINATION (ART. 45–50)

The conditions discussed are the calling (§45), the danger of professionalization (§46), the preparation (§47), the absence of restrictions (§48), the relation to mutual recognition of ministry (§49), and grounds for refusal to be rejected (§50).

⁵² See also Frieling, "Amt," 151.

Discussion per Paragraph

Paragraph Forty-Five. *People are called in differing ways to the ordained ministry. There is a personal awareness of a call from the Lord to dedicate oneself to the ordained ministry. This call may be discerned through personal prayer and reflection, as well as through suggestion, example, encouragement, guidance, coming from family, friends, the congregation, teachers, and other church authorities. This call must be authenticated by the church's recognition of the gifts and graces of the particular person, both natural and spiritually given, needed for the ministry to be performed. God can use people both celibate and married for the ordained ministry.*

Article 45 discusses the first condition for ordination: there must be *vocation*.

1. It is important to remember that people are called to the ordained ministry in different ways.⁵³
2. On the one hand, there is the *vocatio interna*: a personal consciousness of the calling by the Lord to devote oneself to the ordained ministry. This personal calling by the Lord can take form in many different ways and with the help of various people.⁵⁴
3. On the other hand, the *vocatio externa* is also given its rightful place by the church. The Lima text argues that the external call is indispensable—even more strongly than was the case in the Accra text.⁵⁵
4. Almost as an afterthought,⁵⁶ paragraph 45 says that both celibate and married people are eligible for the ministry. To express this theologically: God can use them both. It appears that the commission is of the opinion that this is the strongest argument against obligatory celibacy; namely, the freedom of God to extend a call.

⁵³ As late as at the beginning of the fifth chapter, “Who is to be ordained?” of the 1971 Louvain text, “The Ordained Ministry,” in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 127, it is said that the order: internal call—external call could be reversed.

⁵⁴ When speaking about “teachers” in combination with “other church leaders,” the authors probably thought in the first place of seminary lecturers. In the parallel Accra article 51, they speak of school as well as of seminary.

⁵⁵ Accra 51 “(...) It will be tested and fostered and confirmed or perhaps modified, particularly through the years of training.” Striking is the strong sociological approach that is an echo from the Louvain text. It is not said, in so many words, that the church will also have to confirm the calling.

⁵⁶ In the Accra version, the question of the relation between celibacy and ministry still occupied a separate article (57).

Paragraph Forty-Six. *Ordained people may be professional ministers in the sense that they receive their salaries from the church. The church may also ordain people who remain in other occupations or employment.*

Article 46 says that the ordained ministry requires a call, but that this does not necessarily involve a professional interpretation in the sense of remuneration by the church. This article is a late echo from the discussion about ministry and professionalism within *Faith and Order* in the 1960s that was expressed for the first time in the Laity Department's text, *Christ's Ministry and the Ministry of the church*.⁵⁷ It regarded the professionalization of the ministry as an obstacle to the full participation of lay people within the church. The 1963 Montreal text discusses the subject in the framework of the need to make more flexible use of the special ministry (Mo 101–102). The 1971 Louvain text dedicates a separate chapter to this subject, entitled “VI. Ordination, Ministry and Profession.”⁵⁸ Also in the Accra text, the discussion is even more detailed than in the Lima text. It not only discusses payment by the church (Ac 59), but also the question of whether it is necessary for ordained ministers always to be full-time (Ac 60), and the question whether an ordained person must always work within the ecclesiastical organization (Ac 61).

It is possible to have the opinion that these questions have been regarded too much as sociological questions that have no place in this theological study, and that this is the reason why they have been omitted. This also applies to the article about professionalization that was retained. It does not really belong here. It does not belong to the conditions for the ordained ministry because it is clear that the payment of salary is not a theological condition for ordination. This paragraph would have been more convincing if it had been based on a theological argument.

Paragraph Forty-Seven. *Candidates for the ordained ministry need appropriate preparation through study of scripture and theology, prayer and spirituality, and through acquaintance with the social and human realities of the contemporary world. In some situations, this preparation may take a form other than that of prolonged academic study. The period of training will be one in which the candidate's call is tested, fostered and confirmed, or its understanding modified.*

⁵⁷ *Christ's Ministry and the Ministry of the church*.

⁵⁸ “The Ordained Ministry” in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 129–131.

The ordained ministry requires adequate preparation.

1. Three aspects are listed:
 - a. Study. There is a differentiation between studying scripture and studying theology.
 - b. Prayer and spirituality.⁵⁹
 - c. Insight into the social and inner environment.
2. It is possible for the preparation to take a different form from that of a continued academic training.⁶⁰
3. During the period of preparation the calling is tested, so that it may be confirmed or led in a different direction.

Paragraph Forty-Eight. *Initial commitment to ordained ministry ought normally to be made without reserve or time limit. Yet leave of absence from service is not incompatible with ordination. Resumption of ordained ministry requires the assent of the church, but no re-ordination. In recognition of the God-given charism of ministry, ordination to any one of the particular ordained ministries is never repeated.*

Article 48 discusses the question whether or not ordination is valid for the ordained minister's whole life.

1. The text takes, as its starting point, the principle that consecration is—in principle—without reserve or time limit.
2. On the other hand, leave of absence from service⁶¹ is not incompatible with ordination. No further arguments follow.⁶²
3. Resumption of the ordained ministry requires no re-ordination, but it does require the assent of the church because ministry must always be accepted on behalf of the church.

⁵⁹ Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the 'Lima Document,'* 410, reads too much here when he regards the addition of "prayer and spirituality" as a shift from the functional to the ontological approach to ministry. A theology of ministry that pays attention to spirituality is quite different from a theology of ministry that attempts to explain the essence of ministry in ontological categories.

⁶⁰ Accra 58 discussed this extensively in a separate article.

⁶¹ Accra 62 discusses this in great detail and indicates that it must not be seen as suspect, and that no reproach is justified here. It need not mean that the work had not been blessed by the Holy Spirit or that the ordination had been a mistake.

⁶² Accra 62 explicitly says that leave of absence from service does not mean that the status as ordained minister is lost or that the special relationship with the community as a result of the ordination ceases to exist. In this respect, Accra is more explicit and clearer than Lima.

4. Lima goes further than Accra in rejecting re-ordination for a particular form of ordained ministry; the theological argument is that the charism of ministry is granted permanently.

Paragraph Forty-Nine. *The discipline with regard to the conditions for ordination in one church need not be seen as universally applicable and used as grounds for not recognizing ministry in others.*

This paragraph about the conditions for ministry in relation to mutual recognition of ministry does not occur in the Accra text. The point of departure is the relativity of each church's own conditions for ordination. They must not be used as a pretext not to recognize ministry in other churches.

Paragraph Fifty. *Churches which refuse to consider candidates for the ordained ministry on the ground of handicap or because they belong, for example, to one particular race or sociological group should re-evaluate their practices. This re-evaluation is particularly important today in view of the multitude of experiments in new forms of ministry with which the churches are approaching the modern world.*

Paragraph 50 concludes this section about the conditions for ordained ministry with a call to reject particular reasons for not accepting candidates for ordination.

1. A handicap or belonging to a particular race⁶³ or sociological group must not be a reason to reject people as candidates for ordination. The Accra text does not contain an earlier version of these remarks, but, in one of the proof versions for the Lima text in which this idea surfaces for the first time, we also find a theological foundation that was abandoned later. It said: "Churches find themselves impoverished when their ministries do not reflect the richness and diversity that constitute their communion in Christ." The theological foundation gave this statement additional importance in this theological explanation.

2. The importance of this call for renewed consideration receives an additional impulse because of the necessity to try out new forms of ministry as a response to the modern world. In our opinion, this is not

⁶³ The fact that the compilers of the text speak about 'race' is an indication that they had not yet been able to let go of the language concepts that are also used by racist race theories. A better description would have been: 'ethnic groups.'

the best place for this statement. It comes from article 50 of the Accra text and fits in better with the train of thoughts of article 49 of the Lima text. The challenges of the fast pace of change in society make it necessary for the church to realize which conditions for ordination are essential and which are not; they can serve as an additional encouragement to ask this question. The idea behind article 50 is different. Here we not only have conditions that are relatively reprehensible, but objectionable in principle.

When comparing the Lima text with the much longer text about the conditions for ordination in the Accra text (article 50 to 63), it is striking that two articles have been omitted altogether in the Lima text; namely, Accra 54 (basic gifts the ordained person needs to have; namely, the Spirit of reliability, prayerfulness, patience, perseverance, courage, humility, hope, and leniency), and Accra 55 (the necessary cooperation).

The Lima text has, in general, a less sociological and a more ecclesiastical and theological emphasis. That is a plus-point in the framework of this theological explanation. It is obvious that the commission is trying very hard to avoid getting enmeshed in church order regulations. Sometimes the commission appeared to have problems in determining what should be included in this statement, and what should be left out. On the one hand, they realize what the context is in which ministry has to function today, and the questions that are raised in doing so. On the other hand, only those aspects must play a part in the dialogue between churches that bring in a theological argument that is in keeping with the lines that have been drawn. Sometimes the theological argument appears to have been insufficiently worked out or even absent. As a result, the choice of subjects that are discussed in this study when dealing with the conditions for ordination can sometimes appear to be arbitrary.

Responses from the Reformed Tradition

1. Concerning the absence of gender as a disqualification criterion for ordination that must be rejected

There are not many responses to this section. Quite probably this is because what is said here will have reasonably general approval. There is one point to which a number of Reformed churches responded;

namely, the absence in paragraph 50 of gender as a disqualification criterion for ordination that must be rejected.⁶⁴

2. *Concerning the theological argument for the rejection of re-ordination*

Paragraph 48 concerning the rejection of re-ordination had required further clarification. This is not because the Reformed tradition has problems with this principle. It regards retired ministers as ordained ministers because the charism with a view to the ministry of the Word remains. At a particular moment, retired ministers lay down the burden of responsibilities connected with the exercise of ministry in specific functions, and they retire. Even so, the calling and the charism of ministry to proclaim the Word and administer the sacraments are permanent. The case for rejection of re-ordination could have been argued more cogently. The prohibition of re-ordination is also connected with the role of referrer to Christ, as representative of Christ. Pannenberg adds yet another reason. Because ordination creates a different relationship between the ordained person and not only the local church but also the universal church (§42), re-ordination at another place and time must be regarded not only as unnecessary but also as impossible.⁶⁵

3. *Concerning the absence of the local congregation in the ordination*

The church has a clear role to play in the ordination (§46), but it remains unclear what the exact role of the local congregation is in the election of ministers. It is a specific contribution of the Reformed tradi-

⁶⁴ See, among other things, the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 107: "The Commission's treatment of the ordination of women was described by one province as 'evasive and unhelpful'. These words were blunter than most, but the feeling was widespread. It was felt that the comment about discrimination on grounds of handicap, race or sociological grouping (M50) should be extended to include sex as well. We value the sense of wholeness in ministry experienced as a gift of the Holy Spirit through the ordination of women, which has been practised since 1917 in one of our constituent churches." See also the strong language in the response from the church of Lippe, *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. VI, 73: "Ought not conditions excluding the ordination of persons on the ground of their belonging to particular races, sociological or ethnic groups (cf. §50) to be refused as biblically unfounded? As regards the fully valid cooperation of women in the ordained ministry, should not those churches which have not supported and practised it up till now re-evaluate it anew in the context of Bible and theology?"

⁶⁵ Pannenberg, "Herausforderung der Amtstheologie," 412.

tion to give the local congregation an important role in the election of ordained ministers. Unfortunately, this element is completely absent.⁶⁶

A Lesson and a Question for the Reformed Tradition

1. *Concerning the time-limit in the offices of elders and deacons*

The question about re-ordination is one that must be answered by the Reformed tradition. In his review of a report that had been written in the Dutch Reformed Church as preparation for an official response to BEM, K. Blei said that the church should be more unambiguous in its response about the problems of the time-limited office of elders and deacons. What he is suggesting here is that it might be possible to have elders and deacons serve for unlimited periods as well.⁶⁷ The idea behind this is that the offices of deacon and elder must be elevated to the same level as that of ministers wherever that is possible. In our opinion, that is not the right way forward because it would be much better if there was a clear distinction between the ordained ministry and the offices of deacon and elder as local ministries.

CONCLUDING REMARK

We have come a long way in the discussion about ordination, its meaning, rite, and conditions. It is clear that fifty years of ecumenical dialogue have borne fruit. Churches are much closer together than fifty years ago. It has become clear that the biggest stumbling block remains the sacramental character of ordination. The commission was right in pointing out that the question about whether or not ordination is a sacrament or has sacramental meaning is less important than what is understood by the concepts 'sacrament' and 'sacramental.' The commission is convinced that as a result of a wide interpretation of the concepts 'sacrament' and 'sacramental,' it will be possible to find a road towards further dialogue.

⁶⁶ Bronkhorst, "Kroniek," 330, and K. Blei, "De receptie van de Lima-tekst over doop, eucharistie en ambt in Nederland," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40 (1986) 1, 42.

⁶⁷ Blei, "De receptie van de Lima-tekst," 31 (footnote 49), and K. Blei, A. Houtepen, M. Gosker, "De Nederlandse kerken en het Lima-rapport," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 29 (1989) 2, 161.

For the churches of the Reformed tradition, it would make sense to continue to listen to what Calvin has to say about the sacramental nature of ministry. His nuanced reflections are certain to find an interested audience in the ecumenical dialogue.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TOWARDS A MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF ORDAINED MINISTRIES (ART. 51–55)

THE PRECEDING HISTORY

At the first *Faith and Order* World Conference in Lausanne in 1927, mutual recognition of ministries was regarded as a matter of ecclesiastical politics that was expressed in legal categories in which the question about legitimacy was the key issue,¹ but not as a question of faith and doctrine. At this conference, the word ‘recognition’ was applied to confessions of faith in which the churches expressed the church’s faith.² Recognition of ministries could only be part of the process of recognition of churches.

*The Mutual Recognition of Churches*³

After the foundation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, the mutual recognition of churches was theologically assessed during a discussion of the central committee in Toronto in 1950. Did acceptance of a church as a member of the World Council of Churches mean that it was recognized as a full and true church? Both an Orthodox delegate and a representative of The Church of Scotland had theological reservations against the free use of the term ‘church’ for every organization that called itself ‘church.’ Dr. Maury, a Reformed delegate, formulated a solution that differentiated between each existing church or denomination and the full and true church. In accordance with this differentia-

¹ H.N. Bate (ed.), *Faith and Order, Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 3–21, 1927*, 255–256, 272–273 (in the speech given by the Lutheran representative), 277 (in the speech given by the Presbyterian representative).

² Bate, *Faith and Order, Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 3–21, 1927*, 188, 200, 466.

³ In this section I have made extensive use of the insightful article by G. Kelly, “The Recognition of Ministries: a Shift in Ecumenical Thinking,” *One in Christ* 30 (1994) 1, 10–21.

tion, it was no longer necessary for churches to judge each other against their own performance as church. Because of the Toronto declaration, *The church, the churches and the World Council of Churches*,⁴ mutual recognition of churches was no longer first and foremost a legal problem, but an ecclesiological issue whereby the question was not to what extent the other church was in accordance with one's own church, but the extent to which the content and form of the *una sancta* were recognizable.

The consequences of this declaration for the view of unity became clear during the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Delhi in 1961.

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that *ministry and members are accepted by all* (*author's italics*), and that all act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.⁵

Now there is no longer the idea that church unity can be achieved when all churches return to one of the existing churches. Church unity can be achieved only when the churches grow towards each other 'organically,' when together they achieve renewal of church life, so that each of the churches will be better able to express the apostolic faith. This quotation shows that mutual recognition of ministries will only be part of that process. From then on the *Faith and Order* texts begin to speak about the recognition of the apostolic faith in the churches.

In the following decades, the idea of unity between churches will be understood more and more as a conciliar community of local churches that recognize each other's apostolicity and catholicity, instead of a reunification of denominations. This choice is connected with the fact that the method of comparative ecclesiology is being replaced by a joint study of the sources of the Christian faith. *Faith and Order* began to tell

⁴ This text can be found in M. Kinnamon, B.E. Cope (ed.), *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997), 463–468.

⁵ The quotation comes from the second paragraph about the unity of the church in the report of the section about unity at the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in Vischer, *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927–1963*, 144–145.

the churches that had a tendency to protect their denominational identity that denominational renewal could take place only by strengthening their ecclesiological identity. While the comparative model could only lead to recognition of diversity, the perspective of recognition of the apostolic faith in the different churches entails that the degree of community between the churches within the one church of God can grow. When the churches acknowledge each other's catholicity, there will be room for diversity.

It is this shift from recognition of denominations to recognition of common apostolic faith that becomes apparent in the first question to the churches in the introduction of the Lima text; namely, "the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the church through the ages," and "recognize the text as expression of the apostolic faith." The responses from many churches showed that they thought in terms of denominations and confessions, and that they regarded the Lima text as a variant of the existing confessions. Some regarded it as an attempt by *Faith and Order* to force a mainly Orthodox or Roman Catholic church order on them. Many had not understood the conceptual framework within which *Faith and Order* worked, although they stated in the introduction to the text that it was intended "to become part of a faithful and sufficient reflection of the common Christian Tradition on essential elements of Christian communion." They did not understand the expression "the faith of the church through the ages" because they were not familiar with the difference between the *una sancta*—the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church that is confessed by the creed—and the churches in the sense of denominations. In reality, the process of recognition can be understood only against the background of knowledge and insight of the ecclesiology that had grown within *Faith and Order*. The commission was wrong to assume that the denominations had already completed this thought process. For this reason, the commission tried in their next large project, aimed at a common confession of faith on the basis of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) and entitled *Confessing the one Faith*,⁶ to explain more clearly what is involved in the recognition process for the churches.

⁶ *Confessing the One Faith*.

The Mutual Recognition of Ministries

While *Faith and Order* gave the outlines within which mutual recognition of churches gained a new meaning, some churches had started negotiations with a view to church reunification. They could not wait for theological results. Re-ordination in the united church was rejected because this would compromise the validity of existing ministries. Instead, these churches opted for the possibility of recognizing each others' ministries.

The text, *The Ordained Ministry*, of the 1971 meeting of the commission in Louvain contains a separate chapter about mutual recognition of ministries: "VII Mutual Acceptance of Ministry." The tone of this text is hopeful. On the basis of the promising results of the Second Vatican Council, it must be possible to come to a joint evaluation of the development of the ordained ministry. The growing consensus between the churches about the meaning and practice of the ordained ministry and the experiences of uniting churches with mutual recognition of ministries offer encouragement for much wider recognition of each other's ministries: "In view of the already mentioned ambivalent New Testament witness, the many irregularities of church history, the intention of faithful ministry in the various traditions, and a desire to be one in the universal Church, could not an initial ministerial unification be accomplished by a *per saltum* acceptance of all existing ministries by the others?"⁷

In 1972 the ecumenically influential *groupe des Dombes* wrote the text, "Pour une réconciliation des ministères."⁸ This group of Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians goes further than mutual recognition of ministries in their attempts to achieve reconciliation of ministries. Reconciliation is only possible on the basis of confession of guilt for the mistakes of the past. For this reason, they have added separate paragraphs for the Protestant churches and for the Roman Catholic Church with concrete instructions for repentance and conversion.⁹

But in the multilateral context of *Faith and Order*, whose members are theologians and official delegates of churches, this step towards recon-

⁷ Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 135.

⁸ *Pour la communion des Eglises. L'apport du Groupe des Dombes 1937–1987* Paris 1988, 55–80.

⁹ For a discussion of the texts of the group of Dombes from the point of view of mutual recognition of ministry, see also J.F. Eagan, "Is BEM's Call for mutual Recognition of Ministry realistic? Review of ten post-Vatican II Dialogues on ordained Ministry," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 4, 677–680.

ciliation is not possible. The last and detailed chapter of the 1974 Accra declaration is entitled “V. Towards the Recognition of and the Reconciliation of Ministries.” This chapter consists of three sections. The title of the first section is “A. The Unity of the church and the Recognition of Ministries” (Ac 88–92); it is based on the importance of mutual recognition of ministries for church unity (Ac 88). Disunity between churches often resulted in the rejection of each other’s ministries. These differences of opinion were often about doctrine or practice of the churches, sometimes about the theology of ministry itself (Ac 89), and issues such as apostolic succession (Ac 90). For some churches, a common understanding of ministry will mean a break-through in their relations, while for others the results will be less spectacular because the problems are situated elsewhere (Ac 91). It is unavoidable that attention will be given to the historic circumstances that caused the differences of opinion, but the discussions must also include the current need for renewal within all churches (Ac 92).

The second section, “B. Different Degrees of Recognition” (Ac 93–100) deals with different gradual steps in mutual recognition:

1. Mutual respect whereby, in any case, the fact that the minister represents his community is recognized.
2. Recognition of the ecclesiastical character of the other faith community, which also gives the ministry within that church a spiritual dimension. This makes intensive cooperation possible.
3. Official recognition that the ministry in the other church is an apostolic ministry that is a gift from Christ. Although this does not create any obligations, it may open the way to complete recognition of each other’s eucharist.
4. Mutual recognition of each other’s churches that immediately implies a mutual recognition of ministries.

The third section, “C. Proposals for Advancing on the Way towards Mutual Recognition,” (Ac 101–106) makes two concrete proposals for mutual recognition of ministries. The first one deals with ordination practice. The rite must take place while invoking the Spirit and with laying on of hands, and with the aim to pass on the apostolic ministry of the Word of God and the sacraments (Ac 102). The second proposal is about steps that can be taken by churches with and without the office of bishop in apostolic succession. The churches with episcopal succession can recognize “the real content” (Ac 103) of the ordained ministry in churches without episcopal succession, and the churches

without episcopal succession can recognize that they miss the fullness of the sign of the apostolic succession. Accra 103 and 104 emphasize the meaning of the episcopal succession as expression of continuity; Accra 105 and 106 describe the bishop's office in its pastoral meaning and as a sign of visible unity.

The nineteen paragraphs of the Accra declaration was reduced to six in the Lima text. The Lima text mainly built upon the third section of the Accra text.

DISCUSSING THE INDIVIDUAL PARAGRAPHS OF THE LIMA TEXT

Paragraph Fifty-One. In order to advance towards the mutual recognition of ministries, deliberate efforts are required. All churches need to examine the forms of ordained ministry and the degree to which the churches are faithful to its original intentions. Churches must be prepared to renew their understanding and their practice of the ordained ministry.

This paragraph, first of all, establishes that the churches need to be prepared to renew their own understanding and their own practice of ministry.

1. While the Montreal text (Mo 152) extensively quoted from the New Delhi declaration about the link between church unity and mutual recognition of ministries, and while the Accra text (Ac 101) still referred to it, the reference to New Delhi has disappeared. Mutual recognition of ministries has now become the self-evident basis for the visible unity of the churches.
2. Paragraph 51 is based on the premise that mutual recognition of ministries does not come automatically. Deliberate efforts are needed from all parties if mutual recognition of ministries is to be achieved.
3. All churches must accept their responsibility in this respect.
4. The churches need to ask themselves if their forms of ordained ministry are still in keeping with the original intentions. In the first place, the churches must—of course—examine their own forms of ordained ministry, but it is quite possible for them to also evaluate the forms of other churches. The text does not specify what these “original intentions” are, but we can assume that they are essentially what the Lima declaration itself has said about them.

5. If churches are not prepared to renew their understanding and their practice of the ordained ministry, there will be no steps towards mutual recognition of ministries. The Accra version of this paragraph expressed this even more sharply; namely, that it is not enough just to have discussions without any commitment.

Paragraph Fifty-Two. *Among the issues that need to be worked on as churches move towards mutual recognition of ministries, that of apostolic succession is of particular importance. Churches in ecumenical conversations can recognize their respective ordained ministries if they are mutually assured of their intention to transmit the ministry of Word and Sacrament in continuity with apostolic times. The act of transmission should be performed in accordance with the apostolic tradition, which includes the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands.*

1. As in the Accra version, ordination is approached in the same way as the sacraments in the scholastic tradition, whereby three aspects are distinguished and established: the intention, the *materia* (laying on of hands), and the *forma* (*epiklesis*).
2. The ordination practice with the invocation of the Spirit and laying on of hands as fixed elements must be aimed at the apostolic succession. Apostolic succession can be recognized when there is an intention to express the link with the apostles in the transmission of the ministry of Word and sacrament. By making apostolicity a condition for mutual recognition of ministry, the text demonstrates that the concept of apostolicity is at the heart of ecumenical theology of the ordained ministry. By formulating this ministerial apostolicity in terms of continuity with apostolic times, the Lima text tends towards a linear-historical rather than a pneumatological approach to the apostolic succession of ministry.
3. The use of the expression “ministry of Word and Sacrament” instead of the classical expression ‘ordained ministry’ is notable.

Paragraph Fifty-Three. *In order to achieve mutual recognition, different steps are required of different churches. For example:*

- a) *Churches which have preserved the episcopal succession are asked to recognize both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry of episkopé in various forms.*

- b) Churches without the episcopal succession, and living in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission, have a ministry of Word and Sacrament, as is evident from the belief, practice, and life of those churches. These churches are asked to realize that the continuity with the church of the apostles finds profound expression in the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that, though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, this sign will strengthen and deepen that continuity. They may need to recover the sign of the episcopal succession.*

This paragraph tells the episcopal and non-episcopal churches how they can move towards mutual recognition of ministries. In comparison with the four paragraphs in the Accra version, the text has become more concise and stronger, but then the findings of paragraph 37 and 38 of the Lima text had already formed the basis for this paragraph. The tone has become more like an invitation and less prescriptive. The questions to be asked of the two groups of churches are presented as ‘examples’ designed to make it easier to discuss the matter.

1. Churches which have preserved the episcopal succession are asked to do two things; namely, to recognize the apostolic content of the ordained ministry in churches without this succession and the acknowledgement that these churches too have a ministry of *episkopé* in various forms.
2. Churches without episcopal succession are, first of all, acknowledged to live in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission. Their faith and practice show that they also have a ministry of Word and sacrament. They are asked to consider the sign of the episcopal succession because this sign of laying on of hands by the bishop can strengthen and deepen the link with the apostolic tradition.
3. In comparison with the Accra text, the formulation has been made more carefully. The word “fullness” (Ac 104), for instance, that was used to qualify apostolic succession has been left out. The formulation is more positive. The paragraph does not say churches without episcopal succession are lacking something, but they can strengthen and deepen their continuity with the apostolic tradition by the sign of episcopal succession.

Paragraph Fifty-Four. *Some churches ordain both men and women, others ordain only men. Differences on this issue raise obstacles to the mutual recognition of ministries. But those obstacles must not be regarded as substantive hindrance for further efforts towards mutual recognition. Openness to each other holds the possibility that the Spirit may well speak to one church through the insights of another. Ecumenical consideration, therefore, should encourage, not restrain, the facing of this question.*

Paragraph 54 contains a call to not avoid the different views with regard to the ordination of men and women in ecumenical discussions about ministry, although it is an additional obstacle to mutual recognition. The paragraph is in line with the final section of the commentary to paragraph 18. Openness to each other holds the possibility that the Spirit may speak to one church through the insights of another. This paragraph is a paraphrase of the final paragraph (69) in the section of the Accra text that deals with the ordination of women (Ac 64–69). While the Louvain text favored a positive evaluation of the ordination of women and, in any case, asked for this matter to be placed on the ecumenical agenda,¹⁰ the Accra text took up a neutral position and deferred the matter to a future ecumenical council. The Lima text restricts itself to a call to not avoid discussing this matter in the ecumenical dialogues.

Paragraph Fifty-Five. *The mutual recognition of churches and their ministries implies decision by the appropriate authorities and a liturgical act from which point unity would be publicly manifest. Several forms of such public act have been proposed: mutual laying on of hands, eucharistic concelebration, solemn worship without a particular rite of recognition, the reading of a text of union during the course of celebration. No one liturgical form would be absolutely required, but in any case it would be necessary to proclaim the accomplishment of mutual recognition publicly. The common celebration of the eucharist would certainly be the place for such an act.*

The final paragraph deals with the form that mutual recognition of ministries between churches would take. The text is the equivalent of that of Accra 99, but it also mentions the need for a prior decision by the relevant ecclesiastical authorities. The main question is how mutual recognition of ministries would be made manifest liturgically. A

¹⁰ "The Ordained Ministry" in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 128–129.

number of suggestions are made. Doubtless, this is in part thanks to the experience gained by the ecumenical movement in the context of the reunification of churches. None of these liturgical forms is absolutely essential, but it would—in any case—be necessary to publicly announce that mutual recognition had been accomplished. The most appropriate context would be a common celebration of the eucharist.

RESPONSES FROM THE REFORMED TRADITION

1. *Concerning the willingness to achieve mutual recognition of ministries*

The commission came to the conclusion¹¹ that not many churches responded to this concluding chapter of the section about ministry with steps towards mutual recognition of ministries. The majority of churches from the Reformed tradition do not feel any particular challenge to say a clear “yes” or “no” in response to the concrete proposal in paragraph 53 to consider the sign of the episcopal succession as expression of continuity in the apostolic tradition. Most of them responded to the proposals to consider the threefold pattern of ministry (§ 25) and to accept the episcopal succession as a sign, but not as a guarantee of continuity and unity of the church (§ 38).

The implicit, basic attitude of most Presbyterian churches is made more explicit by the answer from the Presbyterian Church in Canada: “It should be noted here that we in the Presbyterian Church in Canada do not have a problem with the recognition of the ordained ministries of other churches (...) it has been our historical position that the sacraments and ministerial orders of other churches are, indeed, valid. We recognize the baptism, eucharist and ministry of sister churches to be authentic. We would humbly invite them to do the same for us!”¹² This attitude does not find its origin in superficial tolerance, but in the conviction that where questions about ministry are at issue, they often concern questions about form and questions of secondary importance. What is of fundamental importance is not the messenger, but the message of the gospel. The unity of the church is not built on the ordained ministry, but on the proclamation of the gospel.

¹¹ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 86.

¹² *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 156–157.

2. *Concerning the willingness to consider episcopal ordination*

As far as most churches are concerned, the proposal to consider the introduction of episcopal ordination would be going too far for a number of reasons. First of all, an objection on principle exists against the view that the unity of the churches requires a common structure of ministry:

The New Testament testifies to different orders of ministries. Different orders of ministries can exist side by side in the church. Thus it is possible for different polities of ministry to be valid in the churches. It is not necessary for churches to accept a particular pattern of order, e.g. the threefold pattern of ministry, in order to achieve unity.¹³

When the acceptance of the sign becomes *conditio sine qua non* for unity, does this not mean that the freedom of the gospel is destroyed and that church order is placed above the gospel? Does this not mean that questions of church order are unjustifiably given a soteriological meaning?¹⁴

The most frequent criticism is connected with a feeling of imbalance in what is being asked of episcopal and non-episcopal churches. The episcopal churches are asked only to recognize the apostolicity of the ordained ministry and the exercise of a ministry of oversight within the non-episcopal churches, while the non-episcopal churches are asked to carry out a fundamental change of their church structure.¹⁵ This criticism in its turn evokes another question: Does this not reduce the ecumenical dialogue to a political balancing act?¹⁶

¹³ See the answer from the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 152.

¹⁴ See question 57 of the list of questions drawn up by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches for its member churches as guideline when studying the Lima report: "57. If we have the substance but lack the sign (which, it might be agreed, is preferable to possessing the sign and lacking the substance) would an insistence on reception of the sign as a *sine qua non* of union be to place order above the gospel?," in A.P.F. Sell, "Responding to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: A word to the Reformed Churches," *The Reformed World* 38 (1984) 3, 197.

¹⁵ See the response from the Church of Scotland in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. I, 96; the response from the Presbyterian Church in Canada in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 158; and the response from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 219.

¹⁶ A.P.F. Sell published an overview of the first series of responses to BEM in *The Reformed World* 39 (1986) 3, 549–565. Reid responded to that with the article "Reformed Responses to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: A Commentary," 683–692. On 686 he writes: "We are not in the situation of bargain-hunters haggling with street barrow boys, where indeed tit-for-that and equality of give-and-take are the order of the day."

Sometimes it is obvious that there is doubt about the willingness of the episcopal churches to do what Lima asks of them. Do the episcopal churches really accept the continuity in the apostolic faith in the non-episcopal churches (§37), and, on that basis, are they willing to recognize the ministries in non-episcopal churches? Do the episcopal churches accept that episcopal ordination is only a sign, and are the episcopal churches really willing to reform their own structure?¹⁷ Sometimes the respondents do not believe in the possibility that the compromise of paragraph 53 will work because it is based on two different theological options.¹⁸ Does the acceptance of the laying on of hands by a bishop also mean the acceptance of sacramentality of ordination and the acceptance of the hierarchical, only authentic ministry of teaching and oversight?¹⁹

The Accra version was heavily criticized by non-episcopal churches because of the suggestion that these churches are lacking something because they do not have episcopal succession. The Presbyterian L.S. Mudge, a member of the group which prepared the draft text for Lima, defends the new Lima text. He pleads for acceptance of the sign of episcopal succession, not because the non-episcopal churches lack apostolic content, but because in this way our common apostolicity can be expressed to the world in one sign.²⁰

Ecumenical dialogue that sinks to this level is profoundly unworthy. What is necessary for the sake of unity is necessary, and equality/inequality have no place. Churches farther from the truth have a longer way to go."

¹⁷ See the response from the Presbyterian Church of Wales in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 172–173.

¹⁸ See the response from the United Protestant Church in Belgium in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 178: "For this reason the compromise solution proposed in §53 will not work in practice: churches which already have bishops would pass over in silence the question of the historical and theological basis for the episcopal ministry, while those without bishops would accept the figure of the bishop, but without accepting its traditional theological implications."

¹⁹ Frieling, "Amt," 157.

²⁰ Mudge, "A Reformed Theologian views the BEM Documents," 131–140; in particular, 135: "Of importance, moreover, is the recognition which stands over this whole section, that what we recover in the achievement of unity is a singular succession of episcopal ministry as 'sign' of apostolicity, not the reality of apostolicity as such, which is affirmed to be present in churches faithful to the gospel already. The recovery of the 'sign' means agreement on a common means of expressing our existing apostolicity before the world, not the recovery by some of what has been maintained all along only by others."

3. *Concerning the need to continue the dialogue about the ordination of women*

A number of churches express their disappointment about the very cautious call not to avoid the dialogue about the ordination of women and not to make this point a stumbling block for mutual recognition of ministries. Some churches find this expression ambiguous;²¹ others expressly demand that this subject be discussed.²²

LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION

1. *Concerning the necessity to reflect on the Reformed tradition's own theology of ministry*

Paragraph 51 is first and foremost an invitation to the churches to examine their own theology and practice of ministry. This is a challenge to the Reformed tradition. This study is an attempt to make a start with this.

2. *Concerning episcopal ordination*

Paragraph 53b asks the presbyterian tradition to consider episcopal ordination as a sign to deepen and strengthen the apostolic tradition in the church. In reality, the commission asks the non-episcopal churches to change their church structure. This cannot be done for purely formal reasons or because of considerations of a political nature. It is possible only when urgent theological aspects are at stake. Such considerations are not presented in this paragraph, but previous chapters of the text contain arguments. In our opinion, the most important reason for considering an episcopal structure is the absence of a personal aspect of *episkopé* at the level beyond the local in most churches of the Reformed tradition. Such a person could contribute better to the representation of the church's unity and continuity in his area. For this reason, we encourage the churches of the Reformed tradition to seriously consider this possibility.

²¹ See the response from the Presbyterian Church in Canada in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. II, 157.

²² See the response from the Presbyterian Church (USA) in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. III, 204, and the response from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in *Churches respond to BEM*, vol. IV, 108.

CONCLUSION

The concrete demand for mutual recognition of ministries has had only limited success. This is not only due to the inability of the non-episcopal churches to recognize the importance of the episcopal ministry and the episcopal succession for the mutual recognition of ministries. The main cause is the refusal by the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches to consider the concluding chapter. For the Roman Catholic Church, sacramental ordination is a necessity. The Orthodox churches indicate that the fundamental ecclesiological problem is not mutual recognition of ministry, but recognition of the church. In particular, whether this church in which the ordained ministry is exercised is truly church as contained in the Apostles Creed. The Roman Catholic Church concurs with this. Recognition of ministries cannot be separated from the question about the ecclesiological character of the Christian community in which that ministry is exercised.²³ For these churches, therefore, the issue of faith and identity of the church is fundamental.

The commission admits that in the concluding chapter it has not made it sufficiently clear that the recognition of ministries of other churches is not meant to be act in isolation, but that it must be the result of a wider and more complex process. "Such a process would include for example the factual acceptance of ministries as they are exercised in another church in serving the gospel of Jesus Christ through word and sacrament, the reality of the function of *episkopé* in different forms, and the intention and forms of transmitting the ministry in continuity with apostolic times (cf. M. 52)." The commission also confirms the ecclesiological context of the ordained ministry: "Essential to such a process would be the acknowledgement of an inter-relationship between the understanding and reality of the ordained ministry and the understanding and reality of the church." It is in this broader ecclesiological framework that the reflection about mutual recognition of ministries will have to take place.²⁴

Ten years later in *Confessing the one Faith*, the commission has become more cautious: it no longer emphasizes episcopal succession as a strong

²³ See the summary of the responses in *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 86–87.

²⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990*, 129–130.

expression of apostolic succession. What in BEM was a clear recommendation has been reduced to an open question.²⁵

Whether the demand for mutual recognition of ministry can be successfully tackled depends on a number of factors. The Roman Catholic Church keeps insisting that *communio* with Rome is a precondition for recognition of ministries. It is also possible that some forms of episcopacy will be recognized while others are not. A Roman Catholic bishop differs theologically from a Lutheran or an Orthodox one; within the various traditions, differences often exist between different countries. In our opinion, mutual recognition of ministries will be successful only when the perspective of reconciliation becomes stronger right from the start—as was suggested by the *groupe des Dombes* in its proposal for reconciliation of ministries. This reconciliation will be possible only when guilt is accepted for what has gone wrong in the past. We read in the responses from different churches, e.g., with respect to the recommendation of episcopal succession, that no thought has been given to negative experiences with the Catholic bishops in the sixteenth century. We must assume that there is hurt on both sides. To achieve reconciliation it must be possible for this mutual pain to be acknowledged and for mutual guilt to be accepted. The author of this study found out how difficult this is when he met with members of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. To admit that one's spiritual forbears made errors can be very threatening to one's identity. When faith communities are prepared to confess their guilt, this is a miracle. On the road which the churches try to walk together, we hear the words that were spoken to Abraham and Sara: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14a). These words are still as full of promise and challenge as they were then.

²⁵ *Confessing the One Faith*, n° 241, commentary.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY: QUESTIONS BY AND FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION

In this section, we draw up the balance sheet of the analysis of the ministry part of the BEM document. We describe the broad outlines and the most important results in order to get a clear picture of the key issues in the interaction between Reformed and ecumenical theology of ministry. We begin with a description of two elements that made the discussion difficult from the point of view of the Reformed tradition: lack of knowledge of the ecumenical theology of *Faith and Order*, and linguistic and structural alienation. We continue with the points where there are affinities between ecumenical theology and the Reformed tradition. After that, we indicate which aspects of ordained ministry still remain unsolved for the Reformed tradition at the current stage. In conclusion, we list the lessons and remaining questions for the Reformed tradition.

TWO STUMBLING BLOCKS FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION

Lack of Knowledge of the Ecumenical Theology of Faith and Order

As a theological explanation, BEM can be understood and evaluated properly only when it is seen in the broader framework of the vision of the World Council of Churches and the theological work of *Faith and Order*, in particular. This means that a basic insight into the way in which the commission has approached baptism, eucharist, and ministry in the fifty years prior to BEM is absolutely essential. In their responses to BEM, many theologians and churches demonstrated their ignorance of the methodological evolution that *Faith and Order* went through. Those who only see the ecumenical theological debate as taking note of and giving an explanation for the various theological traditions are very likely to evaluate a text like BEM, which is the result of a much more ambitious approach, negatively and to reject it as a dangerous and wicked aberration. A minimum of confidence in the value of building

a joint theology of ministry on the basis of common Christological, pneumatological, and ecclesiological principles is essential for a serious discussion about the results of the Lima text.

Those who have no insight into the scope of the aims of *Faith and Order* and the World Council of Churches will tend to either expect too little or too much. The commission has set its aims quite high. The theological debate about ministry is concentrated on mutual recognition of ministries in order to increase visible unity. Visible unity is not an aim in itself, but is aimed at the renewal of the world. Some responses from churches that say that it is all wonderful and interesting are suspiciously positive because they do not mention the actual consequences for the churches' theology and practice. They demonstrate that the expectations of the ecumenical debate are very low. Other responses show expectations that are too high. Because they expect a comprehensive theology of ministry, they diligently identify all the aspects that are missing. They show that they have not sufficiently realized that the ambitious and concrete aims are limited. BEM theologizes only about the issues that are connected with mutual recognition of ministries which will lead to the visible unity of the church.

Those who evaluate BEM must also know what a convergence text is. Too many responses from churches and theologians demonstrated that they did not understand the difference between a convergence and a consensus text. Another source of misunderstanding was the concept of 'reception.' The renowned, Reformed theologian Marcus Barth, whom we quoted in the introduction, is a good example of this. He thought that reception meant acceptance without criticism. Although the commission acknowledged that it was, in part, responsible for this misunderstanding due to insufficient explanation, M. Barth's response does reveal a worrying degree of lack of understanding of the meaning this word had acquired within the ecumenical movement in the last few decades. To understand the commission's intentions in its presentation of BEM, it was also necessary to be familiar with its own hermeneutics, which has been developed since the conference in Montreal in 1963. By being too eager in giving the rallying cry, *Sola Scriptura*, a number of churches demonstrated that they had not adequately processed these hermeneutical developments. This was also why they were unable to deal with the demand for the recognition of the faith through the ages. They proved to be unable to understand the demand for the apostolic tradition as an impulse to look further than the limits of their own tradition.

Alienating Elements in BEM

In their response to the Lima text, a number of churches from the Reformed tradition indicated that they did not feel much affinity with this document; this applied, in particular, to the section about ministry. There are a number of reasons that could be given for this that all strengthened the impression of alienation. Some pointed to the terminology that is closer to the Catholic than to the Reformed tradition. The word “ordination,” discussed in previous paragraphs, is an example of this. The expression, “the local eucharistic community,”¹ is another example. Within the section about ministry, this alienation is made stronger because the ordained ministry is discussed in terms of the central concept, “apostolic succession,” and by opting for the threefold pattern of ministry of bishop-presbyter-deacon—a structure of ministry that is uncommon to the Reformed tradition. The complete absence of Reformed elders in the text made it very difficult for a bridge to be built to ministry in BEM.

All these elements together—the lack of familiarity with the ecumenical theology of ministry, the terminology, and the concepts and the structure proposals in BEM itself—formed an important barrier to the start of a broad dialogue between an ecumenical and a Reformed theology of ministry. Sometimes the result was that churches or theologians hardly responded at all; sometimes it caused a negative attitude, and sometimes it was not possible to indicate exactly where the weak points in the Lima text were from the point of view of the respondents’ own tradition. But more than anything else, it was a missed opportunity for the Reformed tradition itself. The elements that the section of the Lima document about ministry contributed to a deepening of the thought process about the churches’ own theology of ministry and practice were only sporadically noticed and processed.

¹ See, among others, the response from the Presbyterian Church (USA), *Churches respond to BEM*, Vol. III, 200, which makes the point that this sacramental and eucharistic terminology does not do justice to the relevance of ministry for the whole people of God.

RECOGNIZABLE ELEMENTS FOR
THE REFORMED THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

On closer inspection, it turns out that many elements from BEM's section about ministry are in agreement with fundamental options of the Reformed theology of ministry. We shall identify the similarities for each chapter of the section about ministry of the Lima document.

1. The Reformed tradition also wants to place its theology of ministry in the framework of the calling of the whole people of God that is built on a Trinitarian-based ecclesiology with missionary and eschatological aspects. The key question about ministry (§ 6) is asked in a way that the Reformed tradition can respond to.
2. What makes the ordained ministry unique is discussed in a combination of functional elements—proclaiming the Word and celebrating the sacraments in order to provide leadership for the faith community—and symbolic language; in particular, when discussing the representation of Christ. Reformed theology traditionally sees a close link between responsibility for proclaiming the Word and for presidency at the Lord's Table. In addition, the balanced way in which exercising authority is formulated; namely, on the basis of the Word and with the cooperation of the faith community, can count on approval from the Reformed tradition.
3. Although there are fewer interfaces with the chapter about the forms of ordained ministry, the complementary nature of personal, collegial, and communal exercise of ministry is sure to find approval within the Reformed tradition. There is also approval for the freedom to stimulate the charisms present in the community that take the form of all sorts of special ministries.
4. Originally, the chapter about apostolic succession was the one with which there was least affinity. Nevertheless, bridges have been built to the Reformed tradition. To give an example: a differentiation is made between the apostolic tradition and the succession in the apostolic ministry, and the apostolic tradition has been drawn in broad outlines. The importance of the apostolic succession is made relative in a number of ways: the place of the orderly transmission as only one aspect of the apostolic tradition as a whole, the recognition that other forms of orderly transfer of ministry than episcopal succession are possible, and the recognition that episcopal succession does not offer a guarantee for continuity and unity of the church.

5. The Reformed tradition is familiar with an ordination rite with the elements of invoking the Holy Spirit and laying on of hands. The emphasis on the communal and liturgical aspect of ordination are sure to meet with approval, as well as the conditions for ordination in respect of calling, professionalization, preparation, the lifelong calling, and the grounds for refusal to be rejected.
6. Within the Reformed tradition, a large degree of willingness to recognize the ministries of other churches is generally observed.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE ECUMENICAL DEBATE ABOUT MINISTRY
FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE REFORMED TRADITION

All points of recognition and agreements do not remove the fact that many elements still must remain on the agenda of the ecumenical debate about ministry from the point of view of the Reformed tradition; this applies even after convergence has been achieved in the Lima text and after the evaluation by the commission of the responses from the churches. Many of these issues are problem areas even within the Reformed tradition. They are therefore not given out of a sense of arrogance.

In the first place, a number of classic sensibilities that determine the thinking about ministry within Reformed theology since the Reformation cannot be avoided. Due to the redefinition of ministry in the church as ministry of the Word, a permanent aversion exists to ontological formulations of the essence of ministry and function descriptions in terms of sacerdotal priesthood. In addition, a deep-seated fear of misuse of power by ministers is expressed—as can be seen from the countless responses from churches that are on their guard against a hierarchical ministry, clericalization of ministry, and a ministry in the church that takes the place of Christ. Finally, there is the fear that too much emphasis on ministry in the church might mean that ministerial work and tradition become the determining factor for the truth of the gospel in the church instead of the word of God.

The theology of ministry in the Lima document is written in the knowledge that the elements described above would be unacceptable for churches with their roots in the Reformation, and that the formulations used in the final text were an attempt to prevent these objections. Therefore the opinion that is sometimes uttered—that the

Reformed delegates were not paying attention during the development of the text—is not justified. On the other hand, it is necessary for the Reformed tradition to continue voicing its opposition to possible developments in that direction. For this reason, it is natural that it repeats its fears of a development towards ministerial hierarchy when the proposal for a threefold model of ministry is made.

The hermeneutical question in connection with the relationship between scripture and tradition is another element from the controversies in the Reformation that regularly turns up in the responses from the churches. Even though scripture does not offer a blueprint for ministry, many Reformed churches asked how the witness of scripture remains normative for ministry in the church, and they were correct in asking that question. The fact that there are very few references to scripture in the text of the section about ministry, and that the arguments are based on traditions of the early churches is seen as a warning sign. Because of its origin, the Reformed tradition must continue to demand that the relationship between scripture and the traditions be constantly reviewed in the theology of ministry.

These responses apply to the whole text, but in addition to them there are also a number of specific remarks that are connected with the individual chapters of the Lima text about ministry. Below follows a summary per chapter.

1. The first chapter, *The Calling of the Whole People of God*, was positively received—even enthusiastically—by Reformed churches and theologians. However, the expectations that were raised in this ecclesiological introduction were not fulfilled for many people in the outworking in the theology of ministry. For this reason, there is a constant demand for more consistency in elaborating the ecclesiological principles contained in the first six introductory paragraphs in the discussion about the section about ministry. The relationship with the gifts and responsibilities of the whole people of God could have been elaborated more strongly. The missionary aspect is present in the rest of the text, but it has been pushed into the background. Finally, the pneumatological and eschatological elements of the structure of ministry demand a better elaboration.

2. In the second chapter, *The Church and the Ordained Ministry*, the following elements demand clarification: the use of the qualification ‘constitutive’ for ministry in the church, the unclear relationship between the

apostles and later office bearers, the theological reflection on Israel and the offices in the Old Testament, and the ordination of women.

3. The new, third chapter in the Lima version about *The Forms of the Ordained Ministry* did not receive a favorable reception within the Reformed tradition, in general, because the threefold ministry failed to be convincing. The function description of the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon were too concise, and the collegial and communal aspects in the exercise of *episkopé* in the church remained too sketchy. The silence about history; in particular, about the failure of bishops in the Reformation, was experienced as a shortcoming. It remained unclear how a bishop gives spiritual leadership to his church, and how it is possible to achieve greater adhesion between churches and traditions. The status and functions of the office of deacon also need further clarification.

4. Because traditionally the Reformed churches do not express the meaning of ministry in the church in terms of succession in the apostolic tradition and because, in particular, they do not practice episcopal succession, the fourth chapter, *Succession in the Apostolic Tradition*, causes most problems. Because the essence of the ordained ministry is expressed in the concept of the apostolic succession according to Catholic conviction, affinity with this concept is absent. The Reformed tradition appreciates the attempt to build bridges to churches who do not know this concept, but the classic objections and reservations remain in force. This revolves mainly around the fear that evangelical legitimacy is no longer connected with the continuity of scriptural witness, but with the legitimate transfer of ministerial responsibility. As in the proposal for the threefold structure of ministry, a serious consideration of experiences from history is lacking: at the time of the Reformation, the legitimate Catholic bishops who said that they stood in the apostolic succession worked with all their might against the reformation of the church according to the evangelic model. Lack of scriptural underpinning makes this fear even stronger. H.-M. Barth wrote the most thorough analysis of this section. In particular, his analysis of the terms ‘apostle’ and ‘apostolic’ in the Lima text are an encouragement to further plan research into the apostolicity of the church and ministry.

5. In the fifth chapter, *The Ordination*, the sacramentality of this rite is the traditional point of controversy. This is not only because theologians and churches fear that ordination is made into a sacrament, but they also fear that the ordained ministers will be seen ontologically different from other church members and that ordained ministers become part of a clerical 'estate.' For this reason, the Reformed tradition continues to ask for further study of the concepts 'sacrament' and 'sacramentality.' A proposal is formulated to describe the function of the ordained ministry more explicitly in the ordination rite. The relation between the ordained ministry and exercising power within the church needs further clarification. The local congregation does not play a role in the election of ordained ministers, and gender is missing from the list of disqualification criteria that must be rejected. Finally, there is the demand for a more detailed theological argument against reordination.

6. In general, churches from the Reformed tradition do not have substantial problems with the proposal for recognition of ministries in other churches, but the demand to consider episcopal ordination still evokes fear and scepticism.

LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION

In our opinion, this intense confrontation with an ecumenical theology of ministry supplied a rich harvest of lessons and questions for the Reformed tradition.

1. The ecclesiological introduction leads to questions about ecclesiology in the Reformed tradition. To what extent do the Reformed churches function as a faith community that has been given gifts of grace? To what extent is the missionary basis of the ecclesiology reflected in the view of ministry of the Reformed tradition?
2. The chapter, *The Church and the Ordained Ministry*, has a variety of lessons.
 - a. The essence of ministry in the church cannot be completely expressed through functional descriptions; it needs a symbolic terminology which expresses that the minister refers to Christ. In the

faith community, the minister is a symbol of Christ on the basis of his or her function as servant to the Word.

- b. The ordained ministry in the church is service to and sign of the unity of the church. This applies to the unity of the local faith community as well as to the link between the local level and that beyond the local.
- c. The authority of the ordained ministers cannot be separated from their symbolic function as representatives of Christ and as sign of unity.
- d. Can more personal leadership on the level beyond the local prevent bureaucratic leadership within Reformed churches?
- e. The importance of the priestly-liturgical functioning of ordained ministers may have consequences for the theological identity and the training of ordained ministers.

3. The chapter, *The Forms of the Ordained Ministry*, also contains some lessons and questions for the Reformed tradition.

- a. The question about the enduring importance of the structure of ordained ministry from the past and guided by the Spirit.
- b. The added value of a personally exercised pastoral and representative ministry of a bishop, which symbolizes the unity and continuity of the church.
- c. The improvement of the collegial and communal exercise of ministry.
- d. The value of the council of ministers as policy-preparing body within the church.
- e. The meaning of being church at the level beyond the local.
- f. The status of the Reformed office of elders and deacons.
- g. The ministerial status and structure of a large range of gifts and ministries within the church.

4. The lessons presented by the chapter about *The Succession in the Apostolic Tradition* concentrate on the breadth of continuity in the apostolic tradition. The Reformed tradition tends to narrow the apostolic tradition to adherence to the scriptural witness. In the past, much less attention was given to the importance of the uninterrupted celebration of the sacraments and to the transfer of ministerial responsibility in the continuity in the apostolic tradition. The synchronous and eschatological aspects of the apostolic tradition also remained too much in the

shadows, and the result was a narrow apostolicity concept that lacks the missionary-ecumenical dimension. Can episcopal succession strengthen the expression of the apostolicity of the church?

5. The fifth chapter *The Ordination* has the following issues for the Reformed tradition:

- a. The congruence of the ordination liturgies with the theology of ministry within the Reformed churches.
- b. The compatibility of ordination as sacramental sign with the Reformed tradition.
- c. Whether elders and deacons should be ordained or not.
- d. The sense or lack of sense of a time limit to the service of elders and deacons within the church.

PART THREE

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A REFORMED
THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

After our study of the sources of Reformed and ecumenical theology of ministry, we want to use this concluding chapter to supply a number of building blocks for a new theology of ministry from the perspective of the Reformed tradition. In this way, we shall try to combine the results of the analyses into a cohesive structure that can be helpful in finding the way forward for ecclesiology as well as for theory and practice of how ministries function within the church.

In the first instance, these building blocks originate in the Reformed tradition. Ecclesiology and theology of ministry are not the most important aspects of Reformed theology, but they traditionally form part of it and are connected with and result from the specific fundamental theological choices and emphases of the Reformed tradition in general. The most impressive example of this can be found in Calvin's *Institutes*. The fourth book of the *Institutes*, containing his ecclesiology, and, in particular, the third chapter about theology of ministry is an integral part of his theology and not an appendix. For this reason, we purposely search for continuity and connection with this tradition. But we do not want to try to copy the models from the sixteenth century. That is not possible, especially because our analysis of Calvin's theology of ministry demonstrated how his own thinking about this particular point often had a tentative and provisional character. We also found that other theologians and a number of early confessions of faith within the Reformed tradition emphasized different aspects of the theology of ministry. Being faithful to Calvin's theology, therefore, does not consist of copying or merely defending his writings, but of working in accordance with his method; namely, looking for a theology of ministry that is in keeping with the time we live in, in agreement with the witness found in scripture, and in discussion with the theologians of the early church. Our time and place ask for a model that is contemporary. This means, for instance, that the structure of ministry that flourished in an environment of enlightened citizens with aristocratic tendencies will have to be adjusted to fit in with a culture in which all people have become more emancipated. We have restricted ourselves to the most fundamental elements in the Reformed theology of ministry that, in our opinion, must be preserved for future generations.

Other building blocks come from an analysis of ecumenical theology of ministry. That is not very surprising. Our study has tried to under-

stand and evaluate the ecumenical theology of ministry in an open, non-defensive way. It is our firm conviction that the Reformed tradition can benefit from the results of the ecumenical debate about ministry. It will give the Reformed theology of ministry a higher profile. It will not only show which elements have a broad ecumenical base, but also where the Reformed tradition places its own emphases. It will also become clear which aspects in the Reformed tradition have not or have not adequately been elaborated, although they have to be regarded as essential for a well-balanced theology of ministry.

In combination all these building blocks provide the contours of a house, but no more than that. We do not present a completely finished home. This limited nature of the final result is, first of all, caused by the limitations of our study. We only read a limited, but—in our opinion—sound, selection of Reformed source texts. The history of ecumenical theological debate about ministry has taught us that modesty about the possible results is desirable. Attempts to create a uniform theology of ministry have ceased, and instead people concentrate on demolishing obstacles to mutual recognition of ministry. Finally, the Reformed theology of ministry and the Reformed faith are strongly influenced by time and place. This contextual character makes it impossible to present a theology of ministry as a finished home. This awareness of contextuality is reinforced in our post-modern society.

Our response to the passage concerned in the Lima text has made it clear that we see no reason to deny women in the church access to ordination. If in the remainder of this concluding chapter we only use masculine pronouns when referring to minister, this is done purely on practical grounds. Female ministers are included in the masculine pronouns in our use of language.

Continued Sensitivity for Potential Misuse of Power

The reason for theologizing about ministry in the Reformation is the horror over the misuse of power by office bearers in the church: office bearers—in particular, doctors in theology, bishops, and the pope—tried to place and keep the free Word of God under their own authority. For this reason, the Reformers wanted to develop a new theology and structure of ministry. This was why Luther restricted the power of office bearers in the church by subjugating their authority to the power of the Word and by pointing to the authority of the congregation as a community of baptized and pneumatologically blessed believers.

The Calvinist tradition restricted the power of the individual minister even further by giving presbytery and synod, collegial governing bodies within the church, much more decision making authority. This restriction of power revolved around the meaning of ministry in the church: ordained ministry is service to the Word. This meant that ministry was given its place in the church: ministry in the church does not exist for the sake of power in itself, its sole purpose is to create the right conditions for God to come to his people through his living Word. Another important change took place with regard to the form of ministry: it was no longer laid down in ontological, but in functional terms. As a result, the risk diminished that ministry would develop its own importance that was unconnected to the Word.

The Reformers soon discovered, however, that this did not eliminate the problem of power in the church because giving leadership and the exercising power by ministers remained a necessity. Just like the churches of the first centuries, the Reformed congregations were faced by internal and external threats. On the one hand, they wanted to avoid the dangers of doctrinal confusion, heresy, and fragmentation that were threats posed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptist movement. On the other hand, they wanted to prevent the church from being robbed of its fundamental freedom by interference by the government. During the Reformation, it became clear that spiritual leadership by ministers was essential if the freedom of the church under the Word was to be safeguarded. Misuse of power by ministers had to be avoided, but it was not possible to do that without ministerial authority. For this reason, the Reformers came to the conclusion that ministry in the church as service to the Word was a necessity and that proclamation by ministers was necessary for the salvation of the people.

A certain ambivalence towards ministry in the church developed in the Reformed tradition: on the one hand, a constant alertness, reticence, and critical attitude towards ministry as a potential instrument of power misuse; on the other hand, the realization that ministerial leadership was needed in the church. The first attitude, historically the first one to develop, very often determines how the debate about ministry develops. A strong fear of ministerial manipulation is dominant. To a certain degree, it is a strong point of Reformed theology.

In the ecumenical debate this is one of the most important tasks of the Reformed tradition. It must continue to ask questions about misuse of power. The Reformed churches admirably carried out this task

in their response to the ministry section of the Lima text. This is why they have problems with a word such as 'constitutive,' which might suggest that it is not the Word but ministry that forms the basis for salvation. And does the minister not usurp the place of Christ as 'focus of unity'? Is the assumption of continuity between apostles and ministers in later times too strong? Is the use of the expression 'representative of Christ' for the minister, with its connotations of replacement, without risk? Does the term 'priest' for ministers not short-change the unique priesthood of Christ, and does this not encourage the development of a separate, ministerial, clerical group with its own claims to power? The lack of emphasis on collegiality within ministry causes resentment, and the pleas for a personally exercised ministry of *episkopé* cause suspicion. Power in the hand of one person needs much caution, not least when this power is in the hands of a bishop at the level beyond the local. Did the commission sufficiently weigh the dangers of encroaching hierarchy when making the proposal for threefold ministry? Is the failure to mention the pope a sign of a hidden agenda? Is the debate about apostolic succession not about legitimacy and therefore about power? The hesitation to express 'ordination' in terms of 'consecration' is connected with fear of making the rite into a sacrament and fear of the ontologization of ministry, which makes it a power in its own right that is independent of the Word.

It is encouraging to find that the ecumenical theology of ministry tackles the element of misuse of power. In 1997 the *Faith and Order* commission organized a consultation about '*Episkopé* and Episcopacy' in Strasbourg. One of the work groups wrote introductory theological reflections. A third of that text dealt with power and its potential misuse. The last sentence of the report speaks for itself: "We have devoted significant attention to the area of power because it is precisely in the use and abuse of power that the gifts and distortions of oversight find a fulcrum point."¹

This critical attitude towards authoritative relations within the church and in the ministry, in particular, must be aimed at the Reformed churches' own practice as well, and results in a permanent task

¹ "Preliminary Theological Reflections. Report of Group II" of the consultation in Strasbourg, 2 April to 9 April 1997 can be found in P.C. Bouteneff and A.D. Falconer (eds.), *Episkopé and Episcopacy and the Quest for Visible Unity. Two consultations* (Faith and Order Paper 183) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1999), 34–39. The quotation can be found on 39.

for the Reformed tradition. Psychology, sociology, and applied social science can help in analyzing how power operates. How urgent and pressing this subject is is proved by the fact that in the last decade sexual abuse in pastoral relations has become much less of a taboo subject. In the last few decades, it has also become ever more obvious that the fierce opposition to women ministers in the church was not exclusively based on theological grounds, but also on a fear of the loss of power held by men. The final example is the interaction between the generations that is also a power factor in the exercise of ministry, and the difficulty this often creates in effecting changes in the church.

When the Reformed tradition theologizes about ministry, it must not lose sight of the fact that problems related to power always play an important part in questions about ministry. If it wants to retain its credibility, it must be aware of the tendency to speak in a veiled way about ministry in the church. Ministry in the church is service to the Word and serves to charismatically build up the church, but this must not hide the fact that ministry is involved in leadership in the church and therefore in power. Exercise of ministry is meant to be service, but this does not mean that it is not exercise of power. Calvin makes this quite clear in his chapter about ministry: "Iam de ordine dicendum est quo Ecclesiam suam gubernari voluit Dominus" (*Institutes* IV.III.1). Ministry has to do with government and with leading the church. Thinking about ministry involves reflecting about giving leadership to the church, about being asked which direction the church takes, and accepting responsibility for that direction. It is, in fact, about authority and power to govern the church as faith community. This clarity is sometimes in danger of being lost due to the emphasis on the serving character of ministry within the Calvinist tradition. We refer to a number of significant examples cited by M. den Dulk.² In the classical Reformed dogmatics of H. Heppe, he says: "And thus human mediation of grace ordered by God is called ministry, because it does not consist of governorship over the souls but it is a service (...)"³ Another formula can be found in Barmer thesis IV: "Die verschiedenen Ämter in der Kirche begründen keine Herrschaft der einen über die andern,

² M. den Dulk, "De verzoeking Christus te representeren" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?*, 121.

³ "Und zwar wird diese von Gott geordnete menschliche Vermittlung des Heils darum *ministerium* genannt, weil sie nicht in Herrschaft über die Seelen besteht, sondern ein *Dienst* ist," H. Heppe and E. Bizer, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Neukirchen 1958), 529 and 544.

sondern die Ausübung des der ganzen Gemeinde anvertrauten und befohlenen Dienstes.” Finally, we refer to a recent article by A. van de Beek in which he analyzes why even the Protestant churches, who only want to recognize the authority of the Word, have not freed themselves from the authority question in the church. The revulsion of ministerial hierarchy leads to a bureaucratic structure in which nobody has the final responsibility and in which power is shadowy: “... the expert minister, the serving elder, the converted or committed member of the congregation, the church governor or official or faceless commission all have power. Up to a point they all have their power. They also limit each other’s power. But because they all work in different areas the power in their own area is very often greater than that of the bishops.”⁴

Developing a Theology of Ministry on the Basis of asking the Right Questions

Sensitivity to and a healthy suspicion of the relationship between ministry and power can be played like a trump card in the ecumenical debate, but they can also become a stumbling block that prevents the participants in the debate from really understanding the issues involved. This happens when sensitivity to the misuse of power develops into prejudice that causes any real inner freedom towards the subject under discussion to be lost. In that case, the fear of misuse of power takes on a blinding, obsessive character. A number of examples of this can be found in the responses to the section about ministry of the Lima text.

The razor-sharp analysis of the apostolic succession in the Lima text written by H.-M. Barth⁵ does not escape this trap. He reminds us of the risk that ministry starts to function in the apostolic succession divorced from the Word, and that, in this way, a hierarchical principle with consecration and teaching authority is introduced into the structure of the church. In his opinion, it is the duty of theologians to warn believers

⁴ “... de deskundige dominee, de gezeten ouderling, het bekeerde of geëngageerde gemeentelid, de kerkelijke bestuurder of ambtenaar of de gezichtsloze commissie hebben allemaal macht. Zij hebben hun macht alleen tot op zekere hoogte. Ze perken elkaars macht ook in. Maar doordat ze op verschillende terreinen werken is de mach op hun eigen terrein vaak groter dan die van de bisschoppen.” A. van de Beek, “Kerk en macht” in J. Haers, T. Merrigan & P. de Mei (red.), “*Volk van God en gemeenschap van de gelovigen*”. *Pleidooien voor een zorgzame kerkopbouw. Aangeboden aan Professor Robrecht Michiels bij zijn emeritaat* (Averbode: Altoria, 1999), 499–511; in particular 508.

⁵ Barth, “Apostolizität’ und ‘Sukzession’,” 339–357.

of the possible dangers of episcopal succession. For this reason, he suggests time-limiting the ministerial exercise of power within the church and attaching more importance to the priesthood of all believers. In doing so, he formulates the classical objections made by the Protestant tradition to the apostolic succession under the pretence of restricting potential misuse of power by ministers. He is unable, however, to rise above the power problems and fails to see anything else but an attempt to legitimize power behind the notion of 'apostolic succession.' The suspicion of power blocks the possibility to honor 'apostolic succession' as a question to the Reformed tradition, and the only result is that he confirms the classical theses.

A current example of this prejudice based on fear of ministerial power can be found in two studies by M. den Dulk about ministry in the church.⁶ In the first publication, he reminds us of an amendment of the formulation of the prayer "May God govern you in your ministry" in the classical Reformed formulation of The Hague 1586 to: "May God bless you in your ministry" in the order of service for the ordination of ministers in the *Proeven voor eredienst* dated 1989.⁷ According to Den Dulk, this change, which was a sort of Freudian slip, would camouflage the ministerial power relationships and illustrates the difficult balancing act of the Calvinist tradition between a high and a low regard for ministry. According to the author, this ambiguity towards ministry as power factor is caused by the construction of Calvin's *Institutes*. The author detects a contrast between the third book with its theme 'the power of God to give mankind an incomparable freedom in the Spirit' and the fourth book, whose theme is 'the power God gave mankind to maintain that freedom.' In our opinion, this contrast between divine power in the third book and human power in the fourth book does not do justice to the cohesion between the two books. In reality, both the third and the fourth book deal with the work of the Spirit. In the third book, the work of the Spirit within the individual human being takes center stage; the fourth book deals with the external means that the Spirit uses with a view to the salvation of humankind, such as: the church, ministries, the sacraments, and the government. Therefore,

⁶ M. den Dulk, "De verzoeking Christus te representeren" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?*, 115–129 and idem, *Vijf kansen. Een theologie die begint bij Mozes*, (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1998), 170–194.

⁷ *Bevestiging van ambtsdragers. Proeven voor de eredienst, aflevering 2*, 51. This publication was presented by the Commissie Dienstboek of the Samenwerkingsorgaan voor de Eredienst of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

the sharp contrast between the human structures in book four and the power of the Spirit in book three is not correct.

In the second text about ministry and power, another contrast is constructed—this time between Luther and Calvin. For Den Dulk, the fire used in burning the papal bull on 10 December 1520 is the symbol *par excellence* of Luther's protest against human inequality of power in the existing ecclesiastical law. He battled against that inequality by allowing all believers to share in ministry on the basis of the freedom given to all Christians in the priesthood of all believers. Calvin, on the other hand, describes ministry as an instrument of power from God in a human organization. This contrast is not correct. The description of this one aspect of Luther's view of ministry is one-sided because it does not say anything about Luther's later addition where he distinguishes between the 'minister' according to an order of Christ, and the *sacerdos* of all believers. Because of this correction of a later date, it is wrong to speak of a contrast with Calvin. The theology of both Reformers is only characterized by differences of emphasis. Because of the focus on misuse of power, Den Dulk fails to read and analyze the Reformers' texts about ministry without prejudice.

Den Dulk's second article then goes on to give a fascinating analysis of the book of Numbers. In this he differentiates between the regular offices in the people of Israel with its Levites, priests, and elders—on the one hand—and the actions of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam—on the other hand—who with their separate actions and words keep the realization alive in Israel that it is God's Spirit and not human leaders that makes history. We do not want to enter into a discussion as to whether Den Dulk does the book of Numbers justice with this analysis, but it is clear that he wants to completely differentiate between the movement of the Spirit and the dynamics of the offices in the church. For this reason, he deems it necessary to be aware of the power of ministers and to handle it by managing it properly. The Spirit, who is separate from the church as organization with its offices, can involve the church, but there can never be any identification. It is therefore obvious that Den Dulk will not look favorably on ministry as 'representation of Christ,' and that he rejects it as a temptation. Both his analysis of the Reformers' writings and his exegesis of Numbers, as well as his own theologizing about ministry, remain caught in the context of power and its dangers.

Another recent example of how the Reformed theology of ministry focused on the misuse of power can be found in the article "Why three

offices within the congregation (*Waarom drie ambten in de gemeente?*)” by F.G. Immink.⁸ In a nutshell, the author offers a classical discussion of the current view of ministry within the Calvinist tradition. The three Reformed offices, that involve not three ranks but three different tasks, form the basis. But because of the position of the minister as a learned person and a professional, there is a danger of an unnatural position of power. For this reason, it is the function of deacons and elders to act as a conscience with regard to the minister: they check to what extent the service to the Word is relevant to the life of every day. He describes how the basic structure of traditional Reformed ministry developed in the interplay between congregation and ministry and between apostolic witness and ministry. The Holy Spirit brings the Word to life through the service of people. The *missio Dei* is *personalis*, and therefore the authority of scripture and personal authority must not be played against each other. This is probably related to how the minister functions and not to the offices of elder and deacon, but it is not made entirely clear. In conclusion, Immink again draws our attention to the starting point of his article; namely, the threatening inequality between the offices. The author concludes by giving two remedies. First of all, education and training can promote reflection and keep the realization of a potential inequality alive. Second, the offices of elder and deacon can serve as a good counterbalance. Immink places the question as to why there are three offices in the context of restraining and keeping control over the power of the minister. In his article, he increases this tension by formulating the minister’s function in terms of being a witness who acts as God’s delegate (“over-against”). Elders and deacons are given the function of watchdogs to keep the minister in check.

These examples show that there is a tendency in Reformed theology for ministry to reduce the problems around the ministry to a power problem. The gratitude for the minister’s service is overshadowed by the fear of misuse of power. A bishop in the church is suspect per definition; apostolic succession is seen only as a clever way to make the minister’s power legitimate. The representation of Christ is a temptation. Practical suggestions for the refinement of the ministerial structure are mainly related to setting a time limit to the minister’s period of service and by seeing their relations with other office bearers in terms of

⁸ F.G. Immink, “Waarom drie ambten in de gemeente?” in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?*, 250–257.

control and monitoring. These recent articles prove that the Reformed theology of ministry is in danger of being incarcerated within the horizon of problems with power. That is a shame because, in this way, the most fundamental question about ministry threatens to be obscured.

This question is accurately the starting point of the section about ministry of the Lima text (§6). It is about how the life of the church is to be ordered in such a way that God can speak to our generation through the proclamation of the gospel, and how the faith community around Jesus Christ can be built up in love. How can that be done in accordance with God's will and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? How can a ministerial order be made to serve the Word of the Lord in our time? Which office is the most efficient in ensuring that God himself can speak his Word? It is, in our opinion, very important that the Reformed tradition in its thinking about ministerial structure in the church becomes aware of its strong preoccupation with the power question. If it becomes aware of this preoccupation, it will again be possible, together with other ecclesiastical traditions, to concentrate on the central questions relating to ministry and to learn from each other's experiences.

The missio Dei as Starting Point for the Theology of Ministry

Those who want to say something about the meaning of ministry in the church would do well to take the words and deeds of God of which we can read in scripture as their starting point. We do not place the ministry in this salvation perspective in order to give it a divine or unassailable aura, but to indicate that the importance of the ministry is only relative. The constant birth of ecclesiastical community and calling of people to ministry in the church finds its origin in the calling and sending heart of God, whose purpose is to save the world. To this end Jesus came and gave his life, and to this end God sends the breath of his Spirit. Church and ministry do not exist separately; they only receive their meaning in this Trinitarian perspective.

Even the importance of the church is regarded as relative in the perspective of the *missio Dei*. After all, it is not the church that is important, but the whole of humankind. The church must be seen only as an instrument with a view to God's deeds in history. For this reason, the church cannot be a community that is only looking upward or is only inward-looking; it must be involved in what is happening in the world around it, as the church's Lord focused his attention fully on the

world. Ministry in the church must, therefore, not be exclusively aimed at internal leadership of the church or equipping the church: its main aim must be to proclaim the Word to all people, including those who do not belong to the church of Christ.

This approach of church and ministry from the basis of the *missio Dei* will create sufficient opportunity to experience and understand ministry as a calling. Ministers should not hide behind the *vocatio*: on the contrary, they remain constantly answerable to God and humankind because of the *vocatio*.

With this approach to *missio Dei*, we harvest the fruit of BEM's first chapter of the section on ministry. This first section of the Lima text's theology of ministry was received positively by nearly all churches. The emphases found here are not in contradiction with the classical Calvinist viewpoints, nor are they their automatic and direct results. In a theology of ministry for our time based on the Reformed tradition, this ecumenical viewpoint must not be lost.

The Context of the Church as Charismatic Faith Community

In the Lima text (§5), theology of ministry is developed against the background of the ecclesiological principle that the church has the character of a charismatic faith community and is endowed by the Holy Spirit with diverse and complementary gifts. This is the result of the biblical concept of 'priesthood of all believers.' The ordained ministers must concentrate on the development of gifts and services in the community with a view to its growth. (§§32–33).

A new theology of ministry cannot ignore this. The aim of ministry in the church must be to discover, stimulate, encourage, and support the gifts that build up the faith community. For a Reformed theology of ministry, this is less self-evident than it might seem—as can be seen from the way the *Institutes* is structured. In his discourse, Calvin attaches much importance to the external working of the Spirit through church, offices, sacraments, and government, but not through gifted individuals. The aristocratic attitude to life prevented Calvin from entrusting the leadership of the church to the faithful crowd because of fear of imprudence, partisanship, and chaos. It is therefore not surprising that Calvin does not advocate the priesthood of all believers in his work. He can only think of a people of God that receives strict leadership through the proclamation of the Word, and that celebrates communion in a pure way under the supervision of the elders. The Reformed the-

ology of ministry followed in Calvin's footsteps and hardly developed this element as well. For this reason, we are of the opinion that when developing a theology of ministry it must be based on a faith community endowed with charisms. The aim of the offices in the church must be to promote these gifts that are a contribution to an encounter with God and with each other. Also, it is necessary to most emphatically deny that the congregation as people of God is nothing but an under-age mass in need of tutelage and leadership. The congregation needs leadership through the service of the Word, but this does not mean that it does not have its own responsibility and task, both with regard to witness to the world and to the direction taken by the church.

Office is a Function: Service to the Word

The Reformation redefined the function of ecclesiastical ministry as a response to the misuse of powers by ministers. Luther gave the ordained ministry in the church of his time a new interpretation by describing it as *ministerium verbi*. In doing so, he ensured that the basic function of the ordained ministry returned to exegesis of scripture and proclamation of the gospel. In our opinion, this was a master-stroke on Luther's part that returned ecclesiastical ministry to its essential core. The re-orientation was also adopted by the Reformers that came after Luther and is a point of view that the Reformed theology of ministry of our days must not lose sight of. By describing ordained ministry as service to the Word, it is redefined both with regard to its form and with regard to its content, which provides two corner stones for an up-to-date theology of ministry from the Reformed tradition.

In the first place, it involves a functional approach of the question of ministry as a response to the ontological formulation of the question. Ministry consists of one or more specific tasks. An up-to-date theology of ministry requires a consistently functional language when speaking about ministry. Functional terminology creates clarity with regard to the expectations that people have of ministry; it is an aid in the preparation for ministry and also facilitates the subsequent evaluation discussion. In the ecumenical debate, it is not unreasonable to expect from participants from the Protestant tradition that they watch over the functional terminology when describing what the essential elements of the ecclesiastical ministry are.

Describing ministry as service to the Word is not only a formal description of the ecclesiastical ministry, it also tells us what the essence

of ministry is. If God comes to humankind through his Word, then it is important that ministry serves the Word and ensures that God's living voice is heard through the service to the Word. Ministerial tasks such as preaching, celebrating the sacraments, teaching, giving leadership, pastoral care, or diaconal presence are all forms through which the Word of the Lord can come to humankind. When that happens, that is grace. Ministerial service can help to smooth the path along which the Lord comes without wanting to claim that God depends on human service. All we can do is to confirm that this is the way through which God wants to work; namely, that of human mediation in ministerial service to the Word.

Protestant theology states that the work carried out by the ministers to the Word shows a ministerial character because it has been qualified as proclamation of the gospel through exposition of scripture. This means that functional terminology is not just a protection against misuse of power, but also an instrument to give ministerial service content. We must continue asking whether the minister's task is still basically orientated towards service to the Word. The training of ministers must fundamentally be aimed at developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable the minister to listen carefully to the words of the Bible, with a view to proclamation. In addition, the minister regularly needs to ask himself whether—in all the diversity of the work in its pastoral, diaconal, congregation-building, teaching, management and missionary dimensions—the essential involvement in the service to the Word can be maintained and guaranteed. Whoever loses the habit of reading scripture in order to open himself regularly to the Lord's Word must wonder if he still functions adequately as minister. This may mean that the minister has to rethink all sorts of priorities or must remove particular tasks from the minister's task package in order to ensure that he remains focused on his essential task; namely, service to the Word.

Ministry in the Church as Symbol

The Lima text has shown how in the ecumenical debate the essence of ministry cannot be adequately expressed in functional language alone. This is very clearly expressed in paragraph 13 with commentary. After listing the tasks of ordained ministers (§13), the commentary adds that these tasks are not exercised by the ordained ministry in an exclusive way, but that ordained ministers carry out these tasks in a

representative way as focus of unity. On further study of the text, we found that functional and symbolic language alternate.

The responses from the Reformed tradition clearly showed a reticence to speak about ministry in symbolic language; in particular, with regard to speaking in terms of representation of Christ. The fear that ministers will take the place of Christ as Lord of the church, and the fear that this language can lead to an ontological understanding of ministry are unmistakable. Again we recognize the sensitivity towards legitimating potential misuse of power. An echo of this can be heard in M. den Dulk's discourse about the temptation to represent Christ.

Our study of the starting point of the ministry, chapter III in the fourth book of the *Institutes*, showed us that Calvin also used symbolic language, and that he laboriously tested a number of words for their usefulness. The reason for this can be found in Calvin's starting point: the realization that this is the way in which God appears to communicate with us; namely, that he chooses individual people and calls them to be his spokesmen. In ecumenical literature what is called "the personal nature of the Christian Gospel and ministry" (*The Meaning of Ordination*, 1968) and "the scandal' of particularity" as God's *modus operandi* (*The Ordained Ministry*, 1971) will inevitably lead to one form of symbolic terminology or other. Ministry cannot be completely separated from the person who carries out the ministry. Pragmatic and functional language does not do justice to the minister's functioning. In church and culture,⁹ he is a reference to Christ and to God. Naturally, there is no automatism here. If it goes well, he will remind people of the Lord through his presence. He represents the church, but above all he represents Christ. This is how it can work in practice.

This is expressed very well in a poem by J.W. Schulte Nordholt written when the Rev. N. ter Linden left the *Westerkerk* in Amsterdam; he speaks of the minister who can sometimes be a person who "for a while is a place of God."¹⁰ Our plea for the use of symbolic language when expressing the meaning of ministry does not mean that it is

⁹ Brinkman, "Het ambt als heilzaam symbool in onze cultuur" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop*, 97-114.

¹⁰ Quoted by M.E. Brinkman, "Het ambt als heilzaam symbool in onze cultuur" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop*, 113-114. It is likely that Schulte Nordholt was inspired by the first sentence of the well-known poem "Deïsme" by G.A. Achterberg: "De mens is voor een tijd een plaats van God" (Humankind is a place of God for a while).

impossible for other people to be “a place of God.” What we do want to indicate is that, as servants of the Word, ministers have particularly been called to fulfil that role.

In our opinion, the Reformed tradition must not try to avoid this symbolic language; it must give it a place in its theologizing about ministry because this is how God works: he chooses individuals who represent him or symbolize him through their actions. Here, we also feel on familiar Reformed territory, when—like Calvin—we search for adequate, everyday concepts to express this Christ representation. In this respect, the Reformed tradition should not feel out of place when it finds itself next to the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox traditions. The difference from these traditions is not a dislike of symbolic expressions when describing ministry, but a great freedom to express this Christ representation in ever new and different metaphors. We must avoid the temptation to express this symbolism in strongly dogmatic-tinted terminology, such as *in persona Christi* or *icon of Christ*, which tends towards shibboleth. This permanently tentative attitude is caused by the Reformed sensitivity to ontologization and misuse of ministry, and the knowledge that a symbol loses its power if it becomes completely unambiguous. In addition, there is a permanent task here for the Reformed tradition to continuously emphasize in the ecumenical discussion that the symbolic representation of Christ does not happen in isolation from service to the Word and celebration of the sacraments. The ordained minister represents the Lord because he has been called to proclaim the Lord’s story in word and sign and to encourage and admonish in the midst of people’s life stories as they happen.

Ministry in the Church as Function and Sign of Unity

When we continue to follow this route of functionality and symbolism, we find that in the ecumenical debate about theology of ministry two additional fundamental roles have been given to this ministry; namely, to safeguard unity and safeguard continuity with the witness of the apostles. Ministers watch over the catholicity and apostolicity of the church. In this section, we want to study the ministerial task with regard to its service to unity.

In the Lima text, the ordained ministry functions as a focus of unity. The person who points to the center—Christ—and, in doing so, creates unity becomes himself a center of unity because he symbolizes the bond with Christ in his person (§8–14). Even the plea for the threefold

structure of ministry is determined by the preservation of unity. At the regional and local level, bishop and presbyter represent their church in the encounter with other churches and represent the unity with the other churches in the community for which they have responsibility (§ 13 and § 29). When discussing the text, we drew attention to the subtle change from the function as the one who refers to Christ to the function as the sign of unity and the role of focus of unity.

In their theology the Reformers were reluctant to make too strong a connection between unity and the person of the minister. Their struggle with Rome over the bishop's office as a sign of unity meant that to develop the ministry's unity function any further would lead to problems. The Roman Catholic bishops used their unity function as an argument to characterize the Reformers as schismatics. In response, the ordained minister's prime task became the pure proclamation of the Word and the pure celebration of the sacraments, a shift of emphasis from the minister's role as focus of unity. Second, safeguarding unity was no longer carried out personally, but—above all—collegially. In this way the direct link between safeguarding unity and the ministry disappeared. To this day, safeguarding unity is not a prominent theme in Reformed theology of ministry. This is in part due to the remaining fear of misuse of ministry.

When we look back at the history of Reformed Christianity, we cannot avoid the conclusion that this tradition has a problem with safeguarding unity. H.W. de Krijff calls the lack of *sensus unitatis* the heresy of Reformed doctrine.¹¹ All too often the battle for the pure proclamation of the Word and pure administration of the sacraments is fought at the cost of the unity of the church. For this reason, the Reformed tradition should not ignore this plea for the value of ordained ministry as focus of unity. If the ordained ministry is seen as a means to preserve unity, this can be a support of unity in the church—both with regard to how ministry functions and to the church's structure of ministry. Correct proclamation, administration of the sacraments, and exercising of discipline should not be regarded as the only aims of ordained ministry; these aims must include safeguarding and renewing the unity of the church—personal and collegial, local, and regional.

¹¹ H.W. de Krijff, "Hoe katholiek is de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk? Het oecumenisme vanuit een hervormd perspectief" in J. Hallebeek and B. Wirix (red.), *Met het oog op morgen. Ecclesiologische beschouwingen aangeboden aan Jan Visser* (Zoetermeer: Boeken-
centrum, 1996), 90–98, 96.

This plea for a deeper understanding of the importance of ordained ministry for the unity of the church does not mean that we mean to contradict the principles of Reformed theology of ministry. Although the link between ministry and unity has not been strongly elaborated because of a fear of the misuse of power, Calvin's theology of office does contain motivations for a further elaboration of this subject. For him the purpose of ministry is essentially to promote the unity of the church. In principle, he does not have any objections against bishops giving leadership to the unity of the church.

We conclude, therefore, that the development of an up-to-date theology of ministry requires more attention to the way in which ministers can strengthen the unity of the church. The Reformed tradition's own contribution can be in emphasizing the link between the unity as symbolized, guarded, and strengthened by the minister, and his task in proclaiming the Word. Why does the minister symbolize unity? Because he is the one who is called to proclaim the Word.

*Office in the Church as Function and Sign
of the Continuity with the Church of the Apostles*

In the first instance, ecumenical theology regards the importance of the ordained ministry for the apostolic tradition as relative. Ministry is only one of the elements that play a part in safeguarding continuity with the church of the apostles (§34). In the second instance, the role of the ordained ministry with a view to safeguarding the church's apostolicity is anything but secondary. The importance of this element is proved not only by the extensive discussion in the fourth chapter of the Lima text, but also from the fact that apostolic succession is emphatically made a condition of mutual recognition of ministry (§52).

Churches with their roots in the Reformation fear a continuation of the Incarnation—be it historic or pneumatological—in the transfer of ministerial authority. God's sovereignty cannot be pinned down. Apostolic succession has too many connotations of a church that could and can embody what has to be received in grace time and time again. God's sovereignty cannot be manipulated either. For this reason, there is great apprehension with respect to claims to power. This fear of a claim to authority on the basis of a presumed historic legitimacy in the apostolic succession is not unfounded. During the controversies that reigned during the Reformation, it played a part in the battle for the souls of the believers. The church was governed by bishops whose claim

to legitimacy was based on apostolic succession, even though they were criticized for the way in which they carried out their apostolic task as servants of the Word, and for the way in which they maintained the apostolic doctrine and the apostolic way of life. Therefore, apostolic succession can never be a guarantee for the apostolicity of the church.

This does not alter the fact that special care must always be taken that continuity with the church of all times and places is maintained. The negative experiences of the functioning of apostolic succession in the Reformation has overshadowed the role of ministry in service to continuity. Ministry is service to the Word and, consequently, service to unity and continuity with the salvation-bringing words of the Lord. This readiness to maintain continuity with the church of the apostles is expressed, among other things, in the continuing willingness to listen to all books of the canon and not just to the ones that at any particular time are in harmony with the spirit of the age. It also ensures that we do not attempt to understand the scripture's witness in isolation, but, rather, in harmony with those who have gone before us in their authoritative interpretation. They were not only familiar with the text of the scriptures, but also with the writings of the church fathers and tried to understand scripture in their time in dialogue with the church fathers. Therefore, we argue that in the Reformed tradition the care for the continuity with the church of the apostles must be emphatically formulated as one of the tasks of the ordained ministry. The minister as servant of the Word tries to understand the Word of the Lord as it comes to us today by carefully listening to the words of scripture; in doing so he knows that he is not the first one, but that he walks in the footsteps of many who—like him—tried to do just that in their own time and place.¹² As servant of the Word, he is the person with the best opportunity to guard and symbolize that continuity.

The ministerial structure in the apostolic succession is one of the elements of the continuity principle from the time of the early church. Paragraph 35 of the Lima text states that the orderly transfer of the ordained ministry is a powerful expression of the continuity of the church in the apostolic tradition throughout the ages. Within the Re-

¹² An element of the realization of the importance of ministry for the continuity of the church can be found in the tradition of many congregations to have either a board with a chronological list of the names of ministers who served the congregation, or to have a portrait gallery with photos of ministers who have been connected with the church.

formed tradition, accession to the ministry is not usually connected with the idea of continuity. It is seen more as a formal conclusion to the process of recognition of charism, *vocatio*, and *electio*. On the other hand, ordination has traditionally been restricted to ministers because their authority is recognized for the transfer of the ministerial task. In our opinion, the ordination of a new minister is always a good opportunity to accentuate the apostolicity of the church. This can be achieved by giving more attention to the continuity principle in the liturgy. The task given to the new minister as servant of the Word is to safeguard the link with the church of the apostles.

When assessing the lessons for the Reformed tradition, we already came to the conclusion that ordination by a bishop can have added value because the ordination of a new minister is an important moment to emphasize that the ordination is not exclusively a matter for the local congregation and its new minister, but also for the wider church which regards itself as standing in continuity with the apostolic tradition. While the bishop embodies the personal dimension of the oversight task at the level beyond the local, at the ordination he can express both the unity of the church and the continuity with the church of the apostles. Therefore, the request to the non-episcopal churches to consider episcopal ordination can, in our opinion, be considered positively. In doing so we do not want to suggest that episcopal succession is a guarantee for continuity in the apostolic tradition. In classical terms, the best way to express the relative importance of episcopal succession is to see it as *bene esse* but not as *esse*.

The issue of apostolicity in relation to ordained ministry is an important lesson for the Reformed tradition from the ecumenical discussion about ministry. The ordination of new ministers is an appropriate moment to express and emphasise the wish of the congregation to stand in the apostolic tradition. The Reformed churches with their specific character of their confession *in loco et tempore* would do well to add to this contextual emphasis by a careful formulation of the link with the church of the apostles, which supersedes place and time. The ordained ministry can play a role in this.

Ministry as a Primarily Liturgical Function

By preserving the word 'priest' for the ordained minister (§17), the ecumenical theology of ministry does not want to opt for a sacerdotal ministry, but for a ministry that is liturgical in proclaiming the Word and

administering the sacraments both in intercession and in pastoral leadership. In our opinion, it is better to avoid this term because of its connotation with ‘sacrifice.’ On the other hand, the Lima text’s emphasis on liturgy reminds us of the liturgical character of ministry. This approach is in keeping with the Protestant description of a minister as the one who proclaims the Word and administers the sacraments. The primary place for exercising ministry is the liturgy. When the congregation meets around the lectern or pulpit and the table, the minister’s service is a reminder of the Lord’s coming, of encountering God. The minister cannot bring this meeting about because when the people know that God speaks to them it is grace; but what he can do is create the right conditions through his work. In short, ministry, a structure element that helps to create the conditions for the encounter between faith community and the living Lord in Word and Spirit, primarily has a liturgical function.

As servant of the Word, the minister must fulfil a central role in worship. When we think of this task, our thoughts spontaneously turn to the sermon, but it encompasses much more. As the one presiding, the minister is also responsible for administering the sacraments, prayers, and pastoral leadership during the service. In our opinion, this function and role of the servant of the Word needs more attention in the theological reflection about the meaning of ministry in the church. This task is connected with the representative character of the minister’s role as leader of worship.¹³

The Difference between Ordained Ministry and Local Ministry

What struck Reformed church people first of all when they read the Lima text’s section on ministry was the absence of the Reformed elder. Because the office of elder plays a very important part in the Reformed tradition, its absence gave them the feeling of not having been taken seriously as Reformed tradition. A second response concerned the Reformed delegates of the *Faith and Order* commission. They received a

¹³ G. Mattheeuws wrote an enlightening article about the representation of Christ and the church when leading worship in the context of Roman Catholic theology of ministry, “De voorganger in de eucharistie als Sacrament van de ecclesiale Christus,” *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 15 (1999), 95–117. His discourse is based on the interpretation of Vatican II by R. Michiels. The distinctions made and the connections established can also be helpful when reflecting on the liturgical role of the minister of Word and sacraments in Reformed perspective.

reprimand. Had they been dozing? These responses were not justified. Many Reformed people did not realize that the fact that the elder was not mentioned did not entail a value judgment about the office, but that it had been the logical consequence of the decision to concentrate on ordained ministry. The office of elder was not discussed because even within the Reformed tradition itself there is some doubt as to whether the appointment of elders constitutes ordination.

As a consequence, the attention is focused on ordination. In discussing this rite too much attention is given to the controversies respecting its form elements and its sacramental status. Too little thought is given for what this sign means and why in the case of some offices ordination takes place and in others not. The ordination is a rite with a long ecclesiastical tradition that consists of invoking the Spirit ('form') and laying on of hands ('material'); it marks the end of a process of discovery of charism, *vocatio*, *electio/receptio*, and the beginning of a service where the ordinand enters into a new relationship with the community as spiritual leader of this faith community through the service of the Word and the sacraments. In other words, this liturgical act qualifies the function of the spiritual leadership which consists of proclaiming the Word of the Lord in the proclamation of scripture and celebrating the sacraments. The ordination is connected with this specific function (§13) and the representative way in which it is carried out (commentary to §13). This task is essential for the continued life and mission of the faith community. Without people who proclaim the Word and celebrate the sacraments to bind the faith community together, and to lead its members as people who are called by God, sent by Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and recognized by the faith community, the future of the faith community is very uncertain. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin regarded ministry as part of the *esse* of the church, as a necessity for the life of the church of Christ. We are reminded here of the mother image for the church and the way God works; in particular, the ministerial proclamation which in Calvin's opinion made both church and ministry indispensable for salvation. Ordination symbolizes this service that is needed for salvation.

Reformed deacons and elders are, however, not ordained because their office is not concerned with the fundamental service to the coming of the Lord through his Word. Reformed elders and deacons are Reformed office bearers who are elected from the congregation and who represent the local faith community. Their services stimulate each in its own way the life and calling of the Christian faith community, but

they are not fundamental for the church. For this reason, they belong to the *bene esse* of the church. This means that a church can remain church without these offices, but to its own detriment. These offices are important because they contribute to the well-being of the church. If a church wants to do more than survive, it is advisable to see to it that these offices function, but they are not fundamental to the church in the same way as the office of minister of Word and sacraments. For that reason, it is logical that in the Reformed tradition the minister is ordained while elders and deacons are not because they are not essential for the continuity of the church as called and sent community in the same way. For this reason, we would plead for a clear differentiation between, on the one hand, the ordained office of ministers and, on the other hand, the local ministries of elders and deacons. They are ministries of a different order.

Many people within the Reformed tradition are of the opinion that there is a difference between ministers, on the one hand, and deacons and elders, on the other hand.¹⁴ Yet they do not feel comfortable with this difference because of the fear that a ministerial hierarchy could develop in the church. This led to a strong tendency to attach equal importance to the offices of minister, elder, and deacon wherever that was possible. This was intended to prevent misuse of power by the minister and to optimize the principle of the priesthood of all believers within the Reformed structure.

Even within theology, attempts are made to eliminate this difference. M. Gosker applies the symbolic character of the minister's function as representative of Christ to elders and deacons as well. Within his system, the minister represents Christ as embodiment of the prophetic calling of the church in the service of the living Word, the elder the kingly calling, and the deacon the priestly calling.¹⁵ The classification into prophetic, kingly, and priestly aspects of the Christ representation seems to us to be artificial and far-fetched. On the one hand, all believers are called to represent Christ in their lives¹⁶ while, on the

¹⁴ In his article, "Over protestantse reacties op de ambtsvisie van het rapport over doop, eucharistie en ambt van de Wereldraad van Kerken" in A. van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding. Over kerk en het christenzijn in een veranderende cultuur*, 129–130, the author indicated how in the Church Order of the Dutch Reformed Church in the 80s, ministers had a special position in comparison with other office bearers.

¹⁵ M. Gosker, "Ambt als Christusrepresentatie" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?*, 137–139.

¹⁶ M. Gosker also expresses the calling and mission of all believers in the world

other hand, elders and deacons do not represent Christ in the same way as ministers of the Word do. Elders and deacons know that they have been called to their office by the Lord and by the congregation, but in what they say and do they, first of all, represent the congregation. They carry out their office on behalf of the church, either in their co-responsibility for the leadership of the church or in their works of charity and justice.

The sources of Reformed theology of ministry do not offer a basis for this supposed equality of the three offices. When we studied Calvin's writings, we came to the conclusion that his concern for Christocracy within the church led to the introduction of three offices in addition to the office of servant of the Word; we also learned that these offices never developed beyond the level of being auxiliary offices, both in his theology and in his ecclesiastical practice in Geneva. Calvin did not use the expression 'auxiliary office,' but this is how it functioned in comparison with the shepherd's office. He wanted to see all four offices as full offices, but the shepherd's office was the core office because God has chosen to continue speaking to us through the words of scripture and through the mouth of the persons who speak the living Word to us. Whoever carries out the service to the Word carries out a core task because God wants to continue to speak to us through his Word. The ordination is the rite that marks this core task. For this reason, Calvin restricts ordination to the servants of the Word in the *Institutes*, although he knows that teachers and deacons were ordained in the early church. There is no mention of ordination of elders.

Even the first rule of the Synod of Emden of 1571—that no office shall exercise dominion over another—does not negate this difference. The phrase “not exercising dominion” in the Latin version of the Emden text refers to each office individually; namely, no minister shall exercise dominion over another minister, no elder over an elder, and no deacon over a deacon. But even if this was to be interpreted differently; namely, as a reference to the various offices in relation to each other, this does not need to be a problem because this quote is about exercising dominion over each other. The difference between ordained

in terms of “Christ representation of the ‘office’ of all believers.” This terminology is borrowed from A.A. van Ruler. In our opinion, the word “office” should not have been used here. By using this expression the believers are placed very emphatically placed over against the world. Their whole existence is claimed by the specific calling as believer in the world.

ministry and local ministry is not a hierarchical difference. This is not about higher and lower, but about a difference in tasks and responsibilities and necessity of life for the continuity of the church.

In our study we also found that elders and deacons are representative in a different way from ministers. While ministers of the Word, as ordained ministers, represent Christ in their service of the Word, express the unity of the wider church, and express continuity with the church of the apostles, elders and deacons act as those elected by and representatives of the local congregation. The personal character of the work of elders and deacons is less pronounced than of that of the minister because elders and deacons act on behalf of a community and speak more collectively as members of a council.

It makes sense to plan a liturgical rite when elders and deacons take up their office during which a concise description is given of their tasks within the tradition of the Reformed churches. They promise to carry out these tasks to the best of their abilities and receive a benediction on their work. Based on the paragraphs above, we would plead for a clear differentiation in liturgical form between the ordination rite for ministers and the benediction at the beginning of the service for elders and deacons. A formal invocation of the Spirit and laying on of hands are, in our opinion, not appropriate here and would be confusing.

The difference between ordained ministry and non-ordained office can help us to make a number of differentiations in terms of church order between the minister's office and that of elders and deacons. Precisely because of the symbolic character of the ordained ministry, it could not be described as a task that is subject to a time limit. An office that is symbolic cannot simply be subjected to a time limit like any other function. Hence, the realization that ordination does not have to be repeated and does not disappear after retirement either.

The Special Meaning of the Offices of Elder and Deacon

We differentiate between ordained and non-ordained offices in the Reformed tradition in order to clarify the fundamental task, role and responsibility of the ministers within the church. This diversification is emphatically not created to devalue the meaning and value of the Reformed offices of elder and deacon. These offices have given the structure of ministry of the Reformed churches a very characteristic accent. A renewed theology of ministry based on the Reformed tradition must therefore build on this specific ecclesiastical structure which

had grown in and is the result of centuries of church practice. The offices of elder and deacon are important components of the identity of the Reformed churches; it is traditionally here that the heartbeat of Reformed theology of ministry is found.¹⁷ The long and positive experience with these offices must be seen as element of the Reformed contribution to the ecumenical debate about ministry.

It is important to establish what is characteristic of these offices and in what way they give added value. This can, first of all, be expressed functionally in specific tasks. The office of elder is the spiritual office to which members of the congregation are elected by the faith community, and which gives them the authority to keep members of the community in communion with Christ, by taking care of each other. The office of deacon is the spiritual office to which members of the congregation are elected by the faith community and which gives them the authority to embody mercy and justice within church and society. These tasks are not taken up on an incidental basis, but permanently and structurally on behalf of the church, and this co-determines the ministerial character of these tasks. Thus the office of caring for each other in order to maintain communion with Christ and the office of mercy and justice are part of the Reformed contribution to the task of *koinonia* and *diakonia* to which the whole faith community is called as a priesthood of believers.

Reformed church history shows us that these offices have undergone an evolution with regard to their content: from government officials to office bearers in the church, from scrutiny of conduct to caring for and involvement in the life of neighbors, from charitable support of the poor to assistance in self-help, and from social to liturgical tasks. These developments illustrate the adaptability of local ministries when places and times change.

There are other ways in which the structure of offices within the Reformed tradition proves to be flexible; in particular, with regard to the number of offices. Calvin distinguished four offices in answer to the requirements of the time. After Calvin, the offices of elder and deacon remained nearly everywhere in the Reformed tradition, in addition

¹⁷ In this context, it is telling that the only contribution about theology of ministry in the recent collection about the future of the Reformed theology gives the elder center stage, see W. Herrenbrück, "Presbytery and Leadership in the church" in D. Willis and M. Welker (ed.), *Toward the future of reformed theology: tasks, topics, traditions*, (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 283–301.

to that of minister, while the office of teacher disappeared in many churches. Does that mean that we can draw the conclusion that the Reformed local ministries were limited to these two important tasks of *koinonia* and *diaconia*? The history of the Reformed tradition tells a different story. In his study about Antwerp in the time of the Reformation, G. Marnef mentions that there was an additional office in the underground congregations in the sixteenth century; namely, that of ‘messenger.’ This office bearer was a sort of secret go-between to inform the members of the congregation where meetings were to take place.¹⁸ In that situation, this task was apparently so important that it was given office-status. The historical, contextual flexibility supports the attempts to adapt the way offices in the church are structured to the needs of our time. New tasks that comply with what is needed at the time can lead to the creation of new offices as expression of our constant attention for an important matter. We could, for instance, think of the office of evangelist¹⁹ in response to the need for a missionary profiling of the church in a secularized society, or the office of cantor²⁰ as a permanent expression of the calling to a life of worship before the Lord. In each time the church must ask itself whether there are particular, important tasks to which it feels itself to be called as a faith community and which need to be structured as separate offices.

This is not the only way in which the special character and the additional value of these local ministries manifest themselves. Elders and deacons are not only permanently responsible for particular tasks; they are also co-responsible for determining church policy at the local level and at the level beyond the local. The way the church is governed is not just a matter for ordained ministers; it is co-determined by non-ordained office bearers. The office bearers’ co-responsibility for church policy prevents the clergy from becoming dominant and expresses the structured involvement of the faith community in the government of the church. *Episkopé* is not only exercised communally by consulting all members of the church via church meetings, it is also expressed structurally in the non-ordained office bearers’ responsibility for policy

¹⁸ G. Marnef, *Antwerpen in de tijd van de Reformatie. Ondergronds protestantisme in een handelsmetropool 1550–1577* (Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1996), 101.

¹⁹ In 1997 a study group submitted a report to the synod meeting of the United Protestant Church in Belgium with a view to the possible recognition of the office of evangelist.

²⁰ A number of considerations can be found in S. de Vries, “Een dienaar des lieds?—Over de kerkordelijke status van het cantoraat—,” *Eredienstvaardig* 13 (1997) 1, 21–22.

in the church council. In keeping with the terminology used within the ecumenical tradition, we do not call the joint responsibility for policy of ordained and non-ordained office bearers an expression of collegiality, but of communality in the *episkopé*. In ecumenical literature, collegiality refers to cooperation between ordained ministers.

Quite rightly, the churches of the Reformed tradition criticized the scant attention the Lima report paid to the involvement of non-ordained office bearers in the government of the church. Even the Reformed tradition itself will have to be watchful regarding this point. Time and time again, Christocracy threatens to degenerate into dominance by ministers. It is therefore important to continue asking to what extent the congregation is involved in the policy of the church via the representation of non-ordained office bearers. The government of the church is not the prerogative of the clergy. With this plea for permanent and strengthened responsibility of elders and deacons for church policy, we want to emphasize again that the differentiation between ordained ministry and local ministry is not made to undermine the authority of the ecclesiastical office bearers. On the contrary, we plead for a permanent renewal of these dynamic offices and for a permanent and stronger involvement in determining policy by these representatives of the local faith community. The age-old positive experience must play a part in the ecumenical debate about ministry.

Another question is whether all non-ordained office bearers should be members of the church council as a policy making body. On the one hand, there are some arguments in favor of that. If, for instance, the deacons were not members of this council, there is a risk that there would not be sufficient attention for the diaconate when making policies. On the other hand, it is quite clear that a number of church office bearers gladly undertake their task, but find themselves overburdened when as members of the church council they also have to make decisions about policy matters which go beyond the level of the local faith community. It might be an idea to work out structures in which not all office bearers have to be members of the church council.

Summarizing, we would plead for a flexible approach to local ministries. We see no reason why local ministries have to be restricted to the two classical offices; namely, those of deacon and elder. Where special services are deemed to be of structural importance for building up the congregation in its calling to living before God's face and to its mission in the world, they can be qualified as offices, depending on the demands of the time. Within the Reformed tradition non-ordained

office bearers have always been involved in the policy of the church. The communal aspect of the *episkopé* merits additional strengthening at this time in which participation in policymaking is a general social principle. The question whether it is necessary for all non-ordained office bearers to be members of the church council remains unanswered.

The Added Value for the Church of a Bishop's Office

The proposal to introduce a joint, threefold ministerial structure of bishop-presbyter-deacon is the most striking innovation of the Lima text in comparison with previous ecumenical texts about ministry. The proposal did not find favor with most Reformed churches because the argumentation was not convincing. The most important argument in favor of the introduction of this threefold structure was the conviction that this is the best way structurally to watch over and promote church unity. On further reflection, it is not so much the joint threefold structure as the figure of the bishop that is crucial in promoting unity. The question is therefore whether the Reformed tradition would profit from an episcopal order. Does the bishop's office have the potential to remove the fear of hierarchy?

The Church of Scotland indicated in its response to the Lima text that the weakest link in the classical Reformed structuring of the church is providing leadership at the level beyond the local. At that level there is not enough continuity in the personally exercised *episkopé*, while the Reformed structure does have this at the local level. If someone with responsibility at the regional level were to provide personal leadership for the church's mission then this would, in our opinion, provide added value for the church. A personally, representatively exercised ministry of spiritual leadership at the level beyond the local would complement communally exercised ministry, which currently characterizes leadership at this level within the Reformed tradition. Personally exercised ministry must not take the place of communally exercised ministry at this level, it must only complement it. In this way the road to a hierarchical church order is blocked.

The added value depends mainly on the concrete content. In our opinion, the bishop's function in the Lima text represents a good task description. His core tasks are the same as those of a presbyter; namely, proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and responsibility for discipline. In our opinion, the office of bishop does not differ from that of the servant of the Word. The bishop is servant of the Word—

not at the local level like the minister, but at the level beyond the local. This means that we recognize only one ordained ministry; namely, that of minister of Word and sacraments that can be exercised at two levels. Because the bishop functions as servant of the Word, his task has a strong liturgical and pastoral content, as is the case for the minister. The bishop must give leadership as a spiritual supervisor who visits, encourages, strengthens, and leads on the way of the Lord. This is the only way for his ministry to be credible. A task profile that is solely managerial or governmental with a strong administrative or legal content will, in principle, mean that the bishop does not do justice to his ministry as a servant to the Word. If the bishop functions first and foremost as pastor and minister within his diocese, this creates the possibility of his functioning within his diocese as *pastor pastorum* of the ministers.

A bishop who functions in this way can promote the unity of the church as servant of the Word by helping to keep the relationship with the Lord open and by stimulating solidarity among local congregations. In this way, he can become a symbol of unity in the church. It is also logical that the bishop has responsibility for the ordination of new ministers, not as guarantee but as sign. Because ordination has significance at a level beyond the local, it is right that someone with a regional supervision task carries out the ordination rite on behalf of the church and on behalf of the Lord. The task to maintain the continuity with the church of the apostles is a logical extension of this special task at the ordination.

It is not the intention of this study to develop a theology of the bishop's office. We restrict ourselves to the plea to the Reformed tradition to weigh up the advantages of a carefully considered bishop's office based on the arguments explained above. The volume, "*Episkopé and Episcopacy and the Quest for Visible Unity*. Two Consultations," may be helpful when reflecting on the theology of the bishop's office within the Reformed tradition.²¹

²¹ P.C. Bouteneff and D. Falconer (eds.), *Episkopé and Episcopacy and the Quest for Visible Unity* (Faith and Order Paper 183) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1999). In addition to an overview and discussion of the meaning of the bishop's office in a number of recent bilateral dialogues, this volume contains theological reflections on individual aspects of this office. J.H. Erickson's contribution, "*Episkopé and Episcopacy: Orthodox Perspectives*," 80–92,—with an overview of the Orthodox studies of various theologies of the bishop's office in the early church—is very instructive.

Ordained Ministry in Personal, Collegial, and Communal Perspective

The most enlightening difference in exercising *episkopé* in the church that the ecumenical tradition has always held on to is related to the differentiation between a personal, a collegial, and a communal aspect of leadership. As early as 1927, the First World Conference of *Faith and Order* said that the episcopal, the Presbyterian, and the communal system contain valuable elements for the reunited church of the future. Personal, collegial, and communal leadership must complement each other.

In order to illustrate this, we look at ordination. At ordination, in the continuity of the church's apostolic tradition, the three aspects that were identified in the previous chapter; namely, the personal, collegial, and communal way of exercising ministry can play a role.

1. The transfer of ministerial authority has a personal aspect. Because ordination has meaning at the regional level, someone with a supervision task at a level beyond the local should carry out the ordination rite on behalf of the church. This personal aspect of the apostolic succession is encountered in the study, "Meaning of Ordination," from 1968 and in the principle of "the scandal of particularity" from the 1971 Louvain study, "The Ordained Ministry." The personal expression of continuity is an additional element encouraging us to consider the bishop's office as an expression of the personal element of the oversight task at the regional level. In his responsibility for ordination, the bishop not only represents the unity of the church but also continuity with the church of the apostolic tradition. He does not claim historical legitimacy. This way of functioning personally has a symbolic character in the framework of the continuity of the apostolic tradition, but it does not pretend to be a guarantee of apostolic succession.

2. The transfer of ministerial authority has a collegial aspect. This aspect is strongly present in the presbyterian tradition. Ministers from other congregations take part in the ordination with laying on of hands. Through this joint ordination, the new minister is also made a member of the corps of ministers as one of their colleagues. This expresses the synchronic aspect of the apostolic tradition. The ordinand is kept in the truth, not on his own, but together with the other ordained ministers; the new ordinand is co-responsible for keeping the church in the truth, not on his own, but together with the other ordained ministers. The

personal and collegial aspects of the ordination are referred to in the commentary to paragraph 34.

3. The transfer of ministerial authority has a communal aspect. According to the Reformed tradition, the local congregation has a decisive voice in electing the minister. This aspect is expressed in the involvement by the local congregation in the service of the Word (and Communion?) in which the ordination takes place. It is given shape in the elements of welcoming the new minister, recognition and acknowledgment, acceptance, and mutual dedication. In this way, the service expresses that remaining in the apostolic tradition is a matter which involves the concrete faith community in which the ordinand is to serve, and that it is their own choice. By taking part in the ordination, the local faith community expresses its willingness to be part of this broad apostolic tradition with a diachronic, synchronic, and eschatological aspect.

The Biblical Interpretation of Ministry in the Church

This study has devoted much attention to the Reformed theology of ministry against the background of the ecumenical debate about ministry. Many aspects and elements have been weighed up, but until now we have not spoken about one important aspect; namely, the biblical orientation of theology of ministry. This is precisely where Reformers such as Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin made one of their most important contributions to a renewed theology of ministry. In their theological deliberations about ministry, they constantly allowed themselves to be led by the witness of scripture. Their willingness to listen to scripture against the hermeneutical background of their own battle to reform the church of their time resulted in some fascinating pages in their theology of ministry. The primacy of scripture meant that they were willing to adjust their own presuppositions. Because they carefully listened to what scripture had to say, they constantly had to review their own thinking about ministry. As a result, their theologizing about ministry obtained a fascinating and provisional character, much more so than later confessions of faith might suggest. In our study of their work, we already came to the conclusion that for a Reformed theology of ministry their method is far more important than their results. This means that a renewed theology of ministry from the Reformed tradition not only needs an analysis of the current time and the concrete situation

of the churches as element of our hermeneutical horizon, but also a thorough biblical reflection to achieve a new reassessment of theology of ministry.

C. Graafland, in his study *Gedachten over het ambt*,²² attempts to achieve this. In the first chapter, he defends the need for a new unprejudiced reading of scripture when developing a theology of ministry; in particular, against his own traditional background of the Reformed Alliance in the Dutch Reformed Church and, more generally, the orthodox-Reformed circle. In this way, he tries to discount the opinion that is still widespread in these circles that Calvin's work gives the definitive and decisive explanation of scripture with regard to the ecclesiastical ministry. With his hermeneutical principle, *sola et tota scriptura*, he attempts to hold on to scripture as his point of departure as well as to put a stop to simplistic use of the scriptures. With a detailed, dogmatic, historical study, he tries in the following chapters to explain his own hermeneutical position, and in the final chapter he gets to his real goal; namely, to make a start with re-reading scriptural data.

Although our church background is rather different, his analysis of the Reformed tradition's theology of ministry did have some points of similarity with our own analysis. As a result, we even had a feeling of great solidarity at some moments. But despite these elements of affinity, the result of Graafland's work did not really satisfy us. In our opinion, that is connected with the fact that—despite his attempt at a critical approach—he cannot achieve a sufficient degree of detachment from his own tradition, which leads to a degree of inconsistency in his own hermeneutical principle. This feeling of attachment to his own tradition becomes apparent at the start of his dogmatic-historical overview when, for his explanation of the ecclesiastical ministry, he does not get any further than the analysis of Calvin in the sixteenth century. We are of the opinion that at the end of the twentieth century we do not do the medieval church justice by reading it only through the eyes of someone from the sixteenth century, even if this someone was Calvin. But even in his reading of scripture, which was intended to achieve a renewal of his own tradition, he appears to be too much caught up in the classical Reformed premises about ministry to link his findings with the questions about ministry with which all ecclesiastical traditions are struggling. Because he lacks this ecumenical sounding board, his

²² C. Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt* (Thoughts Concerning Ministry) (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1999).

findings are not really successful in putting the Reformed theology of ministry on the rails again.

Because this fate threatens every ecclesiastical exegesis, the way to create distance with one's own tradition is to immerse oneself in ecumenical theology of ministry. For this reason, our advice would be to re-read scripture in an ecumenical context in order to renew the theology of ministry. We would like to remind our readers of the challenge in the concluding paragraph of the first chapter of the important *Faith and Order* commission report about *Scripture, Tradition and traditions* that was drawn up at the Third World Conference in Montreal (1963) to undertake the study of scripture jointly.²³

The greatest danger that threatens the exegesis of scriptural texts about ministry is the tendency to read them with a view to or as justification for the church's ministerial structuring. At the end of this study, we plead for focusing the ecumenical exegesis on the way ministry is exercised. Theology of ministry and exegesis of the texts about ministry have been dominated too much and too long by the formal aspect of ministerial functioning: organization, power and authority, and relationships between ministers and the faith community. Even the Reformed theology of ministry has not managed to create sufficient distance from the legalistic thought patterns that dominated theology of ministry in the Middle Ages. The Bible with its pluriformity of models of ministry cannot help us in this respect. It does not offer us a clear-cut blueprint for the ministerial organization in the church. But this does not mean that this is the whole message regarding ministry. To listen again to the wealth of concepts with which scripture defines ministry and an investigation of the way in which the Lord leads his people and Christ communicates with his disciples will be much more profitable. How promising this approach is can be found in a study by A. Houtepen into the roots of the concept *episkopé* and the verb *episkopein*.²⁴ These

²³ "55. Modern biblical scholarship has already done much to bring the different churches together by conducting them towards the Tradition. It is along this line that the necessity for further thinking about the hermeneutical problem arises: i.e. how we can reach an adequate interpretation of the Scriptures, so that the Word of God addresses us and Scripture is safeguarded from subjective or arbitrary reading. Should not the very fact that God has blessed the church with the Scriptures demand that we emphasize more than in the past a common study of the Scripture whenever representatives of the various churches meet? Should we not study more the Fathers of all periods of the church and their interpretation of the Scriptures in the light of our ecumenical task? ..." in Gassmann, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, 13.

²⁴ A. Houtepen, "Episkopé" in Brinkman and Houtepen, *Geen kerk zonder bisschop?*,

concepts do not lead to notions such as control, mandate and power, or jurisdiction, but to ideas such as ‘watching, investigating, visiting, comforting, and caring like parents care for their children’ and bring the author to modern forms of monitoring and oversight. We are convinced that a study of the biblical roots of the minister’s description as ‘pastor and teacher’ might yield much very worthwhile material to describe the ordained minister’s function, in general, and his role as minister of the Word in the Reformed tradition, in particular.

14–20; in particular, 19.

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