

# ECUMENICAL TASKS IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

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The current state of ecumenical dialogue between the churches of the Reformation and Rome, and between the Lutheran churches and Rome, is not encouraging. A few years ago things were different. With the signing of the Official Common Statement of the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999, there was some hope that an understanding on the other doctrinal differences that exist between Rome and the churches of the Reformation had become possible. Based on the German study of sixteenth-century condemnations—published under the title *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend?* in 1994 and subsequently accepted, although not without some reservation, by the responsible ecclesial committees on the Lutheran side—these doctrinal differences included two other important topics in addition to justification, namely, the doctrines of the sacraments and ministry. The results of the Condemnation Study regarding the topic of justification were received and affirmed beyond Germany—that is, internationally—by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Yet, in many German Protestant circles this reception and affirmation was met with a lack of understanding, primarily because they had expected a direct, reciprocal reaction by Rome to the positive reception of the Condemnation Study results by German ecclesial committees. This expectation was not realistic in large part because the consensus reached in Germany was initially only a regionally adopted result. A statement by the whole

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1. Guest lecture at the University of Münster, 28 January 2004, trans. by Fr. Edward Rommen.

Roman Catholic Church would have required an international consensus. With respect to the doctrine of justification, such a consensus had been reached through the Declaration on Justification worked out by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. As for the other two topics—the doctrine of sacraments, in particular the Eucharist, as well as ordained ministry—no corresponding international reception has, as yet, been forthcoming, even though that would have been in keeping with the logic of the process begun by the Condemnation Study and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

One of the reasons for this stagnation is certainly the strong resistance to efforts at reaching an understanding with Rome that has become noticeable on the Lutheran side, especially in Germany. The text of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was largely read with a hermeneutic of mistrust and suspicion, as if this declaration contained a betrayal of the central Reformation teaching of justification by faith alone. The opposite is true, however, for this declaration moves the Roman Catholic side toward the central Reformation position, accepting the formula of justification by faith alone as well as affirming the thesis of the assurance of salvation by faith. These two important points of sixteenth-century Reformation teaching were sharply rejected by the Roman side at the time, but they are better understood today, making agreement possible. It must, consequently, be all the more hurtful and incomprehensible to the Roman Catholic side that many in the Protestant churches, instead of gratefully acknowledging these facts, insinuate that the other side has all manner of dark intentions, above all the monopolization of Protestantism by the Roman Catholic Church. Genuine Roman Catholic interaction with core Reformation insights is for Protestant critics apparently unthinkable. It should not come as a surprise, then, that Roman Catholics raise the question of whether Protestants actually want ecclesial unity with Rome or whether their anti-Roman affect is a deep bond that, in spite of all differences, unites the various branches of Protestantism and proves itself stronger than all efforts at understanding. That impression—the result of the unobjective criticism of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which has remained even after the 1999 signing in Augsburg—must have weakened the position of ecumenically engaged discussion partners on the Roman Catholic side within their own church. In Rome there were and still are advocates of an engagement with Reformation positions on the doctrine of justification. There also were and continue to be advocates of a clear separation. The unobjective Protestant criticism of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification plays unambiguously into the hands of the latter.

Conversely, Protestant critics of ecumenical efforts at understanding with Rome might feel justified, since the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, in its declaration *Dominus Iesus* (5 September 2000) on the churches of the Reformation, states that they are “not Churches in the

proper sense," since they have not preserved the episcopal constitution of the church in apostolic succession and, for that reason, have also not preserved "the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery" (DI, 17). There is much in *Dominus Iesus* over which all serious Christians could rejoice, above all the emphasis—against the "relativistic mentality" of our age—of "the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ" (DI, 5). Pope Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (22 September 2000) that the intention of the declaration was to give "a great and festive confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ." It was intended to be an invitation for all Christians to "reaffirm this confession." In that case, the declaration should not have rejected the churches of the Reformation with so negative a verdict as the remark that they are "not Churches in the proper sense." The Lutheran side must have experienced this formulation as a brusque rejection. Only the opponents of ecumenical understanding with Rome, however, could see themselves confirmed by that remark.

Not only Lutheran but also Roman Catholic theologians have criticized the exclusion of the Reformation churches from the term "church." The Munich dogmatic theologian Peter Neuner—writing on the language of church and ecclesial communities in the documents of the Second Vatican Council—determined that, next to the Roman Catholic Church, the council described not only the Eastern Orthodox churches as "Churches," but also spoke of Western confessional churches of Reformation origin as "Churches and ecclesial communities," "deliberately leaving open which were to be considered 'Churches' and which [only] 'church communities.'" Here the Council did not want to make a decision.<sup>2</sup> This means that the statement of the declaration *Dominus Iesus* represents a step back from the ecumenical openness of the council: "When the document *Dominus Iesus* maintains that the Churches of the Reformation are 'not Churches in the proper sense' it is not in keeping with the Second Vatican Council." The Council "no longer . . . explicitly denied" that they are churches.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith is correct in maintaining that the one Lord and the unity and oneness of the church belong together, since the church is the body of Christ. "Just as the head and members of a living body, though not identical, are inseparable, so too Christ and the Church can neither be confused nor separated" (DI, 16). According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, this one church of Christ "subsists" in the Roman Catholic Church (LG, 8). This is a modification of the earlier equation according to which the Roman Catholic Church simply "is" the one church of Christ. While the word "is" implies the exclusive identity with the church of Christ, the phrase "subsists in"

2. P. Neuner, "Belastungsprobe für die Ökumene. Anmerkung zum Kirchenverständnis in einem Dokument der Glaubenskongregation," *Stimmen der Zeit* 218 (2000), pp. 723–38; p. 732.

3. Neuner, "Belastungsprobe für die Ökumene," p. 734.

could be taken to mean that the one church of Christ can “subsist” in other churches besides the Roman Catholic Church. As an example of such multiple subsistence of one and the same essence, Eberhard Jüngel has correctly pointed to the doctrine of the Trinity according to which multiple persons “subsist.”<sup>4</sup> Certainly the different confessions are not bound by so close a fellowship as the Trinitarian persons. Nevertheless, the example shows that linguistically one and the same essence can subsist in multiplicity. Seen in that way, the Lutheran side does not need to question the fact that the one church of Christ is “realized”—subsists—in the Roman Catholic Church. It is only the exclusive identification that cannot be accepted, especially since it does not conform to New Testament usage. Acts as well as (and especially) Paul speak of a plurality of churches (e.g., Rom 16:19; 2 Cor. 8:1, 18; Gal. 1:2, 22) in various places, churches which as churches of Christ are bound together “in Christ” and for that reason are to maintain fellowship with one another. In the case of ecumenical efforts we are also dealing with the theme of church fellowship. With communities that are not even “churches” there can be no church fellowship. Those in the Lutheran churches are certainly aware that, from the Roman Catholic viewpoint, Lutherans do not fully exhibit all the characteristics of a church. This is, above all, true for the episcopal constitution of the church. But does that require that they be altogether denied the characteristic of church? Just as individuals who have been baptized in the Lutheran churches and therefore incorporated into Christ can be said to be “in a certain, albeit imperfect, communion” with the Roman Catholic Church (*DI*, 17), so also the Reformation churches that are today still separated from Rome are “in a certain, though not perfect, communion” with the church of Rome.

The document *Dominus Iesus* compels the ecumenical discussion between the Reformation churches and the Roman Catholic Church to seek an understanding concerning the relationship between the one church of Jesus Christ—which we all confess in the creed—and the various particular churches, be that the Eastern Church or those church associations—that have arisen for various historical reasons—such as contemporary confessional churches. The declaration of the Congregation of Faith correctly opposes the view that they constitute “nothing more than a collection . . . of Churches and ecclesial communities” (*DI*, 17). The oneness of the church of Christ is specified as the oneness of his body as well as headship over the diversity of local parishes and also over contemporary confessional church associations. This one church of Christ appears concretely in local parishes in which the Eucharist—the meal of the one Lord—is celebrated and his gospel is proclaimed. Thus, the apostle Paul

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4. E. Jüngel, “Nur die Wahrheit befreit,” *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 20 September 2000.

writes, not simply to the church of the Corinthians, but to the one "Church of God, which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2). It is this one church of God and Christ, which also exists in other places where the "Name of our Lord Jesus Christ is called upon," his gospel proclaimed, and the meal left by Christ for his disciples is celebrated. The plurality of the churches in different places is thereby revealed as "church," which is manifested in the liturgical celebration in each place. This oneness of the body of Christ—evident in the local parishes and present in the celebration of the Eucharist—is a *spiritual* reality, which establishes the relatedness of the local parishes and also finds expression in the various forms of church community. Therefore, the oneness of the body of Christ given in the local parish does not mean that a universal church organization—even if it had its center in Jerusalem, as in the time of the apostle Paul, or later in Rome—is constitutive for the Christian identity of individual parishes. The organizational form of the church community derives first and foremost from the given spiritual oneness of the body of Christ, and that spiritual oneness gives it its expression. In the Pauline sense, the various local parishes are shown to be churches, not through "their participation in a 'universal Church,' but through their 'gathering in Christ.'"<sup>5</sup> Their solidarity with the church at large, a solidarity that has always been given by their "being in Christ," follows on this logic. Thus the one church is to be understood neither in terms of local parishes and their federations nor in terms of a universal church organization, but rather in terms of the one Lord, through whose presence in the celebration of his meal, as well as the one baptism, all Christians are members of his body.

If one is to come to an understanding of the conditions for ecclesial communion, there will have to be clarity concerning the relationship between the ecclesial communion sought in the ecumenical process and the oneness of the church specified in Christ. For that to occur—according to Lutheran teaching—agreement on the teaching of the gospel and with respect to the correct use of the sacraments would be sufficient (*Confessio Augustana* [CA], article 7). Whether agreement concerning ordained ministry of the church is also required remains open to dispute. An affirmative answer to this question comes by way of article 5 of the Augsburg Confession, which explicitly states that God has instituted the ministry of preaching—a *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta*—through which justifying faith can be achieved. This suggests that in addition to the agreement concerning the gospel and the sacraments, which according to CA 7 are necessary for the unity of the church, agreement concerning this God-instituted ministry is also necessary. However, since CA 7 does not specifically mention the ministry together with the gospel

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5. J. Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993), p. 97.

and the administration of the sacraments as a necessary condition for the unity of the church, other Lutherans view it as the object of the merely human structure of the life of the church. Yet, CA 5 does not allow the essence of the *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* to be counted merely as *traditiones humanas* or ceremonies, concerning which no agreement is required as a condition for the unity of the church. Only the varied organization of church ministry throughout history can be considered a matter of human order.<sup>6</sup> This, however, necessitates answering the question of just what is to be reckoned to the essence of this ministry of preaching originating in divine institution and what aspects of it might be viewed as the object of variable human structure. An understanding on this topic among Lutheran theologians and between Lutheran churches is today one of the most pressing requirements of ecumenical dialogue not only with the Roman Catholic Church but also with the Orthodox churches of the Christian East and with the Anglican Communion.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, besides the agreement on the basic teachings of the gospel as they are formulated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, the liturgical order of the ancient church and its constitution, that is, the office of bishop and apostolic succession, are necessary for the unity of the church. That is why the declaration *Dominus Iesus* acknowledges only those churches that, in addition to the communion of the faith, have also preserved "apostolic succession" in the office of bishop, and thus a "valid Eucharist," as "true particular Churches" (DI, 17). The churches that developed out of the Reformation are not acknowledged as churches in the complete sense, then, because they have not maintained a valid "Episcopate" and because they have, accordingly, failed to preserve "the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery." The Second Vatican Council in its Decree on Ecumenism had already stated that the ecclesial communities that are separated from Rome, "above all because of the absence of the sacrament of ordination" (*praesertim propter sacramenti Ordinis defectum*), had not preserved the original and complete reality of the eucharistic mystery (UR, 22). The council did not specifically say of what the *defectus* of the sacrament of ordination consisted, but, according to Roman Catholic opinion, the priest's authority to preside over the celebration of the Eucharist in the place of Christ depends on his having been ordained by a bishop in apostolic succession. The episcopal constitution of the church is constitutive of the correct and valid celebration of the Eucharist at the center of Christian worship. For this very

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6. Cf. the position paper of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), "Ecclesial Community in Its Protestant Understanding: A Votum on the Ordered Co-Existence of Churches with Divergent Confessions," *EKD-Texte* 69 (2001), pp. 2-3 (13). [Cf. the symposium in *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (Spring 2005) on this very topic; R. H., editor.]

reason the Council itself had already emphasized that the church ministries (*ecclesiae ministeria*)—in their relationship to the Eucharist and the other sacraments—had to become a “necessary object of dialogue.” The plural form of “church ministries,” moreover, points to the close connection between the ordination of priests and the office of bishop.

The urgency of dialogue on this complex of topics<sup>7</sup> is brought into even sharper relief in light of the emphasis placed on the fundamental relevance of the episcopal constitution of the church in the document *Dominus Iesus*. It is in relationship to this topic that, from a Roman Catholic view, the acknowledgment of the Reformation churches and, thereby, the possibility of ecclesial communion depends.

That said, however, it is not as if no progress has been made in the dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on ordained ministry during the decades since the Second Vatican Council. Think here especially of the 1981 document of the joint commission of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Secretariat for Unity on “The Ministry in the Church.” The 1982 Lima document of the World Council of Churches on “Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry,” moreover, also contains important statements concerning the ordained ministry of the church, in particular concerning the function of preserving the unity of the churches in apostolic faith. One could also point to the results achieved in the dialogue between Lutherans and Anglicans through the 1992 Porvoo Declaration. These will reveal, on the one hand, a recognition of the legitimacy of the Lutheran presbyterial ordination of pastors by pastors as practiced since the sixteenth century and, on the other hand, a willingness on the Lutheran side to be included in episcopal succession as a sign of, if not a guarantee of, the “unity and continuity of the church in all ages and in all places.”<sup>8</sup> The Porvoo Declaration, which made ecclesial communion between the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches and the Anglican Church possible, has, however, not yet been approved by German Lutherans, primarily because they feel hindered by the Leunenberg Concord between Lutherans and Reformed (valid in Germany) to acknowledge the importance of the office of bishop for the being of the church. Naturally, this point also has decisive import for an understanding with the Roman Catholic Church concerning ecclesial ministries.

The Lutheran Reformation did not reject the episcopal structure of the medieval church. That is the meaning of article 28 of the Augsburg Confession. In keeping with the conditions in the medieval Roman Church as

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7. Cf. G. Wenz, P. Neuner, and Th. Nikolaou, *Ekklesiologie und Kirchenverfassung: Die institutionelle Gestalt des episkopalen Dienstes* (Münster: LIT, 2003). Therein especially G. Wenz, “Der episkopale Dienst in der Kirche,” pp. 180–204. Cf. now also G. Wenz, “Defectus ordinis? Zum Verhältnis von Bischofsamt und Pfarramt aus lutherischer Sicht,” *Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur/Ökumenische Information* 35 (31 August 2004), pp. 3–5.

8. Porvoo Declaration, No. 50–54.

well as with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the Reformation understood the office of bishop as well as that of the pastor or presbyter as a ministry of preaching (CA, 28, 5). That the content of the office of bishop in the Augsburg Confession is considered identical with that of the presbyter or pastors, as it is expressed in the phrase *episcopi seu pastores* (CA, 28, 30.53), is, nevertheless, in keeping with the prevailing opinion of medieval canon law, as made known by the *Decretum Gratiani* (Decr. Grat. I D 95 c 5): The office of bishop and the office of pastor are in essence one and the same office, to be distinguished only by the extent of the bishop's jurisdiction and his right to ordain. The latter would have been acknowledged by the Lutheran Reformation (*Smalcald Articles* [AS], part III, article X) if the bishops had only tolerated the Reformation teaching. It was only in Augsburg (1530), when no agreement could be achieved, that they established their own ordination structure, ordination of pastors by pastors (priests or presbyters). This was justified as an emergency measure, as well as by the fact that the pastor or presbyter participated in essentially the same office as the bishops (AS, III, X). It is in this connection that one could believe that they had maintained the principle of the succession of the office. This conviction was in keeping with the personal opinion of Luther, who, in 1523, emphasized the "Christian fellowship or community's right to call, install, and remove teachers."<sup>9</sup> At the same time, he said that this only applied to emergency situations, in which there was no bishop to call Lutheran pastors (WA 11, 413ff). Fundamentally, then, Luther maintained the idea of episcopal succession of office. He also wrote in his 1531 *Commentary on Galatians* that to the end of the world this was the *generalis post Apostolos vocatio in orbe terrarum*, to which he added *neque est mutanda* (WA 40/1, 59, 23f). The apostles had called their disciples to be their successors, as Paul called Timothy and Titus. These, in turn, called bishops as their own successors, and that has been continued into our own time. According to Luther's judgment, this structure was not to be changed. That did not rule out the possibility that in times of need—when there is no bishop who can supply the communities with preachers of the gospel—another way would have to be found, as Luther wrote in 1523: "The example of Titus and Timothy does not apply here, rather one has to call someone out of the community, and God determines whether he is confirmed by Titus or not" (WA 11, 414, 30ff). According to Luther, however, this is not the normal means of investing an individual with an office in the church—the normative mode remains ordination in episcopal succession. That is a mark of the unity of the church in the teaching of the apostles and must be preserved.

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9. D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, J. F. K. Knaake et al., eds. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff), vol. 11, pp. 408–16, hereafter cited as WA.

The Reformation position on the unity of the office of bishops and pastors, as already expressed in the last article of the Augsburg Confession, does not allow us to use the statement of CA 5 concerning the divinely instituted office of pastor to refer to the office of pastor *as opposed to* the office of bishop. Rather, the teaching of the Lutheran Reformation affirms the unity of the offices of pastor and bishop. This is of decisive importance for all ecumenical efforts at an understanding of church ministry. In this sense, the Lutheran side must, in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, strive for recognition of Lutheran ordained ministry as a form of apostolic succession, even though it takes the form of presbyterial succession. On the other hand, there must be, as in the case of the Reformers, a willingness to acknowledge a regional office of episcopal oversight in which the basic right of ordination lies, since, in general, ordination and ordained ministry in particular have to do with the unity of the church in apostolic faith.

It was only in the post-apostolic period that the office of bishop developed its classical form of church leadership. However, this was the result of the development of early Christian offices already documented in the New Testament and thus part of the biblical canon. The earliest reference to the word "bishop" in the New Testament, at the beginning of the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians, speaks of "bishops and deacons" in the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:1). It is worth noting that the text speaks of a plurality of bishops in this local parish. This cannot, therefore, refer to the later office of church leadership but must rather point to the chairmanship of liturgical gatherings in the different homes of church members.<sup>10</sup> This explains the plural form of overseers—bishops—who exercised oversight during these gatherings. By contrast, in post-apostolic times the leadership of the whole local church fell to the *episkopos*—as shown in the pastoral letters (esp. 1 Tim. 3f)—in the sense of a leadership through teaching, that is, preserving the church through the teaching of the apostles. According to the description of the pastoral letters, Paul himself had installed bishops in this function of preserving the churches in the unity of apostolic faith. If the pastoral letters are pseudonymous, this may be historical fiction. But in any case, the post-apostolic bishops did, in fact, assume the task that arose because of the apostles' death—to preserve the churches in the unity of apostolic faith by means of teaching. To that extent the office of bishop in apostolic succession is, in fact, the classical form of the office of pastor, which, according to CA 5, was instituted by God. Initially, however, the office of bishop was a local office, a kind of citywide pastorate, rather than the office of regional oversight, and if this were to be given greater consideration in ecumenical discussion, it would

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10. Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament*, p. 142.

be possible to agree on the episcopal character of the Lutheran office of pastor. This does not rule out the necessity of regional oversight of teaching, which was later connected to the office of bishop. In this sense, the Lutheran Reformation also recognized the necessity of a regional office of bishop (CA, 28), the tasks of which were otherwise identical with those of local church leadership, namely, to preserve the churches in the unity of the apostolic faith by means of the preaching of the gospel. For this reason, the *episkopos*, whether as local pastor or bearer of a regional office of oversight, assumes chairmanship of the celebration of the Eucharist in which we, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:17), are dealing with the unity of the church of Christ. Because of the connection between the office of bishop and the unity of the church, it is correct for the ordination to this office to be administered, as a rule, through a regional office of oversight in apostolic succession, that is, in emulation of the teaching of the apostles and in the office's responsibility for the unity of the church in its faith in the one Lord.

In this sense the Lutheran churches should also be able to approve of the view that the episcopal constitution belongs to the very nature of the church, whereby the originally local character of the office, that is, the unity between bishopric and pastorate, needs to be kept in view, as well as its relatedness to the preservation of the unity of the church in apostolic faith by the observance of the proclamation of teaching. This is, then, closely associated with the task of a regional oversight of teaching, although its concrete organization, as well as the related responsibility for ordination, is conditioned by continued historical development.

The Lutheran churches that signed the 1992 Porvoo Declaration and the analogous Concord of Agreement in the United State of America, and which on this basis reestablished ecclesial communion, acted in agreement with the position of the sixteenth-century Lutheran Reformation. One can hope that the German Lutheran churches will join the others in this step, a step that would open the possibility of a similarly based agreement with Rome. This agreement would find the Roman Catholic Church recognizing the legitimacy and validity of ordained ministry in the Lutheran churches, in the sense of a presbyterial succession of office, and, at the same time, would illustrate a willingness on the part of Lutherans to recognize the necessity of a regional episcopal office of teaching oversight and the importance of coupling the authority to ordain with this office as the normal means of transferring ecclesial offices. This kind of solution would remove the main obstacle for the Roman Catholic Church standing in the way of eucharistic communion between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. That is the very *defectus ordinis* that according to *Unitatis Redintegratio* 22 is the absence in the Reformation churches of a validly ordained ministry that presides over the celebration of the eucharistic mystery.

However, the Lutheran churches will have to take care that their practice corresponds with the principle that only ordained ministers are authorized to celebrate the Eucharist (CA, 14; cf. Apol. 14). If that does not take place, Lutheran churches should not be surprised if their teaching on ministry and ordination becomes implausible.

In the understanding of the Eucharist itself, there are today, according to the ecumenical documents of the last decades, no irreconcilable differences. There is agreement that the theological core of the Roman dogma of transubstantiation, independent of the Aristotelian terminology of substance and accidents, affirms the real presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine, which was also decisively affirmed and defended by the Lutheran Reformation. According to Karl Rahner, transubstantiation means nothing more than that the priest, when distributing communion, does not say "this is the bread," but "the body of Christ." The second, more significant difference in eucharistic understanding has to do with the Roman Catholic position that views that which is brought to God as a sacrifice—a view that, according to the judgment of Reformation critics, is an unacceptable competition to the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Yet, ecumenical discussion has even reached understanding on this topic. The Eucharist is to be celebrated as a remembrance of the unique sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and, through that remembering, the celebrants allow themselves to be drawn into Christ's giving of his life. This new interpretation of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, as well as the agreement concerning the meaning of transubstantiation, however, needs to be given expression in a joint declaration analogous to the one on justification (1999). That said, the basic lines of an understanding on these topics have already been won in ecumenical discussion. Something similar is true for the discussion of sacraments in general and with regard to the related question on the number of sacraments. An agreement has been achieved, according to which the terminology, whether used in a narrow or broad way, is not decisive, as long as there is agreement concerning liturgical actions and facts in question. On all of these topics, already dealt with in the Condemnation Study, a conclusive clarification in the form of a joint declaration by the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Lutheran World Federation would be welcome. However, the central problem in need of a solution, if there is to be progress between the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church toward a mutual communion at the eucharistic celebration, has to do with the understanding of ordained ministries of the church and the possibility of a recognition of the Lutheran ministries by Rome. If this goal were to be achieved, different churches would remain, but they would live in reconciled difference, such that ecclesial communion between our churches would be possible.



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