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Communio
The Guiding Concept of Catholic Ecumenical Theology
The present and future situation of the ecumenical movement

by Cardinal Walter Kasper

I. The Problem: Where are we - where are we going?

One question concerns us deeply: where are we today, more than 35 years after the Second Vatican Council, and after 35 years of ecumenical dialogue? From this arises a second question: How are we to continue in the new Millennium? Is there a way forward at all? What ecumenical goal are we aiming for?

1. If one considers the international dialogues of the last 35 years and studies the two large volumes of "*Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*" one has to note that, on the international level, it is the Catholic church which is involved in by far the largest number of dialogues, and therefore among all the Christian churches and ecclesial communities the one most committed to the dialogue process. For Pope John Paul II the ecumenical task is one of the priorities of his Pontificate (*UUS 99*).

A second discovery is even more surprising. Although all dialogues are based on the Second Vatican Council and its "Catholic Principles of Ecumenism" (*UR 2-4*), they have never been held according to a pre-conceived plan. All the more astonishing is the fact that they converge in a surprising way. All the dialogues - both with the Orthodox churches and with the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran and Reformed ecclesial communities, the "Free Churches" and the new Evangelical and Pentecostal communities - converge in the fact that they centre around the concept of *communio*. *Communio* really is the key concept for all bilateral and multi-lateral dialogues. All dialogues define the visible unity of all Christians as *communio*-unity, and agree in understanding it, in analogy with the original Trinitarian model (*LG 4; UR 2*), not as uniformity but as unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

This convergence in the concept of *communio* corresponds to the vision of the Second Vatican Council. At a first glance, other images and concepts seem to predominate in the description of the nature of the church in the Council's documents: church as People of God, as Body of Christ, as Temple of the Holy Spirit and as Sacrament, i.e. sign and instrument of unity. A detailed analysis however can show that the images and concepts mentioned ultimately are based on, and interpreted through, the understanding of the church as *communio*. Thus, the statement by the extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985 is correct and justified to say that the *communio*-ecclesiology is the "central and basic idea of the Council documents" (*II.C.1*).

2. For the Council, the *communio* is not a distant and future entity which ecumenical dialogue has to aim at. The church as *communio* is not something which has to be achieved ecumenically. Through the one Baptism we have all been baptised into the one Body of Christ which is the church (1 Cor. 12:13); as Body of Christ the church cannot be split by human beings. It is therefore not the aim of ecumenical dialogue to bring about the unity of the church. According to the Council's teaching the unity of the church of Jesus Christ is realised in the Catholic church (*subsistit*) (LG 8; UR 3 f). But for the Council this is not to be understood in an exclusive way: it implies that many essential elements of ecclesial reality are also present in other churches and ecclesial communities (LG 8:15; UR 3 f; UUS 10-14). It is therefore the aim of ecumenical dialogue, with God's help, to enable the incomplete communion which already exists with other churches and ecclesial communities to grow into full communion (UUS 14).

The basic ecumenical insight therefore is that among baptised there is an already existing fundamental unity or *communio*, so that we have to distinguish not between full and no *communio* at all but between full and incomplete unity or *communio*.

The ecumenical dialogues have concretely confirmed this insight in various ways. They have shown that the incomplete *communio*, which links us with the other churches and ecclesial communities, is not just theory but a reality which can be experienced. We have found that what unites us is far more than what, sadly, still divides us. Everybody who has participated in ecumenical dialogue knows what an exhilarating and ever surprising experience this is.

This then is the answer to the question asked at the beginning: Where are we today, after three decades of ecumenical dialogue? It is not only the convergence over the concept of *communio*; it is the concrete experience that *communio* is not only a distant goal but is already a given reality, albeit still in many ways incomplete, troubled and impeded. This discovery represents a 20th century *novum* in church history. The separated churches and ecclesial communities no longer see themselves as hostile brothers, or as ultimately indifferent neighbours. They see themselves as brothers and sisters who together have set out on the way to full communion. The Encyclical Letter "*Ut Unum Sint*" speaks about the re-discovered brotherliness as the essential fruit of the ecumenical dialogue (UUS 41 f).

Thus, old-style polemics and the theology of controversy have been replaced by ecumenical theology. It does not by-pass, deny or gloss over the differences that still exist; it does not derive from illusory wishful thinking, or cheap relativism or from a superficial irenicism. It does not shirk the question of truth. Instead, it starts with the greater things which are held in common, so that, on the basis of what is shared, differences can be correctly defined, better understood and if possible overcome.

3. The new ecclesial reality fills us with gratitude, with joy and with hope; but at the same time it also causes pain. For, the closer we come to each other, the more painful is the experience that we are not yet in full communion. We are hurt by what still separates us and hinders us from joining around the table of the Lord; we are increasingly dissatisfied with the ecumenical status quo, and ecumenical frustration and sometimes even opposition develops. Paradoxically, it is the same ecumenical progress which is also the cause of the ecumenical malaise. This gives increased urgency to the questions: How can we progress? How can we get from the already existing incomplete communion to full *communio*?

The answer is not easy because, as so often, there is no one answer. The present situation is complex and many-layered and there are many reasons why some people at present have the impression that, although a lot is happening in ecumenical dialogue, no real progress is being made. Some even think that things are going backwards. One of the reasons (and by no means the only one) is that dialogue documents may show convergence about the concept of *communio* but, on closer inspection, different understandings are hidden behind the term. The common concept of *communio* has different meanings and thus calls forth different expectations and projected goals. This necessarily leads to misunderstandings on one's own side and with the partners. Thus, convergence about one and the same concept, however, is - apart from other factors - one cause for confusion.

II. Ideological Misunderstandings

The differences in understanding reflect - as will be shown later - the different ecclesiologies of the various churches and ecclesial communities and their different self-understanding as *communio*. But often the theological understanding of *communio* is also replaced or overlaid by an anthropological or sociological understanding. The secularised use of the word *communio* leads to a secular understanding of an ecumenism characterised by non-theological, general social criteria and plausibilities.

1. In its secularised meaning, *communio* is understood in a "horizontal" way as a community of people which results from the individual's desire for community. *Communio* in this sense is the result of an association of partners who are in principal free and equal. This understanding is based on the idea of the social contract which developed during the period of enlightenment in modern times. Such an understanding of the church can even become the battle-cry against a hierarchical understanding of the church as *communio hierarchica*. It then describes the church "from below", i.e. the "base" church over against the "established" church. In the name of the *communio* concept of the church, the idea of the equality and equal rights of all church members is developed, and the democratisation of the church is demanded, where decisions are made in open, fearless dialogue, in critical discourse, in consensus-forming processes or by plebiscite.

We are convinced that democracy is the best of all bad constitutions. But the experiences of the 20th century, and not only they, have shown that majorities can be mobilised by populist agitation and often represent the sum of the highest number of private interests capable of forming a majority, at the expense of minorities which cannot mobilise sufficient voices. Democratically evolved majorities, if generally recognised, may have a pacifying influence but the search for truth cannot be organised by majorities.

2. The neo-Romanticism of the early 20th century tried to distance itself from the rational and utilitarian understanding of society and community. To the rational and interest-oriented, but cold and impersonal civic society, it opposed the idea of a naturally grown, personal community based on primary personal relations, and suggesting personal nearness and warmth in a familiar and friendly atmosphere.

Often this *communio*-idea is applied to the church. Such a brotherly-sisterly understanding of the church can model itself on the example of Jesus and the ideal picture of the early church in Jerusalem. During the course of church history, there have been frequent attempts to realise this ideal in monastic communities and fraternities, also in some Free Church and pietistic communities. Today it is often practised in small groups, in base communities of the church, and especially in the more recent spiritual communities.

There is no doubt that such communities have a beneficial effect on the renewal and revival of the church. However, if the model of a fraternal ecclesiology is applied to the church as a whole, it can lead to a "cuddle in the corner ecclesiology" which chafes against the institutional reality of a large church instead of attempting to establish a constructive relation with it.

3. These interpretations of community however, even sociologically, are unrealistic and do not stand up to rational reflection. Institutions do not only carry the danger of personal alienation and suppression of personal freedom but also have a relieving and liberating function for the individual. They give independence from personal and communal arbitrariness and create security of behaviour, expectations, and rights. If the church is understood as a community of discourse, it would, after all the continual discussion, never be free for its proper task, worshipping God together and bearing clear and unambiguous witness to Christ together before the whole world.

But an institutional understanding of the church can also lead to new misunderstandings. It often leads to an understanding of the church as a *communio hierarchica*, in the sense in which this term was usually understood in pre-Conciliar theology: church as *societas perfecta inaequalis* or *inaequalium*. This understanding was developed as a defence against egalitarian influences which came from the French revolution and its spiritual fathers. Thus, the statement of the Synod of Pistoia (1794) was deemed to be heretical, for it claimed that the authority of the ministry and of the leadership in the church was passed to the shepherds by the community of the faithful, and was therefore democratically legitimised (DH 2603). Against this it was stressed that the *communio* of the faithful was only made possible and held together by the ministry, as a community of those who were in one mind and full agreement about their faith, so that the flock cannot exist without the shepherd (Rohrbasser, 600-669).

4. Attempts are occasionally made to justify this understanding, of *communio* based on a unifying ministry, by referring to the mention of the *communio hierarchica* in the texts of the Second Vatican Council (LG 21 f; Nota 2; 4). This is wrong. On the contrary, the Council tried to overcome a one-sidedly hierarchical understanding of the church, and re-emphasised the biblical and early church doctrine of the priesthood of all the baptised, as well as the doctrine of the *sensus* and *consensus fidelium* which derives from it. Accordingly, the laity are not just the objects of acts of the official church but active and co-responsible subjects in the church. They have their own respective charism and their own responsibility (LG 9-12; 30 ff). This does not lead to a democratic understanding but to a participative concept of *communio* with graduated rights of co-operation.

The church is therefore neither a democracy nor a monarchy, not even a constitutional monarchy. She is hierarchical in the original sense of the word, meaning "holy origin", i.e. she has to be understood on the basis of what is holy, by the gifts of salvation, by Word and Sacrament as authoritative signs and means of the Holy Spirit's effectiveness. The church exists and lives only out of the "in advance" of God's salvific work through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The ministry is not a dominating power which oppresses people (cf. Mt. 20:25-27), but a gift and present from the Lord of the church; it is an authoritative service for building up both the individuals and the whole (Eph. 4:7-12). This brings us to the original and authentic theological understanding of *communio*.

III. Theological Foundations

1. The Greek word for *communio*, "*koinonia*", in its original sense does not mean community but participation (*participatio*). The verb "*koinoneo*" means "to share, to participate, to have something in common".

In this sense, James and John are "*koinonoi*", participants, partners, companions on the way (Lk. 5:11). Blood relationship can also be described in this way (Mt. 23:30). According to the Acts of the Apostles the early church in Jerusalem constituted a *koinonia* in the breaking of the bread and in prayer (Acts 2:42); they held everything in common (Acts 2:44; 4:23). The real theological meaning of *koinonia* is found in Paul, and in the Johannine Epistles. *Koinonia* with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), with the Gospel (Phil. 1:5), in the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13), in the faith (Philm. 6), of suffering and comfort (2 Cor. 1:5,7; Phil. 3:10), of the glory to come (1 Pet. 5:1), of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), with the Father and the Son and consequently among us (1 Joh. 1:3). Basis and measure of this communion is the unity of Father and Son (Jn. 17:21-23).

The sacramental basis of *communio* is the *communio* in the one Baptism. For through the one Baptism we have been all baptised into the one Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Rom. 12:4 f; Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 4:3 f). Baptism is the sacrament of faith. So *communio* through Baptism presupposes and implies *communio* in the common faith of the church, i.e. communion in the gospel. Both communion in faith and Baptism are the foundations of *communio*. The summit of *communio* is the participation in the Eucharist (LG 11).

In the history of theology, the most important text was to become 1 Cor. 10:16 f: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." This text states that the *koinonia* in the one eucharistic bread is source and sign of the *koinonia* in the one body of the church; the one eucharistic body of Christ is source and sign of the one ecclesial body of Christ.

This statement must not lead to a one-sidedly eucharistic *communio* ecclesiology. The sacramental basis of the *communio* in the one Baptism must not be forgotten. It also must be remembered that the communion between the Apostles and between the congregations (*Gal. 2:9*), the community of property of the early church in Jerusalem (*Acts 2:44; 4:23*) and Paul's collections for the church in Jerusalem all happen in the framework of the *koinonia* (*Gal. 2:10; 2 Cor. 8-9*). So the communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit also affects the communion of brothers among each other and especially the communion with the suffering. *Koinonia/communio* therefore has a theological and communal and social dimension as well. It would be wrong to limit the ecclesial significance of *koinonia/communio* to the area of sacraments and worship, or even just to the Eucharist. There is so to say a vertical and a horizontal dimension of communion.

Even a Trinitarian understanding of *communio* as participation in the Trinitarian life implies at the same time the communal interpretation. For the Trinitarian God is self-giving and self-communication of Father and Son and of both in the Holy Spirit. So participation in the Trinitarian life becomes the foundation and the model of mutual communication, of communal and social behaviour and of a spirituality of communion.

2. It would be interesting to follow in detail the subsequent history of the meaning of *communio* in the tradition. This is not possible in this context. We would like to confine ourselves to a few reminders of the most important stages in the development.

The history of the meaning of *communio* is most closely linked with the confession of the "*communio sanctorum*" in the Apostles' Creed which is shared by all the churches of the Latin tradition, i.e. beside the Catholic church also by the ecclesial communities which emerged from the 16th century Reformation, and therefore represents an essential ecumenical bridge of understanding, and is an important point of departure for the ecumenical conversations.

Originally in all probability *communio sanctorum* did not mean communion of the saints (*sancti*), but communion with the Holy (*sancta*); *communio sanctorum* meant *communio* of the *sancta*, i.e. *communio sacramentorum*, especially *communio* in the Eucharist. This meaning of *koinonia tōn hagiōn* was dominant particularly in the East (summed up by *John of Damascus, Explanation of the Orthodox Faith IV, 13; PG 94,1153*). In the Latin tradition since Niketas of Remesiana (+ 414), in whose writings the addition of *communio sanctorum* to the Apostles' Creed is first to be found, a significant and momentous change of meaning can be discovered (*Explanatio symboli, 23; PL 52,87 B*). *Communio sanctorum* was increasingly understood to be the communion of the pilgrim (militant) and heavenly (triumphant) church (Mary, the Patriarchs and Prophets, the Apostles, Martyrs and Confessors, all the just and the angels), but also as the communion of the universal church "from the just Abel to the last of the chosen" (*Augustine, sermo 341,9,11; LG 2*). So the so-called communal meaning became predominant.

Nevertheless, for the Latin fathers, especially for Augustine, the sacramental and eucharistic understanding of the church, and the inner connection between Eucharist and church were still very important (*In Ioan 26, 6, 13, e.a.*). The change occurred only during the second eucharistic dispute around Berengarius of Tours in the 11th century. The term "*corpus mysticum*", i.e. mysterious sacramental body of the Lord, which until then had been usual for the Eucharist could now be misinterpreted in a purely spiritualistic sense. In order to exclude this spiritualist misunderstanding the Eucharist now came to be called "*corpus verum*", and the expression "*corpus mysticum*" was reserved for the church. Church and Eucharist were therefore uncoupled.

This had far-reaching effects both for the understanding of the Eucharist and of the church. The eucharist or communion was largely understood individualistically, and the church as "Christendom" was seen as a sociological and political entity, considered more in terms of the categories of law and power than in terms of the sacraments. In mitigation of medieval scholastic theology however it has to be added that theologians of the standing of Thomas Aquinas retained the relation between Eucharist and church and emphasised it clearly. For Thomas the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is only an intermediate reality, the *res et sacramentum*, the *res sacramenti* itself is the unity of the church. (*S.Th. III, 73:1; 79:5*).

3. The original basic meaning of *koinonia/communio* was first rediscovered in the Catholic Tübingen school, especially by Johann Adam Möhler; the real break-through came with the investigations by H. de Lubac in his book "*Corpus mysticum*" (1943). These insights were made ecumenically fertile by Y. Congar. In addition, a series of church history studies should be mentioned, especially the contribution by L. Hertling. On the Protestant side, P. Althaus, D. Bonhoeffer, and W. Elert should be mentioned. A similar re-discovery occurred in Orthodox theology, as will be mentioned later.

The Second Vatican Council adopted the newer *communio* ecclesiology (*SC 47; LG 3:7; 11;23;26; UR 2*). In the Council's documents we find both the "vertical" sacramental view and the "horizontal" or communal one. Both interpretations are justified. This becomes clear particularly by the way the Council considers the ecclesial *communio* to be based on, and pre-figured in the Trinitarian *communio* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*LG 4; UR 2*). According to the original Trinitarian model of *communio* as self-communication between Father and Son, and of both in the Holy Spirit, inter-subjective communication is also constitutive for the church. The personal *communio* of the Christians with each other and among themselves is founded on the sacramental *communio*. Through sharing in the one eucharistic body we become an ecclesial body; but we cannot share the eucharistic bread without also sharing our daily bread.

Within the framework of this integral view of *communio*, the relation of the foundations of the different aspects has to be noted. The "vertical" communion with God is the foundation and support for the "horizontal" communion of the Christians in the churches and congregations among each other. This *communio* does not come about by gathering the members of the church into a communion, but individual Christians are incorporated into the sacramental given communion. According to Paul, one is baptised into the Body of Christ (*1 Cor. 12:13*). The sacraments are the foundation of the church, and the sacramentally founded church celebrates the sacraments; and the sacramental communion expresses itself in communal and social behaviour.

However, different emphases can be placed on the different aspects of the one *communio* reality. Thus, different and sometimes even opposing *communio*-ecclesiologies can be derived from the one common basic term *koinonia/communio*. On the basis of a far-reaching ecumenical agreement in this concept there are different confessional developments.

IV. Different Confessional Developments

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic church has officially participated in the ecumenical movement. Thus it was confronted with the church and *communio* concept of the Orthodox churches as well as of the ecclesial communities which issued from the 16th century Reformation.

1. First, there occurred an independent, constructive but also critical encounter with the new eucharistic ecclesiology of the churches of the East. This had been developed in different ways by N. Afanessiev, A. Schmemmann, J. Zizioulas and others. However, it is not uncontroversial in inner-Orthodox circles; it is not simply "the" Orthodox position. Ecumenically, however, it has become influential.

The starting-point for the eucharistic ecclesiology according to 1 Cor. 10:16 f is the inner connection between ecclesial and eucharistic *communio*. It means that the church is realised in the local church gathered for the Eucharist. The local church celebrating the Eucharist is the church gathered around the bishop (this is different for Afanessiev who represents a more presbyteral and congregational view). Since the one Christ and the one church are present in every local church, no local church can be isolated; every local church is necessarily and essentially in *koinonia/communio* with all other local churches which are celebrating the Eucharist. The universal church is a *communio*-unity of churches. In this sense Orthodox theologians sometimes take over the WCC's concept and speak of a conciliar fellowship or communion of churches (cf. IV. 3).

The eucharistic view was also adopted by some Catholic theologians, e.g. by J. Tillard (*Église d'Églises. L'écclésiologie de communion*, 1987; *L'Église locale. Ecclésiologie de communion e catholicité*, 1995); it is also found in the first document of the *Joint International Theological Commission between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches*, "The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity" (Munich 1982).

For the Orthodox theologians themselves, however, the eucharistic ecclesiology often has an anti-primatial intention. The Orthodox churches can in general accept that Rome holds the "primacy in love" (*Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Rom, prooem.*); but they understand this as an honorary primacy and exclude any primacy of jurisdiction. They speak in terms of *primus inter pares*, but put the emphasis on *pares*, in the sense of equality in episcopal consecration, hence without excluding the primatial principle within the synodical structure on the different levels of the church. Since every local church is church in the fullest sense, there can be no ecclesial ministry or authority higher than the bishop. There may from early days have been a precedence of the Metropolitan sees and of the patriarchs but it is synodically embedded. The Petrine ministry is exercised by all the bishops, individually and in synodical communion. Therefore, in the opinion of the Orthodox churches, the problem of the primacy of Rome can only be considered in connection with the synodical or conciliar structure of the church, for instance in the manner of the early church pentarchy of ancient patriarchates. The Orthodox partners always refer to *Canon 34* of the "*Apostolic canones*", which states that the first bishop can only take important decisions in agreement with the other bishops, and these only in agreement with the first bishop (cf. *Valamo Document, 1988*).

The Second Vatican Council basically recognised the synodical church order which the churches of the East have had since early days (*UR 16*); the Council also made some attempts to revive synodical or collegial structures which also exist in the Latin tradition. But the crucial point in ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern churches remains the charism which is specific and proper to the Petrine ministry, and therefore the point of reference and the principle of unity for the ecclesial *communio* (*DH 3051; LG 18*). The purely eucharistic *communio*-ecclesiology of many Orthodox theologians lacks this principle of visible unity. The eucharistic *communio*-ecclesiology of the Orthodox theologians does not resolve all the problems linked with the visible unity of the Orthodox churches. They do feel the need of a co-ordination among themselves that may ensure their unity and help overcome the inter-Orthodox, and often ethnic, tensions, they experience.

2. Starting from different and sometimes contradictory presuppositions, the ecclesiology of the ecclesial communities stemmed from the Reformation arrives at a similar structural problem. In his early works, Luther is still very much aware of the connection between Holy Communion and the church (*Ein Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen Leichnams Christi und von den Bruderschaften: WA 2, 742-758; cf. 26,493*). But in Lutheran and Reformed theology the church is generally understood as based on the proclamation of the Word rather than on the sacraments, and defined as *creatura verbi* (*De captivitate Babylonica: WA 6,551*). This also excludes an ecclesiology which understands the church to be constituted "from below", by an association of its members. According to Reformation understanding the church is where the Word of God is preached in its purity, and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel (*CA VII; Apol. 7*). Thus, the *communio sanctorum* becomes synonymous with the *congregatio fidelium* (*ibid., Great Catechism: BSELK 653-8*) - a term for the church which was already usual in the Middle Ages (cf. *also Catechismus Romanus I,10,2; UR 2; PO 4 f; AG 15*). In this sense there exists a basic agreement between the Catholic and the Reformation understanding of *communio* as founded not "from below" by the association of the faithful but as constituted by word and sacrament.

But the difference is also clear. For the Reformers, the church becomes real in the worshipping community of the local congregation. Luther wants to replace the, for him, dark and obscure word "church" by the word "congregation" ("Gemeine" - *Von Konziliis und Kirchen, WA 50,625*). The Reformation understanding of the church has its basis and centre of gravity in the congregation. The worshipping assembly of the local congregation is the visible realisation and manifestation of the church; it lacks nothing of what is constitutive for the church.

The criticism of the theological distinction between episcopate and pastorate, and especially of the "papal monarchy" of the universal church, basically springs from this concentration on the local congregation. According to the usually accepted Reformation understanding, the episcopate differs only functionally from the pastorate; it is the ministry of the pastor exercising a church leadership function. The text of the *Confessio Augustana XXVIII* in itself would really also allow for a "more Catholic" interpretation. But on the whole a view of the episcopate prevails which goes back to Jerome, who in contrast to other Fathers founded the pre-eminence of the bishops "*magis consuetudine quam dispositionis dominicae veritate*" (*Tit 1,5*). This position that the difference between bishop and presbyter lies in an increased *potestas*, but not in a universal sacramental authority came, through Petrus Lombardus, to be widely held in medieval theology and was overcome definitively only by the Second Vatican Council (*LG 21*) based on the overwhelming opinion of the patristic age.

The Council of Trent did not deal systematically with the arguments about the Reformation's ecclesiology, but only considered it under the aspect of the hierarchical understanding of the church. The Council placed the denial of the hierarchical order of bishops, priests, and deacons under anathema (*DH 1776; cf. 1768*). The First Vatican Council additionally taught that the Pope's primacy of jurisdiction was *iure divino*, and essential to the church's being the church. (*DH 3050 f*). According to Catholic understanding, episcopacy and Petrine ministry therefore are constitutive elements of the church. But they are not everything. Vatican II for the first time gave a magisterial presentation of the Catholic understanding of the church as a whole and situated the episcopacy and the Petrine ministry within the whole people of God as well as within the college of bishops (*cf. LG 22 f*).

Within this general design, Vatican II retained the doctrine of the three "perimeters" of unity of the church: unity in faith, in the sacraments and in leadership (*LG 14; UR 2*). The emphasis on the unity in the episcopacy is not only a sharply anti-Reformation argument; it goes back to the basic decision of the early church which opposed Gnosticism with the three bulwarks of Orthodoxy: the canon of scripture, the symbols of the faith and the apostolic succession. (*cf. LG 19*). Thus the Reformation broke away not only from the later Tridentine tradition but also from fundamental decisions and the tradition of the early church.

3. But even regarding this difficult question of episcopacy some convergences can be detected nowadays (*cf. BEM 19-25*). Not even in Reformation times was it possible to maintain an approach which was exclusively centred on the local congregation; even then the question of *episkopé* arose, of the ministry of supervision and oversight in the form of a ministry of visitation. However, the ministry of the *superintendentes* remained theologically insufficiently defined; usually it was considered simply *iure humano* as functionally a pastoral ministry, but exercising church leadership. Progress was made in the 20th century although no consensus was achieved. It became clear that the church realises itself on different levels: on the local, the regional and the universal level. On each of these levels the "with and over against" of ministry and congregation is constitutive. This raises anew the question of the quality of leadership ministries in the church on the regional and universal level. Many of the ecclesial communities stemmed from the Reformation have joined together into worldwide confessional associations which are now on the way from federation to *communio*. With this new openness to a more universalistic viewpoint the question of the possibility of a universal ministry of unity has been raised in several dialogues (*cf. V.4*).

At present, however, the approach centred on the local church and local congregation still prevails. The ecumenical goal accepted today by most of the ecclesial communities stemmed from the Reformation is not institutional unity, or organic union (*New Delhi, 1961*) but conciliar fellowship (*Salamanca, 1973; Nairobi, 1975*), or a communion of churches which remain independent but recognise each other as churches, and agree to have altar and pulpit fellowship as well as mutually accepted ministries and services. This idea in particular is the basis of the *Leuenberg Church Fellowship (1973)*. This concept is also behind the model of "reconciled diversity" (*LWF: Dar-es Salaam, 1977*) "ordered in all its components in conciliar structures and actions" (*LWF: Budapest, 1984*).

So the question arises whether, and perhaps how, the Reformation model of unity as a network of local congregations, local churches or nowadays of confessional families is compatible with the Catholic ecclesiological approach. My thesis is: It is clear that here some progress has been made in formulating the problem, and that possible lines of convergence are beginning to appear. So far, however, a firm ecumenical consensus is not yet in sight.

V. The Catholic Communio Ecclesiology

For a systematic presentation of the Catholic *communio*-ecclesiology we start with the Council's Constitution "*Lumen gentium*". The first seven chapters of this Constitution in which the *communio*-ecclesiology is touched upon occasionally do not present any fundamental ecumenical problems; in principle, they are "consensus-worthy". Only in Chapter Eight, which tries to define where the church is really and concretely to be found, does the ecumenical question arise sharply with the famous "*subsistit in*". The Constitution states that the church of Jesus Christ is concretely real in the Catholic church, in communion with the Pope and the bishops. In this statement lies the crux of the ecumenical dialogue, and the declaration "*Dominus Jesus*" (2000) and the subsequent debate have shown very clearly that the nerves here are raw, and the pain threshold correspondingly low.

1. First of all, the formula "*subsistit in*" needs to be correctly interpreted. The main drafter of "*Lumen gentium*", the Belgian theologian G. Philips, foresaw that much ink was to flow over this "*subsistit in*". And his prediction proved to be only too correct. The meaning of the expression "*subsistit*" is controversial. Is it - as has been usually presumed - a kind of auxiliary idea which only serves to make possible a greater ecumenical openness and flexibility, compared with the strict identification of the Roman-Catholic Church with the church of Jesus Christ which was expressed by the former "*est*"? Or is the "*subsistit*" to be understood in the sense of the scholastic concept of subsistence? The Council documents give no indications to support this last interpretation.

But it is not only a question of terminology; what is at stake is the ecumenically crucial question of how the two statements relate to each other: that, on the one hand, the one church of Jesus Christ is concretely real and present in the Roman-Catholic Church, and how, on the other hand, many essential elements of the church of Jesus Christ can be found outside the institutional boundaries of the Catholic Church (*LG 8; 15; UR 3*) and, in the case of the churches of the East, even genuine particular churches (*UR 14*).

The statement in "*Dominus Jesus*" which goes beyond the Council's words and says that the church of Jesus Christ is "fully" realised only in the Catholic Church provides a hint for an appropriate answer. This statement only appears to be a sharpening of the Council's statement. In reality, logically and conclusively it means that, although outside the Catholic church there is no full realisation of the church of Jesus Christ, there still is an imperfect realisation. Outside the Catholic church therefore there is no ecclesial vacuum (*UUS 13*). There may not be "the" church, but there is church reality. Consequently, "*Dominus Jesus*" does not say that the ecclesial communities which issued from the Reformation are not churches; it only maintains that they are not churches in the proper sense; which means, positively, that in an improper sense, analogous to the Catholic church, they are church. Indeed, they have a different understanding of the church; they do not want to be church in the Catholic sense.

If one further asks what concretely constitutes the fullness of what is Catholic, the Council texts show that this fullness does not concern salvation or its subjective realisation. The Spirit works also in the separated churches and ecclesial communities (*UR 3*); outside the Catholic church there exist forms of holiness, even of martyrdom (*LG 15; UR 4; UUS 12; 83*). On the other hand, the Catholic church is also a church of sinners; it needs purification and repentance (*LG 8; UR 3 f; 6 f; UUS 34 f; 83 f*). One can even speak about "structures of sin" in the church (*UUS 34*). The full reality and fullness of what is Catholic does not refer to subjective holiness but to the sacramental and institutional means of salvation, the sacraments and the ministries (*UR 3; UUS 86*). Only in this sacramental and institutional respect can the Council find a lack (*defectus*) in the ecclesial communities of the Reformation (*UR 22*). Both Catholic fullness and the *defectus* of the others are therefore sacramental and institutional, and not existential or even moral in nature; they are on the level of the signs and instruments of grace not on the level of the *res*, the grace of salvation itself.

2. Even if this understanding of "*subsistit*" does not resolve all the questions, it offers us a solid basis for ecumenical dialogue. The first consequence of the thesis that the one church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Catholic Church is that at the present unity is not only given in fragments, and would therefore be a future ecumenical goal. Rather, unity also subsists in the Catholic Church; it is already real in it (*UR 4*). This does not mean that full communion as the goal of the ecumenical way has to be understood simply as the return of separated brothers and churches to the bosom of the Catholic mother church. In the situation of division, unity in the Catholic Church is not concretely realised in all its fullness; the divisions remain a wound for the Catholic Church too. Only the ecumenical endeavour to help the existing real but incomplete communion grow into the full communion in truth and love will lead to the realisation of Catholicity in all its fullness (*UR 4; UUS 14*). In this sense the ecumenical endeavour is a common pilgrimage to the fullness of catholicity Jesus Christ wants for his church.

This ecumenical process is not a one-way street, in which only the others have to learn from us and ultimately join us. Ecumenism happens by way of mutual exchange of gifts and mutual enrichment (*UUS 28*). Catholic theology can accept everything that the Orthodox *communio* ecclesiology has to say positively because Catholic ecclesiology also maintains that, wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, the church of Jesus Christ is present. From Reformation theology it has learnt that the proclamation of the Word of God also has the function of establishing church and *communio*. The church lives by Word and Sacrament which in their turn depend on the authoritative service of the ministry (*DV 21; AG 9*). Where word and sacrament, especially the Eucharist, are present through the service of the church's ministry, the church is reality in the full sense, in every place. Vatican II has revived the theology of the local church, as it is found in the New Testament and in the tradition of the Fathers (*SC 41; LG 23; 26; CD 11*), and stated that within the one church there can exist a legitimate diversity of mentalities, customs, rites, disciplines, theologies and spiritualities (*LG 13; UR 4; 16 f*).

Conversely the Catholic Church is convinced that its institutional "elements" as episcopacy and the Petrine ministry are gifts of the Spirit for all Christians; therefore it wants to offer them as a contribution, in a spiritually renewed form, to the fuller ecumenical unity. This does not mean the association or insertion of other Christians into a given "system" but mutual enrichment, and the fuller expression and realisation of the one church of Jesus Christ in all the churches and ecclesial communities. The closer we come to Christ in this way the closer we come to each other, in order at the end to be fully one in Christ.

3. Our understanding of the "*subsistit*" points out, that according to Catholic understanding unity is more than a network and *communio*-unity of local churches. Although every local church is fully church (*LG 26; 28*), it is not the whole church. The one church exists in and out of the local churches (*LG 23*), but the local churches also exist in and out of the one church (*Communiones notio, 9*), they are shaped in its image (*LG 23*). Local churches are not subdivisions, simple departments, developments or provinces of the one church, but neither is the one church the sum of local churches, nor just the result of their association, their mutual recognition or their mutual inter-penetration. The one church is real in the *communio* of the local churches but it does not grow out of it, it is pre-given. Taking both together, this means that the one church and the diversity of local churches are simultaneous; they are interior to each other (perichoretic).

Within this perichoresis the unity of the church has priority over the diversity of the local churches. This thesis of the priority of unity over against diversity can be proved ontologically and biblically as well. For classical ontology the "unum" is since the pre-Socratic philosophers, since Plato and Aristotle a transcendental qualification of being, which only founds diversity. For the Bible the one church corresponds to the one God, the one Christ, the one Spirit, the one baptism (cf. *Eph 4:5 f*). The fact that unity has priority over all particular interests is really blindingly obvious in the New Testament (*1 Cor. 1:10 ff*). Thus, all churches confess in the Creed their belief in the "una sancta ecclesia". According to the model of the early church of Jerusalem (*Acts 2:42*), though all legitimate diversities, she is one through preaching the one Gospel, the administration of the same sacraments and the one apostolic governing in love (*LG 13; UR 2*).

The thesis of the priority of unity however is in opposition to the post-modern mentality of fundamental pluralism for which there no longer is one truth, but only truths. Therefore the Catholic position has difficulties at present in public debates. Catholic ecclesiology so to say has to sail against the winds of the spirit of the age. That need not be a weakness, it can also be its strength.

4. This Catholic understanding of the *communio*-unity of the church has its concrete expression in the Petrine ministry as sign and service to the unity of the episcopate and the local churches (*DH 3050 f; LG 18*). All other churches and ecclesial communities find this position offensive, and consider it the greatest obstacle in the way of greater ecumenical unity. The problem is also emotionally heavily charged by "certain painful memories" (*UUS 88*). For us, on the other hand, the Petrine ministry is a gift which serves the preservation of the unity, as well as the freedom of the church from one-sided ties to certain nations, cultures or ethnic groups. Pope John Paul II has now seized the initiative and issued an invitation to a "fraternal, patient dialogue" (*UUS 96*).

It would go too far in the present context to deal with the whole difficult problem of the Petrine ministry. Only a few remarks are needed. The first and most basic is that we have to base the Petrine ministry on the Biblical witness and on the New Testament Petrine tradition and therefore not understand it as a dominant power but as a service of love, and as "primacy in love" (*UUS 61; 95*). Secondly, in continuity with Vatican II, the Petrine ministry has to be integrated into the whole constellation of the church and of all that is Christian, and interpreted as the service to the *communio*, as "*servus servorum Dei*" (*DH 306; UUS 88*). It means a ministry of "vigilance" (*episkopé*), a "keeping watch" (*episkopein*) "like a sentinel, so that, through the efforts of the Pastors, the true voice of Christ the Shepherd may be heard in all the particular churches" (*UUS 94*). But such a responsibility would be illusory without effective authority (*exousia*). This means finally that the relative independence of the local churches and the synodical structures are strengthened, and that the principle of subsidiarity applies. Therefore the three dimensions essential for every ministry in the church could also be applied to the Petrine ministry: it has to be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way (cf. *BEM: Ministry, 26*).

Encouraging progress and convergence in some of the dialogues about a universal ministry of leadership have been made (cf. "*Faith and Order*", *Santiago de Compostela, 1993; ARCIC II, "The Gift of Authority", 1998; "Communio Sanctorum", 2001*) (cf. *UUS 89, note 148 f*). But despite this new openness a basic consensus is still not in view. The ecumenically open positions of the other churches may consider such a ministry of unity to be possible *iure humano*, or even to be desirable, but they do not recognise it as *iure divino* essential for the church.

5. All these questions are not only concerned with individual problems but with the basic relation between Jesus Christ and the church, or between the church of Jesus Christ and the concrete "churchdoms" (Kirchentümern). This relation is understood in different ways (*Nature and purpose of the Church, 31*). The expression "*subsistit in*" aims at indicating that there is a differentiated relation between Jesus Christ and the church and of the church of Jesus Christ with the Roman-Catholic Church. They must not be identified with each other, or confused, but neither can they be separated from, or simply placed alongside each other. The church is not Christ continuing alive, but Jesus Christ lives and works in the church as his body. Together they make the "whole Christ" (*Augustine, Enarratio in Psalmos, Ps 90, Sermo 2,1; CCL 39,1266*). The *solus Christus* is for us at the same time the *totus Christus, caput et membra*.

Only on this general basis can discussions with the Reformation position be held in all their depth. The Reformation view tends to oppose Jesus Christ as the head of the church to the church itself. Therefore the confession of Jesus Christ as the head makes it impossible for them to recognise the Pope as the visible head of the church, representing Jesus Christ as the invisible head. This becomes obvious when reservations about the definitively binding character of ecclesial doctrines are registered on the basis of whether they are in accordance with Scripture; the protestant position tends here to a certain revisionism. A similar problem arises, when it comes to admission to the Eucharist, and when it is argued that since Jesus Christ invites everybody, the church cannot deny access. Such argumentation is impossible for Catholics since Jesus Christ only invites in the church and through the church.

If one recognises the fundamental nature of these problems one realises that despite encouraging progress, the way ahead still appears difficult and perhaps long (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 12). All the more important to ask therefore: What can we do already, here and now? What are the next steps?

VI. Interim Steps during the Transition Period

It is essential for the church to acknowledge that she lives in an intermediate situation between the "already" and the "not yet". Full communion in the complete sense can now be only an eschatological hope. Here on earth the church will always be a pilgrim church struggling with tensions, schisms and apostasy. As a church of sinners she cannot be a perfect church. But according to *Johann Adam Möhler*, who inspired *Yves Congar*, one of the Fathers of Catholic ecumenical theology, we have to distinguish between tensions, which belong to life and are a sign of life, and contradictions, which make impossible and destroy communal life and lead to excommunication. The ecumenical task therefore cannot be to lift all tensions but only to transform contradictory affirmations into complementary affirmations, i.e. to find such a degree of substantial consensus which permits us to lift the excommunications. We reached this goal in the christological agreements with the Ancient Church of the East and in the Joint Declaration on Justification. In other questions, particularly in the questions regarding the ministries in the church, we have not yet been successful. Thus we still live in a transition period, which probably will last some time.

1. We have to fill the interim stage that we have reached, of a real if not complete church communion, with real life. The "ecumenism of love" and the "ecumenism of truth" which both naturally remain very important, must be complemented by an "ecumenism of life". We have to apply all we have achieved to the way we actually live. The churches did not only diverge through discussion, they diverged through alienation, i.e. the way they lived. Therefore they have to come closer to each other again in their lives; they must get accustomed to each other, pray together, work together and live together, bearing the pain of incomplete *communio* and of not yet being able to share eucharistic communion around the Lord's table.

This interim stage is not to be understood in a static way; it is a process of healing and growing. It must have its own "*ethos*". Renunciation of all kinds of open or hidden proselytism, awareness that all "inside" decisions touch also our partners, healing the wounds coming from history (purification of memories), larger reception of the ecumenical dialogues and the agreements already reached. Without danger to our faith or our conscience we could already do much more together than we usually do: common Bible study, exchange of spiritual experiences, gathering of liturgical texts, joint worship in services of the Word, better understanding of the common tradition as well as of existing differences, co-operation in theology, in mission, in cultural and social witness, co-operation in the area of development and preservation of the environment, in mass media etc. It is particularly important for us also to develop a "spirituality of communion" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 42 f), in our own church and between the churches. Only if in this way we can restore the recently lost confidence will further steps be possible.

2. We must find institutional forms and structures for the present interim stage and for the "ecumenism of life". This can particularly be done through Councils of churches on the regional and national level. They are not a super-church, and require none of the churches to abandon their own self-understanding. Responsibility for the way of ecumenism remains with the churches themselves. But they are an important instrument, and a forum for co-operation between the churches and an instrument for promoting unity (*cf. Ecumenical Directory, 1993, 166-171*).

3. After the substantial clarification of the central content of the faith (christology, soteriology and doctrine of justification), it is the question of the church and her mission which becomes central. It will be necessary to clarify the understanding of church and *communio* and to come to an agreement on the final goal of the ecumenical pilgrimage. In the present situation we have to explain anew the "already givenness" of the church, which is founded in the "in advance" of God's redemption and grace in Jesus Christ. All churches will have to do their homework in order to understand and better explain the nature and mission of the church. In doing so we have to make plain our agreements and our differences; this is the only way to come to a clarification and, ultimately, to a consensus. False irenicism leads nowhere. The multi-lateral consultation process of the Commission for Faith and Order, "*Nature and Purpose of the Church*" therefore is important even if at present it cannot yet lead to a full consensus.

4. Part of the discussion of the understanding of *communio* is the discussion of ministries in the church. This is at present the crucial point of the ecumenical dialogue. The episcopate in apostolic succession and the Petrine ministry particularly require further clarification. We should make it more clear that both are a gift for the church which we want to share for the good of all. It is not only the others who can learn from us, but we too can learn from the Orthodox and Reformation traditions, and consider further how best to integrate the episcopate and the Petrine ministry and synodical and collegial structures. Such an effort to strengthen and develop synodical and collegial structures in our own church without giving up the essential aspect of the ministers' personal responsibility is the only way in which an ecumenical consensus could be reached about the Petrine and episcopal ministries.

5. Finally, in this interim stage two ways of ecumenism are important and interrelated: ecumenism *ad extra* through ecumenical encounters, dialogues and co-operation, and ecumenism *ad intra* through reform and renewal of the Catholic church herself. There is no ecumenism without conversion (*UR 6-8; UUS 15-17*). From its very beginning the ecumenical movement was and will continue to be an impulse and a gift of the Holy Spirit (*UR 1; 4*). So the pre-eminent among all ecumenical activities is spiritual ecumenism, which is the very heart of ecumenism (*UR 7-8; UUS 21-27*).

Now, as we begin the new Millennium we need a new ecumenical enthusiasm. But this does not mean devising unrealistic utopias of the future. Patience is the little sister of Christian hope. Instead of staring at the impossible, and chafing against it, we have to live the already given and possible *communio*, and do what is possible today. By advancing in this way, step by step, we may hope that, with the help of God's Spirit who is always ready with surprises, we will find the way towards the better common future. In this sense "*Duc in altum!*" "Put out into the deep!" (*Lk. 5:4*)

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