

## Present Situation and Future of the Ecumenical Movement

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### I. ECUMENISM IN A CHANGING SITUATION

The following report on the activities of the Pontifical Council during the three years since the last Plenary limits itself to a short period. Nevertheless, as we hold our first Plenary in the new Millennium, this report cannot avoid facing the much larger question: Where are we ecumenically at the beginning of the new Millennium? What have we achieved in the last 35 years since the Catholic Church officially entered the ecumenical movement with the Second Vatican Council? What have been the positive outcomes? What are the new problems and new challenges that we face? My reflections on these issues have been deliberately placed under the heading: "Ecumenism in a changing situation".

I will and can not enter into all the details of the 13 different dialogues being carried out at the present time, and into all the many other activities of our Council. You have the detailed reports before you; you are invited to present questions during the general discussion for any further information or clarification. At this point I want to highlight some general elements of the present situation and to reflect on the changes that seem to me to be characteristic. I want to put forward the thesis that a new ecumenical situation is emerging.

In a certain sense we can speak of a crisis. But the term 'crisis' is not to be understood one-sidedly, in the negative sense of a break-down or collapse of what has been built up in the last decades - and that is not negligible. *Here the term 'crisis' is meant in the original sense of the Greek term, meaning a situation where things are hanging in the balance, where they are on a knife-edge; indeed, this state can either be positive or negative. Both are possible. A crisis situation is a situation in which old ways come to an end but room for new possibilities open. A crisis situation therefore presents itself as a challenge and a time for decision.*

If we look back over the last three years, and especially at the Jubilee Year 2000, it is clear that there is no one-sided form of crisis. In 1999 in Augsburg we not only signed but celebrated the signing of the *Joint Declaration on Justification* with the Lutheran World Federation. As Pope John Paul II expressed, this was a real milestone: on the one hand, it was the result of many ecumenical dialogues on the international and national levels during the preceding years; on the other hand, however, we had reached only a differentiated consensus, and are still far from the goal we are seeking. But even so, the event was seen by many Christians as offering the world a sign of hope. They rejoiced that centuries-old polemics and differences which had divided the churches over a central and fundamental point of her message could be overcome through serious ecumenical dialogue.

During the Jubilee Year we had the joy of celebrating some important prophetic ecumenical events, as delineated by the Pope: *Novo Millennio inenunte* (2001) (No. 48): The opening of the Holy Door in St Paul's Outside the Walls; the Day of Pardon on the first Sunday in Lent; and the commemoration of the new martyrs (or, better, witnesses) of the 20th century at the Colosseum. At the first and the last of these three events more ecumenical delegates were present than during the Second Vatican Council. All of the delegates were deeply moved. For was it not moving that at the beginning of the new Millennium the Bishop of Rome, as the first of all the bishops, together and united with the representatives of the churches and ecclesial communities of the East, the delegate of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and the representative of the churches and ecclesial communities of the West, the Archbishop of Canterbury, entering the Basilica of St Paul, took some steps together, albeit not many, and that towards the end of the solemn liturgy all the bishops and leaders of the separated churches and ecclesial communities shared the sign of peace with the bishop of Rome? Even more moving for me was the celebration of the witnesses of the 20th century which, more than any previous century, had been the century of martyrs in all the churches and in all ecclesial communities. The commemoration of this common heritage of martyrdom is a source of hope, because "*sanguis martyrum semen christianorum*" (Tertullian) and *semen christianorum unitatis* as well.

We recall in this context all the visits of the Holy Father: to Egypt and Mount Sinai; to the Holy Land; before that to Romania, then to Greece, Syria, the Ukraine and Armenia. [These visits were very important from the ecumenical point of view and are, as are the letters that the Holy Father exchanges regularly with the heads of other churches, much more than an expression of diplomacy and courtesy. They have a deeper ecclesial meaning.](#) For just as in the tradition of the church of the first centuries they are expressions of church communion which today is already

real and deep even if still incomplete. As such they were the result, the fruit and the summary of 35 years of ecumenical work.

All this shows very clearly the positive new ecumenical situation, and is proof of what has grown during the last decades. Besides all the precious individual results of the dialogues these events demonstrate an essential historical shift and a new historical situation. Pope John Paul II in his ecumenical Encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995) describes and appreciates the fruits of the dialogues as “brotherhood rediscovered” (No. 41). Christians of the different churches and ecclesial communities are no longer enemies or indifferent neighbours; they meet as brothers, as sisters and as friends; they are on the same common way, on the same pilgrimage towards full communion.

We cannot and will not go back behind this rich ecumenical heritage. We must build on it. Nevertheless we would be blind if we did not see that there is a new situation emerging that is not only the continuation of the last 35 years. The Jubilee Year celebrated these fruits but at the same time highlighted that, in different ways at the beginning of the new Millennium, we face a new situation which can be called a crisis situation in the dual sense of the term.

Let us first take a quick glance at some of the dialogues and then make some general observations. Firstly, the dialogue with the Oriental and the Orthodox Churches. Theologically they are nearest to us. Since 1980 we have achieved good and profound results in the dialogue. The exchange of delegates between Rome and Constantinople for respective feast days, and the visits to Moscow, Bucharest and many other centres prove that the new spirit exists despite all the problems which have arisen, especially with the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, in reference to the situation in the Western Ukraine. But although these churches are theologically very close to us, they are extremely remote both mentally and culturally, much more so than the Protestant ecclesial communities. This often creates suspicion and misunderstandings and makes the dialogue sometimes difficult and emotional.

The tensions evident on the universal level correspond to tensions among these churches themselves. Today they find themselves in a new situation. For the first time in their long history, most of them are free—free from the Byzantine emperors, from the Ottoman rulers, from the tsar, from communist oppression and persecution. Thus the Orthodox world today is confronted by a new situation, and the churches need time to find their direction and to define their identity. This requires time and patience on our side. But it also creates fear and tensions among

the churches, and fosters the temptation to close in upon themselves. Moreover, during the time of persecution many of their members fled to the West. Now these churches are no longer only Eastern churches but have a large diaspora in Europe, America and Australia, and therefore within the pluralistic Western culture. This is also a new situation that, up to now, has not yet found a satisfactory solution. The problem and the accusation of proselytism and and so-called 'uniatism' is to some degree a projection of fear and a form of self-protection.

However, the demand of the Orthodox churches to discuss and solve first the problem of 'uniatism' before continuing with the agreed agenda of the dialogue has led to a dead end. [How can we solve these problems without speaking about the Petrine ministry which is the very rationale of the existence of the Catholic Oriental churches?](#) After the sad experiences at the last Plenary of the Joint International Theological Commission in Emmitsburg/Baltimore, I do not see how we can continue with the dialogue on this level. Thanks to God, good relations continue with single Patriarchates and on the regional level, the level of bishops' conferences, of dioceses, monasteries, of many personal contacts and of institutions like Church in Need, Renovabis and others.

The dialogue with the Anglican Communion (ARCIC) has also produced good and valuable documents, especially the last one on "The Gift of Authority" (1998). Enormous progress has been made, not least regarding the question of the Petrine ministry. The climate and atmosphere on the theological level and on the hierarchical level are excellent. In contrast to the Orthodox churches, one feels that we come from the same Latin tradition and live in the same Western world. One could think that unity must be possible very soon. But as we saw in Toronto last year during a meeting with all the Anglican Primates—a meeting held in an exceptionally fraternal atmosphere—there is in both churches a lack of reception of our common documents. There are strong tensions within the Anglican Communion, and one may even ask whether these dialogue documents are representative of the whole or even of the majority of Anglicans. In particular, the introduction of women's ordination to the priesthood and, in some Anglican provinces, also to the episcopacy presents a new, difficult obstacle and remains an unresolved problem within the Anglican Communion itself. But here at least the structures and the spirit of dialogue are still intact so that we can hope and go ahead. And we will do so.

The situation with the Lutheran World Federation is similar. There have been good results and excellent personal relations. No doubt, the *Joint Declaration on Justification* was an important step forwards and a breakthrough about which we can and must rejoice. This Declaration brought a new dimension and a new inten-

sity to our mutual relations which are rather different from the relations with other ecclesial communities that issued from the Reformation. Nonetheless, there were different expectations about the consequences of the differentiated agreement on justification which, afterwards, sometimes led to disappointment and frustration. Many Lutherans thought, even though we had denied it clearly from the very beginning, that Eucharistic sharing or at least Eucharistic hospitality should be the consequence of this agreement. **Moreover, it is the ecclesiological problems that now arise for us: the problem of the ministries in the church, especially the episcopate and the apostolic succession.** In this regard, it was my impression at the last session of the International Dialogue Commission in Denmark two months ago that, despite the warm atmosphere, hardly any progress has been made on these ecclesiological problems.

In this context, we might also bear in mind that there are also unresolved problems between the different Lutheran churches: the Porvoo churches in Scandinavia which have the intention of introducing the historical episcopacy, and a similar intention in the US; there are the Leuenberg churches on the European continent, with tendencies towards a new United Church including the Reformed churches under the common umbrella of the EKD in Germany, etc. It is my impression that we still have a long intermediate period to face with these communities. And this is even more so for the other ecclesial communities of the Reformation.

I will not discuss in this frame of reference the dialogues with the other ecclesial communities (Reformed, Methodists, Mennonites, etc.) and the new dialogues that we are starting, for example with the Seventh Day Adventists, even though many positive results could be reported. I finally only want to mention the dialogues with **the new communities, the Evangelical and Pentecostal communities.** **They best represent the new situation.** These communities are growing very fast whilst the traditional Protestant churches world-wide are shrinking. In ethical questions they are often nearer to us than to the historical Protestant churches and to the WCC. Often they are committed Christians who take seriously the Biblical message, the Godhead of Jesus Christ and the commandments of God. With some of them we have good dialogues and firm friendships, or at least positive and promising contacts. To be sure, in terms of ecclesiological questions they are distant from us. So necessarily these dialogues have a quite different character than those with the Orthodox. Their goal is not the unity of the church but the overcoming of misunderstandings, better mutual understanding, friendship and cooperation where that is possible. The dialogues can have a maieutic function and help these communities to question and to clarify their own identity and raise questions that they had not hitherto discerned. So the ecumenical scene is also changing very much in this respect.

The new communities mentioned here should be distinguished from the older and newer sects and from the many new “mushroom churches” in Latin America, Africa and Asia. They too are part of the new scene. But because of their fundamentalist, often very aggressive, proselytising and syncretistic attitudes and practices they can hardly be partners in the ecumenical dialogue. However, those communities that are open to ecumenical dialogue present a real challenge, enabling us to stand together and give common witness to Christian brotherhood despite all the differences and problems that still exist.

The new situation affects also the situation of the WCC and our relations with it. Cooperation in the “Faith and Order” Commission is good, and in the “Joint Working Group” the participation is effective, collaborative and friendly. But the WCC is also in crisis. The Oriental and Orthodox churches do not feel really at home and are threatening to leave unless substantial changes are made in matters of procedure and in issues pertaining to the agenda. Many new communities do not want to join the WCC because of what they perceive to be its liberal positions. This has led to debate about the creation of a Forum which would include all ecclesial communities and groups—whatever form this will eventually take. Within the WCC we can see a diminishing interest in classical theological discussions and often a paradigmatic shift towards a so-called secular ecumenism with the emphasis on common witness in questions of justice and peace, sometimes also with pressure groups in favour of gender questions, etc. [On the basis of our past relationship, the Pontifical Council is determined to continue in its loyal and friendly albeit sometimes critically constructive cooperation that is appreciated by our partners as well.](#)

This presentation is only a superficial report of some aspects, and is by no means complete, and at some points necessarily generalised. I will not insist on every word. What I wanted to say is only an introduction to a definition of the elements of the merging and changing new situation that we should discuss afterwards.

1. A first element of a changing or, better, of an already changed situation is the simple [distance of 35 years from the Second Vatican Council and its Decree on Ecumenism that declared the restoration of the unity among Christians to be one of its principal concerns \(\*Unitatis redintegratio\*, 1\)](#). To some degree the crisis of the ecumenical movement is paradoxically the result of its success. Ecumenism for many became obvious. But the closer we come to one another, the more painful is the perception 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; in this atmosphere,

ecumenical frustration and sometimes even opposition develops. Paradoxically it is the same ecumenical progress that is also the cause for the ecumenical malaise.

There is also a second aspect to the distance in time. For my generation the Second Vatican Council and its decision in favour of the ecumenical movement was a great and to some extent a new experience. In the meantime we have a new generation of Catholic people and young priests who “knew not Joseph”; they were not yet born at the time of the Council, so they do not really understand what, how and why things have changed. They do not understand our theological problems and they are not bothered by them. So the ecumenical questions have lost their fascination. This is very often connected with a lack of catechetical and homiletic instruction. Many do not know what Catholic or Protestant doctrine is all about and what the differences are. Often they have only a superficial and patchy knowledge through the mass media.

In this situation we are faced with a double task and challenge. Firstly, we have to promote ecumenical education and the reception of ecumenical results. The results of ecumenical progress have not yet penetrated into the hearts and into the flesh of our church and of the other churches as well. Ecumenical theology is not present as an inner dimension in theological programmes. Often TV determines the reception whilst, as the German debates after the *Joint Declaration* showed, even serious theologians believe: *ecumenical non leguntur*. Secondly, we must clarify and renew the ecumenical vision; we need a new ecumenical push and verve. We are in danger of losing a whole generation of young people if we do not give them a vision. This means catechetical, homiletic, theological endeavour, but even more a spiritual renewal and a new start.

2. A second element in our situation is the new emphasis on identity. The search for openness and dialogue under a more secular aspect can be seen as a part, an aspect or a form of globalisation. This tendency in the meantime is challenged by a new search for cultural, national, ethnic, confessional and also personal identity. The new question is: Who are we? Who am I? How can we, how can I avoid being absorbed in a faceless, bigger whole?

The question is obvious in the Orthodox world but is also found in some Lutheran reactions to the *Joint Declaration*, and in some Roman Catholic circles as well. In extreme forms the question is alive in fundamentalist movements that are to some degree a reaction to post-modern pluralism. The identity question is a form of self-affirmation and often an expression of the fear of losing oneself. Thus, ecumenism is often accused of or, better, is misunderstood as abolishing confes-



sional identity and leading to an arbitrary pluralism, to indifference, relativism and syncretism. Ecumenism has often become a negative term.

Surely the question of identity as such is legitimate and even essential; as such, genuine dialogue is possible only with persons who have established their proper identity. But the question can also obstruct and confine. *The task will be to reach an open identity because identity is a relational reality: I have my identity only in relation with others, and in sharing with others. In this sense the concept of ecumenism must be clarified.* In this context we should see the problem and the advantage of *Dominus Jesus* that stressed the identity question. We must make it clear that *serious ecumenism is different from confessional indifference and relativism that tends to meet on the lowest common denominator. Ecumenism must be understood as the open and shared Catholic identity, as a genuine expression but also the significance of Catholicity in the profound sense of the term.*

3. A third element is *the inner differentiation within the great confessional world families.* The Pontifical Council decided right at the beginning of the ecumenical movement to engage in dialogues with all the Orthodox churches together, with the World Federations of the Protestant churches (LWF, WARC, etc.) and with the WCC and its sub-units like the “Faith and Order” Commission. This was a reasonable decision even though these Federations and Associations clearly do not constitute individual churches; indeed, it would have been impossible, for example, to enter into dialogues with the different ‘Landeskirchen’ (Evangelical Lutheran churches).

This perspective leads to a consideration of the increasing awareness of the fact that the Orthodox church does not really exist. There are autocephalous Orthodox churches which are often jealous of their independence and live in tension with their own sister churches. Constantinople at this moment seems no longer to be able to integrate the different autocephalous Orthodox churches, and its primacy of honour is questioned especially by Moscow. With Moscow, the dialogue on the universal level at this moment is very difficult. The situation is improving with Greece, while in the Middle East, in the territory of the ancient See of Antioch, we have a completely different situation, one in which almost full communion already exists.

We have already mentioned the tensions within the Lutheran world about church ministries, and the tensions within the Anglican Communion. Besides these tensions about institutional questions there are tensions about ethical questions like abortion, homosexuality, bio-ethics, and questions of political ethics like peace and justice in the world, etc.



These are only some examples, but examples which raise the question of whether we will have in the future a two-speed—or even a many-speed ecumenism. This seems to be likely but it is not without dangers and not without new problems. We must avoid giving the impression of a *divide et impera*. It would be bad ecumenism to create new divisions within other churches or confessional families, or to aim at a new form of uniatism. Therefore a two-speed ecumenism is a very delicate thing that needs to be handled with great discretion. But in the given situation there is no realistic alternative. The implementation of this concept needs an ecumenical responsibility that is balanced between the universal church and the local churches. The local churches must assume their responsibility, they cannot expect everything from the centre. Our Plenary should issue an encouragement in this direction.

4. A fourth and last point: In his Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994) the Pope had expressed the hope that by the year of the Jubilee we would have reached full communion with the Orthodox churches, or at least have come close to it (No. 34). After the Jubilee in *Novo millennio ineunte* he was much more cautious, expressing the view that there is still a long way to go (Nos. 12; 48). This seems to me to be very realistic. The time for an enthusiastic ecumenism that was characteristic of the period immediately following the Council has gone.

The consequences are sometimes disappointment and even scepticism, often also harsh criticism of the official church (“Amtskirche”), attitudes and acts of protest or of a wild ecumenism that disregards the official rules drawn up for instance in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*. This wild ecumenism is counter-productive because, instead of more communion it creates new divisions. I personally prefer to speak of a new realistic approach and of a maturing and adult ecumenism that has gone beyond the enthusiasm of youth but also the loutish behaviour of adolescence and has become mature and realistic.

This means that we have to envisage a longer period during which we will continue living in the present situation of an already existing and profound communion, but which is still not a full communion. It means a situation in which we have left behind the old hostility and indifference and where we have rediscovered the brotherhood of all Christians. This seems to me to be the most important result of the last decades of ecumenism. But we must remain realistic and not make blueprints of abstract models of unity that sooner or later lead only to new disappointments. So now the question arises of how to give life and structure to our situation that will probably last longer than we thought before. How can we live, and how can we shape this intermediate situation? We shall come back to this point further on.

## II. THE CATHOLIC CONCEPT OF *COMMUNIO* AS THE ECUMENICAL VISION

1. We start with a surprising discovery. Although all dialogues of the last 35 years have never been held according to a pre-conceived plan, it is all the more astonishing that they converge in a surprising way. All the dialogues converge in the fact that they revolve around the concept of *communio* as their key concept. All dialogues define the visible unity of all Christians as *communio*-unity, and agree in understanding it, in analogy with the original Trinitarian model, 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. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985 stated that the *communio*-ecclesiology is the “central and basic idea of the Council documents”.

2. As we have already seen, the present situation is complex and many-layered. The dialogue documents 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 part and that of the partners. Convergence about one and the same concept, however, is also—apart from other factors—the cause for confusion. The differences in understanding reflect different ecclesiologies of the various churches and ecclesial communities. 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 which is characterised by non-theological, general social criteria and plausibilities.

In its secularised meaning, *communio* is understood in a “horizontal” way as a community of people resulting from the individuals’ desire for community. *Communio* in this sense is the result of an association of partners who are in principle free and equal. Such an understanding applied to the church describes the church “from below”; that is, the ‘base’ church against the ‘established’ church and its official ecumenism. But *communio* can be also understood in the sense of neo-Romanticism as a naturally grown, personal community based on primary personal relations; this understanding involves personal nearness and warmth in a familiar and friendly atmosphere. This results in a brotherly-sisterly understanding of the church, a model which has been frequently attempted in monastic communities and fraternities, as well as in some Free Churches and pietistic communities. Nowadays it is often practised in small groups, in base communities and especial-

ly in the more recent spiritual communities. However, if this model of a fraternal ecclesiology is applied to the church as a whole, it can lead to a “cuddle-corner ecclesiology” which chafes against the institutional reality of a large church instead of attempting to establish a constructive relation with it.

On the other hand, a one-sided institutional understanding of *communio* can also lead to misunderstandings. It often leads to a misleading 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*. The Council tried to overcome such a one-sidedly hierarchical understanding, 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. This does not lead to a democratic understanding but to a participative concept of *communio* with graduated rights of co-operation.

The church therefore is neither a democracy nor a monarchy, not even a constitutional monarchy. She is hierarchical in the original sense of the word, meaning “holy origin”; that is, she has to be understood on the basis of what is holy, by the gifts of salvation, by Word and Sacrament as signs and means of the Holy Spirit’s effectiveness. This brings us to the original and authentic theological understanding of *communio* as the Catholic vision of unity.

3. 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”. This is part of the overall message of the Bible, that God gathers his people and that he will bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, Jesus Christ (Eph 1:10).

According to the Acts of the Apostles the early church in Jerusalem constituted a *koinonia* in the breaking of the bread and in prayer (Ac 2:42); they held everything in common (Ac 2:44; 4:23). According to Paul we have *koinonia* with Jesus Christ (1 Co 1:9), with the Gospel (Phm 1:5), in the Holy Spirit (2 Co 13:13), in the faith (Phm 6), of suffering and comfort (2 Co 1: 5,7; Phm 3:10). The first and second letters of Peter speak of the *koinonia* of the glory to come (1 P 5:1) and of the divine nature (2 P 1:4); the first letter of John mentions *koinonia* with the Father and the Son and consequently among us (1 Jn 1:3). **Basis and measure of this communion is the unity of Father and Son (Jn 17:21-23).**

The sacramental basis of this *communio* is the one Baptism through which we are baptised in the one body of Christ (1 Co 12:12f; cf. Rm 12:4f; Ep 4:3f) and there-

fore through baptism we are one in Christ (Ga 3:26-28). The summit of communion is the Eucharistic celebration. So in the history of theology, the most important text was to become 1 Co 10:16f: “*Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And 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 the 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 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 as wrong to limit the ecclesial significance of *koinonia/communio* to the area of sacraments and worship, or even just to the Eucharist, as it would be to emphasise only the social dimension. There is so to say a vertical and a horizontal dimension of communion. 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*. There have been different confessional developments in terms of a far-reaching ecumenical agreement in this concept.

4. Firstly, we might take a look at the new Eucharistic ecclesiology of the churches of the East. 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 10:16f is the inner connection between ecclesial and Eucharistic *communio*, meaning 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. 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.

For Orthodox theologians, this Eucharistic ecclesiology often has an anti-primatial intention. Since every local church is church in the fullest sense, there can be no ecclesial ministry or authority higher than the bishop. There may have been from early days a precedence of the metropolitan sees and of the patriarchs but it is synodically embedded. The Petrine ministry also is exercised by all the bishops, individually and in synodical communion. Therefore, in the view 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. 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). In this sense, the Orthodox churches can in general accept that Rome holds the “primacy in love” (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Rom*, prooem.); but they understand this normally as an honorary primacy and exclude any primacy of jurisdiction. Whether this fully corresponds to the first Millennium is another question.

The ecclesiology of the Reformers arrives at a similar problem. In his early works, Luther is still very much aware of the connection between Holy Communion and the church. 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*. 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. Thus, the *communio sanctorum* becomes synonymous with the *congregatio fidelium*—a term for the church which was already usual in the Middle Ages. 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*). 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 arises out of 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.

But even regarding this question of episcopacy some convergence can be detected nowadays. 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 the *episkopé* arose, of the ministry of supervision and oversight in the form of a ministry of visitation. Further progress was made in the 20th century. 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. 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 of the dialogues.

At present, however, the approach centred on the local church and local congregation still prevails. The ecumenical goal accepted today by most of the church communities of the Reformation is conciliar fellowship, or 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” favoured by the LWF. So the question arises whether 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. Though some progress has been made in formulating the problem, and possible lines of convergence are beginning to appear, a firm ecumenical consensus is still not in sight.

5. For a systematic presentation of the Catholic *communio* ecclesiology we start with the Council’s Constitution *Lumen gentium*. In the eighth chapter, which tries to define where the church is really and concretely to be found, the ecumenical question arises 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 communion with him. In this statement lies the nerve of the ecumenical dialogue, and the declaration *Dominus Jesus* (2000) and consequent debate have shown very clearly that the nerve here is raw, and the pain threshold correspondingly low.

The ecumenically crucial question is how the two statements relate to each other: how, on the one hand, the one church of Jesus Christ is concretely real and present in the Roman-Catholic Church, and, on the other hand, how the many and 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).



*Dominus Jesus*, which goes beyond the Council's words and affirms that the church of Jesus Christ is "fully" realised only in the Catholic Church, provides a hint for an appropriate answer. This statement logically implies 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. Consistently, *Dominus Jesus* does not state 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 asks further 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. Conversely, the Catholic Church is also a church of sinners; its needs purification and repentance. 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. Only in this sacramental and institutional respect can the Council find a lack (*defectus*) in the churches and 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.

The consequence of the thesis that the one church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Catholic Church is that at present unity is not given in fragments, and is therefore a future ecumenical goal. Indeed, unity 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 endeavour has to be understood as the simple return of the separated brothers and churches in 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 others have to learn from us and, ultimately, to join us. Ecumenism happens by way of a 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 learned that the proclamation of the Word of God also has the function of establishing church and *communio*. Conversely, the Catholic Church is convinced that its institutional “elements”, such 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 ideal of fuller ecumenical unity. This does not mean association, or the insertion of other Christians into a given “system” but mutual enrichment. The closer we come to Christ in this way, the closer we come to each other in order, ultimately, to be fully one in Christ.

Our understanding of the *subsistit* makes clear that, according to Catholic understanding, unity is more than a network and *communio*-unity of local churches. Although every local church is fully the one 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 or provinces of the one church, but neither is the one church the sum or local churches, nor 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 and subsists in the Catholic Church. 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. The fact that unity has priority over all particular interests is really blindingly obvious in the New Testament (1 Co 1:10 ff). For the Bible the one church corresponds to the one God, the one Christ, the one Spirit, the one baptism (cf. Ep 4:5 f). According to the model of the early community of Jerusalem (Ac 2:42), despite all legitimate diversities, she is one through the preaching of 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 the one truth, but only truths**. Therefore, the Catholic position has difficulties at present in public

debates. Catholic ecclesiology, so to say, sails against the winds of the spirit of the age. That need not be a weakness, it can also be its strength. Its concrete expression finds the Catholic understanding of the *communio*-unity of the church in the Petrine ministry. We will discuss the problem later on the basis of a particular paper.

Finally, the whole problem of the *subsistit* and the specific Catholic understanding of *communio* has one more deeper dimension. The whole problem must be seen against the background of the specific Catholic understanding of the relation between Jesus Christ and the church. The differentiating “subsistit in” aims at indicating that there is a differentiated relation between Jesus Christ and the 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 living and working in the church as His body. In this differentiated togetherness they make—according to Saint Augustine—the “whole Christ” So for us the *solus Christus* is 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. For the Reformation view tends to oppose Jesus Christ as the head of the church to the church itself. This becomes obvious when in the case of ecclesial doctrines, reservations about their definitively binding character are registered, about whether they are in accordance with Scripture; the Protestant position tends here to a certain revisionism. A similar problem arises when it comes to admittance 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 to be difficult and perhaps long (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 12). All the more important to ask: What can we do already, here and now? What are the next steps?

## II. ECUMENICAL PRAXIS 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 therefore 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 as pointed out by 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 abolish all tensions, but only to transform contradictory affirmations into complementary affirmations and into constructive tensions; that is, to find a degree of a substantial consensus permitting us to lift excommunications.

We reached this goal in the Christological agreements with the Ancient Churches of the East and in the Joint Declaration on Justification. In other questions, particularly issues regarding the ministries in the church, we have not yet been successful. Thus, we live still in a transitional period, which will probably last for some time to come.

We have to fill this transitional period, of a real if not complete church *communio*, with real life. To the “ecumenism of love” and the “ecumenism of truth”, which both naturally remain very important, must be added an “ecumenism of life”. The churches did not only diverge through discussion, they diverged through the way they lived, through alienation and estrangement. Therefore, they need to come closer to each other again in their lives; they must get accustomed to each other, pray together, work together, live together, bearing the sting of the incompleteness of the *communio* and of the still impossible Eucharistic communion around the Lord’s table. I want to stress six points, which should be discussed and concretised in the following discussion:

1. This transitional period must have its own “ethos” involving renunciation of all kinds of open or hidden proselytism, awareness that all “inside” decisions touch also our partners, healing the wounds left by history (purification of memories), and wider reception of the ecumenical dialogues and agreements already achieved. Without danger to our faith or our conscience we could already do much more together than we actually do: common Bible study, exchange of spiritual experiences, gathering of liturgical texts, joint worship in services of the Word, better understanding of our common tradition as well as existing differences, co-operation in theology, in mission, in cultural and social witness, co-operation in the area of development and the preservation of the environment, in mass media, etc. **Ecumenical reception and formation are particularly important** for this transitional period, as we have already pointed out. In this context we should recall what was said, but unfortunately mostly forgotten, in the last Plenary.

2. We must find institutional forms and structures for the present transitional period and for the above-mentioned “ecumenism of life”. This can be undertaken in particular through Councils of churches on the regional and national level. They do not constitute a super-church, and they require none of the churches to abandon their own self-understanding. Responsibility for the ecumenical journey ultimately remains with the churches themselves. But they are an important instrument, and a forum for co-operation between the churches and instrument for the promotion of unity (*cf.* Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, 1993, 166-171). This point too was already dealt with in one of the last Plenaries.
3. The changing situation does not prevent us from continuing with our dialogues. 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. All churches will have to do their homework in order to understand and explain better the nature and mission of the church. In doing so we have to present our agreements and our differences; this is the only way to come to a clarification and, ultimately, to a consensus. False irenicism leads us nowhere. In this sense we support and co-operate in the multi-lateral consultation process of the Commission for Faith and Order, “Nature and Purpose of the Church”. For the year 2002 we plan an international theological Congress with the theme “Present Situation and Future of the Ecumenical Movement”. The Congress aims at clarifying the definitive Catholic ecumenical vision.
4. Part of the discussion of the understanding of *communio* relates to ministries in the church. This is at present the crucial point of the ecumenical dialogue. Particularly at stake is the episcopate in Apostolic succession and—in answering the question and the request of Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Ut unum sint* (n. 95)—the future exercise of the Petrine ministry within the new ecumenical situation. We should make it clear that both are a gift for the church that we want to share for the good of all. But it is not only others who can learn from us - we, too, can learn from the Orthodox and Reformation traditions, and consider further how best to integrate the episcopate and the Petrine ministry with synodical and collegial structures. Such an effort to strengthen and develop the synodical and collegial structures in our own church without giving up the essential nature of personal responsibility is the only way in which an ecumenical consensus could be reached about the Petrine and episcopal ministries.

5. In this interim stage two forms 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 and reform (UR 6-8; UUS 15-17). It is particularly important for us also to develop a “spirituality of *communio*” (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 42 f), in our own church and between the churches. Only if in this way we are able to restore the recently lost confidence will further steps be possible. In more concrete terms, only through a balanced relationship between the universal church and the local churches can we conceive a two-speed ecumenism and—what is even more important—can we find credibility for the ecumenical concept of *communio* as unity within diversity and diversity within unity.

6. Last but not least, from its very beginning the ecumenical movement has been and will continue to be an impulse and a gift of the Holy Spirit (UR 1; 4). So pre-eminence among all ecumenical activities belongs to spiritual ecumenism, which is the heart of all ecumenism (UR 7-8; UUS 21-27). Often less ecumenical activism would be more; in this light, spiritual ecumenism should be more strongly promoted, and relations with and between ecumenically concerned monasteries, movements, brotherhoods and groups should be strengthened.

As we embark upon the new Millennium, we need 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 a better common future. In this sense “*Duc in altum!*” “Put out into the deep!” (Lk 5:4).