

Baptism: Ecclesiological Implications of the latest Lutheran-Catholic Joint Commission

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It is a joy to be with you today. And I wish to thank, in particular, Prof. Barbara Hallensleben for the invitation to the LWF to present today.

As you may know Catholics and Lutherans have been in dialogue since 1965. (Well, I suppose if I take a broad historical perspective, I should say the dialogue actually began over 500 years ago when Luther met Cardinal Cajetan and subsequently that search for unity leading to the AC in 1530!). But, yes, back to today, even before the end of Vatican II, a Lutheran theologian from the US, George Lindbeck, began talks with Cardinal Bea about starting a dialogue immediately. This initiative came to fruition and a dialogue did begin at the newly founded LWF Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. The Institute brought many Lutherans and Catholics together at that time, including the young Bishop Kasper and the professor Josef Ratzinger. So, I repeat, it is a joy to continue to explore what this dialogue means now almost 60 years later. Thank you again for this invitation and hospitality. Thank you for making this lecture possible. And thank you to you all for being here today.

I will discuss *Baptism and Growth in Communion*. But first, allow me also to situation myself. I was the North American Lutheran representative on the Fifth Phase of the Joint Commission and the Lutheran English-speaking drafter of the text. My counterpart co-drafter was Prof. Susan Wood, whom many of you may know. She is currently at Regis College at the U of Toronto in Canada.

I am currently serving at the LWF as Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and also as professor of liturgy and systematic theology at the Lutheran faculty in St. Paul, MN

Well, let's get to work. My lecture is divided into five sections: background / process / pneumatological impulse / baptism and ecclesiological implications / and finally paradigm shift.

I. Background

The Report of the Fifth Phase of the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Commission – *Baptism and Growth in Communion* (BGC) – was published on both the DPCU and LWF websites in April 2022. In fact, the Fifth Phase of the Joint Commission produced two reports, one of which also provided the foundation for the Joint Commemoration of the 500 Years of the Reformation, celebrated in the Lund Cathedral, with Pope Francis and leaders of the LWF, in October 2016.

The first report was entitled *From Conflict to Communion*. It is a significant report in that it summarizes the status of the L-C dialogue up to that point in time (it was published 10 years ago already, in 2013) covering such topics as monastic and mystical theology, justification, eucharist, ministry, Scripture and tradition. I call it a significant report because it opened the possibility not only for a theological reassessment, for example, what is the theological paradigm for an ongoing L-C dialogue but also invited into a spiritual challenge, for example, how do we (Catholics and Lutherans) actually understand ourselves and our ecclesial identity. Put more simply: how do we talk about ourselves and about each other to ourselves and to one other, and secondly, based on a shared theological tradition on which Martin Luther drew, how can we envision an ecumenical ecclesiology rooted in baptism?

Let me take a moment to explain and review. After the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999, the L-C Joint Commission produced the report, *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2006) under the presidency of Cardinal Walter Kasper and General Secretary Ishmael Noko. The Report cannot of course be summarized in one sentence but one important step it takes retrieves and develops a statement made in the Malta Report (the very first Report of the L-C Commission published in 1972) concerning the broadening of the notion of apostolic succession. Apostolic succession is not confined only to ministry (or a particular practice) but to the whole life of the church and its proclamation. The Report *Apostolicity* states: “Vatican II drew on Scripture and the Fathers to explain the apostolic tradition, in its objective sense, as an ensemble of gospel preaching, sacraments, different types of ministry, forms of worship, and the apostles’ example of selfless service of the churches founded by the gospel” (§156). Apostolicity is faithfulness to the preaching of the gospel of justification and the practices by which gospel is embodied in ecclesial life.

[Footnote: it is important to note that Facing Unity (1984) already made a similar proposal. Sometimes, we need to keep repeating insights over and over again.]

Continuing on from *Apostolicity*, the new Joint Commission was first of all charged with preparing a document that could hopefully encourage and support a Joint Commemoration of the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. *From Conflict to Communion* achieves this goal by analyzing that particular Reformation moment and that particular theologian, Martin Luther, through the important scholarly work accomplished in the past one hundred years by both Lutherans and Catholics. A very nuanced picture of the origin of the Reformation emerges, highlighting the catholicity of Luther's insights and the inability of the church of his day to receive it.

The ecumenical task is then not about rewriting history or denying the past with its conflicts, tensions, even violence but rather remembering that history differently. In the words of FCTC: "Remembrance makes the past present. While the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable. In view of 2017, the point is not to tell a different history, but to tell that history differently" (§16). This perspective was notably reinforced in the sermon by Pope Francis at the Joint Commemoration on October 31, 2016.

FCTC invites all the faithful on a spiritual and theological journey. This journey is a spiritual challenge because it implies stepping out of one's own comfort zone, stepping out of one's usual categories of analysis and classification and, dare I say, stereotypical descriptions. It acknowledges that, in the encounter with the neighbor, something in me, in my self-understanding, in the self-understanding of my community, will change. This transformative moment is an ecumenical characteristic or truth. It is described, at the end of FCTC, in the five ecumenical imperatives: "The [ecumenical] second imperative: Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith."

With specific reference to the L-C dialogue, this transformation is, I believe, made possible initially by the JDDJ and the consensus reached on the central doctrine of justification – God's ultimate act of redemption. Justification by faith places Catholics and Lutherans (and now Methodists, Anglicans, and Reformed as well) at a table where there are no prerequisites or preconditions. We all come with

our gifts and blessings, our tradition and practices, but we are all like infants at the baptismal font, naked before God. All we have is faith. This nakedness may be described in the context of ecumenical dialogue as a complete openness to listen, to discover, to grow, which are also all part of that sacramental practice we call baptism.

Throughout this period, the Fifth Phase of the Joint Commission continued its work on the topic of baptism and the possibility of a growth in communion, recognizing faith as a dynamic of the Holy Spirit. The topic flows forth quite naturally from the topic of justification, apostolicity, spiritual transformation, and recognition of each other's gifts. But the challenge was to move beyond or better yet to broaden our understanding of the individual implications of baptism to the ecclesial dimension, to demonstrate the connections between the soteriological and ecclesiological dimensions of baptism and then to develop a proposal for an ecumenical ecclesiology.

II. Process

As already mentioned, the Report was published online in 2022 though the work of the Commission had completed the Report in 2019 and had been carefully studied by the LWF and received at the LWF's Council Meeting in June 2019. The Report did include a special statement by an American Catholic theologian, Christian Washburn. It was not the first time a Report had a special statement, in fact, the very first report on *The Gospel and the Church* (or Malta Report) had several special statements. However, it soon became clear that the statement by Washburn needed more clarification as it presented a different reading of the ecclesiology of Vatican II than that held by the majority of Catholic members of the Joint Commission.

One of the first question that needed to be addressed, by both sides, was related to the term: mutual recognition. To respond to a concern expressed by the then PCPCU (now DPCU), a new preface was written by the co-chairs, Bishop Eero Houvinen (Bishop emeritus, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland) and Bishop William Kenney (Aux Bishop, Archdiocese of Birmingham). In this new preface, they defined how the term "mutual recognition" is used in the document.

“Baptism is a once-for-all-beginning, and therefore it extends over the whole life of the baptized who need continuous nourishment for their Christian lives through the means of grace administered in the respective communities. Taking baptism seriously challenges the baptizing communities to examine whether they can recognize each other as members of the body of Christ. Here, the word “recognition” is not used in a canonical sense, rather, it is developed in four interacting levels.”

Then co-chairs highlight certain perspectives on the term “recognition”: a theological meaning (that is, building on the results of ecumenical dialogues); an existential meaning (that is, acknowledging the presence of the means of grace in the other community, participating in them as much as currently possible); a spiritual meaning (that is, the Holy Spirit is active in the other community, creating faith, and sharing the gifts of the Spirit within them); and finally a practical meaning (that is, acknowledging the main areas of cooperation between Lutherans and Catholics).

However, this new Preface did not address a primary concern highlighted in the critical commentary written by Prof. Wolfgang Klausnitzer. [Footnote: It is customary for the now Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity to ask for a commentary on any given Report by an ecumenist who was not part of the Commission.] Prof. Klausnitzer’s full commentary is available online on the webpage of the DPCU. In it, he points out that it is unclear how “mutual recognition” is employed in the text. He asks if the Report is calling for (and I quote in rough translation from the original German) a “mutual recognition of the churches (as they currently are) on the basis of the baptism of their faithful, [that is] the model of the Leuenberg Agreement or [on the basis of] the model of a church (in the multi-faceted form of its local churches that all possess Bellarmin’s three ‘vincula’)?”

It is true, the term “mutual recognition” could have been more clearly defined in the text though the text does make clear that its primary reference is Vatican II and developing a language for the impulse of Vatican II, a language that may nuance the position of Bellarmin. Mutual recognition is one of the questions that will be addressed by a preparatory group which will begin meeting this year.

The question Klausnitzer raises actually points to the critical question that BGC itself raises, and which both the DPCU and the LWF recognize: what is the model of unity that we are pursuing? What do we mean by a communion of churches? I will return to this later.

Back to the chronology of event, the preface was re-written, as I said, and then the above-mentioned commentary by Klausnitzer was shared with the LWF and the Joint Commission. In response to the critical commentary, a small task force of the Commission was convened. The small task force wrote a response, which to date has not been published but upon which I will partly draw my own reflection as I outline the argument made in *Baptism and Growth in Communion*.

Finally, and most importantly, both the DPCU and the LWF made quite clear that despite their differing appreciation of the Report, this situation was not an obstacle but actually an important step forward on the way from conflict to communion as it places us before that critical question concerning models of unity. To express the appreciation (of both the LWF and the DPCU) and to express the concerns (on the part of the DPCU), a Preamble was written, signed by Cardinal Koch and the former LWF General Secretary Martin Junge.

The Preamble recapitulates the situation concerning the differing approaches. I quote:

The Report was studied and received by the Council of The Lutheran World Federation in June 2019.

The Report was studied and critically evaluated by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the assistance of experts. In the process, the Catholic side has expressed serious concerns that focus, above all, on various ecclesiological presuppositions and consequences as well as ambiguities and misunderstandings in the chosen terminology.

The Preamble also expresses its deep appreciation highlighting the fact that the Report, and I quote, “includes important pneumatological impulses for ongoing theological and ecclesiological discussion. It makes a significant step in proposing

a differentiating consensus on baptism.” This differentiating consensus on baptism is found in Chapter 2.

As I said, the critical evaluation of the Report does not hinder our two communions on the way from conflict to communion. Dialogue matters, the Preamble states. In this current year of 2023, a preparatory group will be conducting a thorough assessment of the situation and the text. The preparatory group is named as such because its goal is to work with the critical questions raised by BGC and thereby prepare the ground for the Sixth Phase of the Lutheran – Catholic Joint Commission.

III. Pneumatological Impulse

I want to focus on the affirmative statement in The Preamble which I just cited: BGC “includes important pneumatological impulses for ongoing theological and ecclesiological discussion.” It is these impulses that I will highlight in this lecture, focusing on a dynamic of unity present within the text. Both the DPCU and the LWF acknowledge that BGC sets before us the critical question or the crux of our ecumenical endeavor: defining what is meant by models of unity and what exactly do we mean by a “communion of churches”.

Let’s begin with a simple summary of BGC’s working hypothesis:

Baptism and Growth in Communion starts from the mutual recognition of baptism by Lutheran and Catholic communities and explores the ecclesial consequences of this fact. Baptism does not only refer to a person’s relation to God, but it has – as incorporation into the body of Christ – an ecclesial dimension. Thus, the question arises since baptized individuals are members of body of Christ, are not the communities in which they live their Christian lives also members of the body of Christ. (Preface)

BGC highlights the reality that baptism is more than just an individual experience. It has ecclesiological implications (incorporation into the Body of Christ, initiation into a life greater than one’s own life, that is, initiation into God’s work of new creation, reclaiming and reconciling all humanity and creation to God’s self, becoming part of a communion, an assembly, a gathering of believers). Of course,

there is nothing new in that statement about baptism. However, the Report attempts to take this theological truth and give it new language, language that will highlight the ways in which, beginning in baptism, we can recognize not only the Holy Spirit's gifts in each other's communions but understand these gifts as actualizing an ecclesiological impulse, a Spirit-inspired growth in communion. To put it slightly differently, the gifts of the Spirit embody "church" as they are shared (participated in) with one another and which thereby set our communions on a path ever-deeper into communion.

The Report seeks to accomplish at least two things: 1. to develop a new language to render the insights of Vatican II, and notably *Unitatis Redintegratio*, a reality; and 2. to respond to a challenge presented already by the JDDJ. Let's take the second one first. The JDDJ left open further work on the ecclesial significance of the consensus on justification. To consider the ecclesial significance of justification by faith, the BGC begins with baptism as the event, the place, where those who are baptized experience the saving grace of justification, which as noted by the JDDJ, lays the basis for the whole Christian life (§25). The JDDJ states, justification "occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and incorporation into the one body (Rom 8:1ff., 9ff.; 1 Cor 12:12ff.). All this is from God alone, for Christ's sake, by grace, through faith in 'the gospel of God's Son' (Rom 1:1-3)" (§11).

Justification is received and it incorporates. It is both gift and power. It is a dynamic that sets the baptized on a journey that conceives of a life in faith as individually received but outwardly directed. BGC makes the argument that the communion of the body of Christ consists of those who are justified by faith. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul argues that a common understanding of justification by faith is the criterion for ecclesial communion within a community despite the variety of pieties, traditions, and practices that might be present. (3.3.8.)

An ecclesial communion requires a common understanding of justification by faith according to the apostolic tradition. When such an understanding of justification is present, it can provide the foundation for unity, it can be the measure or touchstone to analyze and resolve situations of conflict. This call is present in the JDDJ when it states, first of all, that the doctrine of justification is an "indispensable criterion that constantly serves to orient all the teaching and

practice of our churches to Christ” (§18) and then further in the Annex: “The doctrine of justification is measure or touchstone for the Christian faith” (Annex 3). There may be several criteria but the measure or touchstone is justification.

Based then on our consensus on justification, a consensus which in itself already indicates the existence of ecclesial communion, how can Catholics and Lutherans take the next step on this journey to a recognition of this communion in the one Church of Christ? What ecumenical efforts are necessary to interpret the message of justification in language for today?

And now back to developing a new language. Ecumenical theology has this challenge at its heart: grounded in the tradition, it seeks both in doctrine and in praxis to find new ways of expressing that tradition. Tradition is never simply repeating old definitions but a witness today that speaks the old in ever new ways, as St. Augustine stated. This characteristic of ecumenical theology is the very challenge to maintain and deepen apostolicity and to recognize it in our historically separated communities. Finding a new language of course never happens all at once. Language itself develops, is modified, nuanced, is continually in flux. The language proposed in BGC is also just that: a proposal. It is a first step, one that needs refining but one that nevertheless takes us a step further on a journey.

The pneumatological and ecclesiological impulse developed within the chapters of BGC is rooted in Scripture. The impulse focuses on the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit, given in baptism through varying charisms, has ecclesial implications. As Paul notes in 1 Cor 12:4-7, each gift is given by God in order to build up others and the whole church. And as the BGC then states, “This ‘building up’ of others and the church is the main criterion Catholics and Lutherans need to identify and actualize at this time” (3.5.5.6.).

But how does the BGC define this Scriptural expression “fruit of the Spirit”. For one, it cites Galatians 5:22-26

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the

Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

The fruit of the Spirit opens us up towards the others, towards the neighbor, towards building up and not competing against, and, in Chapter 6, Paul continues to define this outward and communal perspective as bearing one another's burdens. We do this not only individually but as community.

The term "fruit of the Spirit" in the BGC is always coupled with other theological and ecclesial realities. In its final chapter, the Report enunciates most clearly what it means by "fruit of the Spirit": the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments celebrated, the service rendered (martyria, leiturgia, diakonia)" (page 73).

Recognizing the fruit of the Spirit is also recognizing the visible elements of the Church and acknowledging the sacramental character of those communities in which these elements and fruit are found, for the visible elements and the fruit of the Spirit witness to a broader ecclesial reality (3.5.4.8.). These visible elements include ordained ministry when that ministry is understood, as Catholics and Lutherans understand it, as preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, communicating grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (3.5.4.6.), as ministry of the Word.

At this point, the Report cites *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3 which states, "Moreover, some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ."

BGC seeks to find a language for this impulse given by Vatican II. I quote from BGC: "Vatican II does not only evaluate the ecclesial character of a community by looking at its sacraments, ministry, or institutions but also recognizes the fruit of the Spirit in other communities outside its borders from the perspective that the Holy Spirit uses these elements not only to create faith, love, and hope in human beings, but also at the same time to create church." (3.5.5.1.)

BGC underscores this point citing John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*: “The elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian Communities, in a degree which varies from one to the other, constitute the objective basis of the communion, albeit imperfect, which exists between them and the Catholic Church. To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them.” (3.5.5.3.)

If the one Church of Christ is present in the other churches and ecclesial communities, if, as emphasized by John Paul II who is reflecting on *Lumen Gentium* §15, there is “a true union in the Holy Spirit” which links the Catholic Church with the ecclesial communities, if therefore the fruit of the Spirit has the power to overcome conflicts, to build bridges and to strengthen mission (3.5.5.4.), then how are Lutherans and Catholics to define and live into that true communion in the Holy Spirit? How does that union come to expression?

IV. Baptism: ecclesiological implications

The contours of this “true union in the Holy Spirit” – the pneumatological impulse for ecclesiology – is found in baptism. As noted earlier, BGC is the “first time that a differentiating theological consensus on baptism has been developed between Catholics and Lutherans” including both theological and liturgical analysis (Small Task Force). With this consensus, the Report hopes to make an important step forward on the journey towards visible unity.

BGC states, “Baptism is the entry point for Christian life in the communion of the church. Baptism imparts the full grace of justification and gives full membership in the body of Christ...” (1.6.1.1.). We have just covered this intimate connection between baptism, justification, and ecclesial communion via the fruit of the Spirit.

At this stage, I will not discuss this differentiating consensus on baptism but rather underscore some key characteristics of a theology of baptism and the implications for ecclesiology and ecumenism. Here is a short list that will guide me:

1. Baptism initiates a process (adapting, exercising, growing into an identity)
2. Baptism is a call to discover the dimensions of grace

3. Baptism points to the continual bestowal of the Holy Spirit throughout life –
inspiratio continua
4. Baptism is a sacramental bond that open new ways

BGC attempts to find a new language for ecclesial communion by focusing on these characteristics of baptism that shape the life and the need of both the individual and the baptizing community. This attempt at defining a new language is already present in the title itself *Baptism and Growth in Communion*. Let me parse this out.

On the one hand, there is baptism, a one-time event, a singular event in the life of an individual yet an event that inaugurates into Christian community. The context of baptism is always ecclesial. Baptism is administered by a community, by a local church and into the body of Christ.

BGC states: “Individuals normally are baptized in a local church. They become members of a denominational church with a specific profile and tradition, and at the same time members of the body of Christ. Christian life is shaped by the liturgical assembly in which baptism happens. Nevertheless, [citing Joseph Ratzinger in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*] ‘baptism is the presence of the one church, and it can only come from her – from the Jerusalem above, the new mother [...] in baptism, the universal church always precedes the local church.’” (3.4.3.)

BGC continues, “[t]he ecumenical problem [however] arises from the fact that baptism incorporates the baptized into the one body of Christ even while [at the same time] these baptisms take place in denominational, local churches that are, in many cases, divided from each other.” (3.6.4.) It is be noted that this challenge exists because the body of Christ and the local church are not too separate entities. The body of Christ is not a platonic form but is always located, known through embodied practice, known sacramentality in this time and place, in this particular local church, in this particular denomination. This reality gives rise to a dialectic “as ‘body of Christ’ ecclesiology refers not only to local communities but also to the whole church, it describes the relationship between different Christian communities and traditions in the same dialectic of unity and diversity (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-6).” (3.3.7.)

So back to our title *Baptism and Growth in Communion...* From baptism onwards, an individual is no longer alone but in community and in communion in the Body of Christ. In that community, the Holy Spirit continues to manifest its gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, all for the building up of the body, the church, the mystery of communion. Building up or growth signify a dynamic that links baptism and church. A process is inaugurated. Growth is not only an individual transformation but an ecclesial transformation, that is, a continual conversion of the community, the church, in which the baptized are located. Growth is discovery of identity. Growth begun in baptism is the continual discovery of all the dimensions of grace, both individually and ecclesially, leading to a deeper understanding of ecclesial identity. The defining point then of ekklesia is not a past reference but a future promise held by God. This future is the unity into which the church grows, a theme developed already in the letter to the Ephesians.

This dynamic of growth, discovering the dimensions of grace particularly in their ecclesial embodiment, defines in some ways the shift that BGC proposes.

The Report makes an ecclesiological claim which may have already present in the church's history or not – I'll let others discuss that! The claim is simple enough: church itself can be defined as growth in communion, as a continual discovery of the ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests itself in communities. BGC states, "The church is not a static entity but a body for which growth in communion is an essential element." (4.1.4.) In other words, church cannot simply be juridically defined (though that is also necessary for local communities to function). Church is a dynamic of growth. Christian communities are continually growing into the one Church of Christ.

This ecclesiological claim implies then that unity itself is not static but rather dynamic. The unity we seek is not a "state of being" or an "order" or a "rule" or even a "model" but a dynamic of growth that includes within it continual discovery, *inspiratio continua*, participation and sharing. There is always something "unfinished" in this growth which cannot – and as a Lutheran I can say "should not" – be defined as an imperfection to be completed or a defect to be corrected but rather as a mutual invitation into ongoing growth.

Perhaps it would be better to speak about a dynamic of unity, a dynamic experienced in continual discovery, conversion, attention to the Spirit's ongoing

work, participation and sharing in that work. This dynamic of unity is defined as continual growth in ecclesial communion. This dynamic then begs the questions what do we actually mean by models of unity? Is that even the term that can be used? For example, a “model” might indicate again a particular “order” where ecclesial characteristics are clearly defined and which can serve as a type of rule to determine if unity is accomplished, for example, Bellarmin’s definition. But the proposal for unity in BGC is one of continual growth in ecclesial communion through discernment (for example, doctrinal discussion and differentiating consensus), active participation and sharing in the fruit of the Spirit.

Unity is given through the sacramental bond of baptism (UR 22) and we, as ecclesial communities, continually grow into that bond. The notion of unity itself then would require a more provisional definition, unity grows as the Spirit molds and shapes us, breaking us open, bending what is rigid and reconciling division, as the BGC says in its conclusion. Unity grows as the Spirit’s actions are discerned among our communities, participated in and shared.

Discerned and shared. BGC argues that “prayer, discernment of the fruit of the Spirit in one another’s communities, and shared sacramental life make possible the process of growth in ecclesial communion and the acknowledgement of the ministry that serves them.” (4.1.4.). To be church is an invitation into this participation, sharing, discovery of the Holy Spirit’s work that leads us all into the fullness of Christ, a process envisioned in the letter to the Ephesians. The vision of the church in Ephesians is “set in the largest possible framework, the cosmic body of all the faithful united with its head, the risen Christ (Eph 1:22-23;2:6) (I quote the well-known Catholic New Testament scholar, Prof. PHEME PERKINS).

V. Paradigm shift

The BGC states: “This commission proposes a paradigm shift that grounds the recognition of the other community as church in the recognition of the fruit of the Spirit active in the other community through the elements of sanctification and truth. The elements have not fallen from heaven like meteors but rather are connected with each other and embedded in the communities they shape. Through these elements of sanctification and truth, the body of Christ exists and is present in these communities.” (3.6.8.)

Paradigm shift is perhaps a bold claim. The Report attempts to shift from “older, often oppositional, constructions of confessional identity to the recognition of the ecclesial identity of the other community by identifying the work of the Spirit within it [and] help to overcome traditional controversies.” (4.3.2.) It proposes a shift in focus for the sake of ecumenical dialogue: a shift away from more static or juridical definitions of church to a pneumatological approach that lifts up the way in which the Holy Spirit, molding communities of faith in the greater design of God, bringing all things in Christ.

For the global Lutheran communion, the challenge can be described in various ways but one very evident challenge is the need to develop and deepen a more robust ecclesiology throughout the communion. It is an internal challenge to bring into dialogue various ecclesiologies represented in different local and regional expressions of member churches of the LWF, from well-rooted episcopal expressions (though still often very regional) to very presbyterial expressions. At the same time, another challenge requires examining more closely the Augsburg Confession and its definition of church. It is one thing to always lift up Article VII (where church is defined as “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.” BC, page 42) which can also become a static definition. How do we as Lutherans live into the communion of churches as defined in the Apology of the AC of Articles VII and VIII, which in fact, argues that the church “consists (...) of people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether or not they have the same human traditions.”¹ How do we, as a Lutheran communion, define amongst ourselves “communion of churches”? These are some of the Lutheran challenges. I welcome an exploration on the part of Catholics to state what the questions may be for them.

BGC makes an ecumenical proposal and asks whether Lutherans and Catholics can understand “church” in a dynamic sense. With a mutual and official recognition of baptism, there “is something much more than an act of ecumenical courtesy, writes already JP II; it constitutes a basic ecclesiological statement.” (UUS42) (3.2.3.) When the “marks” of the one body are recognized in a faith community, can we discern and acknowledge the one church of Christ present there? Even

¹ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). [*The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*](#) (p. 175). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

more, can we then participate and share together in that fruit of the Spirit? Through participation and sharing, ecumenical relations are strengthened as they witness to faith, hope, and love. (4.3.2.) Aspects of participation and sharing are developed in the final chapter of BGC.

To quote the final paragraph of BGC: “The fruit of the Spirit, present in different communities, witnesses to this one body of Christ, in which the Holy Spirit is continually active (...) God calls all Christians to grow in personal faith, to transform the life of their ecclesial community, and to deepen the communion among their communities (...). On the way, the churches walk together in God’s Word and Sacrament towards an ever-deeper communion, not for their own self-preservation but to proclaim joyously the Gospel to all people and to serve all creation” (page 75).

Thank you.
Dirk G. Lange