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**TOWARDS THE RECONCILIATION OF MINISTRIES**  
**Apostolic Succession and Mutual Recognition of Ministry**  
**form *Unitatis redintegratio* to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision***

The question of ministry is always the key issue in the ecumenical doctrinal dialogues. During past half a century the Churches and Ecclesial Communities engaged in the bi- and multilateral dialogues elaborated quite a number of documents of various importance. Many of them contained the reflection on ministry as existing now in the Churches.

Hereafter we will look inside the Vatican II's Decree on ecumenism and into the latest Faith and Order document: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*<sup>1</sup> to trace there any proposals for possible reconciliation of ministries that could lead to its mutual recognition by dialoguing parties. In between the two we will also take a glance at the possible solutions, offered on nowadays market of theological ideas.

**1. *Unitatis redintegratio* on ministry and apostolic succession**

The Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* of the Second Vatican Council in its first chapter entitled *Catholic principles on ecumenism* stresses on the principle of instrumental role of the hierarchy in ruling and sanctifying the Church: "In order to establish this His holy Church everywhere in the world till the end of time, Christ entrusted to the College of the Twelve the task of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. Among their number He selected Peter, and after his confession of faith determined that on him He would build His Church"<sup>2</sup>. Thus

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<sup>1</sup> WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper no. 214, Geneva 2013 [further: CTCV].

<sup>2</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Decree on ecumenism «Unitatis redintegratio»* [further: DE], 2.

the hierarchy composed of the successors of the “College of the Twelve” with the successor of Apostle Peter as their head is the specific and in the same time unique instrument by means of which Christ Jesus, who “Himself was forever to remain the chief cornerstone and shepherd of our souls” builds up and governs his Church<sup>3</sup>. The Decree thus follows the conciliar theology of ministry, stressing on the importance of the role of apostolic succession in the transmission of proper authority of teaching, governing and sanctifying: “Jesus Christ, then, willed that the apostles and their successors – the bishops with Peter’s successor at their head – should preach the Gospel faithfully, administer the sacraments, and rule the Church in love”<sup>4</sup>.

What concerns the “Eastern Churches” the Decree confirms the recognition of validity of all their sacraments, including the ordination, and of the apostolic succession: “These Churches, although separated from us, possess true sacraments, above all by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are linked with us in closest intimacy”<sup>5</sup>. This recognition enables the further statement about the sharing in worship, however to a certain extent: “Therefore some worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*), given suitable circumstances and the approval of Church authority, is not only possible but to be encouraged”<sup>6</sup>.

The different approach is then shown towards the “Separated Churches and Ecclesial Communities in the West”. The trouble with the recognition of validity of sacraments comes from the lack of apostolic succession stated by the Roman Catholic Church in the Churches originating in 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. Thus the Decree states “the absence of the sacrament of Orders”<sup>7</sup> in the post-Reformation Churches. This then results in the statement of not retaining there “the proper reality of the Eucharistic mystery in its fullness”<sup>8</sup>.

We could rightly state that the conciliar Decree, repeating the Roman Catholic theology of ministry, does not bring any ecumenical solution in the difficult issue of recognizing the validity of ministries in non-Catholic Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities. However we have to notice, that this was not the purpose of the Vatican’s conciliar statement. The conciliar Decree is not a document of ecumenical dialogue, but the formulation of Catholic theology as understood by conciliar fathers at Vatican II. The same was repeated forty years after in the dec-

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> DE 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> DE 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

laration *Dominus Iesus*<sup>9</sup> by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. However, what cannot be found in the official doctrinal statements of the Roman Catholic Church, should be looked for in the efforts of the theologians, trying to figure out the possible way out of the labyrinth of centuries long accumulation of doctrine of apostolic succession and its validity.

## 2. Ways to reconciliation of ministries?

In this place we should ask a question about the apostolic succession in the context of searching for the ecumenical possibility of reconciling the ministries. First of all we have to ask whether we can attribute to the Church and its ministries the instrumental role in the salvation accomplished by Christ and implemented by the Holy Spirit? According to the Roman Catholic theology the apostolic succession plays the key role in the continuity of the Church. Historical ministry and succession in it belong to the *esse* of the Church, to its deepest identity. The ministry in the Church is threefold and as such constitutes a structural element of the Church. To validly conduct the ordination a bishop himself must persist in the authentic apostolic succession and act in the name of Christ. In the context of such understanding of the apostolic succession the research is being done for the possibility of recognition of ministries in these Ecclesial Communities, which did not upkeep the historical succession according to the Catholic understanding.

The research of two theologians are especially worth of being quoted here: of Hans Jorissen and Hubert Müller. Jorissen starts from the original unity of the apostolic ministry, proposing the acceptance of ministry as a constant element. The historically shaped form of ministry then, as not having the ecclesial importance such as ministry itself, would belong to the accepted differences, if enables the continuation of ministry<sup>10</sup>. In this context justified is the question, if the present structure of ministry is binding and constitutive for the whole Church nowadays and later? These questions are justified by the history of the Church: up to the 15th century there were in the Roman Catholic Church cases of ordination without participation of a bishop, on the basis of papal dispensation. Even if this practice was later abandoned, the ordinations given by presbyters were still considered valid<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH, *Declaration «Dominus Iesus» on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html) [30.09.2014].

<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. JORISSEN, *Behindert die Amtsfrage die Einheit der Kirchen? Katholisches Plädoyer für die Anerkennung der reformatorischen Ämter*, in: *Eucharistische Gasfreundschaft. Ein Plädoyer evangelischer und katholischer Theologen*, ed. J. BROSEDER, H.-G. LINK, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2003, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. PORADA, *Wspólna Eucharystia w kontekście rozumienia urzędu kościelnego*, in: *Wspólna Eucharystia – cel ekumenii*, ed. P. JASKÓŁA, R. PORADA, Opole 2005, 269–270, 274.

The form of the act of ordination and of the transmission of the apostolic succession varied in the history. Piotr Szczur, after careful examination of Klemens of Alexandria's *Stromata* discovered, that the laying on hands as the core of the act of ordination was unknown or rather not practiced in the second century. The Greek verb *hierotoneo*, from which is derived the noun *hierotonia* – the ordination, did not include the notion of laying on hands, but meant: “to stretch out the hand, for the purpose of giving one’s vote in the assembly”<sup>12</sup>. The same opinion presents Rajmund Porada, who develops the question reminding, that in the middle-ages and even at the Council of Florence (1439) the rite of ordination did not include the gesture of laying on hands, and the sacramental sign of ordination was seen in the handing the paten with bread and the chalice with wine to the ordained. It was only in 1947 that Pope Pius XII instituted the laying on hands accompanied by a proper prayer as the constitutive act of ordination<sup>13</sup>.

Hubert Müller in his proposals of reconsidering the meaning of the ministry in his turn offers a re-reading of the documents of the Vatican II. The council speaks about the Church ministry established by God in different levels of ordination, which from the antiquity are called bishops, presbyters and deacons. In such a statement of the dogmatic constitution of the Church *Lumen gentium* Müller would see the council’s confirmation of original unity of the ministry. Instituted by God himself is the ministry, but not its forms. What’s more, the fullness of ministry belongs to the bishops, the presbyters only take part in it. The episcopate then is not a higher level comparing to the presbyterate, nor the source of the presbyterate, because the source of all ministries is Christ himself<sup>14</sup>.

Jorissen follows this reasoning stating, that if one cannot distinguish the functions accomplished in the history by bishops alone, so the ministry of the Church is totally conferred in the presbyterate, even if exerting of the whole range of ministry by the presbyters is suspended<sup>15</sup>.

We have to notice that the proposals pointed out above, especially by Hans Jorissen, are not quite new. This was the way followed in the history of the Church by the Reformed, the Methodists and the Baptists, who rejected some of elements of historically shaped ministry or introduced their own modifications.

Although intellectually attractive could seem the abovementioned proposals of solving the difficulty connected to the understanding of the apostolic succession, determining the reconciliation of ministries, we have to state openly that these

<sup>12</sup> Cf. P. SZCZUR, *Urząd prezbitera w świetle pism Klemensa z Aleksandrii*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 4 (2004), 70–71.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. R. PORADA, *Wspólna Eucharystia w kontekście rozumienia urzędu kościelnego*, 268.

<sup>14</sup> H. MÜLLER, *Zum Verhältnis zwischen Episkopat und Presbyterat im Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Wien 1971, 281–288, 304–338.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. H. JORISSEN, *Behindert die Amtsfrage die Einheit der Kirchen?*, 93.

proposals are still not yet mature enough to be commonly accepted in the Christian world. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches point out rather at the possible “mending” of the historic episcopate in the valid apostolic succession at the side of post-Reformation Churches by coming back to the early-Christian model. The Catholics and the Orthodox prefer to see rather such a development of forms and meanings of ministries, as it was in the first centuries of Christianity and remained up to now in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. They are then reluctant to accept the proposals such as those of Jorissen or Müller.

Undoubtedly the series obstacle, effectively blocking further ecumenical dialog on the recognition of ministries is the practice of women’s ordination introduced by the Anglican and many protestant Churches. We can observe, how the Churches originated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation consider themselves entitled to introduce new theological rules non conform with the tradition of the Church and regardless of the rest of the Christendom. The ordination of women to the presbyterate and to the episcopate have been introduced unilaterally into the Church life contrary to the oldest common tradition, upheld by the Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The protestant Churches consider themselves to have the right to introduce such changes (often even in voting by the simple majority) and do not accept any critics of being anti-ecumenical in their deeds. On the other side the Anglicans and protestant would reverse the question: not the adoption of women’s ordination, but the Roman Catholic and Orthodox refusal of ordaining women causes obstacle on the way to the reconciliation of ministries and the full visible unity of the Church<sup>16</sup>.

### **3. Does the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* bring an ecumenical agreement on ministry?**

The series of ecumenical dialogues, involving the Roman Catholic Church and without her participation, usually touched the problem of ministry, ordination and apostolic succession. As the most advanced of all we can quote the statement issued by ARCIC in 1973 on ministry and ordination<sup>17</sup> and the World Council of Churches’ famous document: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*<sup>18</sup> issued in 1982. These and other documents on ministry are already known enough in the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. P. KANTYKA, *What Happened to «Sola Scriptura»? How the Bible was Used in the Fight for Women Priests and Bishops in the Anglican Communion*, „Roczniki Teologii Ekumenicznej” 4 (2012), 31–42.

<sup>17</sup> *Ministry and Ordination 1973*, in: ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION, *The Agreed Statements: Eucharistic Doctrine 1971, Ministry and Ordination 1973*, London 1973.

<sup>18</sup> WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111, Geneva 1982 [further: BEM].

theological world to still attract attention. They undoubtedly played the role of milestones in the ecumenical discussion on the issues in question. Examining the *status quo* and prompting the theological investigation they largely contributed to the ecumenical dialogue on ministry, ordination and apostolic succession. They did not offer however the mature solutions to be accepted in the ecumenical world in order of reconciliation of ministries. We turn then impatiently to the latest Faith and Order paper: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* to see whether we can find there anything new about the matters tackled in this article.

Firstly we have to ask what is the status of this document? It is obviously the result of long process of ecumenical discussion in the womb of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, and as such the document is inevitably an outcome of as many ecclesiologies as there were discussing parties. Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the WCC, wrote in his *Foreword* that the document “reflects the constitutional aims and self-identity of the WCC as a fellowship of Churches who call each other to the goal of visible unity”<sup>19</sup>. The WCC not being a Church, but “a fellowship of Churches” without doctrine shared in common, we have to expect a reflection of many ecclesiologies rather than an elaborated ecclesiological treaty.

To analyze the question of ministry in the Church we have to examine first what the document says on the apostolic succession. The document refers to the latter by naming the condition of visible unity in mutual recognition in one another “the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381) calls the «one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church»<sup>20</sup>”. These “attributes are not separate from one another” but “inform one another and are mutually interrelated”, in the result of what “the apostolic faith is one”<sup>21</sup>. Further, the document would see the apostolicity of the Church in the divine institution: “The Church is apostolic because the Father sent the Son to establish it. The Son, in turn, chose and sent the apostles and prophets, empowered with the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to serve as its foundation and to oversee its mission”<sup>22</sup>. The question of apostolicity of the Church comes back with the definition of a local Church: “the local Church is «a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of *episkopē* exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community»”<sup>23</sup>. This formula is an explicit reflection of majority of protestant definitions of the

<sup>19</sup> CTCV, *Foreword*.

<sup>20</sup> CTCV 9.

<sup>21</sup> CTCV 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> CTCV 31. Here the documents quotes the report of the JOINT WORKING GROUP OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, *The Church: Local and Universal*, 15, in:

Church<sup>24</sup>, however mentioning apostolic faith is an addition of the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. The “receiving and sharing the faith of the apostles” is also quoted together with “baptising, breaking and sharing the Eucharistic bread, praying with and for one another and for the needs of the world, serving one another in love, participating in each other’s joys and sorrows, giving material aid, proclaiming and witnessing to the good news in mission and working together for justice and peace”<sup>25</sup>.

The document then establishes the link between the apostolicity of the Church and ministry in apostolic succession. “The Christian community is called to be ever faithful to the apostolic origins” and the apostolicity of the Church is served by the apostolic succession in ministry<sup>26</sup>. The Commission agrees, that all this is done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The difference between the Churches consists on the different role attributed to the way in which “the Holy Spirit’s activity in the Church is related to institutional structures or ministerial order”<sup>27</sup>. Here, like in many places in the whole document, the Commission has no other option as to enumerate the differences in perceiving the issue by different Churches, without naming any specific denomination. However, the theologians reading the document will easily notice, that here the Commission refers to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox point of view: “Some see certain essential aspects of the Church’s order as willed and instituted by Christ himself for all time; therefore, in faithfulness to the Gospel, Christians would have no authority fundamentally to alter this divinely instituted structure” In the further words the protestant and especially free Churches position can be easily detected: “Some affirm that the ordering of the Church according to God’s calling can take more than one form while others affirm that no single institutional order can be attributed to the will of God”<sup>28</sup>.

After examining the apostolic succession and the linking with the ministry and ordination, the Commission consecrates a special place to ministry in the Church. In the third chapter of the document entitled *The Church: Growing in Communion*, we find subtitle *Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry*. There, after the points on *Faith* and *Sacraments*, we find the subject: *Ministry within the Church* (points 45–57). This topic is divided into three sub-topics: *Ordained Ministry*, *The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of*

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*Growth in Agreement II, Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1982–1998*, ed. J. GROSS, H. MEYER, W. G. RUSCH, Geneva 2000, 866.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. i.e. the Methodist definition as in the *Articles of religion* from *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012*, Nashville 2012, 66.

<sup>25</sup> CTCV 34.

<sup>26</sup> CTCV 22.

<sup>27</sup> CTCV 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

*the Church* and *The Ministry of Oversight* (Episcopē). The Commission is well aware of the difficulty of the question when it states: “Ecumenical dialogue has repeatedly shown that issues relating to ordained ministry constitute challenging obstacles on the path to unity. If differences such as those relating to the priesthood of the ordained prohibit full unity, it must continue to be an urgent priority for the Churches to discover how they can be overcome”<sup>29</sup>.

The outline of the question of ministry and ordination begins with the statement that Churches differ in the approach to the question of threefold ministry of deacons, presbyters and bishops. This model, still perceived as normative by many Churches has been replaced by variety of models adopted by the Churches issued of the Reformation<sup>30</sup>. The most important question – the Commission points out – is “whether or not the «historic episcopate» (meaning bishops ordained in apostolic succession back to the earliest generations of the Church), or the apostolic succession of ordained ministry more generally, is something intended by Christ for his community”<sup>31</sup>. Here again the Commission must notice difference in the answers given by the Churches. In the same time the Commission seems to be in favour of the “historic episcopate” while quoting from BEM, that the threefold ministry “may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it”<sup>32</sup>.

Besides the constitution of the ministry itself – threefold, twofold or other – it is important to ask about the role of the ordained ministers in providing an authoritative interpretation of revelation<sup>33</sup>. What than is the *episcopē* of ordained ministers for? The document stresses on its importance to maintain continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life<sup>34</sup>. The functions connected to the exercise of *episcopē* are always directed to the community. Whether exercised individually or in common they are always to be exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways. Here again the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* quotes from BEM<sup>35</sup>, referring also to the terms “synodality”

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<sup>29</sup> CTCV, *Ordained ministry*. Italic after pt. 45.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. CTCV 46.

<sup>31</sup> CTCV 47.

<sup>32</sup> BEM, *Ministry*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. CTCV, *Ordained ministry*. Italic after pt. 51.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. CTCV 52.

<sup>35</sup> BEM, *Ministry*, 26: “It should be *personal*, because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be *collegial*, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a *communal* dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community’s effective participation in the discovery of God’s will and the guidance of the Spirit”.

and “conciliarity”<sup>36</sup> and to the “primatiality”<sup>37</sup>. About the latter the Commission once again notes the difference in approach by the Churches not having the common mind, whether “a universal ministry of primacy is necessary or even desirable”<sup>38</sup>.

#### 4. What is the value of the document: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*?

Half a century after the Second Vatican Council and its Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* we looked inside the very important ecumenical statement of Faith and Order Commission *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Did the later bring an ecumenical breakthrough in the question of ministry in apostolic succession?

Those – let us name them the *optimists* – who expected in the latest great document of Faith and Order Commission an agreement on ordained ministry and apostolic succession can be rightly deceived. We did not obtain any ecumenical agreement on the issue. Instead, once again we are offered a very solid and panoramic outline of the results of ecumenical discussions, a true cataloguing of convergences and divergences. The *realists* on the contrary will certainly welcome such a systematic cataloguing of various ecclesiologies, pointing out at the views the Christians have already in common and exposing the remaining differences.

We have to note also, from the Roman Catholic point of view, that the close comparing of the Vatican II’s theology of ministry and apostolic succession and the theology presented in the latest Faith and Order paper brings us to the conclusion, that many formulations found in the Faith and Order document came closer to the Catholic theology, that it used to be before. The document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* can be cherished also for depicting the questions which have to be answered if we want to move forward in our ecumenical dialogue on ecclesiology. It seems to be extremely important to find an answer to the question asked by the Commission, whether the remaining “disagreements are Church-divisive or, instead, part of legitimate diversity”<sup>39</sup>? The detailed questions are also of great importance: “what is the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. CTCV 53.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. CTCV 55.

<sup>38</sup> CTCV 57.

<sup>39</sup> CTCV, *Legitimate and divisive diversity*. Italic after pt.30.

to serve and foster those relations?”<sup>40</sup> The ongoing ecumenical dialogue will have to answer these questions in order to move forward. The Faith and Order Commission is right to state, that “the journey towards the full realization of God’s gift of communion requires Christian communities to agree about the fundamental aspects of the life of the Church”<sup>41</sup>. Among the “fundamentals” are: “communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making; and in common witness and service in the world”<sup>42</sup>.

### **Ku pojednaniu posługiwania.**

#### **Sukcesja apostołska a wzajemne uznanie posługiwania duchownego od *Unitatis redintegratio* do *The Church: Towards a Common Vision***

#### Streszczenie

W artykule poddano badaniu *Dekret o ekumenizmie* II Soboru Watykańskiego oraz najnowszy dokument Komisji Wiara Ustrój Światowej Rady Kościołów *Ku wspólnej wizji Kościoła* pod kątem znalezienia możliwych propozycji wiodących ku wzajemnemu uznaniu posługiwania duchownego związanego z sukcesją apostołską, występującego w Kościołach zaangażowanych w dialog ekumeniczny. W skrócie dotknięto też propozycji niektórych teologów, które jednak nie znalazły odzwierciedlenia w żadnym oficjalnym dokumencie.

Przeprowadzone analizy wykazały, że badane dokumenty nie zawierają konkretnych propozycji wiodących ku pojednaniu posługiwania, w zamian dokument ŚRK kataloguje obszary ekumenicznej konwergencji i dywergencji w tej ważnej kwestii, a także stawia ważne pytania, na które najpierw trzeba znaleźć odpowiedź, by móc przejść do ustaleń w sprawie wzajemnego uznania posługiwania duchownych ordynowanych.

**Keywords:** ministry; ordination; apostolic succession; ecumenical dialogue.

**Słowa kluczowe:** posługiwanie duchowne; święcenia; sukcesja apostołska; dialog ekumeniczny.

<sup>40</sup> CTCV, *The relationship between local and universal Church*. Italic after pt.32.

<sup>41</sup> CTCV 37.

<sup>42</sup> CTCV 37. Here the document quotes from the statement: *The Church: Local and Universal (1990)*, 25, in: *Growth in Agreement II*, 868.