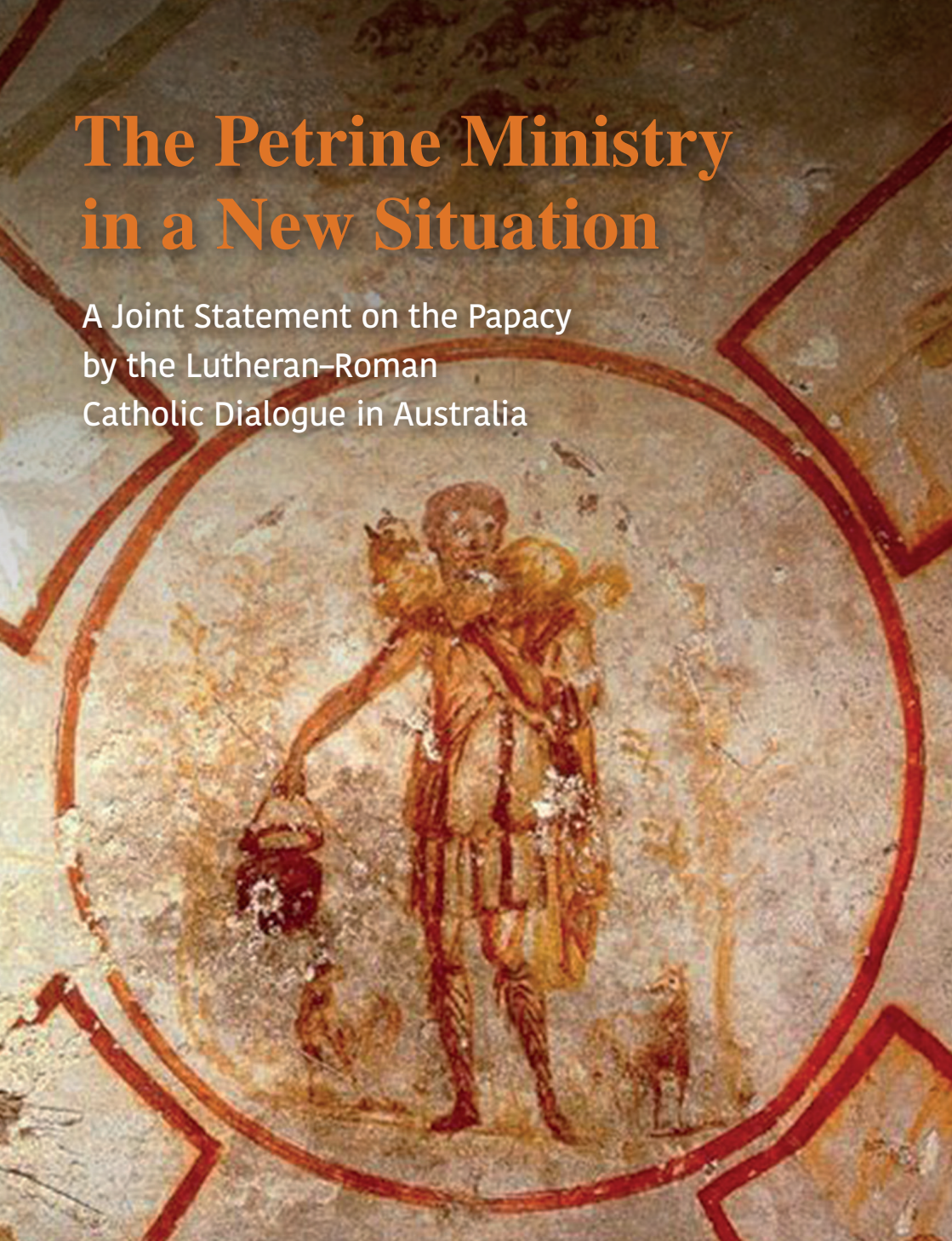


The Petrine Ministry in a New Situation

A Joint Statement on the Papacy
by the Lutheran–Roman
Catholic Dialogue in Australia



2011 – 2016

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Preface

The present document is the fruit of five years of dialogue (2011-2016). It is the eighth joint statement produced in the forty year history of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia. The impetus for the present topic was the invitation of Pope John Paul II to engage in a patient and fraternal dialogue to find a way of exercising the Roman primacy which is open to a new situation.

An early chapter of the document, “Talking Together in a New Situation,” sets out the new situation, not just for our respective churches, but also for our ecumenical relationship, which has evolved over these forty years. This chapter sets the scene and the tone for what follows. We were very conscious that in considering the papacy we had to explore the role of Peter in the New Testament. Such a study will clarify the way we deal with the claims of the papacy and the practical exercise of this ministry. A good grasp of history is no less important, as the history of the development of the papacy shaped the way it was understood and exercised in different generations.

Having explored these two big areas, the document turns to three specific questions. These are the relationship of the centrality of Christ to a proper understanding of the papacy; the exercise of papal infallibility; and the pastoral authority of the bishop of Rome. We move in the following chapter to offer a response to Pope John Paul II’s invitation. In this chapter we indicate steps each of our churches might take in order to receive the renewed understanding of the papacy and the way it can be exercised. The document represents a convergence on the theological understanding of the papacy within the doctrinal framework of both our churches. It also acknowledges obstacles that still remain, but which we believe may ultimately be resolved by building on the convergence we have reached.

We now present this document to our respective churches and to the wider Christian community for study and reception.

Contents

1.	Introduction	5
2.	Talking Together in a New Situation	8
3.	What the New Testament says about Peter	16
4.	The Influence of History	23
5.	Three Particular Questions	37
	i. The Papacy and the Centrality of Christ in the Roman Catholic Church	
	ii. The Issue of Infallibility	
	iii. The Pastoral Authority of the Bishop of Rome	
6.	Responding to <i>Ut unum sint</i>	57
7.	Conclusion	61
	Members of the Dialogue	62

1. Introduction

1. In our earlier agreed text, *Living Word, Living Tradition*, we acknowledged that for Roman Catholics and Lutherans “there is a difference over the role of the Petrine office in authoritative teaching” (42). We signalled that we would explore this issue in a later dialogue. We have since engaged in constructive discussion on this topic and are ready to present the fruits of that dialogue to our respective churches and to the community more generally.
2. A further impetus for the dialogue was Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter on unity, *That they May be One (Ut unum sint)*.¹ In that letter he acknowledged “the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian communities” and indicated he wished to take heed of the request made to him “to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nevertheless open to a new situation” (95). He noted that the Faith and Order Conference had recommended a “new study of the question of a universal ministry of Christian unity” (89). The invitation is couched in a tone that seeks reconciliation and unity rather than confrontation. Indeed, Pope John Paul recalls that the exercise of this ministry constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians and he asks for forgiveness to the extent that the Catholic Church is responsible for this (88). Throughout the encyclical he refers to himself as the bishop of Rome, and rarely speaks of the “pope”. In fact, the title bishop of Rome seems to act as a base from which to explore new ways of exercising the primacy.
3. More recently, as we were well into the dialogue, Pope Francis, referring to John Paul II’s request, commented, “we have made little progress in this regard.”² He went on, “the papacy and the central structures of the universal church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion.” In the mind of Pope Francis, conversion will be facilitated by ecumenical dialogue. In our dialogue Roman Catholics have been ready to learn from Lutherans about new ways of exercising the primacy.
4. John Paul’s presentation of the papacy in the encyclical also created a new starting point for Lutherans. Grounding the Petrine ministry and its *episkope* in the “power of grace,” and its characterisation as a “ministry of mercy” and

1 John Paul II, *That They May All be One: Ut unum sint* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 1995).

2 Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii gaudium* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2014), para. 32.

service (92), are emphases which resonate strongly with Lutherans. It is also helpful that this ministry is rooted firmly in the New Testament narratives of Peter and Paul (90-92). Likewise, acknowledging Christ as “Head of the Church” and its “one Shepherd” indicates that Lutherans and Roman Catholics can share a common ecclesiological orientation (88, 94). The emphasis on the communion of bishops, and on a common, Spirit-led purpose in the mission of Christian communities, can be affirmed by Lutherans whose experience is of a synodical church polity.

5. Notwithstanding these positive openings for dialogue, the topic of the Petrine ministry presents challenges for us. The Roman Catholic Church’s convictions about what is essential to the mission of the papacy are not fully shared by Lutherans. These convictions about what is essential were expressed in *Ut unum sint* (88): that in the ministry of the bishop of Rome the Catholic Church has preserved the visible sign of unity; that this ministry is also the guarantor of unity; that this ministry is exercised in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition and the faith of the Fathers. The ecclesiology implicit here is a challenge for Lutherans, who always refer back to Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, namely that the church and its unity are grounded in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, and that “it is enough” (*satis est*) to agree on these.³ Moreover, while Lutherans can envisage an office which serves the whole of the church (“for the sake of peace and general unity” – Melancthon’s phrase), it has not been possible for them to recognise that the office itself is essential to this unity.
6. Despite these important differences, we have not been deterred from engaging in a “patient and fraternal dialogue.” *Ut unum sint* (96) indicated how such a dialogue might make progress: by leaving useless controversies behind; by listening to one another; by keeping before us the will of Christ for the church; and by the participants in the dialogue allowing themselves to be deeply moved by the plea “that all may be one.” More recently, Pope Francis has encouraged Roman Catholics to put the gospel and its proclamation before all else. Such an approach is welcomed by Lutherans. Pope Francis also counselled to keep in mind the principle of the hierarchy

3 The Augsburg Confession [AC], *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [1580], ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 43 [hereafter cited as *The Book of Concord*].

of truths,⁴ and “to believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit.” Dialogue, he said, is not just about being better informed about others, “but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them” (EG, 246).

7. The papacy has been studied at length in ecumenical dialogues in other parts of the world. We decided not to repeat these studies, but rather to take as our starting point the “new situation” that Pope John Paul referred to. This new situation is marked by a more developed understanding of the papacy at the Second Vatican Council. Closer to home, forty years of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia has created a new situation in our mutual relations. This agreed statement seeks to be realistic about practical steps that can be taken by each of our churches.

4 The principle of keeping in mind the hierarchy of truths was enunciated at the Second Vatican Council. It means that any doctrine is to be understood in relation to all other doctrines. We discuss this later; see para. 87.

2. Talking Together in a New Situation

In the Roman Catholic Church

8. It is legitimate to speak of a new situation within the Roman Catholic Church as a consequence of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, especially as expressed in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*).⁵ In the fifty years since the conciliar vision was proposed, this vision has developed both theologically and in the pastoral life of the church. The papacy can no longer be considered simply in the light of the definitions of Vatican I, even less of its practice in the sixteenth century, but must be appreciated within the larger ecclesiological vision of Vatican II.
9. The Second Vatican Council marked a shift in Catholic understanding of the church from a view that was predominantly institutional and juridical to one that is a more dynamic and theologically rich sacramental understanding. In this vision the church is seen as a sign and instrument of “intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity” (LG 1). This vision does not neglect the visible and institutional aspects of the church, but relates them to the church’s mission to be an effective sign of the mystery of Christ. The fundamental category for this new ecclesiology is *communio* or *koinonia*. The church is understood as a communion, and the exercise of authority and ministry must be understood within this framework of communion. At its deepest level, the papacy is an instrument of communion. It is exercised as an act of communion, within the ecclesial communion, in order to build up communion.
10. Communion should not be understood as a purely Platonic ideal, but is manifest as a concrete reality. The Council first speaks of the People of God as the chosen people of Israel. With the new covenant instituted by Christ, God called together a people who would be bound in unity in the Spirit. Believers in Christ have entered this new People “from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God, not of flesh but of water and the Holy Spirit” (LG, 9. Cf. 1 Pet 1:23, John 3:5-6). Here the Council develops a baptismal theology of church as communion. This people “has been set up by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth; by him too it is taken up as the instrument of salvation for all, and as a mission to the whole world

5 See Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London/Washington: Sheed & Ward/Georgetown University Press, 1990), II: 849-900. Translations of documents of Vatican II are from this edition.

as the light of the world and the salt of the earth” (LG 9). The church is a communion for the sake of the world. “God has called together the assembly of those who look to Jesus in faith as the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, and he has constituted the church that it may be for one and all the visible sacrament of this saving unity” (LG 9).

11. There are three particular consequences of this vision of the church as a communion—as the Spirit-filled baptised People of God—that point to the changed situation for a consideration of the papacy. The first refers to the place of the entire People of God in expressing the faith of the church. “The universal body of the faithful who have received the anointing of the holy one, cannot be mistaken in belief. It displays this particular quality through a supernatural sense of the faith in the whole people when from the bishops to the last of the faithful laity, it expresses the consent of all in matters of faith and morals” (LG 12). The unity of the faith is expressed by the entire People of God. While the council speaks of the faithful consenting to matters of belief proposed by the Magisterium (especially the pope), the ecclesiology here presented highlights the fact that the entire People of God is not passive in the reception of the saving word of God. There is, as it were, a symphony of belief.
12. The second consequence is the principle of unity and diversity within the communion of the church. The Holy Spirit unites in a single communion all of the faithful scattered throughout the world. The church “takes up and encourages the riches, resources and customs of peoples in so far as they are good; and in taking them up purifies, strengthens and raises them up” (LG 13). Local churches thus enjoy their own proper traditions, and contribute to the catholicity of the whole church. At this point the text notes the role of the primacy of the See of Peter “which presides over the universal communion of charity and safeguards legitimate differences while taking care that what is particular not only does no harm to unity but rather is conducive to it” (LG 13). The pope has a specific concern for the communion of the church. In a particular way, he is able to support and encourage diversity within the communion.
13. The final consequence that helps us define the new situation is the place of those churches that are not in communion with the “successor of Peter.” It is clear from the work of the Council that the Catholic Church recognises that Lutheran Churches belong to the communion of the church, even if that communion is imperfect or incomplete (cf. LG 15; cf. UR 3). The general

words of the Council can be applied specifically to Lutherans: they “hold the Sacred Scripture in honour as the norm for believing and living;” “they are marked by baptism;” “there is a true bond in the Holy Spirit” (LG 15). Speaking of the communion that already exists, Pope John Paul II noted that it “is not the consequence of a large-hearted philanthropy or a vague family spirit. It is rooted in the recognition of the oneness of baptism and the subsequent duty to glorify God in his work. ... This is something much more than an ecumenical act of courtesy; it constitutes a basic ecclesiological statement” (UUS 42). This basic statement of the theology of church may allow us to read the principle of unity and diversity mentioned above (LG 13) more broadly. While at this point the text speaks of diversity within the unity of the Catholic Church, we can well ask whether it could also apply to those churches not in communion with the pope. Could we not appeal to this text to suggest that the Lutheran Church brings something essential to the communion of the church? If such a reading is legitimate, we indeed have a new situation which could lead to a new way of exercising the papacy. The pope might then have a particular role in finding a way for the particular charism of the Lutheran Church to enrich and ennoble the whole church. If this is so, then it would suggest that for Lutheran Churches there is already a certain degree of communion with the pope.

A New Situation for the Lutheran Church in Australia

14. Since the time of the Reformation Lutherans have not regarded themselves as being under the authority of the bishop of Rome. More than that, on the basis of statements in the Lutheran Confessions, Lutherans in Australia historically have held the opinion that the Roman papacy bore “the distinguishing features of the antichrist.”⁶ This opinion was brought to the fore in the context of theological controversy over eschatological matters. It was less than a generation ago that this situation changed. In 1993 the LCA’s Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) sent a document to the Synod of the LCA in which it was stated that “[t]he Lutheran Church of Australia cannot continue to affirm at this time that the Roman papacy bears the distinguishing features of the Antichrist. We dialogue with Roman Catholics

6 *Theses of Agreement* [1956] 7.7, in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Church of Australia, 1980 -), volume 1: A16.13(b) [hereafter: DSTO].

as with brothers and sisters in the faith; we certainly do not regard them as people under the authority and spirit of Antichrist.”⁷

15. The 1993 statement recognises a new situation:

Recent developments in Roman Catholic theology, reflected in Vatican II and in official dialogues, reveal changes in the three areas referred to in the Theses of Agreement [1956]:

- a. Past attacks on the doctrine of justification by faith have been replaced by an emphasis on salvation by grace through faith, for Christ’s sake.
- b. Vatican II has repeated the age-old Roman Catholic distinction between the worship due to Christ and any reverence to be paid to human beings as members of the body of Christ.
- c. In particular, Vatican II stressed the conciliar and collegial nature of papal authority ... The pope’s authority over the church as ‘pastor of the faithful’ is exercised with the college of bishops.⁸

16. While recognising that “the papacy still presents formidable problems for Lutherans,” the statement ends on a positive note that hopes for good things to come out of the new situation, and even tacitly acknowledges that the pope has a teaching office that Lutherans take notice of: “The Lutheran Church of Australia looks forward to its ongoing dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and to the confession of a common faith according to the truth of Scripture. While continuing to wrestle honestly with the doctrinal differences which separate us, we affirm every teaching of the pope which glorifies Christ and his all-sufficient sacrifice, and which is in keeping with the evangelical faith.”⁹ Such teaching is to be found in the pope’s recent Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of The Gospel (Evangelii gaudium)*. Lutherans have good reason to affirm and receive the joyous proclamation of the gospel in this document and take to heart the exhortation for renewal in evangelisation, as expressed in its opening sentence:

7 “Is the Pope Antichrist?” in DSTO, volume 2: 13(b). The CTICR statement was put on the agenda of the 1993 Synod, but because of time constraints was not discussed. Its current standing in the LCA is as “a statement of the CTICR,” and was acknowledged as such in the General Church Council Report to the 1997 Synod. Effectively, it has been generally received in the LCA as a theological opinion of the LCA for approximately 23 years.

8 DSTO 2:13(b), 3.3.

9 DSTO 2:13(b), 4.4.

The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelisation marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the church's journey in years to come.¹⁰

A New Situation in the Relations between our two Churches

17. Over forty years of dialogue between our two churches has led to a new situation between us, and especially as we strive to harvest the fruits of this dialogue in practical ways. The first-fruit of our dialogue was, appropriately, fundamental agreement on baptism (1975). Here it was recognised that by baptism we are united in Christ in one body and confess together that “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4-5). This first agreed statement concludes: “We give thanks to the Lord for the gift of baptism from our Saviour Jesus Christ, and rejoice that there is a basic agreement between our churches on the doctrine of Christian baptism.”¹¹ It is because of baptism that Catholics and Lutherans recognise each other as being in communion—albeit “imperfect communion”—in the body of Christ (LG 9, 15; AC 7.1,2; UUS 42). In the body of Christ there is a unity of faith based on a common confession of the gospel and faithful administration of the sacraments, but there is also wholesome and godly diversity in the expression and practice of this one faith (LG 13; AC 7).
18. In this new situation the relationship between our two churches was strengthened by the mutual confession concerning the eucharist that resulted from seven years of dialogue. Although we are not able at this time to share in a common eucharistic celebration, we share a common eucharistic faith:

Lutheran and Roman Catholic Christians hold in common the mystery of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist as taught in Scripture. Our churches stress the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist to highlight the central purpose of the sacrament, viz. that the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord gives himself to us fully, draws us to himself, and shares with us his

¹⁰ *Evangelii gaudium*, 1.

¹¹ *Agreed Statement on Baptism* (1977).

saving work and glorious life. These purposes are achieved by him when he gives us his body and blood by means of and in the eucharistic bread and wine. We hold that this is the mutual confession of our churches.¹²

Knowing and believing that Christ is truly present in the holy supper deepens our communion with one another across the divide. Through Christ's body and blood we are strengthened in faith toward God and love toward one another.

19. These agreements paved the way for a joint study of the doctrine of the church in terms of communion and mission. The language of communion is biblical and traditional and is language that we both embrace. Communion refers first of all to our fellowship with Christ. "Fellowship with Christ also brings fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. And all those who are in fellowship with Christ have fellowship with each other as members of one body."¹³ The New Testament evidence reminds us that "communion" is the key to understanding that "there is only one church even though there are many churches."¹⁴ This insight prompts us to deepen our reflection on the communion we share with each other and the positive contribution diversity is able to make to communion. Against this background our dialogue affirmed that "the church, through the Holy Spirit, remains and must remain in continuity with its own origins. Apostolicity consists in a recognised continuity between the gospel community of the present day and that which gathered around Christ."¹⁵
20. A major breakthrough in the relationship between our two churches was achieved with the 1999 consensus on justification, the doctrine that caused the parting of the ways in the sixteenth century. In the Augsburg Accord, signed by Cardinal Cassidy representing the pope and by Rev Dr Ishmael Noko, the then Secretary General of the Lutheran World Federation, common confession is made concerning the doctrine that is at the heart of the gospel: "Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to

12 *Sacrament and Sacrifice* (1985), para. 22.

13 *Communion and Mission* (1995), para. 6.

14 *Ibid.*, para. 9.

15 *Ibid.*, para. 59.

good works.”¹⁶ Here in Australia our Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue worked for three years (October 1995–October 1998) to produce its Common Statement on Justification. A key paragraph in it reads:

Lutherans and Roman Catholics together see justification as God’s free and saving action in Christ whereby our sin is forgiven and we are both declared and made righteous. Together we confess that it is solely by grace and through faith that we are justified and not through our own merits. Together we say that justification cannot be separated from regeneration, sanctification, and the renewal of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Together we affirm that justification, or salvation in Christ, is central and normative to our Christian faith.¹⁷

21. The new situation between our two churches was also strengthened by the statement of our dialogue concerning the word of God and tradition (2011). This statement acknowledges the central place that scripture has in both our churches. Scripture nourishes and rules the church’s “preaching, liturgy, practice, prayer, ministry, authoritative teaching and theology.”¹⁸ We both acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the church into all truth. In three specific affirmations we stated: a) that “God has given teaching authority in the life of the church to assist the church rightly to interpret the word of God,” and “this teaching authority is not above the word of God but stands at its service;” b) that the pastoral role of the bishop is important “in the oversight of the interpretation, proclamation and teaching of the word;” and c) that synods and councils are important “in receiving the word of God and testing its proper interpretation in the life of the church.”¹⁹ We believe that these affirmations offer a new theological context for considering the papacy.
22. After almost half a millennium of separation, we Catholics and Lutherans really are in “a new situation” in our relationship with each other. Our strong agreement on gospel and sacraments means that we cannot be indifferent to, or dismissive of, what separates us. In our dialogue on the ministry of oversight we made some progress toward overcoming one of the major obstacles to fuller communion and outlined possible future steps toward that goal. One was a Lutheran plea for Catholics to respect the Lutheran

16 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), para. 15.

17 *Justification: The Common Statement of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia* (1999), 4-5.

18 *Living Word, Living Tradition* (2011), para. 41.4.

19 *Living Word, Living Tradition*, paras. 41.9-11.

conviction that God has been with them in their church order and office of oversight. For their part, Catholics on the dialogue expressed the hope that “Australian Lutherans will come to share more fully with them in a common theology of the bishop in the life of the church. While this may involve a change of language from president to bishop, the more significant change would be part of that on-going reform, embracing in ever deeper ways the ancient common tradition of the church, in which the bishop was seen as sign and agent of communion in a local church.”²⁰ It is significant that at the 2013 LCA Synod delegates voted to change the title from president to bishop, and although this was adopted primarily as a constitutional matter, there are signs that this change is already prompting discussion and reflection in the church that will, hopefully, lead to deeper reform and renewal of the office of oversight in the Lutheran Church of Australia. The new bishops of the LCA together form a college of bishops that will continue the collegial way of working that has been a feature of oversight in the LCA. This has created a new situation in the relationship between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

²⁰ *The Ministry of Oversight* (2007), para. 129.

3. What the New Testament Says about Peter

23. Because the role of the bishop of Rome has been understood in relation to the ministry given to Peter by Jesus, it is important that we have a clear understanding of Peter's role in the early church, as witnessed in the New Testament. Any attempt to find a new way for the bishop of Rome to exercise his ministry, so that it remains faithful to its origins but is also open to a new situation, will rely on faithfulness to the word of God through the joint study of scripture. Much has been written by ancient and modern authors on the ministry of Peter in the New Testament. A consistent, general agreement among historians and biblical scholars is that Peter fulfilled a leadership role in the gathering and strengthening of church communities in earliest Christianity; although, for some today, the form of this leadership remains an open question.
24. Peter, also known as Cephas and Simon, is a central figure in all the gospel accounts, as well as the first half of the Acts. In addition, two New Testament letters bear his name and he is a focus of both communion and controversy in Paul's letter to the Galatians and in his first letter to the Corinthians. Yet, while remembered in the New Testament as a leading witness to the teaching and activity of Jesus, it is above all Peter's witness to the heart of the Christian gospel—the resurrection from the dead of Jesus crucified—that characterises his primary role in Christian memory and ministry (1 Cor 15:5; Lk 24:34).

Peter in Mark

25. In Mark's Gospel, Simon Peter is the first disciple named as having been called to follow Jesus (1:16-18), first among the Twelve, and the one who received the epithet "Peter" or "Rock" (3:16). Then in the concluding scene of the gospel, echoing the tradition that Jesus appeared first to Peter, an angel within the open and empty tomb says to Mary Magdalene and her companions, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he [Jesus] is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him" (16:7).
26. The evangelist Mark portrays Simon Peter as representative disciple, or spokesperson for the disciples (9:5); he is a preeminent figure, the first among Jesus' three confidants (9:2; 14:33). Peter is prominent in the narrative of the gospel, even when other disciples are mentioned (Mk 1:35-38; 8:27-

33; 10:28-30; 11:20-22; 14:29-31; 16:7). When the disciples do not live up to their calling Peter is often presented unsparingly as the embodiment of this failure shared by all (9:2-13; 14:19-31, 33, 50). In fact, when the other disciples flee from Jesus at his arrest, Peter goes so far as to deny Jesus (14:54, 66-72). Although Peter epitomises the initial lack of understanding evident in the community of disciples regarding the sufferings of the Son of Man (8:31-33; 9:5), he also is responsible for the first confession of Jesus as the Christ (8:29). Peter was the one to whom the women were specifically asked to report. (16:7-8). Indeed, through his weaknesses and failings he learns to focus on “divine things” (8:33). So, along with the rest of the Twelve, Peter witnesses to the person and work of Jesus the Christ, having been a witness from the beginning of his public ministry to his passion, death, and resurrection.

Peter in Matthew

27. In Matthew, Peter is one of the first disciples to be called by Jesus and is named first in a list of the Twelve; indeed, Matthew is unique among the evangelists in labelling Peter as “first” (Matt 10:2, *prōtos*). Matthew’s portrait of Peter includes the account of his leaving the boat to walk to Jesus and needing to be rescued (14:29-33); his confession of Jesus as Messiah, the Son of the living God (16:16); and words of Jesus to Peter concerning the rock foundation of his church (16:17-19).
28. Matthew identifies Simon from the beginning as Peter (4:18; compare Mk 3:16). In Matthew 16:17-18 Jesus declares, “Blessed are you Simon, ... you are Peter.” In portraying Peter as representative disciple, or spokesperson for the disciples (14:28; 15:15; 16:13; 17:4; 26:40,73), Matthew shows Peter in his human weakness (14:30-31; 16:23). Some commentators identify this as a narrative device shared with Mark’s Gospel to characterise the faith journey of all followers of Jesus as a movement from weakness to confession. Together with Mark, this portrait climaxes with Peter confessing Jesus as the Christ. In Matthew’s account this confession is amplified throughout the Gospel by Peter’s orientation toward Jesus, his dependence on the “Lord”.
29. The position of Peter and his role in the church of Christ is coloured in Christian memory by interpretations of the words of Jesus: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will

give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (16:17-19). The activity of binding and loosing in this text has often been connected to the church’s authority to forgive or retain sins. Some recent approaches suggest that the phrase “binding and loosing” in context refers more immediately to the authoritative interpretation and application of scripture. In Matthew 18:18 the same words addressed to Peter (16:19) are addressed to the church community. While forgiveness of sins is explicit in 18:15, the wider context is the settlement of disputes.

30. It is evident from Matthew’s portrait that Peter exercised a primary role among the disciples and the emerging Christian community. Peter embodies the nature of faith and Christian mission through his reception and giving of Christ; indeed, Peter’s designation as rock is seen to be foundational for the church. In biblical narrative the changing or divine giving of a name is understood to have significance; often indicating a change in vocation or purpose. Peter (*Cephas* in Aramaic) is an epithet with the simple meaning of “rock” or “stone” reflected in the Greek *petros*. Simon Peter’s vocation as “rock” receives legitimacy from the crucified and risen Jesus, who is the “living stone,” the “cornerstone,” the “stone of scandal” (1 Pet 2:4-8) to whom Peter is preeminent witness. The church is founded on testimony to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to the identity of the Christ who promises and the Christ who is exalted.

Peter in Luke

31. In Luke, “Simon,” whom Jesus “named Peter” (6:14) is portrayed as leader of the Twelve, “whom he [Jesus] also named apostles” (6:13). Peter’s leadership emerges in Luke’s gospel narrative not primarily as spokesperson for the disciples or close confidant of Jesus, but in gathering and strengthening the early Christian community around the heart of the gospel—the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ crucified (22:32). This role given by Jesus is evident first when Peter receives his call to discipleship in 5:1-11 and then is reaffirmed by the gathered community when they report, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon” (24:34).
32. Luke speaks of Peter’s commission to strengthen his brothers while at the same time of Jesus’ reminder of Peter’s human weakness and need of conversion: “but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (22:32).

This text is set within the account of the Last Supper. Since the apostles have just been arguing about which one is the greatest, it is significant that Peter is singled out by Jesus as the one in particular who is to strengthen the rest in their struggles against Satan, who seeks to “sift [them] like wheat.” Peter is given the commission in spite of Jesus’ knowledge that Peter will soon deny him. The commission is paradoxical: Peter the one who denies will be also the one who strengthens. It is a paradox very appropriate in the context of Jesus’ teaching on humility. Peter’s ministry is therefore one of service to the community of faith and witness to the resurrection.

Peter in John

33. The outstanding role of Peter portrayed in Mark, Matthew, and Luke appears to be challenged in the Gospel of John with the introduction of a mysterious unnamed “Beloved Disciple.” In John, the first disciples of Jesus to be mentioned include former disciples of John the Baptist: an unnamed one and Andrew, the brother of Peter (1:41-42). They in turn bring “Simon” to Jesus, “who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).” The recognition by Andrew of Jesus as the Messiah is later confirmed in Peter’s confession of Jesus as “the Holy One of God” (6:69). On the occasion of the Last Supper, Peter turns to the Beloved Disciple, who is lying on the breast of the Lord, to learn what Jesus knows of his betrayer (13:23-24). In the account of the Passion, while the Beloved Disciple enters into the court of the High Priest with Jesus (18:15), Peter remains outside before the gate (18:16). At the foot of the cross, it is not Peter who is present but the Beloved Disciple, and he is remembered as a brother into whose care Jesus commends his mother (19:26-27). In the story of the resurrection, the Beloved Disciple comes first (*prōtos*) to the grave (20:4), but does not enter; while Peter comes after him and enters the tomb. The Beloved Disciple follows Peter, and of this disciple alone it is said he “believes” at once when he sees (20:8). In the post-resurrection episode Peter is named first in the list of disciples, but the Beloved Disciple is the first to recognise the Lord (21:2, 7). The paralleling of the two disciples throughout the Gospel finds its climax in the conversation that takes place between Jesus and Peter: Peter is the “shepherd” whose faithful witness to Christ will eventuate in his martyr death (21:15-19), while the Beloved Disciple has a continuing role of a different kind.

34. In John chapter 21 the role of shepherd is applied clearly to Peter, although elsewhere in the Gospel the role of shepherd is applied to Jesus alone. Jesus uses the name Simon in conversation with Peter (21:15-19), calling him “son of John,” a more formal designation than usual. The threefold declaration of love required reflects the threefold denial referred to in 13:38, and recounted in 18:17, 25 and 27. It also indicates Peter’s forgiveness and restoration by Jesus after his denial. Peter’s commission to feed and tend follows upon his restoration and his declaration of love for Jesus.
35. Some interpretations suggest the command to “feed my sheep” in John 21 applies to all who will shepherd Jesus’ flock.²¹ Yet, it is clear the command to “feed my lambs, feed/tend my sheep” is used only in 21:15-19, and is spoken specifically to Peter. Peter as shepherd is thus strongly implied, while in the same post-resurrection appearances the Beloved Disciple has special claim to symbolise love and belief (20:3 -10). In John’s Gospel, the close relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Jesus does not deny the special role of Peter within the circle of disciples, or his status as first Easter witness; instead it serves to emphasise the different type of service ascribed to each.

Peter in the Acts of the Apostles

36. In Acts, Peter is set apart as leader or representative of the Twelve and the community in Jerusalem. He is named first in the post-resurrection list of the eleven (1:13); he identifies the criteria and instigates the election of Matthias in order to fill the leadership role (*episkopē*) left vacant by Judas (1:15-26); he explains the miracle of Pentecost (2:14); he performs miracles by healing the sick and even raising the dead (3:1-10; 5:15-16; 9:32-42); he defends the cause of the gospel against repressive authorities (4:8; 5:29); he exercises discipline (5:1ff; 8:18ff); he confers, along with John, the gift of the Holy Spirit (8:14-17). At what is generally referred to as the Jerusalem Council he confirms the inclusion of “gentiles” among the chosen people of God (10:34-38) without full observance of the Torah (15:1-29). Peter’s speech is influential in persuading the meeting that Gentile Christians need not be circumcised. James, speaking after consultation with the “apostles and elders,” makes the final decision (v.19), declaring that the position taken by Simeon (Peter) is in accord with the prophets, while the whole assembly of apostles and elders informs the church in Antioch of the decision.

²¹ E.g., Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope [Tractatus], 30 (*The book of Concord*, 335).

37. Peter is prominent in the story of the spread of Christianity narrated in the first half of the Acts. But his major role, together with all the other disciples from the day of Pentecost, was to lead public witness to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: “This [crucified] Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses” (2:32; compare 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30-32).
38. Although Peter and the rest of the Twelve exercised leadership in Jerusalem in the early days of the Christian community in that place, James ultimately became the local leader in Jerusalem (21:18). Peter emerged as an apostle and missionary beyond the Jerusalem community, with the mission extending to “the ends of the earth” (1:8).

Peter in other New Testament Writings

39. Peter is an important figure in the writings of Paul: the first named witness of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5), a primary source of the tradition about Jesus (Gal 1:18), a leader in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1ff), and the apostle to the “circumcised” (Gal 2:8). In Paul’s account of his meeting with the other apostles in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1-10), James, Cephas (Peter) and John, the “pillars” of the church, give him the “right hand of fellowship” and their blessing to take his message of grace to the Gentiles. As in Acts 15, the emphasis is on the apostles in their differing roles acting in a conciliar way, with “one-mindedness” (15:25). And yet Paul does not hesitate to confront Peter when he believes Peter has not acted according to “the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:14).
40. The image of Simon Peter as a presbyter-shepherd, who oversees the flock of God and gives personal witness to the suffering of Jesus Christ, is the special emphasis of the first letter of Peter. Even assuming the widely held view that 1 Peter was probably written long after his recorded martyrdom, references in the letter imply a certain enduring conception of Peter and respect for his ministry in the church. Writing as Peter, the author addresses the elders in Asia regarding the exercise of their oversight: they are to shepherd the sheep of Jesus, exercising their ministry modelled on Peter as witness, martyr, and shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4).
41. In Ephesians and Revelation, all the apostles are the one foundation on which the community of faith is built (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14) even though elsewhere Peter is the first and chief witness.

A Consistent Thread

42. Our close reading of the New Testament concludes that Peter had a special and indeed unique relationship to Jesus. He is consistently remembered in the synoptic Gospels as the first disciple called by Jesus to follow him, and he was specifically commissioned by the risen Christ to care for the flock. Paul and the Beloved Disciple also fulfilled leadership roles. Nevertheless, there is a consistent thread running through the loose weave of the New Testament indicating that Peter was singled out by Jesus to fulfil a pre-eminent leadership role. This role was to testify to Christ, to serve, and to strengthen his fellow disciples, despite Peter's own weaknesses. Peter emerges as a primary witness to Jesus, a foundational leader in the church, and shepherd of Jesus' flock. Although Peter's missionary service begins in Jerusalem, his sphere of influence gradually moves beyond Jerusalem. Although given a position of primacy by Jesus, he exercised his leadership collegially, including with James, who became the local leader in Jerusalem. Peter is rightly remembered as the foremost, enduring Easter witness to Jesus, a role which eventually led to his final "witness" as martyr.

4. The Influence of History

43. With the close of the apostolic era, and as the church began to spread to the ends of the earth, institutions of ministry and oversight took shape under the influence of the Holy Spirit in order to ensure fidelity to the divine mandate. These institutions were never static, even after they had been recognised as normative for church life. In the case of the papacy there is a discernible evolution and, at times, a turbulent history. If we want to imagine how the papacy might be exercised today in a new situation we need to understand its history.
44. There is no credible historical evidence of a single bishop in Rome before the late second century. The First Letter of Clement²² does not refer to a single leader but was sent from “the church of God which sojourns in Rome” to “the church of God sojourning at Corinth.” As the terms “presbyter” and “bishop” in 1 Clement 44 seem to be used interchangeably, it is possible that Christian communities in both Rome and Corinth were led by groups of presbyter-bishops in the early second century.
45. First Clement does, however, indicate that the leaders of the Christian community in Rome felt a sense of responsibility for other churches. The fact that Rome was the capital of the empire and Corinth was once a Roman colony may have contributed to this assumption of leadership but this is not stated. There is an implicit association of Rome with the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul which may have enhanced the authority of the Roman church (1 Clement 5).
46. Toward the end of the second century a small monument was built over what was believed to be St Peter’s grave in the Roman cemetery on the Vatican Hill. Graffiti from ancient pilgrims have been found on a wall near the monument appealing to St Peter for intercession, a sign of early devotion to the saint and veneration of his remains.
47. Irenaeus of Lyons visited Rome in the late second century. In *Against Heresies* he cites a succession-list of bishops of Rome, beginning with Linus whom he says was appointed by Peter and Paul. While this list is now thought to contain anachronisms, it suggests that a single bishop had emerged in the Roman church by the time of Irenaeus. According to Eusebius (c. 260-339),

22 The Letter known as 1 Clement was probably late first century and later attributed to Bishop Clement of Rome.

Victor I was bishop of Rome in the late second century (c.189-98). Victor insisted that the churches of Asia change the date on which they observed Easter to match the Roman custom. Eusebius says that Irenaeus advised Victor that there was a legitimate diversity in the ancient way of celebrating Easter and he exhorted him not to excommunicate the Asian churches.²³

48. At first glance this intervention by Irenaeus in the dispute over Easter seems contrary to his tribute in *Against Heresies* to:

the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul . . . For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with [or *resort to*] this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously.²⁴

However, it could simply indicate that for Irenaeus unity should not be reduced to uniformity.²⁵

49. There is evidence of tension between bishops in North Africa and Rome in the mid-third century. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 248-58) exchanged letters of mutual support and recognition with Cornelius of Rome (251-3), but he rejected the ruling of Cornelius's successor, Stephen (254-7), that those baptised in schismatic churches should not be rebaptised if they had already been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A synod of African bishops in 256 supported Cyprian's contention that there was no legitimate baptism outside the true church. It also declared that bishops did not have the right to judge one another or deprive one another of communion:

For neither does any of us set himself up as a bishop of bishops, nor by tyrannical terror does any compel his colleague to the necessity of obedience; since every bishop, according to the allowance of his liberty and power, has his own proper right of judgment, and can no more be judged by another than he himself can judge another. But let us all await

23 Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 5:24 in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 1. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), 377-8.

24 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:3.2 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, undated), 415.

25 John P. Meier, "Petrine Ministry in the New Testament and in the Early Patristic Traditions" in James F. Puglisi, ed., *How Can the Petrine Ministry be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 33.

for the judgement of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only one who has the power both of preferring us in the government of His Church, and of judging us in our conduct there.²⁶

50. Nevertheless, during the fourth and fifth centuries individual churches in Africa, France and Spain did, on a number of occasions, appeal to the bishop of Rome for his advice or ruling on disputed matters. The decrees which he sent in response were clearly influenced by the great lawgiving tradition of ancient Rome. This is also reflected in the art of the period. The *traditio legis* (giving of the law) became a popular theme in western Christian iconography. Typically the risen Christ sits enthroned like a Roman emperor and passes the scroll of the law to St Peter, robed like a Roman senator. Representations of the *traditio clavium* (giving of the keys) also begin to appear in Rome at this time.
51. Overall, the influence of the bishop of Rome was most directly felt on the Italian peninsula where he called and presided over local synods. In the eastern part of the empire, three other bishops also enjoyed what became known as patriarchal status, the bishops of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. In the late fourth century they were joined by the bishop of the new imperial capital, Constantinople. At the Council of Constantinople in 381 it was decreed that “the bishop of Constantinople shall have the pre-eminence in honour after the bishop of Rome, for Constantinople is the new Rome” (canon 3). The implication that Roman primacy was derived from the fact that Rome had been the capital of the empire was vigorously refuted by Bishop Damasus of Rome (366-384) who claimed to be the successor of St Peter and the heir to the promises made to him by Christ (Matthew 16:18).
52. In spite of this, the bishop of Rome’s involvement in the theological controversies of the fourth century was minimal. The emperors called the great councils of the church and they enforced their decrees. The bishops of Rome did not attend, although they did sometimes send representatives or legates.
53. Pope Leo I (440-61) sent to the Council of Chalcedon (451) a doctrinal statement on the two natures, human and divine, of Christ. This was warmly endorsed by the bishops at the Council: “Peter has spoken through Leo.”²⁷ To

26 “The Seventh Council of Carthage Under Cyprian,” Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1957), 565.

27 Cf. *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, translated with an introduction and notes by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 2:24.

Leo's displeasure, however, the Council also reaffirmed the 381 declaration regarding Constantinople as the "new Rome."

54. Our study in the preceding paragraphs shows that to understand the evolution of the papacy and its theological significance we must first acknowledge the pre-eminent authority and dignity that the Church of Rome gradually acquired. It was the place where Peter and Paul were martyred, and thus had a particular mission to bear witness to the apostolic faith. Gradually it was recognised that the succession of bishops of Rome testified to the continuity of the faith of Peter and Paul, the apostolic faith. Other local churches looked to the Church of Rome and its bishop to resolve disputes among them, and the Church of Rome had a care for the other churches. This church thus became the centre and servant of church unity. This defines the theological significance of the bishop of Rome.

The Medieval and Renaissance Papacy

55. Much can be said about the long and colourful history of the papacy between the sixth and sixteenth centuries. The following aspects are particularly worth noting.
56. Bishops of Rome acquired civic responsibilities and became rulers of territory on the Italian peninsula. In part this was a consequence of the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West. In 452 Leo I persuaded Attila the Hun not to attack Rome. Gregory I (590-604) also assumed an important leadership role when the city of Rome was afflicted with natural disasters and besieged by the Lombards.
57. The bishop of Rome in the early Middle Ages was regarded, above all, as the "vicar of St Peter," St Peter's earthly representative. It is evident, for example, in Bede's seventh-century *History of the English Church* that many Anglo-Saxon Christians developed a deep devotion to St Peter, were keen to imitate Roman ways of worship, made pilgrimages to Rome and sought papal patronage for their missionary enterprises in northern Europe.
58. Although local concerns sometimes predominated, bishops of Rome also demonstrated a pastoral concern for Christians beyond their diocese. Gregory I famously initiated the mission of Augustine of Canterbury to evangelise the Anglo-Saxons. He did not insist that Augustine impose Roman customs on the Anglo-Saxons but advised him to select whatever seemed "devout, religious and right" for the English church. Gregory also wrote a pastoral rule

for bishops which maintained that bishops (including the bishop of Rome) should be shepherds of souls, and self-searching men of prayer, meditation and humility. Gregory particularly emphasised a bishop's duty to preach and teach, and published homilies and exegetical works to help bishops do this better. His preferred title for his own office was "servant of the servants of God." Although Innocent III (1198-1216) used more exalted language—he adopted and made common the title "Vicar of Christ"—he also demanded higher standards from bishops, combatted heresy, and called and presided over the greatest council of the Middle Ages, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.

59. Among Innocent III's achievements is the fact that he encouraged Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and Dominic Guzman (c. 1170-1221) to develop their radical new communities of friars. It has been pointed out that "in Pope Innocent, Francis and Dominic, are embodied the three major forms of Christian leadership—institutional, charismatic, intellectual." Few bishops of Rome can be hailed as examples of all three types. By "anchoring" the Franciscan and Dominican movements in the Church, Innocent displayed great institutional leadership.²⁸
60. Less happily, Innocent III was mired in political conflicts. Tension between church and state is a major theme running through medieval history. Extreme claims were sometimes made with regard to papal authority, such as the *Dictatus Papae* of 1075 which famously insisted that the pope could depose emperors,²⁹ and Innocent III's assertion that the pope was "lower than God but higher than man." Rhetoric, however, seldom matched the reality. It was Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) who died in exile from Rome, not Emperor Henry IV whom he had excommunicated. Innocent III was more successful but he had to utilize great political skill to get his way in protracted disputes. Tension was exacerbated by the sacral notions of kingship present in the period which encouraged rulers to believe they had a right to intervene in matters concerning the church in their territories. "Sacred" and "secular" cannot be neatly separated in this period.

28 Eamon Duffy, "Who Leads the Church?", *Faith of Our Fathers* (London: Continuum, 2004), 85-7.

29 The "things dictated by the pope" is a list of twenty-seven declarations inserted into Gregory's correspondence. It has been speculated that the declarations could be chapter headings for a collection of canon law which was never made.

61. During the Great Western Schism there was a succession of competing claimants to the papacy from 1378 after the disputed election of Urban VI. After a failed attempt at resolving the dispute at the Council of Pisa in 1409, the Council of Constance (1414-18) was more successful. Its decree *Sacrosancta* (1415) asserted:

This holy council of Constance . . . declares, first, that it is lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit, that it constitutes a General Council, representing the Catholic Church, and that therefore it has its authority immediately from Christ; and that all men, of every rank and condition, including the pope himself, are bound to obey it in matters concerning the Faith, the abolition of the schism, and the reformation of the church of God.

62. The schism was resolved: one of the rival popes resigned, two were deposed, and another was elected who won widespread recognition, Martin V (1417-31). Before the Council of Constance concluded, its decree *Frequens* (1417) maintained that councils should be held at regular intervals. Martin V initially honoured this, but the conciliar movement lost momentum in the fifteenth century as it became divided and weakened by extremists, and successive popes reasserted their authority.
63. While many of the occupants of the see of Peter were conscientious and devout leaders, there are also examples of human weakness and corruption. This was very much the case on the eve of the Reformation. It is a sad fact that the “Renaissance popes” of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are known more for their patronage of the arts and involvement in Italian politics than holiness of life.

Lutherans and the Papacy in the Sixteenth Century

64. Martin Luther lived in the time of the Renaissance popes. He was a youth and student during the papacy of the notorious Alexander VI (1492-1503), and became a monk during the time of the “warrior pope,” Julius II (1503-13). As a devout young monk, Luther was sent to Rome in 1510 to represent Observant Augustinians in an appeal they had made to the Curia, and during his sojourn there he became more aware of moral corruption and various abuses in the church. During Julius’ time in office the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17) was convened in response to the universal call for reform of the church in head and members, and it continued to meet during the tenure of his successor, Leo X (1513-21). There is some irony in the fact that in the

same year that this rather unfruitful council concluded (March 1517) Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses or “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” (31 October), an event that is commonly regarded as the beginning of the Reformation.

65. In his Ninety-Five Theses Luther did not attack the papacy directly, but assumed throughout that if the pope had known what was really going on he would have swiftly rectified the situation. Thus, for example, thesis fifty states that “Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St Peter were burnt to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.”³⁰
66. Proceedings against Luther began in Rome mid-1518. A theologian of the papal court, Sylvester Prierias, wrote a *Dialogus* against the Ninety-Five Theses in which Luther was condemned as a heretic. Luther was then cited to Rome by Pope Leo X. In October Luther had to go to Augsburg to be interviewed by the papal legate, Cardinal Cajetan, who was not able to persuade Luther to recant. The political situation in the Holy Roman Empire pressured Rome to seek some kind of reconciliation, and to that end the papal nuncio Karl von Miltitz was sent on a mission in early 1519. As a result, Luther wrote an apology to Leo X and there was a reprieve of sorts.
67. However, at the Leipzig Debate of July 1519 Luther called the papacy into question far more radically than he had done previously. In preparation for the debate Luther composed thirteen theses, the last of which challenged papal jurisdiction over the whole church.³¹ In the debate itself, Luther’s opponent Johann Eck seized upon this and contended on the basis of quotations from the scriptures and the fathers that the pope was ruler of the church by divine right. Luther countered by saying that Christ was the head of the church. This does not mean that Luther now repudiated the papacy. In a letter after the debate Luther wrote that his point was simply that “Greek Christians during the past thousand years and also the ancient church fathers ... had not been under the authority of the Roman pontiff, although I did not deny the primacy of honor due to the pope.”³² Luther was convinced that Christ must be the supreme authority in the church, that every other authority

30 *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis/Philadelphia: Concordia/Fortress, 1958–1986 [hereafter: LW]), 31:30.

31 LW 31:318.

32 LW 31:322.

in the church must be judged by the scriptures, and that by that standard history had shown that not only popes but even councils can err.

68. This was the last straw for the Roman Curia. Its case against Luther moved on steadily through various stages and complications. While Luther had criticised the papacy previously, it was only in 1520 that his writing became really polemical. Nevertheless, in his treatise *On the Papacy at Rome* (June 1520) Luther still accepted the pope, provided two conditions were met. He wrote:

This then is my opinion about the papacy: Since we see that the pope has full authority over all our bishops, and he has not arrived at this power without God's providence.... I do not want anyone to oppose the pope. I fight only for two things: First, I will not tolerate it that men establish new articles of faith and scold, slander, and judge as heretics, schismatics, and unbelievers all other Christians in the whole world only because they are not under the pope. It suffices that we let the pope be the pope. Second, I shall accept whatever the pope establishes and does, on condition that I judge it first on the basis of Holy Scripture. For my part he must remain under Christ and let himself be judged by Holy Scripture.³³

69. Quite coincidentally, just four days after Luther's *On the Papacy* came off the press the bull *Exsurge Domine* was published (15 June 1520), threatening Luther to submit within sixty days or be excommunicated. Luther put an end to the desperate hopes of some who wanted excommunication to be avoided by publishing consecutively in 1520 three bold and defining reformation treatises.³⁴ The bull of excommunication was duly published at the beginning of January 1521. It was only after this that Luther expressly and publicly equated the papacy with the antichrist prophesied in certain New Testament texts (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7).
70. As the years went by Luther's writing on the topic of the papacy became increasingly polemical. For all that, as late as the Galatians commentary of 1535 Luther still admitted the possibility of accepting the papacy under certain conditions. Commenting on "God shows no partiality" (Gal 2:6), Luther cited the pope as a case where God wants no partiality in judgment: "Thus I shall honor the pope and love his position, provided that he leaves

33 LW 39:101.

34 *Address to the Christian Nobility, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and The Freedom of a Christian.*

my conscience free and does not require me to offend against God.”³⁵ By 1537, the year in which he wrote the Smalcald Articles, his position against the papacy had hardened and any hope of reconciliation had faded. His last treatise against the papacy (1545),³⁶ penned in the year before his death, is heavily polemical and, from the perspective of the present, is quite troubling for some Lutherans.

71. In all this Luther was not, of course, acting or speaking alone. The call for reform of the church “in head and members” had been widespread and persistent in the late Middle Ages. Lutheran reformers added their voice, pleading for a general council.³⁷ In the tumultuous years following the Diet of Augsburg (1530) the leaders of the evangelical churches in Germany called for a general council so that the case for reform could be properly heard. Eventually, Pope Paul III announced a council to meet in Mantua during May 1537. Luther was asked by the elector of Saxony to prepare articles for consideration at the council—the Smalcald Articles (SA), as they became known.³⁸ He did so in consultation with other theologians, and their discussions included a significant topic side-stepped in the Augsburg Confession, the papacy. In part, Luther’s article on the pope (Part II, Article IV) reflects a discussion which ranged across a number of possibilities for the reform of the papacy. This internal debate provides the context for the famous codicil that Melancthon added when putting his signature to Luther’s articles:

Concerning the pope I maintain that if he would allow the gospel, we, too, may (for the sake of peace and general unity among those Christians who are now under him and might be in the future) grant to him his superiority over the bishops which he has “by human right.”³⁹

72. Luther was no longer ready to make that concession, and the tone of this article (and others) is stridently negative. He does however state his own position clearly and even offers some thoughts on what a reformed papacy could look like.⁴⁰

35 LW 26:97.

36 LW 41:259-376.

37 In the Preface to the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans offer to participate in a “general, free Christian council.” (*The Book of Concord*, 34).

38 The Smalcald Articles, *The Book of Concord*, 295-328.

39 “Subscriptions to the Smalcald Articles,” 326.

40 SA II.4.7-9.

- a. He affirms the evangelical position that “the pope is not the head of all Christendom ‘by divine right’” [*de iure divino*] because Jesus Christ is head of the church). This is of primary significance for Luther. In the Smalcald Articles the article on the papacy is one of four which, in Luther’s view, cannot be compromised because they are all expressions of the “chief article” of faith in Christ, i.e., Justification.⁴¹
 - b. Luther goes on to reflect on his knowledge and experience of the medieval/renaissance papacy, concluding that it exercises no useful or Christian office in the church. He then explores what a useful office might look like. In summary:
 - The claim to absolute power over the church, legitimised by God’s command, would first need to be renounced.
 - Rather, a legitimate headship would be for the sake of the unity of the church and for the promotion and defence of apostolic teaching.
 - This would be an elected office, subject to the assent of the whole church.
 - It would be an office of humility and service, rather than of coercive power and wealth.
 - Set free from its power base in the Roman Curia, it would become a charismatic office, located “wherever and in whatever church God provided a man suitable for the position.”
73. Luther rejects these possibilities at the same time as he presents them because (he says) they wouldn’t work: the pope won’t give up his power and the disparate reforming parties won’t lay aside their freedom for the sake of Christian unity. This assessment reflects his bitter experience after fifteen years of negotiating with both the Roman hierarchy and the radical reformers.
74. He then returns to his preferred alternative to papal primacy, one based on his reading of the church’s early history. This is a collegial approach which regards all the bishops as equal throughout Christendom and “joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc.” In keeping with the chief article on justification, they serve under the one head, Christ. He does not here consider the role or the authority of synods and councils.

41 “According to Luther’s understanding, what follows [SA II,2-4] is connected directly to the office and work of Christ because it detracts from or replaces the biblical soteriology he outlines in SA II, I, and because, as in the early church, teaching a doctrine correctly always entails condemnation of false doctrine that opposes it.” *The Book of Concord*, 301, fn. 26.

75. As it turned out, the Lutheran theologians gathered at Smalcald decided not to submit Luther's articles to the forthcoming council, but instead the more irenic Augsburg Confession, augmented with a new statement about the papacy. Ironically, the task of writing it fell to Melanchthon because Luther was too ill at the time. The *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*,⁴² often referred to simply as "the Tractatus," is more measured than Luther's writing on the topic, but basically presents Luther's position. It states that "the Roman bishop is not superior by divine right to other bishops and pastors,"⁴³ basing this on the scriptural argument that Christ taught "there should be neither lordship nor superiority among them but that the apostles would be sent as equals to carry out the ministry of the gospel in common."⁴⁴
76. Thus it was that Smalcald 1537 crystallised Lutheran teaching on the papacy. The Formula of Concord (1577) simply reiterated what Luther had said in the Smalcald Articles and Melanchthon in the Tractatus; "No one shall burden the church with traditions or allow the authority of any person to count for more than the Word."⁴⁵ Nothing changed substantially until Vatican II and Lutheran responses to it.

The Papacy Since the Sixteenth Century

77. In the latter part of the sixteenth century the papacy emerged at the forefront of what is sometimes now called "the Catholic Reformation." Paul III (1534-49) appointed moderate reformer Gaspar Contarini (1483-1542) to the college of cardinals, and he approved the formation of Ignatius of Loyola's Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1540, one of about thirty new religious orders and congregations established in the sixteenth century. An unusual feature of Ignatius' centralised order was that it had its headquarters in Rome and members vowed to go forth throughout the world to spread the Christian faith wherever the pope sent them. Paul III also called the Council of Trent which began in 1545. While the Council did not directly address the issue of papal authority, it did legislate significant reforms and promote higher standards of episcopal ministry.

42 *The Book of Concord*, 329-343.

43 Tractatus, 7.

44 Tractatus, 8.

45 E.g., Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, 10.21, citing the Tractatus (*The Book of Concord*, 639).

78. The popes of the latter half of the sixteenth century led conspicuously more devout lives than their Renaissance predecessors. Pius V (1566-72) was canonised in 1712. Sixtus V (1585-90) reorganised the papal curia, dividing the cardinals into fifteen separate congregations with responsibility for various aspects of papal administration. He also required bishops to make regular *ad limina* visits to Rome (*ad limina* literally meaning “to the threshold,” this being the shrine of St Peter). The popes remained committed to the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent, and in the wake of the Council in the 1560s ordered the publication of a new catechism, breviary and missal. This helped spread greater uniformity in theology and worship in the parts of Europe which remained Catholic, as did the Tridentine Profession of Faith and the establishment of seminaries.
79. In 1622, as the world beyond Europe opened up, Gregory XV (1621-23) established the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to oversee the disparate Catholic missionary enterprises, so often beset by nationalism and rivalry between different religious orders. Five years later Urban VIII (1623-44) founded the Urban College of Propaganda Fide in Rome as an international college to prepare priests for the mission fields, with special emphasis on candidates from the mission countries themselves.
80. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries popes were at times disregarded by Catholic rulers bent on controlling the church in their realms, the latter aided by clerics who supported the notion that national churches should be virtually independent of Rome. This phenomenon is known as Gallicanism in France and Josephinism in Austria.
81. In the nineteenth century, in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the persecution of the Church in France during that time, an increasing number of people in northern Europe looked “beyond the alps” to the pope in Rome for inspiration. At the First Vatican Council in 1870 the “ultramontanists” were in the ascendancy, although the decree on papal infallibility was, in the end, more nuanced than extreme ultramontanists would have liked. It limits infallibility to when solemn papal statements are made *ex cathedra*, that is “when in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, ... [the pope] defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, ... by the divine assistance promised to him in

Blessed Peter.”⁴⁶ Since the definition of papal infallibility, the Dogma of the Assumption, proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950, is the only example of such teaching.⁴⁷

82. The First Vatican Council was cut short when King Victor Emmanuel invaded Rome and made the city the capital of the new kingdom of Italy. As European governments became increasingly secular, they relinquished their right to appoint bishops. It has been calculated that in 1829, 555 of the 646 diocesan bishops of the Catholic Church were appointed by the state. Another 67 bishops, in parts of Germany and Switzerland, Ireland and the United States of America, were elected by cathedral chapters or some other local arrangement.⁴⁸ By the early twentieth century the pope had assumed responsibility for most of these appointments, and his right to do so was enshrined in the code of canon law which was promulgated in 1917. The code also reiterated the obligation of diocesan bishops to make *ad limina* pilgrimages to Rome once every five years, and to submit a report on the state of their dioceses to the pope. Other canons regulated diocesan administration.
83. The bishops at the First Vatican Council did not have time to address the issues of episcopal ministry and collegiality. These were discussed at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The special role of a bishop to represent Christ as teacher, priest and shepherd was strongly affirmed. This authority comes directly from Christ; it is not merely delegated by the pope. Moreover, in communion with the pope and with each other, bishops form an episcopal college and share responsibility for the universal church.⁴⁹
84. Many of the developments endorsed by the Second Vatican Council had been maturing in the Catholic Church for some time, such as the renewed emphasis on the importance of scripture, the “common priesthood of the faithful” and the participation of the whole assembly in the sacred liturgy. Before the Council began, John XXIII reached out to non-Catholic Christians by establishing in 1960 the Secretariat for Christian Unity and inviting representatives of the “separated brethren” to participate in the Council as observers.

46 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ (*Pastor aeternus*), chapter 4. See *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London/Washington: Sheed and Ward/Georgetown University Press, 1990), II:816.

47 See below, para. 95-100.

48 Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 4th ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 274.

49 *Lumen Gentium*, 3; *Christus Dominus*.

85. After the Council Pope Paul VI (1963-78) implemented a number of reforming initiatives. These included increasing the membership of the College of Cardinals and appointing bishops from around the world to it. Paul also established the Synod of Bishops. He travelled to different parts of the world, addressing the United Nations in 1965 and the World Council of Churches in Geneva in 1969, and visiting Africa in 1969 and the Philippines and Australia in 1970. With Greek Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras, Paul lifted the mutual excommunication of the Greek and Latin Churches in 1965. In another powerfully symbolic gesture, he gave his own episcopal ring to the archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, in 1966.

5. Three Particular Questions

86. Our dialogue raises three particular questions that go to the heart of our division. The first emerges from an historical suspicion since the Reformation that the pope may be perceived as somehow overshadowing the centrality of Christ in the life of the Church. A second question concerns the meaning of papal infallibility, especially since the definition of 1870. The third question relates to the scope of the authority exercised by the bishop of Rome and what is referred to as his universal jurisdiction.

i. The Papacy and the Centrality of Christ in the Roman Catholic Church

87. The question of the relationship between the papacy and the centrality of Christ needs to be approached from the perspective of the hierarchy of truths. In the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), the hierarchy of truths was presented as the way to deal with different doctrines and their relationship. The relevant text notes: "When comparing doctrines with one another, [theologians] should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their connection with the foundation of the Christian faith."⁵⁰ An appeal to the hierarchy of truths is not primarily about ranking doctrines in some sort of order of importance, but rather it considers a doctrine in its relationship to other doctrines in order to bring out its relationship to the "foundation of the Christian faith."
88. The phrase "the foundation of the Christian faith" is not elaborated, but its meaning is clear from the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. The foundation of the Christian faith is there expressed in terms of the revelation of God's plan, made known in Christ, the Word made flesh, and in the Holy Spirit. This is a plan "that human beings can draw near to the Father and become sharers in the divine nature"⁵¹; it is a plan that is concerned with "communion" and salvation. The foundation of the Christian faith concerns the action of the Triune God, made visible in Christ, for salvation. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation speaks of the revelation of this mystery: "By this revelation, the truth, both about God and about the salvation of humankind, inwardly dawns on us in Christ, who is himself both

⁵⁰ *Unitatis redintegratio*, 11.

⁵¹ *Dei verbum*, 2.

the mediator and the fullness of all revelation” (DV 2). The mystery of Christ is truly the “foundation of the Christian faith.”⁵²

89. The Roman Catholic Church understands the papacy within this schema. The proper ordering of truths means that the Catholic Church cannot speak about the papacy without situating it in its relationship to other doctrines that bring out its relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith. In the first instance this means considering it within the context of the college of bishops. Further, the relationship of the college of bishops to Christ depends on an understanding of the church and its relationship to Christ. While this method was clearly visible in the work of the Second Vatican Council and expressed more forthrightly there, it was not absent from the First Vatican Council.
90. The teaching on the papacy at Vatican I in *Pastor aeternus* moves through a series of steps to arrive at a statement about the “Roman Pontiff.”⁵³ The starting point is the saving work of Christ. Christ, “the eternal shepherd and guardian of our souls” desired that the saving work of redemption be rendered permanent, and accordingly “determined to build a church.” In this church “all the faithful should be linked by the bond of one faith and charity.” Just as Christ had sent apostles to carry out his mission, “it was his will that in his church there should be shepherds and teachers until the end of time.” In order that these shepherds should be one and undivided and that all believers “should be held together in the unity of faith and communion” he set Peter over the rest of the apostles. Peter is the “permanent principle” and “visible foundation” of faith and communion. The Council continues: “to this day and forever Peter lives and presides and exercises judgement in his successors the bishops of the holy Roman See.” Thus by considering the ordering of these doctrines the Council situated the teaching about the papacy in its connection with the foundation of the Christian faith.
91. The Second Vatican Council (LG 19) repeated this ordering of truths presented in *Pastor aeternus*. Subsequent paragraphs make this ordering more explicit, emphasising that the college of bishops is the starting point for considering the papacy. Bishops have their origin in Christ; they are “ministers of Christ” and “nourish his flock”; they are “dispensers of the

52 The theme of “mystery” is central to the Council’s teaching about Christ. Mystery refers to God’s plan that existed from the beginning of the creation and was finally and fully revealed in Christ (Cf. Eph 4:1-5 and 10). Hence it is right to speak of the “Mystery of Christ” or the “Paschal Mystery.” This refers to his Incarnation, ministry, passion, death and resurrection.

53 *Pastor aeternus*, chapters 1-4.

mysteries of God.” Christ has entrusted to them “the bearing of witness to the gospel of God’s grace” (LG 21). The pope is a member of the college and has received the same mission from Christ. However, as head of the college, the pope has a particular task to “express the unity of the flock of Christ” (LG 22). Because unity is a unity in faith, the ministry of the pope is to safeguard the profession of faith, and to build up in the church faith in Christ.

92. However, even before it presented the teaching on bishops and the papacy, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church had spent some time considering the mystery of the church. The mystery of the church is visible in its foundation: the crucified and risen Christ poured on his disciples the Spirit promised by the Father. The church receives gifts from Christ and “faithfully keeps his precepts of love, humility and penance.” The church “receives the mission of announcing the kingdom of Christ and of God and of inaugurating it among all peoples.” In fulfilling this mission “it has formed the seed and the beginning of the kingdom on earth” (LG 5). Later, the Council reiterates that “Christ, the one mediator, set up his holy church here on earth as a visible structure, a community of faith, hope and love.” This church is equipped with structures which “serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies the church towards the growth of the body.” This church is “governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him” (LG 8).
93. In terms of the ordering of doctrines in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith, the Roman Catholic Church emphasises the close relationship between Christ and the church, with the church considered to be like a sacrament. A sacrament, in Catholic teaching, reveals and makes present the mystery of Christ. The college of bishops is a special instance of the church making present this mystery. The ministry of the pope, as a member and head of the college, is related to the mystery of Christ. The papacy is thus related to the saving work of Christ who by his death and resurrection has brought about that communion which is the plan of God from the beginning: humankind drawn in faith into communion with God, and consequently into communion with one another. The papacy has a particular role to guard that communion and to foster it in the church, so that the church may be the sacrament of communion.

A Lutheran Response

94. Lutherans welcome the response of their Catholic colleagues to the historical suspicion since the Reformation that “the pope may be perceived as somehow overshadowing the centrality of Christ in the life of the church” (para. 86), because this has been an abiding concern for Lutherans. Even to this day, Lutherans have not felt at ease with titles like “the vicar of Christ on earth”⁵⁴ or “the head of all Christendom,”⁵⁵ since such claims seemed to impinge on Christ’s headship of the church and were even seen to “negate the first, chief article on redemption by Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶
95. The centrality of Christ in the life of the church was strongly confessed and defended by early Lutherans. Melancthon wrote in the *Apology*:
- [T]he church is not only an association of external rites and ties like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons. It nevertheless has its external marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ. Moreover, this church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews, sanctifies, and governs by his Spirit, as Paul testifies in Ephesians 1[:22-23], when he says, “And [God] has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”⁵⁷
96. In a time when bishops wielded secular and ecclesial power, the Lutheran confessors linked the true office of oversight in the church with the gospel: “[A]ccording to divine right it is the office of the bishop to preach the gospel, to forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the gospel.”⁵⁸
97. In our dialogue, it has been helpful for Lutherans to gain deeper insight into the relationship between the papacy and the centrality of Christ from the perspective of the “hierarchy of truths” (cf. para. 87), and from the understanding that this is not primarily about ranking the papacy as a doctrine, but considering the papacy in relation to “the foundation of

54 Tractatus 4.

55 SA 2.4.1.

56 SA 2.4.3-4.

57 Apology of the Augsburg Confession [Apology], 7/8.5 (*The Book of Concord*, 174).

58 AC 28.21.

Christian faith” (paras. 87-88). The foundation of faith is none other than the mystery of Christ: “By this revelation the truth, both about God and about the salvation of humankind, inwardly dawns on us in Christ, who is in himself both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation” (DV 2).

98. The proclamation of this revelation brings into being a community of faith, the church, the body of Christ. Among those who are called to “bear witness to the gospel of God’s grace” (LG 21) bishops have a particular role of oversight and responsibility. Such an understanding is not foreign to Lutherans because Luther himself understood the church and its existence in a similar way: “The church cannot be better ruled and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ, and all the bishops – equal according to office (although they may be unequal in their gifts) – keep diligently together in unity of teaching, faith, sacraments, prayers, and works of love, etc.”⁵⁹
99. Our common understanding of the foundation of faith and the exercise of the office of oversight in relation to it has been well expressed in two earlier statements of this Dialogue, *Communion and Mission* (1995) and *The Ministry of Oversight* (2007):

Lutherans and Catholics agree on the universal and salvific nature of the church’s presence and action in the world. As the body of Christ, the church is used by God to proclaim the divine love through word and sacrament and to model that communion which is the product of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. It is an essential part of the church’s being to be sent out into the whole world on God’s mission.... It is the manifestation of the mystery of God’s gracious purpose for the whole of humanity and of the divine plan to gather all things together under the headship of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:9,10). Accordingly, the church does not exist for its own sake but it is God’s servant in and for the world.⁶⁰

From this agreement on the church we can speak with a common voice about the place of oversight in the church. Oversight is essential to the church; it is exercised by the church and within the church. It is exercised in relation to the preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. In its exercise for the building up of the church the mystery of God’s gracious purpose for the whole of humanity is manifest. Hence we

59 SA 2.4.9.

60 *Communion and Mission*, paras. 63-64.

see the office of oversight as a visible, graced reality. Through its exercise the church continues to be a sign and instrument of God's plan for the unity of humanity and their union with God.⁶¹

100. The office of oversight is exercised in all the world by many faithful bishops, one of whom is the bishop of Rome. Thus also for Lutherans it is entirely appropriate and helpful to seek to understand the relationship between the papacy and the centrality of Christ in the context of the foundation of faith, the revelation of salvation in Christ.

ii. The Issue of Infallibility

101. Dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics about the ministry of the bishop of Rome inevitably leads to the issue of papal infallibility. This Roman Catholic teaching is most explicit in the First Vatican Council's *Pastor aeternus* (1870), and is interpreted and developed in Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Lutherans, on the other hand, have emphasised the way the infallible Word of God is used in assessing teaching.

Papal Infallible Teaching in Roman Catholic Theology

102. Roman Catholics recognise that, in its fullest sense, infallibility is a divine attribute; that only God is infallible in an absolute sense. When they speak of the charism of infallibility in the church, Roman Catholics refer to a gift given to the church by which, under certain circumstances, in specific teachings of faith and morals, the Holy Spirit safeguards it from fundamental error (cf. Matt 16:18; 28:20; John 14:26).
103. The Second Vatican Council broadened Vatican I's focus on infallibility to affirm that when understood in its full and proper sense, the *sensus fidei* of the whole church is indefectible, that is, does not fall away from faith. By the gift of the Holy Spirit the church is preserved from radically falling away from the truth of Jesus Christ: "The universal body of the faithful who have received the anointing of the holy one (see 1 Jn 2:20, 27), cannot be mistaken in belief. It displays this particular quality through a supernatural sense of the faith in the whole people when 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful laity,' it expresses the consent of all in matters of faith and morals."⁶²

61 *The Ministry of Oversight*, para. 70.

62 *Lumen gentium*, 12.

104. Vatican II also teaches that the teaching of bishops can, in certain circumstances, enjoy the charism of infallibility. This is called *ordinary infallibility*.⁶³ Bishops do not individually teach infallibly but can do so corporately, in communion with the pope: “Even though dispersed throughout the world, but maintaining the bond of communion among themselves with the successor of Peter, when in teaching authentically matters concerning faith and morals they agree about a judgement as one that has to be definitively held, they infallibly proclaim the teaching of Christ.”⁶⁴

105. In *Pastor aeternus*, the First Vatican Council defined the doctrine of extraordinary papal infallibility. As the above paragraph indicates, ordinary infallible teaching refers to the bishops, united together with the pope, in proclaiming the doctrine of Christ. Extraordinary or solemn infallible teaching can be exercised in two modes. First, there are times, as at the Council of Chalcedon, when the bishops, gathered together in ecumenical council, act infallibly as teachers and judges for the universal church in matters of faith. And second, there are times when the pope, as head of the college of bishops, defines doctrine *ex cathedra*. John Ford summarises Vatican I’s teaching on papal infallibility: “According to the council, infallibility is given by Christ to the church as a gift that the pope is empowered to exercise under specific conditions.”⁶⁵ Four conditions are outlined. the pope must be speaking:

- in his official capacity, acting as pastor and teacher of the whole church, and not as an individual theologian;
- using full apostolic authority; that is, as successor of Peter;
- on a subject matter concerning faith and morals; that is, a doctrine expressing divine revelation;
- expressly indicating that the doctrine is to be definitively held.

The council put it in these words:

When the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his

63 As noted earlier, this is a particular, canonical use of the word “ordinary,” by which is meant that together the bishops possess the authority to teach *in their own right* (and not in a delegated manner) as bishops.

64 *Lumen gentium* 25.

65 John T. Ford, “Infallibility – Terminology, Textual Analysis, and Theological Interpretation: A Response to Mark Powell,” *Theological Studies*, 74, no. 1 (2013): 119-28, at 122-23. See also John T. Ford, “Infallibility,” in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 664-65.

supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.⁶⁶

106. Vatican I saw “such definitions as irreformable of themselves, not because of the consent of the church.” This statement was intended to oppose the proponents of Gallicanism, who maintained that papal decisions only became effective when they were subsequently ratified by the wider church. Vatican II reiterated this point about the irreformability of definitive teaching, seeing it as a gift of the Holy Spirit. The later council insisted that the pope is obliged to act in conformity with the scriptures, tradition, and the faith of the church: “When the Roman pontiff or the body of bishops together with him define a decision, they do so in accordance with revelation itself, by which all are obliged to abide and to which all must conform.”⁶⁷
107. The infallibility of a doctrine points to the fact that its fundamental content is faithful to Christ and cannot be reversed, but it does not rule out the development of doctrine, nor the possible need for reformulation in other circumstances.

Infallibility in the Church: A Lutheran Perspective

108. One of the challenges for Lutherans in this dialogue has been to reflect on the question of papal infallible teaching. It has led to deep reflection on the relationship of the scriptures as the infallible word of God and the teaching authority of the church.⁶⁸
109. Our dialogue has enabled us to see more clearly that the topic of infallibility in the Church needs to be discussed not just with infallibility in view, but in the broader context that the Holy Spirit is guiding the church and those who

⁶⁶ *Pastor aeternus*, 4.

⁶⁷ *Lumen gentium*, 25.

⁶⁸ In the 1580 Preface to the Book of Concord, the subscribers commit themselves to the teaching of the Augsburg Confession, ‘in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unchangeable Word of God’, (*The Book of Concord*, 10). In Australia the *Document of Union* that enabled Lutherans to come together as one church in 1966 begins its doctrinal basis with this statement about scripture: ‘We ... accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written, and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life.’ “Document of Union” (1966), Doctrinal Basis, 1, in DSTO, volume 1: A27.

have pastoral authority for its teaching. Catholics tend to speak of infallibility as a charism: “a gift given to the church by which the Holy Spirit safeguards it from error.” A similar understanding of the indefectibility of the church is found also in Lutheran theology. Christ is the head of the church, his body, and it is the abiding presence of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit that keeps the church in the true faith, as the Lutheran catechisms teach.⁶⁹

110. In speaking of the true church, the Lutheran Confessions said that what is claimed for the popes, that they are the pillars of truth and do not err, should be ascribed to the true church.⁷⁰ In protest against what they believed to be distortions of Christian truth, the Lutheran reformers insisted on the priority, objectivity and authority of the word of God. Lutherans have always strongly emphasised the authority of the scriptures:

We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone.⁷¹

111. Thus, at the same time, together with the scriptures as the “infallible source and norm,”⁷² there must also be teaching authority in the church which uses the scriptures in judging teachers and teaching.
112. Therefore, Lutherans do not operate with a disembodied authority of the word, but an incarnate ministry of the word. Those called and ordained to the office of ministry are given the responsibility to teach and preach the gospel in truth and purity, and so one aspect of the office is to judge doctrine.⁷³ In terms of polity in the Lutheran Church of Australia, the pastors, under the oversight of those in their midst elected as bishops, act together as the teaching office of the church giving guidance on matters of doctrine to the church as it gathers together in Synod.⁷⁴ While bishops and pastors

69 Small Catechism, The Creed: The Third Article, 6 (*The Book of Concord*, 355-56); Large Catechism, The Creed: The Third Article, 53, 63 (ibid., 438-39).

70 Apology 7/8.27.

71 Formula of Concord, Epitome 1.1 (*The Book of Concord*, 486).

72 DSTO, A27 (cf. fn. 45, above).

73 AC 28.21.

74 “Duties of General Pastors Conference,” *Handbook of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, A15. The General Pastors Conference is to give guidance to the Synod in matters of doctrine and confession. Cf *Living Word, Living Tradition* (Adelaide: Australian Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue, 2011), paras. 28-31 (pp 11-12).

collectively are the teaching office of the church, the church acts together in Synod to test and receive such teaching, or to return it to the pastors for further consideration, as the case may be.

113. From Reformation times until the present this teaching office has looked primarily to the word of God in scripture for authentication of the church's doctrine and proclamation of the gospel. The scriptures remain the norm by which all teaching in the church is judged (*norma normans*). Alongside scripture the Lutheran teaching office looks to tradition⁷⁵ in the form of creeds and confessions as a secondary guide to the establishing of sound teaching (*norma normata*). The ecumenical creeds and confessional writings act as a hermeneutical guide for the church as it interprets the faith for today:

[These] writings ... are not judges, as is Holy Scripture, but they are only witnesses and explanations of the faith which show how Holy Scripture has at various times been understood and interpreted in the church of God by those who lived at the time in regard to articles of faith under dispute and how teachings contrary to the Scripture were rejected and condemned.⁷⁶

114. An historical reality for Lutherans is that their initial intention to maintain traditional ecclesiastical order was thwarted.⁷⁷ Consequently Lutheran churches today are organised in various ways (from episcopal to congregational) and, correspondingly, there are various forms or expressions of the teaching office. Thus Lutherans today do not have a teaching office unified under universal jurisdiction.
115. Papal teaching authority in the Catholic Church, on the other hand, seems to be the opposite. Not only does it appear to be unified and centralised, but it also understands itself to have the charism of infallibility. While Lutherans use the word infallibility with reference to the scriptures, Catholics have commonly used it with reference to the teaching office: "papal infallible teaching." When papal infallibility was promulgated as a doctrine by Vatican I in 1870, it seemed to some Lutherans as if their long-held fears were confirmed in that the way infallibility was defined seemed to be the final step in the direction of papal absolutism, and especially the concluding words:

⁷⁵ See also para. 122 below and its footnote on scripture and tradition.

⁷⁶ Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm, 8 (*The Book of Concord*, 487).

⁷⁷ Apology 14.1-2.

“Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable.”⁷⁸

116. The problem for Lutherans was twofold. First, since they saw infallibility as primarily applying to the word of God, the doctrine of papal infallibility seemed to contradict the Lutheran conviction that it is possible for popes to err.⁷⁹ Secondly, to speak of the pope or any of his pronouncements as infallible seemed like a usurpation of the place that only Christ and the word of God should have in the church’s office of teaching.⁸⁰ To many it seemed as if the pope and his teaching office were being somehow divinised and put above the capacity for error that is part of the human condition.

Lutheran Responses to the Roman Catholic Teaching

117. Although the use of the word “infallibility” in reference to anyone or anything apart from God and the word of God remains a challenge for Lutherans, there are sound reasons for believing that even in this difficult area it may be possible to recognise five significant convergences between Catholic and Lutheran understandings.⁸¹
118. The first convergence is that, contrary to popular Lutheran belief, the Vatican I statement actually limits papal infallibility. *Pastor aeternus* teaches that only when performing certain narrowly specified acts is the pope gifted with “that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.”
119. Secondly, the real intention of the dogma was not to promote papal absolutism but to safeguard the indefectibility of the church. Lutherans also believe that the church is preserved in the one true faith when the Holy Spirit guides and teaches the church through the word of God (Jn 16:13-15).
120. Thirdly, the focus of the doctrine of papal infallibility in *Pastor aeternus* is not on establishing certainty of knowledge (epistemic certainty); rather,

78 ‘First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ’, *Acta et decreta sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani*, trans Cardinal Manning (Rome, 1872), chapter 4.

79 Gal 2:14 (cf. par 39 above). Apology 7/8.27. See also Luther (in an early disputation), “Luther at the Diet of Worms,” LW 32:112; “The Bondage of the Will,” LW: 33, 85-89; and a more comprehensive consideration, “On the Councils and the Church,” LW 41, 3-178.

80 This was a major concern for the Lutheran Reformers: SA 2.4.12-13; Tractatus 7-8.

81 See “Convergences” and “Conclusion” in P. C. Empie, T. A. Murphy, and J. A. Burgess, eds., *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 30-38.

“the primary concern is soteriological.”⁸² Lutherans can identify with this concern for God’s saving work. The infallible truth that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19) must be faithfully taught and handed on in the life of the church.

121. Fourthly, Lutherans welcome the perspective of Vatican II with its emphasis on the *sensus fidei* given to the universal body of the faithful as the context for the teaching on infallibility:

The holy People of God has a share, too, in the prophetic role of Christ ... The universal body of the faithful who have received the anointing of the holy one, cannot be mistaken in belief. It displays this particular quality through a supernatural sense of the faith in the whole people, when “from the bishops to the last of the faithful laity,” it expresses the consent of all in matters of faith and morals.⁸³

122. Fifthly, Lutherans welcome the clear insistence that doctrine defined by the pope or the body of bishops together with him must be “in accordance with revelation itself”:

... by which all are obliged to abide and to which all must conform. This revelation, as written or as handed down in tradition, is transmitted in its entirety through the lawful succession of bishops and in the first place through the care of the Roman Pontiff himself.⁸⁴

Lutherans agree that all doctrine must be in accordance with revelation. They would insist, however, that “revelation” that is normative for doctrine is found in the written word of God. Lutherans have historically preferred to speak more in terms of their “confession” of faith than of authoritative tradition. The confession summarises the content of scripture and, as *norma normata*, is a secondary authority that is itself ruled by the *norma normans*, the written word of God.⁸⁵

123. Finally, Lutherans can learn from the Catholic tradition and from their own theologians that there are appropriate ways of using the vocabulary

82 Gerard Kelly, “The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Papal Infallibility: A Response to Mark Powell,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 132.

83 *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

84 *Lumen gentium*, 25.

85 For Lutheran and Catholic views on scripture and tradition, including agreements and differences, see *Living Word, Living Tradition* (2011), 18-24, 30, 34-35, 41-59.

of “infallibility” with reference to true and faithful doctrine in the church. Johann Gerhard, for example, spoke of scripture “as a touchstone which directs the Church so that she can render infallible judgment in so far as she abides by Scripture.”⁸⁶

Common Affirmations

124. It is important to emphasise that our discussion on infallibility takes place in a changed context. Through patient dialogue and prayer Catholics and Lutherans have come to a significant consensus in gospel and sacraments, and especially in the doctrine of justification.
125. Lutherans trust that, as the infallible word of God is proclaimed and taught in every generation, the Spirit of God will preserve and keep the church in the infallible truth of the gospel until the end of time. Lutherans can recognise that the way the Catholic Church today teaches the doctrine of papal infallibility has much in common with the Lutheran understanding of the infallibility of the word of God and the indefectibility of the church catholic,⁸⁷ which receives this word and hands it on in her proclamation and teaching. Catholics again affirm that God is revealed unsurpassably through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth through the action of the Holy Spirit. Together we recognise the centrality of the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, and that teaching authority is responsible for receiving, promoting and ensuring the faithful proclamation of the gospel.
126. In the area of teaching authority we agree:
- on the centrality of Christ in proclamation and teaching;
 - that the word of God is normative for all proclamation and teaching;
 - that the word of God is handed on in the life of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
 - that the church will remain until the end of time and is preserved in the truth of the gospel through the working of the Holy Spirit;
 - that there is some common ground between what Catholics mean by infallible teaching and what Lutherans mean when they say that the Spirit of God keeps the church in the truth of the Gospel to the end of time;

86 In Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 119.

87 ‘una sancta catholica et apostolica ecclesia’ (Nicene Creed).

- that as the church preaches and teaches the word of God in every generation those in the ministry of oversight are mandated “to judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel.”⁸⁸

iii. The Pastoral Authority of the Bishop of Rome

127. The pastoral ministry and the authority of the bishop of Rome have been understood and exercised in different ways in different periods of the life of the church. The understandings of this ministry that are found in the first millennium, before the major break between East and West, are not identical with the more developed and technical articulation of the First Vatican Council (1870). This Council, which is authoritative for the Roman Catholic community, speaks of the Pope’s jurisdictional power over the whole church as “episcopal,” “full,” “supreme,” “ordinary,” and “immediate.” The meaning of these technical words will be discussed below.
128. Both Pope John Paul II in *That They May All be One* (1995), and Pope Francis in *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013), have asked for help, from their ecumenical partners and from others, to find a way of exercising the primacy for the good of the whole Christian community in a new situation, particularly in the new ecumenical context. In making this invitation, they seek to distinguish between what they see as essential to the primacy and the diverse ways in which it might be exercised.
129. In considering the primacy of the bishop of Rome in an ecumenical context, Roman Catholic interpreters think that three factors are particularly important to consider: the historical and theological interpretation of the First Vatican Council, the ecumenical priority of the theology of primacy of the first millennium, and the diversity of the Catholic Church.

The Interpretation of the First Vatican Council

130. The consideration of several historical factors is helpful in the interpretation of the First Vatican Council. The first of these factors is the Council’s political context, particularly the rise of modern states in Europe, with the associated concepts of sovereignty and absolute monarchy. By appealing to sovereignty, states claimed to direct the church within their territory according to their own interests. In France, for example, the king nominated bishops, and rejected the exercise of papal authority, preventing the

88 AC 28.21.

implementation of the reforms of the Council of Trent. The Revolution had assumed state power over the church, as did the restored monarchy. Along with such “Gallicanism,” the nineteenth century church faced the emergence of rationalism, materialism, and various forms of liberal thought. For many church leaders these factors seemed to constitute an emergency for the Catholic Church. The teaching of the Council was in part a response to this emergency.

131. The second factor is the explanation of the teaching given not only in the chapters of the council text, but also in the discussion of the texts at the council, including the comments of the minority bishops, and the explanations made by the responsible commissions. These latter can act as a kind of commentary on the text.⁸⁹ They make it clear that the intention was not to undermine the role of bishops, nor to make the church into an absolute monarchy. Rather, the intention was to define the primacy of the Pope in relation to the universal tradition of the church, including that of the first millennium.
132. The meaning of key words is clarified by the comments of the commissions. The statement that the pope’s authority is truly “episcopal” indicates that the authority of the pope and the bishop springs from the same sacrament of orders, the difference being that the pope has oversight over the whole church. The use of the words “full” and “supreme” recognise that this full authority is exercised not only by the college of bishops with the pope at its head, but also by the bishop of Rome exercising authority over the whole church. These two authorities are not competing, but seen as united in Christ’s commission to both the apostles and to Peter. The use of the word “ordinary” does not mean that it is normal for the Pope to intervene in dioceses. It is a canonical term that refers to possessing authority in one’s own right. It thus means the opposite of delegated authority. The word “immediate” indicates that the pope can intervene in the church in all places directly, without the permission of another authority.⁹⁰

89 See Hermann J. Pottmeyer, “Recent Discussions on Primacy in Relation to Vatican I,” in *The Petrine Ministry: Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. Cardinal Walter Kasper (New York: The Newman Press, 2006), 210-30.

90 Hermann J. Pottmeyer, “Did Vatican I Intend to Deny Tradition?” in *How Can the Petrine Ministry Be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?*, edited James F. Puglisi (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 116-17.

133. The third historical factor is the fact that the council was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War. The text of the council as we have it does not develop the collegial responsibility of bishops. It was planned that this would be dealt with in a second constitution that never came to pass. In fact it was not dealt with until the Second Vatican Council. This left the Catholic Church of the first part of the twentieth century with a one-sided teaching on primacy. The result was a tendency towards a maximalist and centralising interpretation of primacy in the period before the Second Vatican Council.
134. Cardinal Walter Kasper has suggested four hermeneutical principles for interpreting the teaching of the First Vatican Council: 1. The teaching on primacy of this council is to be interpreted within the context of a full and balanced ecclesiology, including the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the collegiality of bishops; 2. It is to be interpreted in the light of the whole tradition of the church, particularly the communion theology of the first millennium; 3. It must be interpreted in the light of its historical context, and the historical meaning of the concepts it uses; 4. It must be interpreted in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, above all in terms of its teaching of love and of service.⁹¹

The Ecumenical Priority of the Undivided Church of the First Millennium

135. Roman Catholic theology has recognised that the *communio* ecclesiology of the first millennium has normative importance for ecumenical theology and for the theology of church today. Pope John Paul II has said:

The Church's journey began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and its original expansion in the *oikoumene* of that time was centred around Peter and the Eleven (cf. Acts 2:14). The structures of the Church in the East and in the West evolved in reference to that Apostolic heritage. Her unity during the first millennium was maintained within those same structures through the Bishops, Successors of the Apostles, in communion with the Bishop of Rome. If today at the end of the second millennium we are seeking to restore full communion, it is to that unity, thus structured, which we must look.⁹²

91 Walter Kasper, "Introduction to the Theme and Catholic Hermeneutics of the Dogmas of the First Vatican Council," in *The Petrine Ministry*, 7-23.

92 *Ut Unum Sint*, 55.

136. In a particular way the Second Vatican Council has embraced the *communio* theology of the first millennium. This does not mean, however, seeking to go back to the past, but rather embracing the whole history of the church while also being open to the Spirit in a new moment. The theology of the first millennium has particular relevance in discussions of the primacy of the bishop of Rome. Cardinal Ratzinger's comments with regard to Roman Catholic–Orthodox relations are well-known: “As for the doctrine of primacy, the claims of Rome in the face of the East should not be greater than those formulated and lived in the first millennium.”⁹³ This clearly suggests that what was accepted in the church before the division between East and West, and the Reformation, our common heritage, can have a priority in ecumenical theology over developments in individual churches in the later period – even if these are considered by the churches to be Spirit-guided.

The Diversity of the Catholic Church

137. While many people think of the Catholic Church as uniform, and as identical with its Latin (or Western) form, in fact it is quite diverse. Within the Catholic Church, alongside the very large Latin Church, there are the twenty-two other autonomous Churches, all of them Eastern. They follow different Eastern liturgical traditions: Alexandrian, Antiochian, Armenian, Byzantine, and Chaldean. Each is autonomous with respect to other Catholic Churches, but all accept the spiritual and juridical authority of the bishop of Rome. According to the Second Vatican Council they are equal churches: “Thus the same churches enjoy equal dignity, so that none of them ranks higher than the others by reason of rite, and they enjoy the same rights and are bound by the same obligations, even as regards preaching the gospel throughout the whole world (see Mk 16:15), under the direction of the Roman pontiff.”⁹⁴ These Churches have their own distinctive liturgical rites, laws, customs, devotions and theological emphases. Clearly, then, an understanding of the authority of the bishop of Rome needs to take into account not only the way this authority is exercised in the Latin Church, but also the way it is exercised in the twenty-two other Churches that make up the Catholic Church.

93 J. Ratzinger, “Die ökumenische Situation—Orthodoxie, Katholizismus und Reformation,” *Theologische Prinzipienlehre, Bausteine zu einer Fundamentaltheologie* (Munich: Wewel, 1982), 209.

94 *Orientalium ecclesiarum* (Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches), 3.

Lutherans and the Pastoral Authority of the Bishop of Rome

138. Since the schism of the sixteenth century, Lutheran churches have not understood themselves to be under the authority and jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome. After almost 500 years of division, it is not easy for Lutherans to find a way into the question of whether the bishop of Rome could have some form of jurisdiction over the entire universal church of which they consider themselves to be a part. In the polemical situation of the sixteenth century, Lutheran confessors boldly rejected the claim that the pope could be head of all Christendom by divine right (*de iure divino*).⁹⁵ This should not, however, be understood as a blanket rejection of the papal office. By *iure divino* the early Lutherans meant simply: “divinely mandated.” Their belief was that “the pope is not head of all Christendom by divine right or according to God’s Word, for this position belongs only to one, namely, to Jesus Christ. The pope is only the bishop and pastor of the churches in Rome and of such other churches as have attached themselves to him.”⁹⁶
139. Lutherans were not dismissive of the historical development of the papal office that had occurred, nor did they deny that the papacy had acquired a certain legitimacy according to human right (*de iure humano*). The *Smalcald Articles* recognised that there were churches in earlier times that had attached themselves to the bishop of Rome voluntarily, and “chose to stand beside him as Christian brethren and companions.”⁹⁷
140. In a Lutheran understanding, jurisdiction is grounded in the ministry of oversight:

According to divine right ... it is the office of the bishop to preach the gospel, to forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest—not with human power but with God’s Word alone.⁹⁸

95 SA 2.4.1; Tractatus 1-4.

96 SA 2.4.1.

97 Ibid.

98 AC 28.21. Cf. *The Ministry of Oversight*, paras. 30-31, 64-66.

141. According to this understanding, bishops exercise their true spiritual office by divine right, and “whatever other power and jurisdiction bishops may have in various matters ... they have them by virtue of human right.”⁹⁹

142. In the polemical situation of the sixteenth century, Luther’s vision for jurisdiction in a reformed church was grounded in this evangelical understanding of the office of oversight.

[T]he church cannot be better ruled and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ, and all the bishops—equal according to office (although they may be unequal in their gifts)—keep diligently together in unity of teaching, faith, sacraments, prayers, and works of love, etc.¹⁰⁰

143. Many people today would say that such a world-wide college of bishops would need some kind of leader, a first among equals (*primus inter pares*).¹⁰¹ In a hypothetical way—not one that he thought possible at the time—Luther actually acknowledged the possibility of such a leader:

Suppose instead, in order that the unity of Christendom might be better preserved against sects and heretics, that there must be a head to whom all others adhere. Now such a head would be elected by the people....¹⁰²

144. Theoretically, at least, there could be a situation whereby, for the sake of peace and general unity of the universal church, Lutherans, in some carefully defined way, could be counted among those Christians who acknowledge a primacy in *communio* exercised by the bishop of Rome. The situation of the universal church today is very different from what it was in the sixteenth century. Lutherans are not locked in their history, nor in judgments that were made in the past. If the reasons given for rejecting the papacy in the sixteenth century no longer obtain, then Lutherans are free to enter into “the patient and fraternal dialogue” to which Pope John Paul II gave an invitation.

145. Of the three papal claims causing concern in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, only one would be regarded as a problem today, and that is the claim that the pope is “superior by divine right to all bishops and

99 AC 28.29.

100 SA 2.4.9.

101 However, Melancthon in his time thought it would be geographically impossible for one bishop to be “overseer of all the churches in the world” (*Tractatus* 7).

102 SA 2.4.7.

pastors.”¹⁰³ There is no discussion today about the Roman bishop claiming temporal authority, a divine right to possess “both swords, that is, the authority to confer and transfer royal authority.”¹⁰⁴ Nor are we today dealing with the claim “that it is necessary for salvation to believe these things,”¹⁰⁵ that is, the assertions of the papacy of that time.

146. In the new situation that has been described elsewhere in this document—that is, in the wake of the reforms of Vatican II and in view of the fruitful dialogue between our two churches and our common statements on baptism, eucharist, ministry, the doctrine of justification, the office of oversight, and scripture and tradition—this could well be the right time for Lutherans to consider acknowledging, in some carefully defined way, the pastoral authority of the bishop of Rome “for the sake of peace and general unity among ... Christians.”¹⁰⁶ Lutherans welcome the understanding that papal pastoral authority is exercised together with the bishops of the church and for the sake of *communio* in the church.

147. *Ut unum sint* invites other Christians to consider a continuing “function of Peter” for the sake of the unity and mission of the universal church of all believers:

The first part of the Acts of the Apostles presents Peter as the one who speaks in the name of the apostolic group and who serves the unity of the community This function of Peter must continue in the Church so that under her sole Head, who is Jesus Christ, she may be visibly present in the world as the communion of all his disciples. Do not many of those involved in ecumenism feel a need for such a ministry? A ministry which presides in truth and love so that the ship ... will not be buffeted by the storms and will one day reach its haven.¹⁰⁷

148. While many may feel a need for such a ministry, there is not yet a consensus among Lutherans that the “function of Peter” witnessed to in the New Testament *must* continue in the church, or that the envisioned ministry is needed for the unity and mission of the universal church. Be that as it may, it is still worth asking the question how such a ministry might look.

103 Tractatus 1.

104 Tractatus 2.

105 Tractatus 3.

106 Melancthon’s codicil, “Subscriptions to the Smalcald Articles” (*The Book of Concord*, 326).

107 *Ut unum sint*, para. 97.

6. Responding to *Ut Unum Sint*

149. Having explored these issues that have divided us in our understanding of the papacy and its exercise, we are now in a position to respond to the invitation of *Ut unum sint* – an invitation that set us on this journey together. As we stated earlier, we are in a new situation in each of our churches and in our existing relations. We are confident that it is possible in our day to find new ways of exercising the papacy. We make three common affirmations before each of us responds to the invitation.
150. Together we affirm that the bishop of Rome has a special role to foster the unity of the church as the People of God and the Body of Christ.
151. We affirm that the pope does this through his role as pastor and teacher, exercised in many ways. These ways include teaching on matters of faith, pastoral reflections and exhortations, homilies and catechesis, pastoral visits and prophetic actions.
152. In a reconciled church we affirm that the pope might do this by convening and presiding over synods, in order that the whole church may deliberate on the questions and challenges it faces and seek suitable pastoral responses. In this context it may be opportune from time to time to re-affirm the church's doctrine or find new ways to express it in a new context.

Roman Catholic Response

153. We acknowledge in *Ut unum sint* a challenge for Roman Catholics to continue on the path of renewal and reform begun at the Second Vatican Council. This path of reform has been recognised and encouraged by our Lutheran dialogue partners. We think that the following specific areas will assist the reform of the papacy.
154. First, the Catholic Church might reflect further on the relationship between each diocese and the communion of dioceses throughout the world. As the identity of local dioceses is strengthened their communion with the Church of Rome and its bishop will be seen in its proper light. As a consequence, the Church of Rome, especially through the work of the Roman Curia, would be at the service of the local dioceses, offering them support in their mission. This will shed light on the sort of relationship that might be possible between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in a reconciled church.

155. Second, the practice of collegiality among bishops, including the bishop of Rome, might be strengthened. This would enable the pope to support more clearly the bishops throughout the world in their pastoral ministry and the governance of their own dioceses. It would also set the pope's teaching role – even on the rare occasion where he may teach infallibly – in its proper ecclesial context. We are encouraged by Pope Francis' warning that “excessive centralisation, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach” (EG, 33). It would also be important to find ways to broaden the experience of collegiality to include the bishops of the Lutheran Church.
156. Third, deepening our reflection on the special role of the whole People of God and their instinct for the faith (*sensus fidei*) in contributing to the doctrinal and pastoral reflections of the church would help situate the particular ministry of the pope in a broader context. At a practical level this would lead to a broader participation of the laity in the life of the church.
157. Fourth, if the three areas identified above were strengthened, the question of the pope's jurisdiction would be seen in a new light. His duty to guard the unity of the church would be seen in the context of a duty that falls to all bishops. In this way his authority would be understood as a genuine act of communion.
158. Fifth, as the Catholic Church continues to re-invigorate itself by a focus on the joyful proclamation of the gospel, the ministry of the pope will be seen as assisting that proclamation. The pope will be recognised as a true hearer of the Word, heeding its call, and proclaiming it far and wide.

Lutheran Response

159. This dialogue has highlighted the need for Lutherans to interpret the teaching of their confessions regarding the papacy in light of subsequent developments in the teaching of the Catholic Church. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council in particular has made it clearer that, in Roman Catholic understanding, the Petrine ministry has, as an essential part of its mission, a call to act as a centre of communion for the whole church, and that the teaching office of the bishop of Rome is at the service of this communion.
160. Lutherans welcome the invitation to respond to *Ut unum sint* and to explore whether there is some type of situation where a form of jurisdiction by the bishop of Rome could be possible. This has meant taking up the challenge of finding an answer to the question: in what sense could Lutherans accept the

pastoral authority of the bishop of Rome? In answering this we have reflected on what it might mean for us and suggest some things that might help us along the journey of reconciliation.

161. A Lutheran recognition of a Petrine ministry in service of the universal church would need to be informed by, and consistent with, scripture. The image of Peter in the New Testament is manifold and complex, as we have shown earlier in this document, but there is no doubt about his prominence and that this prominence can be traced back to Peter's relationship to Jesus in his public ministry and as the risen Lord. Because of that relationship, Peter, as first of the apostles and primary witness of the resurrection, had a unique role in the unity and mission of the early community.
162. A Lutheran recognition of the universal pastoral authority of the bishop of Rome would require that he act consistently as a true pastor and shepherd of the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep (Heb 13:20). We would like to see in him the very qualities that are portrayed in Peter of the New Testament: one who feeds the sheep by proclaiming the gospel, who strives collegially for the unity of a still divided flock, who inspires the mission of the church throughout the world, who corrects the erring and brings back the straying, who guards the teaching of the church and defends the flock from error and falsehood, who is humble and loving and caring—Christ-like in all his ways—and one who, like Peter, when he fails and sins, acknowledges himself to be a forgiven sinner.¹⁰⁸
163. Recognition of the jurisdiction and pastoral authority of the bishop of Rome could not of course take place without reconciliation. Such reconciliation would include Catholic recognition of Lutheran ministry, and fuller agreement in doctrine and practice. In time we may together be able to recognise key stages of communion more formally, for example, building on what has already been achieved in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.
164. We believe John Paul's *Ut unum sint* has opened the door for genuine dialogue about those things to which we hold fast as a church. In responding to the invitation to assist the bishop of Rome in finding a way to exercise his mission in the new situation, we offer the following suggestions:

108 Cf. the conversation between journalist Antonio Spadaro SJ and Pope Francis: "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" The pope ... tells me: "I do not know what might be the most fitting description.... I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon." *America: The National Catholic Review*, 30 September 2013.

- Lutherans never sought to establish a new church but to reform the existing church. As we consider ways in which we can move towards reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church, it may assist us to consider a relationship analogous to the situation of the Catholic eastern rite churches.
- If Lutheran Churches are to come into closer communion with the Roman Catholic Church we would need to explore together the nature and parameters of papal jurisdiction in the service of the gospel. Areas to be carefully considered include the recognition of the appointment of bishops, liturgical oversight and church structure.
- While Lutheran churches have adopted various forms of polity, it would be important for Lutherans that synodal ways of functioning are retained and that papal authority is exercised in ways that affirm and uphold synodality in the church.¹⁰⁹
- Lutherans are held together more by a common confession of faith than by either polity or particular liturgical forms. It would therefore greatly assist if the Roman Catholic Church could offer a basis for dialogue with Lutheran churches on how churches or ecclesial communities (rather than individuals) could come into full communion.
- It would be helpful if the Roman Catholic Church could consider whether important teaching documents used and treasured by Lutherans, such as *The Small Catechism*, could be seen as legitimate and authoritative catechetical materials in a church in communion with Rome. Similarly, the Catholic Church could consider whether *The Augsburg Confession* could constitute a legitimate ongoing confession for Christians in communion with Rome.
- In considering the question of unity in the universal church today, Lutherans are not looking for a minimalist situation where the office of Peter merely “allows the gospel” (cf. Melancthon’s codicil); rather, our fervent hope is for leadership that whole-heartedly embraces and promotes the gospel of Jesus Christ, serving the church and the world with its truth and freedom.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *The Ministry of Oversight*, paras. 102-110.

7. Conclusion

165. In our dialogue on the papacy we have been motivated by the invitation expressed by Pope John Paul II, "... to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation" (UUS 95). We have also been mindful of the comment of Pope Francis that "we have made little progress in this regard" (EG 32). We have taken as a starting point the new situation in each of our churches and in our existing relations. This opened up for us a degree of confidence that it is possible in our day to find new ways of exercising the papacy. In some areas reform is already underway; some new ways can be welcomed immediately. Other areas of reform will take time and a further deepening of the relations between our two churches. Together Lutherans and Roman Catholics affirm that the path towards full communion will be achieved in stages and that even before then, the bishop of Rome has an important role for the life of the church beyond the Roman Catholic Church.

Members of the Dialogue

Lutheran members

The Rev Dale Gosden (from March 2015)
The Rev Stephen Haar (until March 2014, then from May 2016)
The Rev John Henderson, Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia
The Rev Stephen Hultgren (from May 2015)
Dr Margaret Hunt (until October 2012)
Dr Christine Lockwood (from August 2013)
The Rev Fraser Pearce
The Rev Andrew Pfeiffer (until March 2016)
Ms Chelsea Pietsch (2014)
Mr Mervyn Wagner
The Rev Roger Whittall
The Rev Dean Zweck (co-chair)

Roman Catholic members

Sr Michele Connolly RSJ (from March 2013)
Sr Mary Cresp RSJ
Dr Stephen Downs (from May 2016)
The Rev Denis Edwards (until October 2015)
The Rev Gerard Kelly (co-chair)
Dr Josephine Laffin
The Rev Philip Marshall
The Rev James McEvoy
Ms Julie Trinidad (from May 2016)
Dr Marie Turner (until October 2015)
The Most Rev Philip Wilson, Archbishop of Adelaide

