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Sharing the Body of Christ

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VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

SHARING THE BODY OF CHRIST

Towards an Ecumenically Informed Reformed Theology of Ministry from a Missionary Perspective

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor of Philosophy aan
de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof.dr. J.J.G. Geurts,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie
van de Faculteit Religie en Theologie
op dinsdag 19 december 2023 om 11.45 uur
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De Boelelaan 1105

door

Reinier Gabriël den Hertog

geboren te Grootegast

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PREFACE

The roots of this study lay in the red soil of the Limpopo province in northern South Africa. It was there that in 1999 the journey began that eventually led to this book.

Raised in a family of theologians and ordained ministers, I had resolutely decided to maintain my independence by steering my own course and pursue a very different future. I decided to study history at Leiden University and there was absolutely nothing to suggest that an ecclesial career was on the horizon. On the contrary, I had always made it abundantly clear that my lifepath would take a very different direction. And I meant it from the very bottom of my heart.

However, that was beyond God's guidance. In the summer of 1999, I had just finished the first year of my study when, during a working holiday for Christian adolescents in former Bantustan Venda, I was baffled by the spirituality and practices of the African sisters and brothers who were welcoming us as their guests. The experiences, meetings, and conversations with these culturally different Christians – especially the pastor and his wife who received me and two other boys as guests in their house – made a profound and lasting impression on me because of their deeply rooted joy and faith. Even more, these impressions changed my life. God appeared to be very real in Limpopo. Not only that, but His gospel also gave joy and courage to people seemingly far less fortunate than me.

When, towards the end of our stay, the pastor suggested – or rather posited – that I should dedicate my life to the service of God's kingdom, it was an important indication to me that I needed to rethink the course of my life. On the flight home, I resolved to study theology, although the very prospect did not exactly fill me with joyful longing at the time.

However, the years of study that followed confirmed the turnaround that had begun to take place in Africa, and I came to believe that the path was leading to ecclesial ministry. After completing my studies, I was ordained as a young minister in 2006 in the beautiful town of Zutphen. The congregation patiently endured my inexperience and slowly I learned in practice what was to be expected of a minister of the Word.

As the years progressed, however, this expectation increasingly rubbed shoulders with what I was learning from Scripture about the role of the church in the world. A certain discomfort developed over the fact that much of the minister's work was focused on maintaining an ecclesial culture and satisfying the needs of church members, while dedication to God’s kingdom seemed to play only a marginal role. This unease only intensified when, in 2013, I moved to Groningen and found myself engaged in ministerial work that was even more

inward-focused. Was this where the journey that had begun in South Africa was supposed to lead? Was I really ministering God's kingdom, as the pastor in Venda directed me to do? Was this really the role of the church and its ordained ministry?

When, in 2019, the call came from Amsterdam, it was a clear signal to me that I needed to change the priority of my work. No longer should my focus be on maintaining church institutions, but instead far more on the process of the actual embodiment of the gospel of the kingdom. The two small communities I serve in Amsterdam - *Amstelgemeente* and *Via Nova* - are each in their own way searching for ways to contextually express the church's mission to be a witness to the gospel. For me they embody what C.K. Barrett calls the paradox of the church. These congregations know themselves to be only of *peripheral* importance since the church is all about God's kingdom. At the same time, however, they know themselves to be of *central* importance because God's kingdom calls for contextual embodying by concrete communities. I greatly enjoy the privilege of helping these two vulnerable communities discern the work of the Spirit.

In a way, the chapters that follow can be read as an intellectual reflection on my experiences as a minister. The first step for this study was taken in Groningen. At a time when I was struggling with my ministry, this study offered an escape. In the hectic pace of work, the moments of intellectual reflection brought peace. However, high workload prevented it from taking off. Only in Amsterdam did the study really catch on, not least because of the pandemic that resulted in agenda's being somewhat emptied. However, it was not primarily the blank spaces in my schedule that helped advance, but mainly the ecclesial and cultural context of Amsterdam that provided ample opportunities to reflect on ministerial work in a fresh way.

Professor Eddy van der Borght and Professor Stefan Paas were involved in this project from the very beginning as inspiring, helpful, and patient supervisors. Their respective academic work symbolizes the ecumenical and missionary dimensions of the church that is the very focus of this thesis. With their sharp insights and benevolent criticism, they protected me from making major errors several times. However, it was above all their constant willingness to think along with me and their commitment that supported me and helped to bring this endeavour to completion.

In my years as a minister, I have had the pleasure of working with several colleagues. Without wanting to short-change the others, I would like to mention a few in particular. First, I mention Gertjan Klapwijk, who was hugely important for my development in my rookie years in Zutphen. Through his critical but sympathetic questions he kindly taught me to reflect on what I was doing.

I also think of Wouter Moolhuizen, who was first a friend before also becoming a colleague. Partly because of the friendship with him and his wife Nienke, the years in Zutphen were an incredibly joyful period for Tineke and me. I therefore consider it a great honour that he is willing to stand beside me as a paranymph at the defence of my thesis.

The latter also applies to Jan van Helden. Many pages of this book were written while he sat in the same room working on his own dissertation. It was a privilege to complete the lonely undertaking of a dissertation, in a way, together. The friendship with him and his wife Marloes is a real bliss.

I also think of Wilbert Dekker. He and I started our research at about the same time, and we also seem to conclude it almost simultaneously. It was a fine and inspiring experience to share this endeavour, not only as colleagues but also as families.

In the Amsterdam context, I would also like to mention Marinus de Jong. It was delightful to spend years together trying to instruct the adolescents of our respective congregations. I also think of Gert-Jan Roest, who is a constant source of inspiration in the context of *Via Nova* and *City to City Amsterdam*. As a *millenial pastor* David van der Meulen remains a constant challenge and stimulation.

Here I would also like to thank Kees Hemmes who, for a substantial part, made the publication of this book possible. I also mention Kristina Vos-Petersen who helped by providing linguistic corrections.

Of course, my claim that the origin of this book lies in South Africa, fails to give due credit to my loving parents. I am immensely grateful to them for raising me in an environment where love for the gospel and the church were a given. That this was initially beyond me was not on their account. But that I currently minister the churches and the gospel is in large part due to the foundation God wanted to lay through them. In a somewhat different way, the same applies to my parents-in-law.

Although all my late grandparents are equally dear to me, I want to mention Grandpa Willem van 't Spijker here. I used much of his work, as can be seen in the historical chapter. I sadly regret that he is not alive to witness the final defence, but I will certainly cherish the memory of the conversations we had about this research.

Of course, I also think of our lovely children at this point: Gerben and Amber, Miriam, Anna, Michiel and Vera. I know they made many a sacrifice because of what started in South Africa before they were even born. It is a great joy to, for a while, walk along with them in their lives. Of course, Rita and Wendy are also part of the family, and they bring a bit of Africa into our house.

Back to Limpopo. Under the African sky, my heart opened not only to the gospel, but also to a very Dutch girl: Tineke. My idealizing of the short time in Venda will be partly motivated by the fact that thinking back on this holiday reminds me of how our wonderful life journey together began. It is a privilege and an indescribable joy to share my life with her. I thank God for that! Moreover, the way she brings hope in the concrete brokenness of vulnerable and troubled people continues to be an important source of inspiration. And not only for me.

Finally, the many pages of academic musings that follow can also be read as my way of worshipping and thanking the Triune God with the mind. May He

give the desire and strength to churches and Christians in Western Europe to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of the kingdom.

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Abbreviations

BDS	*Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*, Stupperich, R. (ed.)
BEM	WCC report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*
BEM/m	WCC report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, section on ministry
BEM/e	WCC report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, section on the Eucharist
CGKN	Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands)
CTCV	WCC report *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*
GKv	Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) (Reformed Churches (liberated))
MSC	*Mission-Shaped Church* report
NGK	Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (Dutch Reformed Churches)
PKN	Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (Protestant Church in the Netherlands)
WCC	World Council of Churches

1. Introducing the Challenges
Ministry that is both Missionary and Ecumenical

Theology of ministry seems to be in vogue nowadays. There were days – not even so long ago – that thinking through ecclesial ministry was a rather unexpected phenomenon in Reformed circles, reeking of churches being self-centred and unable to meet the missionary and ethical challenges posed to them by an emerging post-Christian culture.[1]

Times have changed. There is an increasing awareness that questions of the legitimacy, substance and structure of ecclesial ministry need to be thought through in order to meet the deep desire of churches to be witnessing communities in today's culture. There is less and less suspicion that reflection on ecclesial ministry is born out of an inwardly focused longing for self-preservation. Reflection on missionary presence in today's culture and reflection on ecclesial ministry seem to meet each other.

Moreover, the cultural and missionary challenges that spark the reflection on ministry are by no means only confined to some churches or denominations. On the contrary, they are shared by many, if not all churches. Increasingly denominational discussions on ministry are informed by deliberations in other denominations and by ecumenical documents. Apparently, there is a shared sense that the search for an adequate and credible ministerial expression of the church's mission in today's culture needs to be ecumenically informed.

1.1 Dutch Denominational Discussions

A brief survey of discussions about ministry within Reformed denominations in the Netherlands can illustrate the connection between missionary presence, ecumenical awareness, and ecclesial ministry. I limit myself to the PKN (*Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*), as the largest Protestant denomination in the Netherlands, and three small Reformed denominations that have mutually agreed on a form of ecclesial unity, namely the NGK (*Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*), the GKv (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*) and the CGKN (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*). This choice is justified since there has hardly been any fundamental theological reflection on ecclesial ministry in the other Reformed denominations in the Netherlands.

[1] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, XI.

1.1.1 Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (CGKN)

I start with the CGKN because missionary awareness prompted reflection on ministry in this denomination before it did in the other three.

There has been an incessant debate about ecclesial ministry in the CGKN since the end of the last century. There are two main topics that have repeatedly been the main trigger for this. First, there is the issue of women and ecclesial ministry, and, in addition, the ecclesial position of the evangelist has played a major role.

Women and ministry – The issue of women and ministry can illustrate how ecumenical developments influenced the reflection on ministry within the CGKN. In 1998 the question concerning women in ministry was prompted partly by conversations and correspondence with other churches of Reformed confession that allowed women in ecclesial ministry.[2] Ecumenical contacts among others forced the CGKN to undertake its own reflection. The outcome of this was that women were not admitted to ecclesial ministry within the CGKN.

The issue of admission of women to ecclesial ministry was again on the synod's agenda in 2019 after some congregations acted in violation of the 1998 ruling.[3] This time the discussion was for a great deal prompted by some local churches that had proceeded to appoint women elders and deacons.[4] The churches in question were so-called *samenwerkingsgemeenten* (literally: 'cooperation-congregations') made up of two churches from different denominations – a CGKN congregation combined with a GKv or NGK denomination – in the same locality that decided to work together as if they were just one congregation. However, in 2004 the NGK opened all ecclesial ministry for women, and the GKv followed in 2017. In theory, the synod of the CGKN already made it clear in 2013 that in such *samenwerkingsgemeenten* women could not be admitted to ecclesial ministry.[5] In practice, however the developments in this area within the NGK and GKv proved decisive for some of these congregations. Therefore, as in 1998, the question of women and ministry emerged because of contacts with other churches. Again, ecumenical contacts called for an in-depth reflection on the theology and practice of ecclesial ministry.

The position of the evangelist – The discussion of the position of the evangelist has been going on since the beginning of this century and was prompted by a growing missionary awareness. The emergence of missionary congregations at the turn of the century sparked the discussion on the position

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[2] *Vrouw en ambt*, 11. Two other reasons are mentioned: 1. The question concerns the churches as a whole and 2. So far, a scriptural foundation for the standpoint regarding women and ministry is lacking.

[3] *Eindrapport vrouw en ambt*.

[4] *Eindrapport vrouw en ambt*, 127.

[5] *Acta 2013*, 262.

of the evangelist.[6] The developments in some missionary congregations revealed a lingering problem, because these missionary communities considered the gatherings that were led by an evangelist to be official worship services, whereas the Church Order of the CGKN makes clear that this could not be the case. The evangelist is not permitted to conduct a worship service or administer the sacraments. Formally, the sacraments should be administered in the missionary community by a minister of the Word from somewhere else. Since this practice was hard to explain to people who are unfamiliar with the church, the synod decided to address the matter.[7] The synod of 2004 decided that the evangelist can be an actual minister of the Word with the right to administer the sacraments. He should be distinguished from the traditional minister of the Word, though, by the fact that he is a 'special minister of the Word'. The special character is demonstrated by the different educational requirements, the strict binding to one congregation and his temporary authority. However, the matter of the evangelist was again on the agenda of the synods of 2016 and 2019. The 2016 synod decided to evaluate the 2004 decision and the practice that had since developed. For this the committee of Church Order and Church Law wrote a report on the principles of ecclesial ministry. This report argues that the ministry of the Word fans out into a diversity of ministries and that ecclesial ministry should be thought through from the *missio Dei*. Departing from these presuppositions, the work of the evangelist should be seen as a ministry in its own right within the one ministry to the Word.[8]

The fact that the issue of women and ministry and the evangelist were both on the synod's agenda in 2019, combined with a variety of other subtopics, led the synod to install a commission that should reflect on how a Reformed doctrine of ministry for today's culture can be shaped in a principled-ecclesiological and practical way. [9] In its report, called *Dienst aan het Woord* (*Service to the Word*) (2020), the advisory committee calls for a stronger distinction between the various ecclesial ministries. Current times call for a clearer differentiation.[10] Whereas in the sixteenth century, hierarchical thinking was common and the Reformed emphasis on the equality of the ecclesial ministries marked a decisive end to this hierarchy, in the present age equality is

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[6] Admittedly, the question of the position of the evangelist was also addressed in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, because of uncertainty about the social position of members who were professionally involved in evangelistic outreach. However, the synods of 1977, 1980 and 1983 all concluded that the evangelist should not be considered a lasting ministry of the church but 'only' a worker in the church whose social position should be properly settled. See: *Acta 1977*, 36-38, 204-207, 213; *Acta 1980*, 46, 187; *Acta 1983*, 67-68, 82-83, 316-327.

[7] *Acta 2001*, 319.

[8] *Rapport kerkorde en kerkrecht*, 77-79. For the first report, see: *Rapport kerkorde en kerkrecht*, 54-73. Based on the interviews, the committee concluded that the practice that had grown largely corresponded with the vision as laid down in 2004. See: *Rapport kerkorde en kerkrecht*, 64-67.

[9] *Rapport 13 Commissie 7 inzake ambten*, 92

[10] *Dienst aan het Woord*.

a widely shared ideal and a tiered structure of ecclesial ministry seems an appropriate response. The report also advocates that it be more clearly delineated that a minister of the Word has a position of his own and has certain responsibilities and powers that do not belong to elders or deacons. This applies to the administration of the sacraments.

The report attempts to develop an apt doctrine of ecclesial ministry in conversation with today's culture, and, by excluding the elder and deacon from the ordained ministry, adopts a course that moves toward ecumenical consensus. Yet, beyond the position of the evangelist, the report barely addresses the missionary concerns and leaves the challenge of thinking through ecclesial ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei* open.

This brief survey of the situation of CGKN illustrates that even a rather small Reformed denomination faces missionary and ecumenical challenges in the area of ecclesial ministry. The issue of the evangelist shows that there is an increasing missionary awareness within the CGKN. The issue of women and ministry shows that also a relatively small denomination like the CGKN is confronted with ecumenical challenges.

1.1.2 Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN)

Ever since the formation of the PKN in 2004, there have been discussions about ecclesial ministry. Initially, the debate focused almost exclusively on the position of the non-academically trained theologian. In particular, the conversation focused on whether non-academically trained theologians could be authorized to minister the Word and celebrate the sacraments. A period in which several, sometimes conflicting reports appeared was concluded when the synod decided to begin a process of substantive theological reflection on ecclesial ministry.[11]

In this period of theological reflection, a memorandum was released that attempted to answer the question for a well-defined view of ministry for the PKN by discussing the articles of the church order pertaining to ecclesial ministry.

[11] The report *Pastor in beweging* (*Pastor in motion*) (2006) suggested opening the ministry of the Word to non-academically trained theologians. The 2007 report *Werk in de wijngaard* (*Work in the vineyard*) argued for denying non-academically trained theologians the admission to the ministry of the Word. A subsequent report – *De hand aan de ploeg* (*Hand on the plough*) - followed in 2009 offering an opening to theologians with a bachelor's degree. In 2011, the synod accepted the report *Positie van de HBO-theoloog – kerkelijk werker* (*Position of the bachelor theologian – church worker*) which states that non-academic theologians can be installed as elder or deacon and can receive the authorization to administer the sacraments under the supervision of a minister of the Word. Also in 2011, however, the report *Met vreugde en vrucht* (*With joy and fruitfulness*) on career development and differentiation among pastors was published. During the discussion on this report, a motion was submitted requesting that a well-defined theology of ministry of the Protestant Church should be formulated. For the text of the motion, see: *Notitie over de ambtsvisie* (6). From then on, a process of substantive reflection on ecclesial ministry within the PKN begins.

Also, there followed a series of seven pastoral letters on the subject of ecclesial ministry from the secretary of the Synod of the PKN to the various bodies in the PKN and also to the Dutch Roman Catholic bishops' conference.[12] In several letters, the church's apostolic calling and today's missionary challenge regarding ministry comes to the fore. Increasingly, missionary urgency and ecumenical awareness set the tone.[13]

The discussion took a definitive missionary turn in 2019 with the report *Mozaïek van kerkplekken* (*Mosaic of church places*). *Mozaïek van kerkplekken* seeks to answer practical and fundamental questions facing the church because of the proliferation of new missionary forms of church. Since 2005 some 250 new ecclesial communities emerged within the PKN, and in 2019 the question was on the table what this meant in practice for ecclesiology and ecclesial ministry.[14] The report introduces the term *kerngemeente* (*core-congregation*) for new ecclesial initiatives for which a modest form of independence is needed and then lists ten ecclesiological essences for such initiatives.[15] It further proposes that a *kerngemeente* requires three ministers, one of whom is authorized to administer the Word and the sacraments.[16] Ecclesial ministry is necessary for keeping the church focused on Christ, as for pursuing and representing unity and continuity. The report furthermore suggests that non-academically trained pastors should be allowed to administer the Word and the sacraments in new church places. At the same time, it argues that a broader reflection on ministry is needed.[17]

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[12] The first impetus to this substantive reflection is a memorandum from 2012 called *Notitie over de ambtsvisie van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland* (*Memorandum on the vision on ecclesial ministry of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands*). A memorandum entitled *Het ambt in discussie* (*Ecclesial ministry in discussion*) followed in 2013. The memorandum identifies seven problematic issues concerning ecclesial ministry and emphasizes that in these missionary times, more emphasis is placed on the personal dimension of ministry: 'This calls for a different type of preacher than that of the corpus christianum. Virtues like courage and candor are needed.' In 2014, a series of seven letters from the secretary of the Synod of the PKN to the various bodies in the PKN and to the Dutch Roman Catholic bishops' conference on the subject of ecclesial ministry follow. The next important landmark is the vision document Kerk 2025: *Waar een woord is, is een weg* (*Church 2025: Where there is a word, there is a way*) (2016), which is intended to reflect on the shape of the church of the future.

[13] In a letter to church councils, the secretary underlines that the church and its ministries are apostolic and therefore sent into the world. In a separate letter to missionary workers and pioneers, the secretary also emphasizes this and explicitly asks for input on a possible new ministry of evangelist. Finally, in a letter to the bishops, he calls explicit attention to the church's apostolic vocation in the world and suggests that precisely the present urgency in that matter may open the door to mutual ministerial recognition.

[14] *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 5.

[15] *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 26.

[16] *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 52.

[17] *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 49 ff.

This further reflection takes place in the 2020 report *Geroepen en gezonden (Called and Sent)*. This report wants to reflect on the questions concerning ecclesial ministry from the *missio Dei*.[18] The report argues that the fundamental question about ministry is how it contributes to God's mission as it is expressed in the announcement of the coming kingdom. It further argues that the ministry of the Word is a public ministry, and therefore also by definition missionary. From an ecumenical point of view, the report advocates the term ordination in the case of ministers of the Word, as opposed to elders and deacons. However, the report does broaden the group of ministers of the Word, proposing that all elders, deacons, and church workers who have received the authority to administer the sacraments under the laying on of hands should also be considered ordained ministers.[19] The lack of academic formation need not be an impediment to this, as historically and ecumenically there is no requirement for academic formation of ordained ministers. [20]

Fundamental theological reflection is further offered in the report *Geroepen door Christus* (*Called by Christ*) (2022).[21] The starting point in this report is also the *missio Dei*. Fundamentally, the report seeks the uniqueness of the Protestant vision of ministry in a two-track approach in which both ordained ministry and the charismatic congregation go back to Christ. Ordained ministry is not about the performance of a particular task, but about being called by Christ. This gives ordained ministry a more substantial place than has usually been the case in the history of Protestantism and corresponds to what has been taken for granted in the ecumenical movement since the appearance of the report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM).[22] The priesthood of all believers, according to the report, relates primarily to the vocation of believers in the world.[23] This could give the impression that ordained ministry is mainly inwardly focused. However, the report comes to a different conclusion. Ordained ministers also share in God's mission in this world since Christ's called servants are sent into the world to

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[18] *Geroepen en gezonden*, 6.

[19] *Geroepen en gezonden*, 20.

[20] *Geroepen en gezonden*, 20. However, the report does suggest that non-academically trained ministers of the Word should be called *pastor* instead of *predikant*. Based on this differentiation within the ordained ministry, there is also the possibility of differentiation in education and renumeration.

[21] *Geroepen door Christus*. The report's text was also published as a book in 2023. Included were discussion questions at the end of each chapter. (Wisse, *Geroepen door Christus*) In what follows, I quote from the original report.
A first elaboration of the proposals of *Geroepen en gezonden* followed in the study *Geroepen om te dienen* (*Called to serve*). By means of quantitative and qualitative research, this study attempts to help in the search for an answer to the question of the status of the church worker.

[22] In referring to this report, I will use the abbreviation BEM followed by a slash and the part of the report I am referring to. So, BEM/m means the part of the report that discusses ministry. The letter 'b' refers to Baptism and 'e' to Eucharist.

[23] *Geroepen door Christus*, 43.

proclaim the gospel and to make disciples of the nations. Furthermore, the ordained ministry also has a sacramental dimension, in the sense that it represents God's perspective in this world. In doing so, it should be clear that ministering the gospel cannot be limited to the boundaries of the existing church since it is a service in and to the world. However, on what exactly then is the role of ordained ministry in the world and how it represents God's perspective in it, the report says little.

The survey of the discussion on ecclesial ministry in the PKN shows a marked development. At first, the discussion focused mainly on the position of the church worker. In particular, whether he should be allowed to administer the sacraments was up for debate. From 2012, however, it was evident that a thorough reflection on the foundations of Reformed theology of ministry was required. From 2019 onwards there is a desire to think through theology of ministry from the *missio Dei*. This insight was largely driven by an increasing missionary awareness, which in turn arose from the missionary practice of churches and new church initiatives. Moreover, the conversation within the PKN shows a growing ecumenical awareness. Two fundamental reports offer stimulating and fundamental insights. However, the need for further reflection on ordained ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei* remains since more clarity is needed regarding the question of what constitutes the vocation, task, scope, and authority of the ordained minister from a missionary perspective.

1.1.3 Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) and Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (GKv)

Since the discussion of ecclesial ministry has been much less intense within the NGK and GKv, there is no need to devote a section to each separately.

NGK – The *Landelijke Vergadering* (National Assembly) of the NGK in 2013 discussed the report *Om de heiligen toe te rusten voor het werk in zijn dienst* (*To equip the saints for work in his service*).[24] This report does not provide an elaborated vision on ecclesial ministry, but rather seeks to share some fundamental considerations regarding the challenges that evolving culture poses to churches. Specific questions addressed concern the priesthood of all believers, the meaning of ministry in relation to the community of believers, the strong position of the minister of the Word and the relationship between ministry and the administration of the sacraments. After considering developments in other denominations in a few subsections, the report focuses on the NGK. Among other things, the report notes the absence of the missionary element in its own church order (*Akkoord voor Kerkelijk Samenleven*).[25] The report concludes that

[24] *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*. In 2015, the report *Ambt en homoseksualiteit: een Bijbels verantwoord perspectief?* (*Ecclesial ministry and homosexuality: a biblically warranted perspective?*) was published, but since it does not offer a substantially different view from the 2013 report, I will not discuss it here.

[25] *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*, 7.

there is no need to develop a theology of ministry, although further research is required.[26] Here the report explicitly refers to the ecumenical dimension.[27]

GKv – Within the GKv, the discussion around ministries has focused on the question of women's access to ecclesial ministry. The 2017 synod, after discussing the report *Samen dienen* (*Serving Together*), decided to open all ecclesial ministries to women.[28] Since the report *Samen dienen* focuses primarily on the question surrounding the admission of women to ministry, there is less room for fundamental reflection on ecclesial ministry in general. The report dedicates one single chapter to the subject and limits itself to a discussion of some biblical data, confessional writings, and liturgical forms, especially from the point of view of what these sources tell about the question of whether ecclesial ministry can be opened to women. It is noteworthy, however, that an entire chapter is spent on the opinions of sister churches on this issue, thereby indicating a clear ecumenical awareness.[29] In its final considerations, the report explicitly calls attention to the question of the extent to which ecclesial ministry serves the spread of the Word of God in our time.[30] Unfortunately, the report does not elaborate on this substantively, leaving unclear what this means in practice.[31]

Both the discussion in the NGK and in the GKv show that although there are beginnings for reflection on ecclesial ministry from the perspective of the church's missionary calling, these are insufficiently elaborated. However, there is a clear awareness that thinking about the church's ministries should be done from a basic ecumenical stance.

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[26] *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*, 22. The report states that one way to do this is by joining the process within the PKN.

[27] *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*, 25.

[28] *Samen dienen*. This issue was also discussed at the 2014 Synod. The report *Mannen en vrouwen in dienst van het evangelie* (*Men and women in the service of the gospel*) served as the starting point. Only briefly does this report discuss ecclesial ministry in general, emphasizing the divine institution of ecclesial ministry. (*Mannen en vrouwen in dienst*, 25)

[29] *Samen dienen*, chapter 5. But also section 6.3.1.

[30] *Samen dienen*, 61. The committee states that today's time and culture pose challenges that need to be met in order to discern '*how the word of God can be further spread in our time* (my italics) and how we can give substance to our common task with the gifts that Christ gives to men and women in the church.' (*...om te bekijken hoe in onze tijd het woord van God verder gebracht kan worden en om te bekijken hoe we invulling kunnen geven aan onze gezamenlijke opdracht met de gaven die Christus* in de gemeente aan mannen en vrouwen geeft.) (Italics mine)

[31] A third report called *Elkaar van harte dienen* (*Serving each other wholeheartedly*) was published in 2020. This report addressed all the revision requests that had been submitted in response to the 2017 ruling. Because this report does not provide substantially different insights into the topic of ecclesial ministry and mission from the previous reports, I will give it no further attention.

1.1.4 Conclusion

This brief review of developments within Reformed denominations in the Netherlands shows that reflection on theology of ministry is needed for missionary and ecumenical reasons.

Both the development within the PKN and within the CGKN show that there is a growing missionary awareness that necessitates reflection on ecclesial ministry. In both cases, this missionary impulse came from the practice of new initiatives that had emerged from missionary work. Missionary developments revealed the limitations of the current structure of ecclesial ministry and pragmatic interventions alone were no longer sufficient; renewed fundamental reflection was needed. Although this awareness is less apparent in the discussions within the NGK and GKv, there is also a felt need to think through ecclesial ministry from the missionary perspective within these denominations. For all four denominations, however, it is not yet sufficiently clear what the implications of the missionary perspective are for ecclesial ministry. Further study is required on the implications of the *missio Dei* for Reformed theology of ministry.

What is further striking is that within all denominations mentioned, ecumenical considerations play a role. In the discussions on women's access to ecclesial ministry in the GKv and the CGKN, it was apparent that the call for this was brought to the agenda from cooperation with other churches. But also, within the PKN, the discussion shows a growing ecumenical awareness.

1.1.5 Objective and Motivation

In the following chapters, it is my intention to explore how Reformed churches in the Netherlands can meet the twofold challenge of mission and ecumenism and develop an ecumenically informed theology of ministry that serves the church's missionary vocation. My focus will be on the ministry of the Word, which, for ecumenical reasons, I will from now on call *ordained* ministry.

The impetus for this research is in large part personal. In a sense, the present study can be seen as a reflection on my own experience as an ordained minister in de CGKN. In the past seventeen years I have had the privilege of working as a minister of the Word in four congregations in three different cities in the Netherlands. Starting in the little provincial town of Zutphen (2006), via the medium-sized university city of Groningen (2013), I have been working in two congregations in the Amsterdam metropolitan area since 2019. The successive moves to increasingly larger urban environments were matched by growing missionary awareness and discomfort with the current Reformed theology and structure of ecclesial ministry on my part. This combined with an increasingly intense cooperation with churches and colleagues from other ecclesial traditions set me on the path of an investigation into an ecumenically informed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective.

1.2 Academic Discussion

Ecclesial ministry is not only the subject of ecclesial debate, but also the object of academic reflection. An overview of academic books (monographs and collections of essays) published in the Netherlands on the topic will demonstrate the academic relevance for an enquiry into ecclesial ministry from a missionary perspective. Moreover, this review will be helpful in formulating a clear research question.

To provide some structure to the review, I have categorized the various books into four subcategories: ecumenical, missional, practical, and general. I begin this overview just after the turn of the millennium, in the year 2000, because in that year two studies on ecclesial ministry appeared that have proved decisive for subsequent theological reflection: I refer to Eddy van der Borght's dissertation on theology of ministry and Margriet Gosker's dissertation on BEM/m.

1.2.1 Ecumenical impulses

In a sense, the present study can be seen as an extension of Van der Borght's PhD-research on Reformed theology of ministry in light of the ecumenical discussion on ordained ministry.[32] The aim of Van der Borght's study is to provide a number of building blocks for an updated theology of ministry within the field of systematic theology, building on the foundations of the Reformed tradition. One of the building blocks offered by Van der Borght is that theology of ministry in the Reformed tradition should follow BEM/m and take the *missio Dei* as its starting point. Ecclesial ministry is not only meant for internal leadership of the church or for the equipping of the church but should be primarily aimed at proclaiming the Word to all people, including those who do not belong to the church. However, what the concrete implications of this premise in the *missio Dei* are for the theology of ordained ministry within the Reformed tradition, Van der Borght hardly discusses.[33] It is precisely this gap that the present study attempts to fill.

In the same year that Van der Borght's thesis was published, Margriet Gosker's study on the significance of BEM/m for the progress of ecumenism saw the light of day: *Het ambt in de oecumenische discussie* (*Ecclesial ministry in the*

[32] The Dutch version of this research was published in 2000 under the title *Het ambt her-dacht* (English: *Ministry re-considered*). In 2007 an abbreviated English version, titled *Theology of Ministry*, was published. The chapters on Roman Catholic theology of ministry were omitted in this version.

[33] In the context of the missionary profiling of the church in a secularized society, he does mention the possibility of the institution of the ministry of evangelist, but since he discusses these under the heading of elders and deacons - not ordained, but local ministries - it seems that Van der Borght does not envisage an ordained status for them. (Borght, *Het ambt her-dacht*, 498)

ecumenical discussion).[34] In her research - which is an elaboration of an earlier study on BEM/m[35] - she dwells consecutively on the nature, purpose and genesis of BEM/m, before focusing on the use of Scripture and tradition. With these considerations in mind, Gosker provides an analysis of the text that culminates in theological assessment. After reflecting on some aspects of the reception process, some independent chapters on different aspects of theology of ministry follow. In the context of the present study, it is instructive to note that while Gosker notes that BEM/m has a missiological focus in its preamble, she pays little attention to it in the rest of her study.[36] She takes up the ecumenical challenge, but she sidesteps the missionary one. Gosker's book is a rich source of knowledge and reflection for anyone engaged in ecclesial ministry, and I will make much use of it, especially in the chapter on ecumenism.

In 2003 Hans Kronenburg published his PhD research on building blocks for a theology of episcopacy in newly formed united Protestant Church in the Netherlands under the title *Episcopus Oecumenicus*.[37] His incentives for this study were partly very personal because, as a pastor, he had experienced the lack of a *pastor pastorum* who looked after him. Consequently, his thesis can be read as a plea for the ministry of bishop. Kronenburg provides a wealth of material with a view to reflecting on the office of bishop within the Reformation tradition. What is striking in the context of the present study is that Kronenburg, inspired by the episcopal ministerial structure of the Church of South India and Lesslie Newbigin's interpretation of it, draws emphatic attention to the missionary task of the bishop. He quotes several times the words of Newbigin - whom he explicitly calls bishop in that context - that ministry is primarily leadership in mission.[38] While understandable, it is unfortunate that Kronenburg does not elaborate further on what this might mean in the Dutch context, leaving it unclear what is exactly the added value of a bishop in missionary terms. In that regard, it is also notable that Kronenburg does not give any place to a missionary motive for the creation of the ministry of bishop, leaving the missionary character he advocates at the end a bit up in the air.

In 2016 a collection of articles by Martien Brinkman was published in 2016 under the title *A Reformed Voice in the Ecumenical Discussion*.[39] The articles in the volume all revolve around the theme of ecumenism. In the introduction, Brinkman uses the imagery of a bouquet of colorful flowers to describe ecumenical dialogues. According to him, the task of the ecumenist is not just to collect flowers of the same color, but to arrange flowers of different colors in such a way that together they form a whole. The key to ecumenism is complementarity. From this conviction, Brinkman also reflected on ecclesial

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[34] Gosker, *Het ambt in de oecumenische discussie*.
[35] Gosker, *Het kerkelijk ambt in het Limadocument*.
[36] Gosker, *Het ambt in de oecumenische discussie*, 88.
[37] Kronenburg, *Episcopus Oecumenicus*.
[38] Kronenburg, *Episcopus Oecumenicus*, 371, 372.
[39] Brinkman, *A Reformed Voice*.

ministry. Some four articles are devoted to ecclesial ministry in particular, in which he focuses mainly on the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. Themes covered successively are the relationship between Eucharist and ministry, the relationship between the local and the universal church, *episkopé*, the primacy of the bishop of Rome, and apostolic succession. The very nature of a collection of articles implies that no elaborate theology of ministry is offered, but that does not detract from the importance of Brinkman's contributions in view of the themes covered.

This brief overview shows that there has been ample attention to the ecumenical dimension of ecclesial ministry in Dutch academic discussion since the beginning of the 21st century. While a clear missional awareness has emerged in this academic conversation, no systematic attention has yet been given to what this means concretely for theology of ministry.

1.2.2 Missional Impulses

In 2021 Jan van 't Spijker published a study, called *To Participate in God's Mission*, on the question to what extent the concept of *missio Dei* is reflected in the concrete ecclesiology of the CGKN.[40] According to Van 't Spijker, The CGKN need to learn to understand again that they are rooted in the *missio Dei*. Within the CGKN, mission is still 'primarily understood as an activity of the church to which it is called and sent'.[41] Van 't Spijker offers some stimulating suggestions of how this new understanding of mission should permeate the ecclesiology and church practice of the CGKN.

Most importantly for the purpose of this study, Van 't Spijker argues that the CGKN need to rethink their theology and practice of ministry to preclude being focused on self-preservation. The primary focus of ecclesial ministry in all its diversity, according to Van 't Spijker, needs to be the participation of what God is doing in furthering his plan, both inside and outside the church. However, somehow it seems that some of the specific gifts and functions given to the church are left unused. In the eyes of Van 't Spijker, only by bringing back the whole spectrum of ministerial work of Christ to the church would the CGKN do justice to the Word of God. Moreover, the missionary power would thus be strengthened, because this would provide the possibility of engaging 'more diverse people, including more diverse "ministers of the Word", fit to be active in all different situations and contexts. A direct result of the shift in orientation would be that the equipping of the members of the congregation would be focused on helping them to align 'their life to their God-give identity within the framework of what He is doing, as followers and representatives of Christ'.[42]

Van 't Spijker's analysis of the CGKN offers stimulating images of what it might mean if a concrete denomination allows its own structure and agenda to be determined by the *missio Dei*. However, his suggestions on ecclesial ministry

[40] Van 't Spijker, *To Participate*.
[41] Van 't Spijker, *To Participate*, 189-190.
[42] Van 't Spijker, *To Participate*, 200.

are only scarcely substantiated and not embedded in a broader theology of ministry. Moreover, ecumenical considerations hardly play a role. Therefore, further reflection on theology of ministry from a missionary perspective is needed.

1.2.3 Practical Impulses

In his 2001 *Biografie van de dominee* (*Biography of the vicar*) practical theologian Gerben Heitink outlines the evolution of the ministry of the Word (*de dominee*) in the Netherlands since the beginning of the Reformation.[43] His central question is how the vicar has been able to occupy such a central place in the Dutch Reformed setting. After a historical overview, Heitink concludes his book with some reflections on the future of ordained ministry. The book is a combination of historical theology and practical theology. Heitink's *Biografie van de dominee* contains many valuable insights that can help the reflection on ecclesial ministry. I am thinking in particular of the way he provides insight into how the pastor's ministry has changed with the cultural context over time. He shows how the pastor's ministry has gradually retreated more and more into the churchyard, where it has surrendered to a process of professionalization. The book offers a practical-theological vision of the future of the ministry of the Word but only dwells in passing on systematic-theological questions that require further thought.

In 2009, Johan van Holten completed his PhD with a practical-theological study on the concept of role and vocation among ministers in the Netherlands: *Rol en Roeping* (*Role and vocation*).[44] An important part of his study consists of empirical research. Empirical data make clear, among other things, that ministers lack a clear concept of leadership. Moreover, it is found that among the ministers studied, there is hardly any external orientation in their role conception. For students, young ministers, and experienced ministers alike, their role is mainly perceived internally as being focused on building up the *koinonia*.[45] Van Holten argues, with a view to the current secularized culture, that leading outsiders to the church and make them share in the *koinonia* of the congregation should be considered the core calling of ministers.[46] It should be noted, however, that the data for Van Holten's empirical study were collected before 2004, so it is not impossible that a more recent research might give a somewhat different result.

In 2007 Miranda Renkema-Hoffman published a study on the principal starting points for a Reformed church- and ministerial structure called *Naar een*

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[43] Heitink, *Biografie van de dominee*.

[44] Van Holten, *Rol en roeping*. Van Holten limits himself to ministers from the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* and the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, two denominations that were to be united in the PKN in 2004.

[45] Van Holten, *Rol en roeping*, 202

[46] Van Holten, *Rol en roeping*, 235

nieuwe kerkenraad (*Towards a new church council*).[47] As some of the main problems of the Reformed ministerial structure in the 21st century she identifies increasing pressure of work and dissatisfaction with the functioning of the ministerial work. The origins of these problems have to do with spiritual and practical aspects, as well as matters of (lack of) efficiency. She further emphasizes the principal presbyteral structure of the congregation and questions the current situation in which the minister of the Word is considered the pre-eminent minister. In classic Reformed fashion, she argues that all elders should in some way have the competency to teach and instruct and they should not be considered secondary to the ministers of the Word. Renkema-Hoffman's research focuses mainly on the structure of the church council and is therefore less concerned with fundamental theological reflection on ecclesial ministry.

This brief survey of practical impulses shows that, in a historical process, the scope of the minister of the Word in the Netherlands has been increasingly confined to the interiority of the church community. Practical theological research also shows that ordained ministers limit their field of action to the inner church *koinonia*. Moreover, Renkema-Hoffmann's study shows that it is important that a theology of ministry clarifies the (possible) distinction between ordained ministers and the elder. Possible hierarchy remains an open nerve in Reformed ministerial practice.

1.2.4 Other Impulses

In 2008 Teus Brienen published a book on ecclesial, with the title: *Van ambt naar dienst* (*From office to ministry*).[48] Brienen dismisses the Dutch word *ambt* (office) as being unbiblical and pleads for the consistent use of the word *dienst* (ministry). He fears that the word *ambt* and its additional notions brings with it a sense of hierarchy that is unbiblical. Every member of the congregation is in his or her place a minister, and there is no room for hierarchy. Whereas Brienen seems to suggest that his study concerns a major re-evaluation of Reformed ministerial theology, for the most part it does not seem to go beyond a mere semantic issue.

Also in 2008, a collection of articles on leadership and ministry was published under the title *Gezag in beweging* (*Authority in motion*).[49] The collection is a fruit of the cooperation between the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Leuven (ETF) and the Academy of Theology of the Christelijke Hogeschool Ede (CHE). The contributions are written from various denominational backgrounds and offer reflection from different perspectives (theological, social-scientific, and historical) on questions concerning ministry and leadership. In doing so the authors want to contribute to the search for a normative-theological framework. The book thus provides building blocks for a theological framework, without being a coherent and elaborate vision.

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[47] Renkema-Hoffman, *Naar een nieuwe kerkenraad*.

[48] Brienen, *Van ambt naar dienst*.

[49] Boersema/Hoek/Paul/Verhoeff, *Gezag in beweging*

The collection of articles *Religieus leiderschap in post-christelijk Nederland* (*Religious leadership in post-Christian Netherlands*) was published in 2020.[50] The volume was written within a research group that included participants from the breadth of Dutch theological and denominational traditions. The authors relate different theological sub-disciplines to create a picture of the current state of religious leadership in the Netherlands. Although the title suggests that the book is only about leadership, it does contain reflection on the theological concept of ecclesial ministry. Theological reflection in the various articles is very emphatically informed by practice as it emerges from the social science contributions in the first part of the volume. The book aims to contribute to reflection on leadership within the Dutch context, and as such does not provide a finished vision. It is noteworthy, however, that the epilogue of the book speaks of a cautious 'sacramental turn' regarding ecclesial ministry.[51]

This brief overview shows that academic reflection on theology of ministry takes place across the denominational spectrum. The need for theological reflection on ecclesial ministry from historical, practical, missional and ecumenical perspectives is widely shared. The question of hierarchy also comes up here.

1.2.5 Conclusion

The overview of the main books and collections of articles demonstrates there has been much thought about ecclesial ministry from different perspectives. A few things come to the fore.

Over the course of time, the scope of ordained ministry in the Netherlands has been increasingly confined to the community of the church and its missionary vocation has been increasingly relegated to the background. Van der Borght's challenge to reflect on the theology of ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei* is therefore very important, however still outstanding. Van 't Spijker offers some stimulating thoughts in this regard, but they remain fragmentary and too little embedded in a broader ministerial structure. No attempt has yet been made to systematically elaborate the theology of ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei*. This study seeks to fill that gap.

In addition, this survey shows that there is a widely shared desire and urgency to have this reflection proceed from an ecumenical stance. This is reflected in the various studies on ecumenical theology of ministry, as in the several volumes on ecclesial ministry by authors from different theological and denominational backgrounds. From a Reformed perspective, such reflection must give attention to the distinct position of ordained ministry in relation to the other ministries.

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[50] Broeke/Borght, *Religieus leiderschap*.

[51] Broeke/Borght, *Religieus leiderschap*, 295.

1.3 Research Question, Terminology, and Route

With the overview of ecclesial discussions and academic literature in mind, it is possible to arrive at a sound research question.

This research is an attempt to explore how Reformed churches in the Netherlands can meet the twofold challenge of mission and ecumenism and develop an ecumenically informed theology of ordained ministry that serves the church's missionary vocation. To that end, I will try to answer the following research question:

> *How can an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ordained ministry serve the church's missionary calling in the Netherlands?*

In formulating the question, I opt for the singular 'church' over the plural 'churches'. Of course, I am aware that 'the church' in the pure sense of the word does not exist, that is, 'the church' only becomes concretely visible in the various churches. Nevertheless, I choose to use the singular church in my question, for by doing so, I want to make it clear that this concerns primarily a systematic theological research.

The question focuses explicitly on *ordained* ministry. Thus, I will not be dealing specifically with the other Reformed ministries of elder and deacon. However, the distinction between ordained ministry and the other ministries will need to be addressed.

To bring the question into sharper focus, it is important to reflect on what I understand 'missionary calling' and 'ecumenism' to mean. Moreover, it is also necessary to comment on the adjective 'Reformed'.

1.3.1 The Missionary Calling

On a superficial level, the missionary challenge facing the churches in the West is sparked by the changed cultural climate. Declining membership and shifting public roles give reflection on the nature and the practice of the church's mission an urgency hitherto unknown to established churches in Western Europe.[52] It is no surprise that since the middle of the 20th century many books and articles were published that discussed theories, practices, and methodologies for churches to follow, if they were to withstand the secularizing wind of culture.[53]

However, on a more fundamental level, there was another development that proved to be more important than relatively simplistic methodological considerations. Already in the beginning of the 20th century – even before the symptoms the radical de-Christianization of the Western world became apparent to most people – an ecumenical missionary movement came into existence. The first missionary conference of Edinburgh in 1910 was supposed to

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[52] For a brief overview of the post-Christendom context in the Netherlands and Belgium, see Barentsen/Foppen, 'Post-christendom'

[53] For an overview of the different approaches to mission in the West, see Paas, *Pilgrims and Priests*, 44-115.

usher in a new era of Christian missions with the possibility of the evangelization of the world in one generation.

However, the missionary longings of Edinburgh were (unconsciously) intertwined with imperialistic and optimistic Eurocentric motives. From the moment that these motives were shattered on the Belgian and the French battlefields of World War I, a different missionary paradigm began to emerge, and missionary longings were increasingly matched by a deeper understanding of the nature of mission. The missionary conference of Willingen 1952 turned out to be the turning point by introducing the concept (not the term) of *missio Dei* in the ecumenical discussion. Mission was no longer considered to be only one activity of the church among other activities, but the meaning of the concept was derived from the nature of God himself. God is a missionary God and mission should be seen as a redemptive movement from God to the world in which the church is called to participate.[54]

Although the concept of *missio Dei* can encompass 'a wide variety of seemingly incongruous positions' and serve as an umbrella term, its revolutionary power cannot easily be overestimated.[55] I mention the most important aspects of it.

First, the term *missio Dei* places mission at the heart of the doctrine of God. As a triune being, mission for God is not a second step, but is part of his nature. God is a missionary God and his movement towards humanity is not an addendum to his otherwise perfect divine being.[56] It logically follows that the church too cannot be said to have mission as a second step. On the contrary, the church that lives in relation to God's revelation in Jesus Christ participates in this divine movement towards the world and cannot but be sent, i.e., directed to all humanity and all creation.[57] In the words of Daniel Migliore:

> The mission of the church is to participate in the reconciling love of the triune God who reaches out to a fallen world in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit brings strangers and enemies into God's new and abiding community.[58]

Thus, an ecclesiocentric approach of mission is precluded from the outset. It is God who graciously incorporates his church in the divine involvement of the world. *Missio Dei* keeps the church from being the centre of attention and the

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[54] For the history and development of the international missionary movement and the concept of *missio Dei*, see Bevans/Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 286-304; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 344-347; Flett, *The Witness of God*, 78-162; Van 't Spijker, *To Participate*, 25-92; Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, 59-72.

[55] See Flett, *The Witness of God*, 4-10. Also: Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, 68-70.

[56] Flett, *The Witness of God*, 197.

[57] Flett, *The Witness of God*, 242.

[58] Migliore, 'The Missionary God and the Missionary Church', 14-15.

world only of incidental importance. God's mission pertains to all humanity and creation and the church exists in service to this mission.[59]

Next, the church itself is called to participate in God's mission, not just special para-church agencies, or organizations. The belief that 'mission' and 'church' belong together is a rather recent phenomenon for churches in the Protestant tradition. David Bosch shows in his landmark study on Christian mission how in the centuries since de dawning of Enlightenment, mission was predominantly (almost exclusively) the occupation of para-church organizations.[60] According to Bosch, only after the Tambaram conference (1938) 'the recognition that church and mission belong together indissolubly began to dawn in a way that could no longer be overlooked'.[61] Nowadays, it is common to speak of the missional church. The adjective 'missional' refers not to 'a specific activity of the church but the very essence and identity of the church as it takes up its role in God's story in the context of its culture and participates in God's mission to the world'.[62]

Finally, the concept of *missio Dei* makes clear that 'that every Christian community is in a missionary situation'.[63] Until the second half of the 20th century, one could believe that mission referred to the geographical expansion of the gospel, bringing it from the West to the South or the East. Often the gospel was filled with or replaced by Western cultural imperialism.[64] Today, there is a broad consensus that the West is also mission territory. Not only because Christians in the West are a minority within their own culture, but also because most Christians live outside the West.[65]

The three points above taken together illustrate the need to rethink ecclesiology in general and theology of ministry from the concept *missio Dei*. Churches are called to reflect on their theology and practice from the *missio Dei* in order to fully participate in God's movement towards humanity and creation.

But what might this mean in concrete terms? Lesslie Newbigin's distinction between the missionary dimension and missionary intention of the church may be helpful here.[66] Because the church participates in the *missio Dei*, every aspect

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[59] Flett, *The Witness of God*, 292.

[60] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 334-341.

[61] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 379. In the words of Flett: 'Volunteer missionary societies developed because the ecclesiologies of the period proved insufficient for the missionary task. The disjunction of church from mission does not merely devalue mission with respect to the life of the community; it indicates that the church misconceives herself. She is too static, that is, not oriented to the purpose for which she exists.' (Flett, *The Witness of God*, 62). See also: Van Gelder/Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*.

[62] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 4.

[63] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 379.

[64] See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 309-320.

[65] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 2.

[66] Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 21, 43. See also: Vicedom, *Die missionarische Dimension*, 14-15; Gensichen, *Glaube*, 80-95 and 244-249; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 282.

of church life has a missionary dimension, although this does not mean that everything also has an explicitly missionary intention. In other words, that the whole of church life is at the service of God's movement towards the world (in humanity and creation) should be manifest in intentionally centrifugal missionary activities and institutional practices, in which the church reaches out beyond its own borders to the world in evangelism and/or diaconal aid, but also in the church's internal life in liturgy, community and service that is shaped and sustained by the *missio Dei* in the world.

In a narrower sense, Newbigin's distinction also applies to ecclesial ministry. Reflecting on theology of ministry from the *missio Dei* means focusing both on those aspects of ecclesial ministry that are intentionally missionary as on those aspects that at first sight have little to do with mission but do have a missionary dimension. Merely adding some intentionally missionary elements to an existing concept of ecclesial ministry is not the same as thinking through the theology of ministry from the perspective of the missionary calling of the church. Indeed, it is then quite possible that mission remains a second step for ecclesial ministry, rather than theology of ministry being permeated by the *missio Dei*. Nor is it enough to rethink the missionary character of an existing concept of ecclesial ministry, as if it were possible to assume a preconceived concept of ministry and deepen it in missional terms by uncovering previously unimagined missionary dimensions. Rather, it is necessary to rethink the whole concept of ordained ministry, in order to discover what its missionary dimensions and missionary intentions are.

For the remainder of this study, the distinction between missionary intention and missionary dimension will be used to weigh the concepts and theological premises of the respective interlocutors. In other words, I will assess the respective concepts of ordained ministry in terms of their missionary dimension and missionary intention.

1.3.2 The Ecumenical Challenge

The ecumenical challenge is closely related to the missionary one. After all, the decisive impetus for the ecumenical movement that emerged in the 20th century was a shared longing of different churches and denominations from all continents to reach the world with the gospel.[67] Missionary longings and efforts to unite the global church went hand in hand.

From a biblical point of view, this should hardly be surprising, since it was Jesus himself who explicitly related both to each other by praying for unity among his followers so that the world may have knowledge of His divine mission.[68] Paul Avis puts the matter succinctly:

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[67] Best, 'Ecclesiology and ecumenism', 402. Also: David Nelson/Raid II, *Ecumenism*, 6, 27 ff.; Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, 23, 34-35.

[68] John 17:20-25

> The true ecumenist knows that unity and mission are inseparable in the purposes of God (the *missio dei*); that they are two sides of the one coin; that God purposes to unite all things in and through Jesus Christ (Eph.1.10; Col. 1.20).[69]

Yet when it comes to the theology of ministry in an ecumenical perspective, things are rather thorny. To quote Avis again:

> Basic agreement in the fundamental faith of the creeds is not particularly difficult to achieve, but issues of ministerial authenticity and of sources of authority or oversight in the Church are more intractable.[70]

This is not due to a lack of effort. Already since the Faith and Order conference of 1927 in Lausanne, the issue of ecclesial ministry was on the agenda of the ecumenical movement. In the first period, the issue was approached primarily in a comparative way, by exposing differences and noting agreements. From the conference of Lund in 1952 onwards a more integrated approach to ministry was chosen by discussing it in the context of Christology and eschatology. Since the conference of Bristol in 1967, attempts have been made to formulate consensus and achieve doctrinal agreement between churches. The result was a text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry that was approved by the plenary meeting of Faith and Order in Accra (1974) and distributed among the churches with the request for comments. The received responses contributed to the definitive version of the report on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which was approved by the plenary Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in Lima in 1982. The preface to the report speaks of

> 'a Kairos of the ecumenical movement when sadly divided churches have been enabled to arrive a substantial theological agreement'.[71]

Ecumenical endeavour, missionary longing and theology of ministry came together in the years following Lima. Especially since the fifth world conference of the World Council of Churches of 1993 in Santiago de Compostela, reflection on the nature of the church became the central theme of ecumenical work, culminating in a new convergence text on ecclesiology that was published in 2013: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.[72] This report builds on the

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[69] Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, 23.

[70] Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, 11.

[71] BEM, X. For the history of this document, see Gosker, *Het ambt*, 30-48, and Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 145-147.

[72] *The Church: Towards a Common Vision,* 41-46; Best, 'Ecclesiology', 409-410; Koffeman, 'Ecumenical Reference Text', 222.

fundamental lines of the Lima report but explicitly reflects on the missionary dimension of the church and its ministry.

Given the missionary challenges, the ecumenical developments, and the responsibility to strive for unity, churches cannot reflect on theology of ministry in isolation. Sectarianism and/or secularism loom large for churches that do not take this ecumenical calling seriously. The brief overview of ecclesial discussions in §1.1 show that also Reformed churches in the Netherlands are also increasingly aware of this ecumenical challenge.

In this study I pursue a Reformed theology of ministry that is ecumenically informed. This implies that I want to look for a concept of ordained ministry that is influenced by ecumenical consensus on the one hand, but expressly reasons from the Reformed tradition on the other. This involves two things. Firstly, taking ecumenical developments seriously means that fundamental insights from the ecumenical discussion on ecclesial ministry and mission are processed and, where possible, integrated. In this study, this is done by processing the two WCC reports mentioned above. Secondly, it entails that certain fundamental insights from Reformed theology of ministry are brought into the ecumenical conversation. It thus concerns a two-way street: it concerns learning from the ecumenical consensus, but also letting the Reformed voice be heard within the ecumenical conversation.

1.3.3 Reformed Theology of Ministry?

It is also crucial to shed some light on the adjective 'Reformed' beforehand. Unreflective use of the term 'Reformed theology of ministry' may give the impression of a sharply delineated and clearly definable concept. Reality, however, is unruly, and Reformed ecclesiology resembles a pallet of different colours rather than the uniformity of a military parade. Thus, there is not so much a clearly defined concept that conforms to a doctrinal system as there is a theological tradition comprised of different currents sharing certain characteristics.[73] Therefore, it is impossible to provide a straightforward definition beforehand.

That said, more clarity and delineation is obviously called for. In this research I focus specifically on Reformed ecclesiology as it has taken shape in the context of Reformed denominations in the Netherlands. The early beginnings of these Dutch forms of theology of ministry are to be found in the magisterial reformation of the sixteenth century and became visible in cities such as Strasbourg, Geneva, and London. To find out what the most defining elements for the Dutch context are, part of this research will consist of

[73] In the words of Paul Nimmo and David Ferguson: 'If there cannot be said to be univocity across all its expressions, there can at least be said to be material and thematic resonances across its diverse texts at a most profound level.' (Nimmo/Ferguson, 'Introduction', 4). For a brief description of Reformed ecclesiology, see Van der Borght, 'Reformed Ecclesiology', 187-200.

questioning three theologians from the early days of the Reformed Protestantism who have been crucial for the development of Reformed churches in the Dutch setting. What were the characteristic elements of their ecclesiology? What should be considered pivotal for a theology of ministry in the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands?

1.3.4 Route

To answer the research question, I take the following steps. First, in chapter two, I reflect on the origins of Reformed theology of ministry. Making use of a hybrid combination of both a historical and a systematic-theological approach, I want to discover the characteristics of Reformed ministerial theology and practice that shaped Reformed denominations in the Netherlands. I will focus on three key figures in the development of Reformed theology of ministry. First, I will pay attention to the pivotal role of the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer, who is widely considered to stand at the bedrock of Reformed ministerial practice. Next, I will focus on John Calvin and John Łaski, who, in distinctive ways, exerted a decisive influence on the shaping of the Dutch Reformed churches. Working in different contexts, they both developed the ideas of Bucer in their own fashion.

This second chapter can be considered a modest cross section of Reformed theology of ministry in the early days. As a well-performed cross section lays bare the characteristics of the object of investigation, without being exhaustive, this part is meant to identify the heart of the Reformed theology of ministry that shaped Dutch Reformed churches without giving a full account. By doing so, I hope to gain a better understanding of the various theological features that have shaped the Reformed theology of ministry and prepare the encounter with the interlocutors in the chapters that follow. The question I seek to answer is this:

> *What distinctive aspects of theology of ministry in the Reformed tradition are to be processed in conversation with the theological voices in the remainder of this study?*

Since I am striving for a Reformed theology of ministry that is ecumenically informed, the next step consists of a reading and weighing of the two WCC reports that deal explicitly with ecclesial ministry: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. My concern in this third chapter is not to provide a meticulous account of the ecumenical understanding of ecclesial ministry, which has already been done by others, but rather a missionary assessment of it in view of a Reformed theology of ministry. Questions that concern me in this chapter are:

> *What are the missionary dimensions and intentions of ecclesiology that emerge in both reports and how can these be made fruitful for a Reformed theology of ministry?*

And:

> *What are indispensable elements of a theology of ministry that strives to be ecumenical?*

In chapter four I want to question a theologian from the Reformed tradition who has dealt explicitly with mission, ecumenism, and ecclesial ministry. For this, my attention has been caught by the American missiologist Darrell L. Guder. Guder's reflections on ecclesial ministry deserve attention because – as a student of Lesslie Newbigin and Karl Barth – he has reflected on theology of ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei*. Moreover, in his role of professor of missional and ecumenical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, he has also dealt with the ecumenical challenge. The conversation with Guder demonstrates what an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei* could possibly look like. The question I seek to answer in this chapter is:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Guder's theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

To provide a counterweight, in the subsequent step I want to focus on someone who is critical of the concept of *missio Dei*. To this end, I discuss the theology of ministry of the Dutch theologian Bram van de Beek in chapter five. As a systematic theologian Van de Beek has dealt extensively with theology of ministry and is constantly in touch with the discussion within Dutch Reformed circles. Moreover, he is clearly influenced by ecumenical developments. Van de Beek develops an idiosyncratic theology of ministry that is highly critical of the concept of *missio Dei* and thereby challenges to reflect on its legitimacy and usefulness. Giving consideration to Van de Beek's views helps to remain alert and bring potential vulnerabilities of the missionary approach into focus. The question I seek to answer in this chapter is:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Van de Beek's theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

In chapter six I focus my attention on the British theologian Michael Moynagh, a minister within the Fresh Expressions stream of Anglicanism. Moynagh is a bit of an outsider since he has no Reformed background and does not develop a theology of ministry in the strict sense of the word. Nevertheless, his thoughts deserve attention, because of their rootedness in ecclesial practice and their relevance for a church longing to be missionary in a post-Christian culture. He can be considered a reflective practitioner. Moreover, his thoughts are also received and processed in the Netherlands. A clear example is the so-called *leergemeenschap pionieren* (*learning community on pioneering*) in the PKN,

which is partly based on the thoughts developed by Moynagh.[74] Although this study is primarily systematical theological, in this chapter I lend my ear to someone who is reflecting extensively on missionary practice. This is well justified in my mind, because systematic-theological reflection on ecclesial ministry takes place with a view to practice and should therefore also be informed by practice. The question I seek to answer in this chapter is:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Moynagh's reflection of church leadership and theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

As a final step, I will try to bring in the harvest in chapter seven. What has the search for an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry that serves the missionary vocation of the church yielded? The result will not be a full-fledged Reformed theology of ministry. If it had been my intention to develop a Reformed theology of ministry, it would have been inescapable to reflect on biblical data. It may be a truism to state that the New Testament does not provide a blueprint for ecclesial ministry, but that does of course not mean that the Bible can remain closed for a fully developed theology of ministry.

Next, a matured Reformed theology of ministry would require interaction with confessional documents and other theologians from the Reformed tradition. Finally, in this research I focus on the ministry of the Word. To develop a mature Reformed theology of ministry, it would have been necessary to explicitly elaborate on the ministries of the elder and the deacon.

Rather than developing a full theology of ministry, it is my intention to map the presuppositions, principles, tasks, and themes of an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry that serves the missionary vocation of the church.

> *Excurs: A (New) Consensus on Ministry in the New Testament?*
> At times it can seem that the mere observation that the New Testament does not provide a blueprint for a theology of ministry is used as an excuse to leave the Bible aside. In the discussion of the various theologians and documents in the following pages, it will become clear that such a pragmatic approach is far too short-sighted. Any theology of ministry will have to relate to the Scriptural witness. My refraining from explicitly addressing the biblical data in this study, besides lack of space, has to do

[74] See https://lerenpionieren.nl/voor-beginners/ (Accessed 2 February 2023)

with the fact that the discussion surrounding New Testament ministries is so complicated that it is best left to New Testament scholars.[75]

However, the above observation does not preclude a brief comment on the current state of research. Historically, two lines emerge since the nineteenth century:[76]

1. On the one hand, there is the line of research that focuses particularly on the relationship between ministry and charism. This line is mostly visible within the German speaking research and has its origins in Rudolf Sohm's thesis that the earliest church was a spiritual reality. In his view, the development of the church into a legal organization constituted its degeneration: 'The doctrine of the constitution of the ecclesia, drawn from the Word of God and in truth apostolic, is that the organization of Christianity is not juridical but charismatic'.[77] This view of ecclesial ministry still resonates decades later in Hans von Campenhausen's influential book on ecclesiastical authority in the early church, when he argues that in the Pauline congregations the Spirit was the organizing principle that was gradually replaced by the legalistic office of the elder.[78]
2. The second line of research focuses on the ministerial organization of the church and specifically on the distinction between the *episkopos* and the *presbyter*. This line is particularly visible in English-language literature. Important names in this line of research are that of Joseph Lightfoot and Edwin Hatch. The questions central to this discourse is whether the *presbyteros* and the *episkopos* are one and the same and what were the respective origins of the two terms/offices.

However, since the last decade of the previous century there seems to develop a cautious new consensus in which both above lines converge.[79] A clear example of this new consensus can be found in R. Alastair Campbell's book on the elders in the New Testament church. Based on exegetical, historical, and sociological research, he concludes that the ministry of

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[75] For a well-readable and insightful overview of the discussion on ministry in the New Testament from the Reformation to the 1990s, see: Burtchaell, *From Synagogue*, 1-179. Kertelge, *Das Kirchliche Amt*, offers a very helpful, albeit it quite dated, anthology of important German-language texts on ministry in the New Testament. Discussions of ministries in the New Testament often follow religious-historical lines. For relatively recent exegetical contributions, I refer to Hofius' insightful articles: 'Gemeindeleitung und Kirchenleitung'; 'Die Einzigartigkeit'; 'Die Ordination'; 'Das Kirchliche Amt'.

[76] Campbell, *The Elders*, 2.

[77] 'Die aus dem gottlichen Wort geschöpfte, in Wahrheit apostolische Lehre von der Verfassung der Ekklesia is die, daß die Organisation der Christenheit nicht rechtlich, sondern charismatische Organisation ist', Sohm, 'Begriff und Organisation', 57.

[78] Von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt,* 62.

[79] Campbell, *The Elders*, chapter 8 and Stewart, *Original Bishops*, Preface.

elder/*presbyter* should primarily be considered an honorary title and, moreover, a collective one. An important part of his argument is the fact that the early Christian churches consisted of house churches, of which the *pater familias* was the *episkopos*. The various *episkopoi* in a city collectively constituted the *presbyteroi* of the local church. Thus, there was no such thing as the ministry of the elder/*presbyter*, there were only several *episkopoi* who were collectively referred to as elders/*presbyteroi*.

Campbell's thesis is supported by Roger Gehring's insightful research on the relationship between the house church structure of the Christian congregations in New Testament times and the mission of the early church.[80] Moreover, the house church structure of early Christianity sheds illuminating light on the relationship between ministry and charism. For instance, because the ancient household structure was taken for granted as the organizing principle of the Christian church, it was not necessary for Paul to unfold extensive views on ministry and leadership in his letter to the church at Corinth.[81] Since leadership was a given in the person of the *pater familias*, Paul could be virtually silent about it, while he did elaborate on the charismata. Thus, this Corinthian imbalance is not so much an expression of an originally purely 'charismatic' church, but rather of the obvious traditional leadership structure that underpinned the house church. Later, when house churches increased in number and, consequently, the organization of the local church became more complicated, it became necessary to address the theme of leadership more explicitly. This development can, for example, be seen in the pastoral letters.

In the German setting, Jochen Wagner reaches more or less the same conclusion as Campbell when he observes that the ministry of *presbyter* is a relative latecomer, projected back to the earliest beginnings of the church by Luke in Acts. He too emphasizes the importance of the house church structure of early Christian communities for the ministerial organization of the church.[82]

In 2014, Alistair Stewart published his book *The Original Bishops*, in which he argues that the words *episkopos* and *presbyteros* should not be considered synonymous but rather as perionyms, i.e., 'a term coined to denote two words in unspecified relationship that inhabit the same semantic domain but are not synonyms'.[83] He joins Campbell and Wagner in the thesis that the term *presbyteroi* is a collective designation. Besides a

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[80] Gehring, *House Church*.

[81] Barrett speaks of a 'social inevitability' when referring to the fact that householders were an important part of the leadership structure of the Pauline churches. (Barrett, *Church*, 36-37)

[82] Wagner, *Die Anfänge*.

[83] Stewart, *Original Bishops*, Chapter 1, Section: The Alleged Synonymy of *Episkopos* and *Presbyteros*.

historical reconstruction of the developments of the organization of the church in different cities, an important pillar under this claim is Stewart's interpretation of Titus 1:5, where (pseudo-)Paul instructs Titus to appoint *prebyteroi* for each city (κατὰ πόλιν πρεσβυτέρους). The communities in Crete had long been familiar with the ministry of *episkopos*, but the institution of the ministry of *presbyteroi* at the federative level was a novelty. The 'traditional' view that the council of *presbyteroi* was a collegial governing body within the house church is rooted in the idea that there is a strong analogy between early church organization and the organization of synagogues. However, this analogy cannot be proven and seems unlikely, according to Stewart, because there is insufficient evidence to suppose that there was a council of *presbyteroi* within the synagogue. Stewart himself makes a connection to associations within the Hellenistic world to explain the existence of *presbyteroi* within individual house churches. Within classical societies, substantial and influential members in old age were referred to as *presbyteroi*. These *presbyteroi* were then often referred to in the same breath as *neoteroi*, young men. When *presbyteroi* are mentioned - as, for example, in 1 Timothy - they should be thought of as such substantial men and not as ordained ministers.

I deliberately used the adjective 'cautious' when referring to the emergence of a new consensus. The abovementioned trend does not take away from the fact that other voices can still be heard. One of these dissenting voices is that of James Burtchaell who argues in an extensive study that the church has almost completely adopted its organizational structure from the synagogue.[84] Another dissenting voice comes from Benjamin Merkle who, based on exegesis of the relevant texts, concludes that the offices of *prebyteros* and *episkopos* are identical to each other.[85]

It is not possible in the limited space available to me here to evaluate and assess the state of New Testament research. However, it is important to take to heart the warning of Burtchaell, among others, who, speaking of Protestant researchers on the offices in the early church, states 'that it was often not their scholarship but their churchmanship, which governed their theory, at least on the subject at hand'.[86]

1.3.5 Terminology

Before I continue, a few words on the terminology used are in place. Since this research is undertaken with an eye to ecumenism, I choose to use ecumenical terminology as much as possible. For example, I will for the most part avoid the word 'office' (Dutch: *ambt*) and use the word 'ministry' (Dutch: *dienst*). To

[84] Burtchaell, *From Synagogue*. He develops his own vision starting in Chapter 5.
[85] Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*.
[86] Burtchaell, *From Synagogue*, 190

differentiate between institutionalized ministries and the ministry of all believers, I speak of 'ecclesial ministry' in the former case. So, where I use the words 'ecclesial ministry', I can refer to institutionalized ministries such as those of elder, deacon and minister of the Word. To differentiate between the ministries of elder/deacon and minister of the Word, I use the term 'ordained ministry' only for the latter.

I will also use the ecumenical words 'ordination', instead of the word 'installation' that is mostly used in Reformed circles.

I already mentioned the fact that I equate the 'ministry of the Word' with what in ecumenical texts is referred to as 'ordained ministry.' I am aware that both terms have somewhat different connotations. From a Reformed perspective, the term 'ministry of the Word' refers primarily to the function of ecclesial ministry, while the term 'ordained ministry' in the ecumenical conversation refers to concepts such as authorization, internal and external calling and in the case of some ecumenical partners to a sacramental sign. Notwithstanding these different connotations, for practical reasons I will use primarily the term ordained ministry.

It is also helpful to comment on the use of the adjectives 'missionary' and 'missional'. Although these adjectives lean toward synonymy in colloquial language, there is a subtle but significant difference.

The adjective 'missionary' concerns the communal or individual activity of sending and being sent into the world to communicate the gospel. It explicitly refers to the calling of the people of God to engage in a centrifugal movement towards the world in order to witness to the gospel. Hence, it has much in common with what Newbigin calls the missionary intention of the church.

The adjective missional has a somewhat different meaning. As an adjective refers to something that is related to mission. It does not necessarily refer to the purposeful activity of sending or being sent, but rather to the 'qualities, attributes or dynamics' that belong to a person or community, even when it is not explicitly engaged in the centrifugal movement towards the world.[87] To put it in another way: Even when a community refrains from explicit missionary activities, it remains missional.

In this research I am primarily interested in the deliberate centrifugal movement of church(es) towards the world in order to witness to the gospel. Therefore, I will primarily use the adjective missionary. That does however not take away from the fact that I believe every church to be missional. After all, the deliberate missionary movement of a church towards the world is grounded in it being a missional community. This is why I also give explicit attention to the missionary dimension of the church in the individual chapters.

I have considered using the adjectives 'missional' and 'missionary' instead of Newbigin's distinction between the 'missionary intention' and 'missionary dimension'. However, I choose to use the terms 'intention' and 'dimension' for

[87] See Wright, *Mission of God*, 23-24. The words between inverted commas are from Wright.

the sole reason that their difference in meaning is more obvious, making them less prone to confusion.

Lastly, as much as possible I will employ gender-inclusive language and alternate between male and female pronouns when referring to ordained ministry. To avoid anachronisms, however, the historical chapter is an exception to this.[88]

[88] The use of gender-inclusive language implies a choice for the admission of women to ordained ministry. Since I will not address the question of women and ordained ministry separately in this study, it is good to put my cards on the table beforehand, even if in doing so I may anticipate in some ways what follows.

In general, those opposed to the admission of women to ordained ministry base this on an argument consisting of a two-tiered approach. First, it is argued that in the Reformed tradition, ministry is for a large part about ruling with authority and then, based on texts such as 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15, it is concluded that this right does not belong to women. However, in my mind, both parts of the argument fall short.

First, the authority of the ministry in a Reformed perspective never lies in the ordained minister himself, but in the Word he (or also: she) ministers. In fact, the argument that women cannot be admitted to ordained ministry because they are not to rule authoritatively presupposes a more Roman Catholic approach to ministry in which the authority of ordained ministry is localized in the person of the minister. The authority is the authority of Scripture and not of the minister.

Second, arguing on the basis of the two Bible texts mentioned does not comply with the Reformed principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture (*sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). The New Testament in its entirety bears witness to the totally new reality created in the Christ event, in which the dividing line between the position of man and woman has been erased. The two Pauline texts mentioned do not detract from this but can be considered as expressions of the fact that this new reality does not become visible overnight. Moreover, they can be read as Paul's attempts to prevent the end of male dominated society from conversely leading to female dominance.

Thus, in my view the categorical refusal to admit women to the ordained ministry stems from a misinterpretation of the Reformed doctrine of ministry (See: Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 236) and an interpretation of Scripture that falls short when it comes to the fundamental (Reformed) hermeneutical principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture.

2. TRAVELLING THE MIDDLE ROAD
A Cross Section of Early Reformed Theology of Ministry

Since this study aims to contribute to the systematic theological reflection on Reformed theology of ministry, it is of vital importance to have some clarity on what is meant by the adjective 'Reformed'. However, this adjective is not easily defined. Whereas other ecclesial and confessional traditions can be outlined with relative ease by means of ecclesial teachings or confessional documents, the Reformed tradition is characterized by a diversity of theological and ecclesial expressions. Rather than referring to a well-defined theological and ecclesiological field, the term Reformed seems to concern a 'particular theological agenda of theological discourse' with 'material and thematic resonances across its diverse texts at a most profound level'. There is no single authoritative text that can be taken as a starting point, but rather a variety of expressions with common emphasis and family resemblances. Theological voices from the past - either pivotal theological contributions of Reformers or confessional documents – are not to be seen as expressions of timeless propositional truths, but as starting points of trajectories marked by a particular pattern of thinking and 'an identifiable set of theological instincts' and 'doctrinal impulses'.[89]

In this chapter, I want to examine more closely the starting point of one such trajectory: the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands. To a considerable extent, the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands traces its origins to the urban reformations of Germany and Switzerland and the ecclesiastical practices of refugee congregations outside the Netherlands. By zooming in on these origins, it will be possible to trace common emphases and patterns of thinking that shaped the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands.

The main objective of this chapter is to prepare the reflection on an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective. The aim is not to arrive at a clearly delineated definition of the adjective 'Reformed', but rather to expose its theological instincts that can be made fruitful in conversation with the theological voices in the remainder of this study. Thus, this chapter is not about admiring a supposed golden age of Reformed theology of ministry but concerns a historical exercise that can illuminate distinctive aspects of a particular theological tradition. The question I seek to answer is this:

[89] Nimmo/Ferguson, 'Introduction'.

What distinctive aspects of theology of ministry in the Reformed tradition are to be processed in conversation with the theological voices in the remainder of this study?

To that end, I do not necessarily want to present fresh insights or unfold a vision of my own, but I draw on the insights of experts in this field of research to achieve my goal.

In what follows I assume a nuanced relationship between theoretical ecclesiology and ecclesial practice. Nicholas Healy speaks of a practical hermeneutical circle in which contextual ecclesial practice informs ecclesiology, and ecclesiology informs contextual practice.[90] A historical reconstruction on its own will not suffice, just as a purely systematic theological approach is insufficient. What is needed is a combination of both a historical and a systematic-theological approach that lays bare the characteristics of Reformed ministerial theology and practice. The danger of such a hybrid approach is of course that it is not historical enough for the historian and not theological enough for the theologian. I will consciously take this risk in the conviction that rethinking Reformed theology of ministry benefits most from a combination of history (i.e., contextuality) and theology.

In the following sections I focus on three key figures in the development of Reformed theology of ministry. First, I will pay attention to the pivotal role of the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer. Bucer is probably best known for his little book *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, in which he writes extensively about the ministries of the church.

Next, I will focus on his friend and associate John Calvin. His systematic treatment of theology of ministry in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is unparalleled, and his structuring of the Genevan church has determined the shape Reformed churches right up to this day. No serious treatment of Reformed theology of ministry in the early days can ignore the towering figure of Calvin.

Finally, I will turn to another theologian from Bucer's orbit. John Łaski may be less well known, although, according to MacCulloch, he had become 'more influential in the geographical spread of Reformed Protestantism than John Calvin' by the end of his life.[91] The figure of Łaski is particularly interesting because his *Forma ac Ratio* belongs to the first comprehensive ecclesiastical ordinances. The ecclesial practice of the refugee congregation in London, led by him, greatly influenced the ecclesial practice in the Dutch Reformed churches.

Both Calvin and Łaski exerted a decisive influence on the shaping of the Dutch Reformed churches, each in their distinctive ways. Working in different contexts, they both developed the ideas of Bucer in their own fashion. Notwithstanding the evident similarities between their ecclesiological principles, there are some striking differences that reveal the continuum on which Reformed theology of ministry is located.

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[90] Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 46.

[91] MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 254. I will follow MacCulloch and write 'Łaski' instead of 'a Lasco'.

The present chapter can be considered a limited cross section of Reformed theology of ministry in the early days. As a well-performed cross section lays bare the characteristics of the object under investigation, this chapter, without being exhaustive, is meant to reveal essential aspects of Reformed theology of ministry.

2.1 Martin Bucer (1491 – 1551)

Martin Bucer's ecclesiology was largely shaped by the controversy with both Roman Catholic and Anabaptist ecclesiology. In addition, Bucer developed his ideas against the background of the socio-political context of the city-state of Strasbourg. All three of these factors are also evident in his little book *Concerning the True Care of Souls*.[92]

In what follows, I want to highlight these three factors individually. I begin with the controversy with Roman Catholicism as it is chronologically first, followed by a treatment of his confrontation with the Anabaptists. By way of interlude, I then very briefly pause to consider Bucer's ecumenical commitment. Next, in a subsequent section, I want to explore how the socio-political context of Strasbourg contributed to the genesis of Bucer's ecclesiology. In a final section, I would like to note some observations that I will take with me as I treat Calvin and Łaski.

2.1.1 Why Bucer?

Why start a treatment of the origins of Reformed theology of ministry with Bucer? A simple reason could be that his still influential little book *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, *in nuce* contains all the characteristic elements of reformed ministerial theology and practice – priesthood of all believers, necessity of ordained ministry, variety of gifts and ministries, collegiality, and the role of elders –, and can therefore be read as an enchiridion to reformed ecclesiology.

More importantly, however, overall Bucer is widely considered to stand at the bedrock of Reformed ministerial practice. In the words of Van 't Spijker:

> An inquiry into Martin Bucer's view on ecclesiastical office takes us directly to the sources of the Reformational, more precisely, the Reformed concept of office.[93]

Where better to start than at the source? Bucer's pioneering role in Strasbourg and his thoughts on ecclesial ministry opened the way for other theologians to follow in his footsteps. His ministerial theology and practice in the Alsatian capital highly influenced reformers like John Calvin and John Łaski and his

[92] *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*, Vol. 7, 90-245. From now on I will use the abbreviation *BDS* 7 to refer to this work.

[93] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 1.

importance for reformed ministerial theology can hardly be overestimated. Any serious attempt to rethink reformed ministerial theology should therefore in one way or another relate to the work of Martin Bucer.

2.1.2 The Priesthood of All Believers

When Bucer arrived in Strasbourg in the middle of May 1523, he was already dedicated to the cause of the Reformation. In the Alsatian metropolis he would become one of the most prominent Reformers of his days.[94] At Bucer's arrival, anti-clericalism was already widely spread in Strasbourg. The reasons for these anti-clericalist feelings were not religious per se, but consisted of an incendiary combination of economic, ethical, and theological elements. First were the economical elements, because the rising class of burghers watched with disapproval how clergymen lived a life of relative luxury without having to pay taxes, while they themselves worked hard to stimulate their newly won upward mobility. Next there were ethical elements, because, inspired by Erasmus, moral and intellectual expectations of the laity had grown and were increasingly not met by the disappointing ethical and intellectual level of the clergy. Finally, there was also a theological element to Strasbourg's anti-clericalism, where the gospel of justification by grace emancipated the laity from the bondage of the church's instruments of grace.[95]

Despite being prone to the cause of the Reformation, the Strasbourg city council remained reticent regarding concrete measure. The magistrates were 'united in their desire to keep developments under their control and use them to further their own interests'.[96] It was only in February 1529 that the Mass was finally abolished.[97]

In the preface of *Concerning the True Care of Souls* Bucer states how the essence of the church is unknown to many people because of Roman Catholic superstition. He has in mind the binding of the laity to the ceremonies of the church, while the church does not pay any attention for the spiritual development, ethical conduct, and theological knowledge of the same lay people.[98] Bucer's critique concerns the *Ex opere operato* character of Roman Catholic theology of ministry. This principle gives the administration of the Mass an almost automatic and mechanical character. According to Bucer, the ministry of the church has nothing to do with automatism and formally correct procedures, but everything with faith and the Holy Spirit. All work of the

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[94] For biographical information on Martin Bucer, I relied on Greschat, *Martin Bucer* and McKim/West, *Martin Bucer*.

[95] Abray, *The People's Reformation*, 25; Brady, *Ruling Class,* 237-238; Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 50-52.

[96] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 53.

[97] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 83-85.

[98] *BDS 7*, 92.

ministers of the church depends on the work of the Spirit, who remains free to use whatever means he wants in the building of the congregation.[99]

This freedom of the Spirit consequently brings with it the freedom of the congregation from clerical bondage. The congregation is not subordinated to the ministry of the church in an ontological sense. Both the ministers of the church and the community of believers are dependent on the work of the Spirit.

The second point of critique of Roman Catholic ecclesiology in *Concerning the True Care of Souls* concerns the distinction between the clergy and the laity. Since the Spirit endows all members of the congregation with his gifts, there is no room for some kind of vicariate.

The medieval Roman Catholic view of ministry was characterized by the ecclesiastical concept of order (*ordo*), which served to distinguish between clergy and laity. The priest receives with the ordination the authorization and the competency to repeat the sacrifice of Christ on the altar. This power (*potestas ordinis*) gave the priest an indelible spiritual character (*character indelibilis*) and gave him a status above the community of the church. The community of the church is in turn fundamentally dependent on the minister. Although the concept of the priesthood of all believers was not totally absent in the medieval Roman Catholic view, it did not play an important role in its theology of ministry.[100]

Contrary to the Roman Catholic view, Bucer precisely stressed 'Christianity's dangerous idea' of the priesthood of all believers and he treated ministry within the order of salvation instead of the sacerdotal order.[101] The ministry of the church is not confined to certain designated people who vicariously rule the church but is an indispensable feature of the entire congregation. Clearly, Bucer underlines the charismatic structure of the congregation. This charismatic structure is also visible in the fact that Bucer emphasizes the need for diversity of gifts within the ministry of the church. The Lord distributes the many gifts needed to tend the flock over many different ministers.[102]

There is a – more implicit – third point of critique on Roman Catholic ecclesiology in *Concerning the True Care of Souls*. Bucer sees it as one of the fundamental tasks of the ministers to practise church discipline. The exercise of this discipline is not given to the ministers as a prerogative or some kind of ontological feature, however, but merely as representatives of the entire congregation.[103]

Bucer here implicitly criticizes the Roman Catholic concept of the 'power of jurisdiction' (*potestas jurisdictionis*). In the Roman Catholic view, it is the person of the priest who opens and closes the way to the altar by means of the 'power

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[99] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 19-23.
[100] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 16-18.
[101] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 465. Cf. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 2 ff.
[102] *BDS 7*, 117.
[103] *BDS 7*, 180.

of the keys' (*potestas clavium*) which was giving to him through the apostolic succession (*successio apostolorum*). According to Bucer, the power of the keys that is mentioned in Matthew 16 and 18 are not confined to certain people, but to the preaching of the Word.[104]

The 'power of the keys' of the church belongs to the community, but the administration of the keys is delegated to the ministers, who are given to the congregation by Christ. In this way, the ministers represent Christ as well as the congregation. The power of the ministers is not their own power by which they are given a status above the congregation, but it is the power of the Word which is given to the entire congregation.[105]

Let me share two observations. First, in confrontation with Roman Catholic ecclesiology Bucer radically de-clericalizes the ministry of the church. In this matter, his line of thought is congruent with the anti-clericalist tendencies within the city of Strasbourg. One could even go so far as to claim that Bucer's anti-clericalism is not much more than an emancipatory feature of the early modern upcoming class of burghers. Admittedly, such a line of thought would deny the theological thrust underneath Bucer's anti-clericalism. However, it nevertheless rightly points to the fact that his egalitarian approach could only flourish against the backdrop of the collapse of the medieval equilibrium based on the concept of hierarchical complementarity. Asking the question if theology was the driving force of Bucer's anti-clericalism, or if it was his pre-modern context that mainly drove him to it, denies the subtle interaction between the two.

Next, Van 't Spijker rightly claims that Bucer's initial anti-clericalist approach gives his early ecclesiology a subjective undertone and locates him close to an Anabaptist view of the church.[106] Against the Roman Catholic emphasis on the objective character of the church and its ministry, Bucer stresses the importance of the subjective work of the Spirit. In other words, in Bucer's early years, the institutional aspect of the church is radically downplayed in favour of the charismatic structure of the congregation.

2.1.3 The Necessity of Ministry

Strasbourg was a haven of refuge for Anabaptists from Switzerland, Holland, and large areas of southern Germany at the beginning of the Reformation. From 1524 onwards Anabaptist refugees were arriving in Strasbourg, culminating in the influx of an extraordinary number of significant personalities of the Radical Reformation in 1529. Among the Anabaptist entering the Alsatian capital in this year were names as Caspar Schwenckfeld, Melchior Hofmann, and Sebastian Franck. Although a mandate was issued against Anabaptist radicals as early as

[104] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 23-29.
[105] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 93.
[106] Van 't Spijker, 'Historische Plaats en Achtergrond' (1), 16.

July 1527, their influence did not diminish mainly due to the lenience of the magistracy towards them.[107]

From 1529 onwards tensions increased due to a growing Anabaptist presence within the imperial city. Intense eschatological expectancy of some of the radicals, combined with anti-authorial tendencies, convinced the magistrates and the reformers that Anabaptists formed a potential threat to the city order.[108] To counteract potential Anabaptist anarchy, a synod was held in 1533 during which the radical ideas were rejected. In the aftermath of the synod, several prominent Anabaptist were banished, imprisoned, or even sentenced to death.

Initially, Bucer proved himself lenient toward Anabaptists' views.[109] However, as the influence of the radicals grew with the influx of outspoken Anabaptist personalities, Bucer felt obliged to oppose their supposed anti-authoritarian and separatist views. During the synod of 1533, Bucer emerged as the leader of the magisterial reformers to the point that he could even be called *Nostrae ecclesiae episcopus* by one of his colleagues.[110]

The challenge of Anabaptism plays an important role in the genesis of Bucer's theology of ministry. First, the confrontation with the radicals made Bucer appreciate the institutional aspect of the church. Next, the Anabaptist focus on sanctification was a decisive impetus for the creation of the Reformed elder.

Because of the alleged anti-authoritarian and sectarian attitude of the Anabaptists, Bucer felt the need to stress the importance of the means of grace and the ministry of the Word. According to him, the Anabaptist's one-sided focus on the work of the Holy Spirit led them to the rejection of ecclesial ministry and even to contempt for the church. With the Anabaptist controversy in mind, Bucer emphasizes the role of ecclesial ministry in his *Concerning the True Care of Souls*. God makes use of certain people who receive a special vocation and a public ordination to build his church. It would be a mistake to look down on the formal ministry of the church.[111]

It seems that Bucer's initial insistence on the freedom of the Spirit (the charismatic aspect of the church) contradicts his later emphasis on the institutional character of the ministry of the church. In the eyes of Bucer, this was not the case, though, because every believer received the Holy Spirit and

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[107] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 68; MacCullogh, *Reformation*, 182 ff.; Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 114; See for a historical overview of Anabaptism in Strasbourg: Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 234-298.

[108] Abray, *People's Reformation*, 37 and 110-112.

[109] For example, when parents displayed a sense of solidarity with the Christian community at large, he was even prepared to let parents postpone the baptism of their children for conscience's sake. See Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 250.

[110] The words are from Capito in a letter to Gryneaus. Cited by Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 290.

[111] *BDS 7*, 111.

with him a special gift to serve the whole in his own place. The congregation is a charismatic community *within* (not *above* or *against*) which de ecclesial ministries receive their organic place. Every member has their own vocation, and the ministry of the church can only truly function if every believer takes their own place in the body of Christ.[112]

As became clear in confrontation with Rome, Bucer rejected the division between clergy and laity on the one hand. On the other hand, though, he also fought against the Anabaptists' spiritual volatilization of ordained ministry. How could the relation between clergy and laity be defined more adequately? Ordained ministry, according to Bucer, does not arise from within the community, nor does it stand in opposition to it. The opposite pair 'from above' and 'from below' does not rightly render the way ministry and congregation are related. Because the congregation is Christ's body, all members share in the gifts of the Spirit. It is by the gifts of this Spirit that the ministers of the church are called and empowered. Therefore, ecclesial ministry is always implicated in the congregation. There is a subtle interaction of the charismas and ecclesial ministry that Bucer calls a spiritual partnership.[113]

The confrontation with the Anabaptists also contributed to the genesis of the Reformed elder. The Anabaptists rejected the idea of a *Volkskirche* like Strasbourg and emphasized the importance of purity of the congregation. Their insistence of the importance of sanctification and the need for discipline in the community pointed to a potential weak spot of the covenantal ecclesiology of Bucer and his colleagues. In the end, it was partly thanks to the Anabaptists that Bucer developed his presbyterial church structure.

Based on their covenantal theology, Bucer and his fellow reformers accepted the idea of the city as a sacral community, but the Anabaptists' longing for a holy church of actual believers asked for a response. Bucer gave this response in the form of the institution of confirmation and the creation of church discipline. The confirmation of young believers should ensure a congregation of dedicated members, while church discipline should contribute to the holiness of the church.

In the 1520s Bucer gave little attention to the subject of church discipline, but that changed in the 1530s. Oecolampadius, the reformer of Basel, had been convinced of the need for church discipline since 1518. In the spring of 1530, he gave a speech in which he pleaded for the institution of a purely ecclesiastical discipline and of a presbyterate consisting of pastors and lay presbyters or elders. When the content of this speech reached Strasbourg, Bucer remained hesitant because he still thought that discipline was the task of the civil government. In a letter to Zwingli, he wrote that he fears that the discipline of the church will hinder the work of the magistracy of the city and furthermore that the severity of its practice will do more damage than good.

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[112] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 370-372.

[113] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 374.

Less than half a year later, Bucer had radically changed his opinion. He pointed to the practice in Basel as a promising step towards a much-needed institution of church discipline. Bucer himself does not explain his sudden change of opinion, but it seems likely that the great influx of Anabaptists in Strasbourg during these months and their rising critique concerning the form and the sanctity of the church played a major role.[114] From that moment on, Bucer devoted a lot of time and energy to the restoration of the church discipline.

In the spring of 1531 Bucer, together with Oecolampadius and Blarer, was asked to design a church order for the church in Ulm. Here, for the first time, Bucer seeks to implement an independent ecclesiastical discipline.[115]

To put the practice of church discipline into effect, Bucer proposes the formation of a special board of 'eight esteemed, devout, God-fearing, wise and diligent men': three members of the magistracy, three from the congregation, along with two ministers of the Word. The community should be informed that this board is meant to help in case the community itself cannot help or correct the sinner. When a member falls into sin, a member of the board will admonish him in secret. If this does not help, one or two others will go to him once more. If even that has no result, the sinner will be summoned to appear before the ministers of discipline.[116] In the final draft of the church order of Ulm, almost all the proposals of Bucer could be found, but regarding a purely ecclesiastical discipline the magistracy did not agree. The government should have the last word in matters of excommunication.

Two recurring features come to the fore in this first attempt of Bucer's to implement ecclesiastical discipline. First, for Bucer church discipline is a responsibility of the church and should be independent of civil jurisdiction. Although Bucer does not deny the need for civil discipline and judgement, he does make a clear distinction between church and magistracy.

Second, Bucer stresses the need for helpers of the ministers of the Word in the administration of church discipline. In the eight esteemed and God-fearing men one can recognize what would later become called the elder.

Back in Strasbourg, Bucer attempts to implement ecclesiastical discipline with the aid of special designated men. A milestone in this process is the institution of the so-called *Kirchenpfleger* (church wardens) on 30 October 1531. These church wardens were government officials who were to supervise the doctrine and the life of the preachers and their assistants, although Bucer and his colleagues had hoped that they could play a part in the discipline of the church.

Bucer had fervently hoped that these church wardens would identify themselves with the New Testament presbyters and that they would be viewed as such by the church and the magistracy. In Strasbourg it seemed impossible to

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[114] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 81-82; Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 219-225.
[115] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 106-111.
[116] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 83-87; Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 190-195.

put his ideas concerning elders in practice, though, due to the continuing resistance of the city council.[117]

What can be learned from Bucer's confrontation with the Anabaptists? Bucer's initial emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the freedom of the Spirit gave his ecclesiology a subjective undertone and placed him close to Anabaptist ecclesiology. In the years following the abolition of the mass, Bucer dedicated his energy to rebuttal of what seemed to him major shortcomings of the Anabaptist ecclesiology. The institutional and mediating role of the church received more attention from Bucer in this confrontation.[118]

The confrontation with Roman Catholic ecclesiology made Bucer place his emphases on the freedom of the community and on the Spirit. However, these beliefs alone do not explain the emergence of a presbyterial church structure. It was enough to stress the priesthood of all believers against the Roman Catholic view on ministry, but Bucer places a different emphasis in confrontation with the Anabaptists, that is on the need for the holiness of the church. It was the confrontation with the Anabaptists that convinced Bucer of the need of elders.[119]

2.1.4 Unity of the Church

A very brief interlude is in order here. The description of Bucer's confrontations with the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the Anabaptists on the other demonstrates that, in ecclesiological terms, he stands between two extremes. His views on ecclesial ministry develop in a constant dialogue with divergent theological positions. Not without reason does Bucer himself speak of his theology as a *Via Media*, avoiding the one-sidedness of both extremes.[120] This emphasis on the middle road carries within it the potential to be ecumenically significant.

In his life, Bucer himself also strongly experienced striving for church unity as a personal calling. It is by no means without justification that Greschat included a chapter entitled 'A Champion of Protestant Unity' in his biography of Bucer.[121] During the years 1543 to 1539, he travelled more than 2,000 kilometres annually to advance the cause of Protestant unity. His work in this regard, however, did not focus only on inner Protestant unity. Bucer's participation in the religious colloquies in Leipzig, Hagenau, Worms, and Regensburg show that he was willing to negotiate with his Roman Catholic opponents.[122]

In view of an ecumenically informed theology of ministry, it is important to note that from the source of the Reformed theology of ministry there is a clear ecumenical flow that wells up.

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[117] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 471.
[118] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 101-102.
[119] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 114.
[120] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 465 ff.
[121] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 129-161.
[122] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 178-183.

2.1.5 Magistracy and the Leadership of the Church

In the previous sections I have described two major theological factors that contributed to the shape of Bucer's ecclesiology. As mentioned in the introduction to the section on Bucer, a third factor should be examined. This third factor concerns the socio-political situation of the city of Strasbourg, which played a decisive role in the development of Bucer's ecclesiology. Whereas the confrontation with Roman-Catholic ecclesiology and Anabaptism were more or less confined to certain periods in Bucer's ecclesiological development, the interaction with the socio-political situation permeates his ecclesial work from beginning until the end. Because of this all-pervasive aspect of the socio-political background for Bucer's ecclesiology, its influence is harder to demonstrate than in the case of Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism. Nevertheless, an attempt should be made, because any serious description of Bucer's theology of ministry that does not pay attention to its social and political backdrop falls short by neglecting an important part of the practical hermeneutical circle that informs his ecclesiology.

In *Concerning the True Care of Souls* Bucer explicitly mentions the social-political context of the city state twice. The first time he uses the example of a city council to demonstrate how the community of the church should be governed. The second time, Bucer, without extensive substantiation, refers to the duty of the civil authorities to support the church wherever possible.[123] Bucer's uninhibited use of the socio-political situation of an early modern free city as an example for the organization of the church and his unreflective description of the civil authorities' duties towards the church, reveal how Bucer's ecclesiology is rooted in a Christendom concept that will prove to be highly determinative for the actual form of the church. Berndt Hamm speaks of the late medieval city as a sacral community with a vital connection between 'devotion to the temporal "common good" and the concern for eternal salvation'.[124] The city was – in the words of Bernd Moeller – a *corpus Christianum* in miniature.[125]

One could object that the mere observation that Bucer lived in a Christendom context is self-evident, but this alone does not fully account for the peculiarities of his ecclesiological developments. A brief general sketch of the interaction between Bucer (and his colleagues) and the magistracy through the years reveals an inner tension that remains unresolved.

Initially, Bucer's view on the relationship between church and civic authorities falls completely within the vision of the city as a sacral community. For example, Bucer and his fellow clergymen do not cease to remind the magistrates of their duties towards the church in the ever-present hope that God will use the civic authorities in the implementation of the reformation of the church. The constant pressure exerted by Bucer and his colleagues to abolish the

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[123] *BDS 7*, 120 and 146.

[124] Hamm, 'The Urban Reformation', 194-195.

[125] Cited from Hamm, 'The Urban Reformation', 195.

administration of the Roman Catholic mass, and its actual abolition by the civil authorities in 1529, can serve as one example of this.[126]

Following the abolition of the mass, this tight relationship between church and magistrates is increasingly pressurized, as the handling of the supposed Anabaptist menace by the magistrates and the clergy demonstrates. As mentioned earlier, the influx of Anabaptists and the rise of their anti-authoritarian attitude was perceived as a potential threat to the order of the city. Based on their vision of the city as a sacral community, Bucer and his colleagues strongly opposed the Anabaptist, although they appreciated some aspects of their theology and practice.

The evangelical preachers thus sided with the magistrates in their desire to eliminate the potential threat the Anabaptists posed to the well-being of the sacral community. The magistrates in turn used the preachers 'to channel Strasbourg's reformation in directions where it did the least harm to the status quo and where more of the damage was borne by the clerical than by the lay lords'.[127] It was obvious that the city council gladly used the clergy in the rebuttal of the Anabaptist danger but was not planning to transfer any of his authority to the church out of fear of returning to the ecclesial bondage they rejected when they broke with Rome.[128]

Worse still, at least from the perspective of Bucer and his colleagues, an unintended result of this shared endeavour was that the magistrates seized control over the church in a subtle way. The institution of the church wardens embodies this seizure of power by the magistrates. Deeply desired by the preachers in order to serve the sanctity of the church, the wardens, when actually installed, turned out to be government officials who were to supervise the doctrine and the life of the preachers. Bucer and his colleagues sought a system of church government in which they would have 'at least an equal role with the regime; but what they got was thoroughgoing system of lay government of the church'.[129] In a relative short period, the magistrates had established a control over 'the church and the religious life that would have been unthinkable a generation earlier'.[130]

There was another unintended result of the tight relationship between the magistrates and the church and their joint endeavour against the Anabaptists. Whereas Bucer and his colleagues had initially stressed the concept of the

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[126] Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 63-64.

[127] Abray, *People's Reformation*, 39.

[128] 'The oligarchs did not need the advice of the anti-Bucerians in the schools, the "epicureans", to tell them that Bucer's proposal amounted to a "new papacy", a reconstruction of clerical power.' Brady, *Ruling Class*, 247.

[129] 'The city council turned the preachers into civic employees and made use of their new status as citizens to police them. It created a new lay office, that of church warden, to monitor the preachers' opinions and behavior.' Brady, *Ruling Class*, 247. Also: Abray, *People's Reformation*, 46.

[130] Abray, *People's Reformation*, 43.

priesthood of all believers, the Anabaptist episode had seriously endangered the potential realization of it. Abray claims that 'defeat of the radical movements meant that the egalitarian notion of the priesthood of all believers would be confined to the religious sphere and have limited consequences there'.[131] Williams goes even further and points to the fact that within the context of the Magisterial Reformation 'the doctrine of the lay priesthood had tended so to reinforce a late medieval laicism everywhere that it gave theological colour to the pre-eminence of civic magistrates as the principal laymen of the Reformed churches'.[132] According to him, the Reformers of Strasbourg unintentionally imported the socio-political framework of society into the ecclesiastical structures, thus making it impossible seriously to concretize the doctrine of the priesthood of *all* believers. In theory, the ministry of the church was a feature of the entire congregation, but in practice it was limited to only a small and socially privileged segment of the community.

Williams may go too far when he claims that the magistrates functioned 'as the effectual successors of the apostolic elders and corporately as the local equivalent of the ancient Christian emperors in the council', but his point should be taken.[133] As long as Bucer and his fellow Reformers expected the community of the church and the civil community to be coterminous, the ecclesiological principles of the priesthood of all believers, namely church discipline and the presbyterate, would be almost impossible to realize, given the different interests of church leadership and magistracy.

The control of the church by the magistrates, and their continuing refusal to impose stricter morals on the Christians in Strasbourg, frustrated Bucer and his colleagues so much that they started creating small voluntary communities of dedicated Christians (Christian communities/*Christlichen Gemeinschaften*) that would take church discipline seriously.[134] Behind this attempt to create Christian communities Bucer's commitment to ecclesial unity in Strasbourg is visible, as well as to the holiness of the church and its fidelity to the apostolic model.[135]

Bucer and his colleagues put their hope in these small voluntary communities to choose their own elders who should help the ministers of the Word and administer the church discipline. In the words of Brady: 'Bucer returned at least partly to the congregational principle' that characterized his ecclesiology during his confrontation with Rome.[136]

These small communities embodied the ecclesiastical ideal of Bucer. In a letter from 1547, in which he countered some objections against the *Christlichen*

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[131] Abray, *People's Reformation*, 40

[132] Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 236.

[133] Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 290.

[134] Bellardi, *Geschichte der 'Christlichen Gemeinschaften'*; Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 309ff.

[135] Hammann, 'The creation of the 'Christlichen Gemeinschaften', 143.

[136] Brady, *Ruling Class*, 250.

Gemeinschaften in Strasbourg, Bucer laid out what he had in mind. Based upon Ephesians 4 he emphasized that the building of the community is not only a prerogative of ordained ministry, but of the entire congregation. Therefore, there should not only be public meetings in which the gospel is preached by the ministers of the Word, but also specific gatherings of the community in which every member can share the spiritual gifts they received according to 1 Corinthians 14.[137] The picture that thus emerges is that of small communities of dedicated members who were united in a communal process of spiritual discernment. Interpretation of scripture was not confined to ordained ministry but a feature of the entire congregation as an interpretive community.

Unfortunately, the *Christlichen Gemeinschaften* in Strasbourg had little influence, but according to Van 't Spijker Bucer's plans were realized in the refugee congregation of London, in the proposals of Łaski and the stipulations of the Convent of Wezel.[138]

What can be learned from Bucer's tussle with the magistracy? The confrontations with Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism played a decisive role in the genesis of Bucer's ecclesiology, but it was the constant struggle with the magistracy that eventually shaped the church of Strasbourg. The turning point in this struggle was the creation of the *Christlichen Gemeinschaften* in 1547. Before this point, the praxis of Bucer and his colleagues was aimed (at least partly) at the solidification of the sacral community of the city. From 1547 Bucer and his colleagues chose to opt for an independent church organization that would do justice to some of his ecclesiological principles. These principles could not flourish within the structure of a people's church that was part of the sacral community of the city state.

Williams's observation that Bucer and his colleagues unintentionally imported the socio-political frame should be taken seriously. Notwithstanding the constant criticism of the magistracy of Bucer and his fellow clergymen, before 1547 they essentially served the interests of the secular government of Strasbourg more than their own ecclesiological principles, especially in their strong rebuttal of the Anabaptists. As a result, the Strasbourg church could be considered a magisterial church that was ruled by the same elite that governed the city.[139]

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[137] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 331

[138] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 471.

[139] Brady also points in this direction when he speaks about the social specificity of the various forms of the Reformation. He writes: 'The noble and merchant aristocrats as groups were comfortable either within the old religion, with the highly private spiritualism of Schwenckfeld (for the more forward looking), or with the Lutheran dualism. The less feudal elements of the ruling class, on the other hand, tended to the highly communitarian form of Evangelical religion represented by a Zwingli or a Bucer, plus the republican politics it normally accompanied. Here, among the small independent artisans and tradespeople, the idea of the commune as the Christian collective found its proper social home.' Brady, *Ruling Class*, 295.

The concept of the priesthood of all believers was one of the main victims. The socio-political frame that had, rather unconsciously, been imported into the ecclesiastical structures of the Strasbourg church made it impossible seriously to concretize the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. If one would take the situation before 1547 as starting point one could even say that at the root of the Reformed theology of ministry and its practice lies a social structure which prevents one of its main theological features to become reality.[140] If and how this socially structured and in practical terms even internally contradictive ecclesiology is a peculiarity of the Strasbourg church will have to become clear when I turn to the ecclesiological practice of other Reformers and their churches.

2.1.6 Observations

Theologically, Bucer's ecclesiology developed on the continuum between Roman Catholic clericalism and the Anabaptist emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. Both extremes can be seen as ideal types and, as such, they can function as heuristic tools to identify various ecclesiological emphases.

In his study of Martin Bucer's theology of ministry, Van 't Spijker argues that both fronts emerged in a particular phase of Bucer's work. In the first period, Bucer set his sights on Rome's theology of ministry, while from the mid-1530s onward he gave particular attention to what he saw as the fallacies of the Anabaptists. Toward the end of his life, he seems to have found some balance by systematically opting for the *Via Media*.[141]

Van 't Spijker's description of Bucer seems to assume a steady development toward a proper balance between two extremes. In his historical study of the Reformation in Strasbourg, Brady presents a somewhat different picture. He notes two 'potentially antagonistic moments' – an individualistic moment of freedom based on the Spirit; and an ecclesiastical, corporate moment based on clerical mediation of the gospel – that provide a kind of zigzag movement in Bucer's concrete ecclesiology. Attention to the priesthood of all believers on the one hand and emphasis on clerical mediation of the gospel on the other hand alternate until the very end.[142] Unlike Van 't Spijker, Brady argues that there is not a carefully found and matured balance between the two extremes, but rather an enduring bipolarity caused by the socio-political context of Strasbourg. Clericalism and the priesthood of all believers form the continuum on which Bucer's ecclesiology continues to move without coming to rest.

The strength of Van 't Spijker's approach lies in the in-depth theological analysis of Bucer's writings against the background of the opposition between

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[140] In other wordings, James Kittelson makes the same point in his article on Bucer and the ministry of the church: 'Whatever merit his views of ministry may have had in theological terms, they were at last fundamentally contradictory and unproductive when they were put into practice in his own time and place.' (Kittelson, 'Bucer and the ministry of the church', 94)

[141] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 352.

[142] Brady, *Ruling Class*, 245 n. 36.

Roman Catholic clericalism and Anabaptist egalitarianism. The strength of Brady's analysis lies in its attention to the socio-political context of the early modern city, against the backdrop of which Bucer's concrete ecclesiology took shape.

Taken together, they reveal how ecclesiology, and the socio-political context are tightly interwoven. Van 't Spijker makes clear that there is development and ripening, because over the years the various discussion partners have contributed substantially to his ecclesiology. Brady, however, shows that there is also a zigzag movement between the two extremes: the question at which end of the continuum Bucer's ecclesiology finds itself has everything to do with the extent to which Bucer deliberately moves within the structure of the early modern city as a sacral community. As soon as Bucer moves within this structure, certain aspects that are central to his ecclesiology become subsumed, while in contrast these aspects come to fruition when he chooses an independent course for the church.

The more Bucer operates within the structure of the city state as a *corpus Christianum* and thus emphasizes that the church is a people's church, the more emphasis he places on the institutional side of the church. In his opposition to Anabaptist egalitarianism, he takes his starting point in people's church as a natural part of the sacral community of the city state. In doing so, he ignores some of the perceptions he gained in his discussion with Roman Catholic clericalism. Bucer sacrifices the charismatic character of the congregation on the altar of the sacral community of the city. However, when Bucer chooses an independent course for the church in relation to the sacral community of the city, the charismatic character of the community emerges more fully. This became apparent both in the first subjective phase of Bucer's work in which he primarily opposes the Roman Catholic church and later in the formation of the *Christlichen Gemeinschaften*.

A final key observation concerns the ecumenical slant of Bucer's ecclesiology. His theological middle road between clericalism and egalitarianism has a clear ecumenical potency. In Bucer's case, this was not just a matter of theology on paper but was also evident in his actual commitment to inner-Protestant unity and his participation in various religious colloquies.

With these observations in mind, in the remainder of the chapter I turn to John Calvin and John Łaski. Is the same continuum identifiable in their case and if so, where on the continuum is their ecclesiology located? And just what role do their respective socio-political contexts play in this? These questions are important because their answers convey something of Reformed patterns of thinking.

2.2 John Calvin (1509 – 1564)

In this section I will focus on the theology of ministry of John Calvin. Does Calvin also exhibit a constant oscillation between Bucer's two ecclesiological extremes

or does his ecclesiology display greater stability? And what are the background factors that play a role in answering this question? The focus of these questions implies that I do not necessarily want to survey all of Calvin's theology of ministry. Broadly speaking, Calvin continues to work in Bucer's footsteps. What I am particularly keen to explore are the points in which Calvin differs from his Strasbourg mentor. Precisely these differences can bring us to the specifics of Calvin's doctrine of ministry. Here again I take a hybrid approach in which I wish to try to connect theology and history. I take my starting point in the latest version of the *Institutes*.[143] This choice is well justifiable because in principle all of Calvin's ecclesiology can be found there.[144]

2.2.1 Why Calvin?

The decision to discuss the French reformer may seem obvious from a Reformed point of view. Nonetheless it is good to make my motivations explicit.

The first and primary reason for choosing Calvin for the context of this study is his influence on Reformed Protestantism, which is difficult to overestimate, especially as it developed in the Netherlands. Churches in the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands are referred to as Calvinist for a reason. Calvin's influence on the Reformed churches in the Netherlands can be traced in several ways. I name three of them.

First, the institutional structure of the Genevan church left its imprint on the Dutch Reformed churches. Next, confessionally the Dutch Reformed churches are shaped by the Belgic Confession, which in turn was heavily dependent on the French Confession that was written under influence of Calvin. Moreover, Calvin's *Institutes* have formed many ministers of the Word intellectually. Finally, in the first period of the Reformation in the Netherlands, many ministers of the Word were educated at the academy in Geneva.[145]

The second reason for choosing Calvin has to do with his relationship with Bucer. Bernard Cottret says in his biography of the Genevan reformer that Calvin only really became Calvin during his stay in Strasbourg. By this he means that in

[143] When referring to this work, I will only note the book, chapter and paragraph number that are involved. I mainly used the Latin edition in the *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta* series and the English translation of Battles/McNeill.

[144] According to Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 140.

[145] Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook*, 87-96.

Strasbourg Calvin came upon 'his way of reformation', in which thought, and form are balanced.[146]

In this city in Alsace, Calvin underwent the influence of Martin Bucer, particularly when it came to the organization of the church. Ganoczy argues that Bucer's contribution to Calvin's ecclesiology can never be overemphasized.[147] It was in Strasbourg, for example, that Calvin's thoughts on discipline and the role of church ministers came to fruition. However, upon returning to Geneva, Calvin chose to interpret Bucer's ecclesial principles in his own way.[148]

The last point is important in view of the subject of this study. Calvin incorporated Bucer's legacy into the Genevan context in an autonomous and creative way. While there were certainly points of contact between the socio-political situations of Strasbourg and Geneva, the circumstances were nevertheless different enough to ensure that Geneva's ecclesiological practice was likely to develop its own distinctive dynamic.

2.2.2 Visibility and Invisibility

As an entry point into the distinctiveness of Calvin's doctrine of ministry I will use the recurring tension between the visibility and invisibility of the church in Calvin's ecclesiology.

In the first chapter of the fourth book of his *Institutes* Calvin repeatedly stresses the invisible nature of the church. The foundation of the church is God's secret election. Only God knows who really belong to the church.[149] Therefore, in essence the church is a community that is visible to the eyes of God alone and consists of the elect that have entered into fellowship with Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit.[150]

Of course, that does not preclude the church from having an outward stature. Calvin explicitly makes the visible church the subject of his treatment in the fourth book of his *Institutes*. Following Cyprian, Calvin describes the visible

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[146] Cottret, *Calvin, A Biography*, 132. Maruyama also stresses the importance of the Strasbourg period for Calvin. According to him, the time in Strasbourg is a transitional period between his 'Catholic ecclesiology' and his later 'Reformed ecclesiology' and 'Reformation ecclesiology'. (Maruyama, *Calvin's Ecclesiology*, 225) Maruyama, however, somewhat nuances the picture of Calvin as a faithful student of Bucer. Based in part on the polemical treatise *Theological Advice* (*Consilium theologicum privatim conscriptum*), included only in 1988 in the *Martini Buceri Opera Latina*, in which Bucer distanced himself from certain radical views of Calvin, Maruyama argues that the latter was a much more independent figure in relation to his teacher than is generally assumed. (Maruyama, *Calvin's Ecclesiology*, 259 ff.)

[147] Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 24. See also: Van 't Spijker, 'Bucer's influence' and Van 't Spijker, 'Bucer und Calvin'.

[148] For Calvin's stay in Strasbourg, see Arnold, *John Calvin*; Van 't Spijker, *Calvin,* 51-65; Selderhuis, *Calvin Handbook*, 38-44, and 74-75; Maruyama, *Calvin's Ecclesiology*, 225 ff.

[149] *Institutes* IV. 1.2, 1.3, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 1.16.

[150] *Institutes* IV.1.7.

church as the mother of those who have God as their Father. The image of a mother underlines the indispensable nature of the visible church. As a mother the church conceives, gives birth, nourishes, and cares for the believers. Consequently, there is no salvation outside the visible church.[151]

There is thus a lingering tension in Calvin's ecclesiology.[152] On the one hand, the emphasis on the invisible church seems to tone down the importance of the visible church. On the other hand, in his treatment of the visible church Calvin stresses her necessity in view of eternal salvation.[153]

However, much as he tries, Calvin does not seem to give the visibility of the church full theological weight. In explaining the article concerning the church in the Apostles' Creed, Calvin explains that this article also (*quoque*) applies to some extent (*aliquatenus*) to the outward church. The word 'also' combined with 'to some extent' points to the secondary nature of the visible church.[154] There is the actual church that exists in God's presence, and there is the community which is called church in respect to men.[155]

Calvin's emphasis on divine election with its implicit individual undertones in his ecclesiology seem to pressurize the communal and stimulate the instrumental character of the visible church from the beginning. The church is a necessary means God uses to gather his elect. I should be more precise, though. Calvin does not call the church as such an instrument. According to Calvin, God has deposited the treasure of the Gospel in the church and entrusted her with the external means necessary to beget and increase faith within the elect: the ministry (pastors and teachers) and the sacraments.[156] So, it is not so much the church itself that is an instrument. Rather, the ministry of the church and the sacraments are the instruments that God has entrusted to the church.[157]

Here it is obvious that the tension between the visibility and invisibility and the resulting subsidiary character of the outward church also has its effects on Calvin's treatment of the ministry of the church. On the one hand, the ministry of the church is relativized by Calvin. It belongs to the *bene esse* and not to the

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[151] *Institutes* IV.1.1, 1.4

[152] Ganoczy has shown in his treatment of Calvin's ecclesiology how this secondary nature of the visible church permeates Calvin's ecclesiology from the beginning. See Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 140-175.

[153] Van der Borght signals a tension between the relativity and the indispensable nature of the church. Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 43-44.

[154] *Institutes* IV.1.3. Calvin uses the words 'quoque' and 'aliquatenus'. See also: Graafland, *Gedachten*, 14.

[155] The secondary nature of the church is part of the reason why Calvin places church doctrine outside the actual doctrine of salvation and breaks with the structure of the Apostles' Creed, which he used as a guide in the first three books of the Institution. The church is only an aid to personal salvation. Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 39.

[156] *Institutes* IV.1.1.

[157] See also *Institutes* IV.3.1.

esse of the church. This is underlined by the fact that de ministry does not belong to the *notae ecclesiae* of the visible church according to Calvin.[158]

On the other hand, we can read seemingly contrary passages. After all, the instrumentality of the ministry of the church also points to its indispensable nature. Alongside the sacraments, ecclesial ministry is a necessary and divinely ordained instrument with a view to salvation. Therefore, for Calvin words are lacking to underline the dignity and honour of the ministry.[159] Van der Borght has shown the consequences of this way of treating the ministry by Calvin:

> The service character of the ministry is mortgaged when, at the outset, the God-given order is emphasized – immediately bringing with it connotations of authority and power, and when the testing of obedience is given as the first reason for this order.[160]

2.2.2.1 Front lines

The tensions between visibility and invisibility of the church and between relativity and necessity of ministry have a clear origin in Calvin's theological and ecclesial biography. Just by reading the first two chapters of book IV of the *Institutes* of 1559 one can easily discern two major front lines on which Calvin fought his theological and ecclesial battles: Roman Catholicism on the one side and Anabaptism on the other.

In the first chapter of his fourth book Calvin capaciously refutes the ecclesial perfectionism of Anabaptism. According to Calvin, there is no reason to reject a church as being false because she contains sinners. After all, only God knows who belongs to the church and he 'is daily at work in smoothing out wrinkles and cleansing spots'.[161] In the second chapter Calvin makes great effort to deny the visible institute of the Roman Catholic church its spiritual authority, because it leaves no room for the preaching of the gospel.

These front lines did not just emerge in 1559 but lingered in Calvin's ecclesiology from the beginning. Ganoczy has shown how the tension between visibility and invisibility permeates Calvin's view of the church through the years.[162] In the edition of the *Institutes* of 1536 Calvin emphasizes the invisibility of the church over against the visible institute of the Roman Catholic papacy. In 1539 Calvin already allows more space for the visibility of the church, due to the influence of Bucer's confrontation with Anabaptism in Strasbourg.[163] In the edition of 1543 the visibility and invisibility of the church are even more in

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[158] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 46-47.

[159] See for example *Institutes* IV.3.3, where Calvin uses the following words: 'highest honour and esteem', 'most excellent of all things' and 'nothing more notable or glorious'.

[160] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 45.

[161] *Institutes* IV.1.17.

[162] Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 140-175.

[163] See Balke, *Calvijn en de Doperse Radikalen*, 125-154.

balance. Calvin still takes its invisibility as his starting point, but he devotes ample attention to the outward church that he as a reformer is called to build up. In the edition of 1559, we encounter a synthesis in which visibility and invisibility both have their place.[164]

What can be learned from this for the purpose of this chapter? The bipolarity of Bucer's ecclesiology is also evident in Calvin's treatment of the church, as becomes clear in the tension between the visibility and invisibility of the church. Yet Ganoczy's survey of the various versions of the *Institutes* paints a slightly different picture than the one we encounter in Bucer's ecclesial practice. Whereas in the case of Bucer there is a constant oscillation between the two extremes, in the case of Calvin Ganoczy speaks of the emergence of a synthesis in which all the elements from earlier versions fall into place.[165]

The word synthesis can be deceptive, though, as if the theology of ministry of the last version of the *Institutes* is a balanced treatment that perfectly unites the best of two worlds. Ganoczy means it differently. According to him, it concerns a final synthesis (*endgültige Synthese*) in the sense that the death of the reformer prevented him from developing its thoughts further. So, it is not necessarily the case that in the ecclesiology of the 1559 *Institutes* we find the perfect *Via Media* between Roman Catholic clericalism on the one hand and Anabaptist egalitarianism on the other.

Ganozcy's overview of Calvin's development also suggests otherwise. Ganoczy argues that Calvin began to place increasingly more emphasis on the institutional aspect of the church in his ecclesiology. Ganoczy explains this by the fact that in his ecclesial practice Calvin had to deal more and more with the concrete organization of the church. Also the decisive influence of Bucer in Calvin's Strasbourg years should be taken into account.[166] The tension between invisibility and visibility remains, but gradually the focus comes to lie increasingly on the visibility of the church and the clerical character of the ministry of the Word. Unlike Bucer, therefore, there is no zigzag movement, but rather a steady development. Maruyama somewhat nuances Ganoczy's view by arguing that Calvin had an eye for the visible church from the beginning, although he did give more attention to the legitimate form of the church based

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[164] See also: Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 42-43.

[165] Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 165. Maruyama refers to Calvin's 'Reformation ecclesiology', which can be seen as a culmination of his early 'Catholic ecclesiology', in which he sees the supra-historical church of the elect and the historical community of believers as images of the church, and his later 'Reformed ecclesiology' in which he pays particular attention to the legitimate form of the church. Calvin's 'Reformation ecclesiology', according to Maruyama, involves much more than just an ecclesiology in the strict sense of the word, but concerns a comprehensive vision of Christianity in Europe, placing the reality of church and state under the spiritual kingdom of Christ. (Maruyama, *Calvin's Ecclesiology*, 443-44).

[166] Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 141.

on the Scripture and the ancient church tradition in his later 'Reformed ecclesiology'.[167]

2.2.2.2 Unity of the Church

As with Bucer earlier, a very brief interlude is in order here. In the case of Calvin also, the ecclesiological front lines demonstrate that his theology emerged from a constant dialogue with theological extremes. In this alone, a certain ecumenical slant is visible. However, this ecumenical slant of Calvin is even more evident in his *Institutes*. First, the letter to Francis I, included in all editions of the *Institutes*, shows Calvin's desire to emphasize the Catholic character of the magisterial Reformation. Moreover, in his treatment of ecclesiastical ministries, Calvin extensively elaborates on their historical development. Thus, he tries to demonstrate that there is a high degree of continuity between the ecclesiology of the early church and that of the Reformation in order to emphasize the Catholic character of the latter. Calvin was very concerned with the reformation of the entire Western church, not with the creation of his own denomination.[168]

For Calvin, too, this ecumenical approach was not just a matter of letters on paper, but an essential part of what he considered his vocation. Calvin also took part in the colloquies in Hagenau, Worms, and Regensburg, even if it was at the expense of his health.[169]

2.2.3 Priesthood of All Believers

To bring Calvin's distinctiveness into sharper focus, I now want to focus on two important aspects that came to the fore when dealing with Bucer, namely 'the priesthood of all believers' and the place of the elder.

I start with Calvin's view on the priesthood of all believers. Bucer had emphasized the very concept against the backdrop of Roman Catholic clericalism. Within the context of the sacral community of Strasbourg the priesthood of all believers could not really flourish, but in the short period of the *Christlichen Gemeinschaften* its revolutionary potential became (briefly) visible. The clerical prerogative for the developing of the community was downplayed in favour of the charismatic contribution of the entire congregation. In Calvin's ecclesiology such an emphasis on the charismatic structure of the congregation is hardly found. As will be argued, Calvin did not have too high an opinion of the charismatic character of the congregation.

The difference in emphasis regarding the appreciation of the charismatic nature of the church is already implicit in the massively institutional approach to the ministry of the Word at the beginning of Book IV of the *Institutes*. In IV.1.5 Calvin emphasizes that God has determined that people should be raised by the church as a mother and that God has appointed teachers for this purpose. This

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[167] Maruyama, *Calvin's Ecclesiology*, 443.
[168] Van der Borght, 'Theologie van kerk en ambt', 11-13.
[169] Van 't Spijker, *Calvin,* 61.

institution has a dual function: on the one hand, people are thus exercised in obedience, while on the other hand, God adapts to human weakness, since frail humans could not exist if God addressed the Word directly to them.

When Calvin comes to speak of the ministries in the church in chapter 3 of book IV, he reiterates his point and emphasizes the importance and necessity of ministry in the church. The ministry of men is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body.[170] The ministry of preaching is given the highest honour and esteem and should be considered necessary because it is the way God wants to maintain his church, as becomes clear by the examples of Paul and Peter, among others.[171]

The clerical nature of the ministry of the Word should be seen within the context of divine ordering and the salvific necessity of the church as the mother of the faithful. It is true that Calvin somewhat relativizes the importance of teachers by pointing out their necessary dependence on the Holy Spirit in the following paragraphs, but this does not take away from the fact that the ministry of the Word is restricted to people who have been specially appointed for it. In this regard, Van der Borght asks how much room is left for the meaningful working of the Spirit outside of ministerial access if the ministry of the Word is strictly tied to ecclesial ministry. In addition, the emphasis on the God-given order of ministry in the church immediately brings with it connotations of authority and power, thereby implicitly downplaying the charismatic structure of the congregation.[172]

Calvin's low regard for the charismatic structure of the congregation is also evident in the passive way he speaks of the congregation's role in the election of new pastors. In *Institutes* IV.3.15, Calvin emphasizes the importance of pastors presiding 'over the election in order that the multitude may not go wrong either through fickleness, through evil intentions, or through disorder'. Further on in IV.4.12, however, he goes even further and quotes with approval the decision of the synod of Laodicea, which decided not to leave the choice of a bishop to the people because of 'the multitude's foolish desires'. The role of the church community is clearly minimized, and Calvin's choice of words does not show great appreciation for the people.

This disregard for the role of the congregation is not limited to the text of the *Institutes* but is also evident in the ecclesial practice of Geneva. In the church order established by Calvin, it is the pastors who choose a new pastor. Then they submit their choice to the council of Geneva. Only after that has happened is the candidate presented to the congregation for approval. The election of ministers by the people consisted of no more than the right of ultimate approval or rejection of those already elected. The role of the congregation is thus greatly

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[170] *Institutes* IV.3.2.

[171] *Institutes* IV.3.3.

[172] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 45.

reduced.[173] In this regard, Ganoczy refers to the typical Calvinist distrust of the masses, who are so quick to fall into anarchy and even speaks of an 'aristocratic' trait of Calvin's church practice.[174]

The aristocratic tendency in Geneva's ecclesiastical practice is also confirmed by Naphy's historical description of the Company of Pastors in Geneva. From the moment of his return to Geneva after his period in Strasbourg, Calvin made efforts to improve the quality and consistency of the pastors of Geneva. Naphy speaks of 'a distinct tendency to hire better qualified, more experienced men of prominent background', resulting in a unified and stable Company of Pastors who were marked by education, religious zeal, noble birth and fiery preaching.[175] In his eyes, Calvin embarked on a consistent 'program of pushing aside the earlier, less qualified, less pliant ministers and replacing them with educated, socially prominent, hand-picked foreigners who could be expected to give Calvin their wholehearted support'.[176]

Next to the efforts to improve the Company of Pastors, Calvin and his colleagues were simultaneously concerned with the creation of a stable and united consistory composed partly of members of the magistrate who could not be counted among Calvin's opponents, at the very least. As a result, 'the city's religious settlement was in the hands of a unified, determined, qualified body of men'.[177]

The existence of a unified and determined consistory did not mean that it was of equal importance for the life of the church. The consistory – consisting of pastors and elders – was entirely in the shadow of the Company of Pastors. The elders were only called in in the event of differences regarding doctrine. The task of the elders was limited to overseeing discipline, whereas the actual policy of the church was in the hands of the even smaller circle of Company of Pastors and the city council. The Company of Pastors had the right of nomination in elections, and of the city council was responsible for finances. Nevertheless, taken together, the Company of Pastors and the consistory formed a united and secure ecclesiastical structure that provided Geneva with an aristocratic

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[173] *Ordinances*, 240; Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 262; Graafland, *Gedachten*, 83. Graafland speaks of an ambivalence in Calvin's view of the church. On the one hand he can speak highly of the congregation and speaks of her as 'mother of the faithful' and 'bride of Christ,' while on the other hand he regards the congregation as a fickle crowd. Graafland suggests that Calvin speaks highly of the congregation when he looks at her in the light of God's covenant as it becomes visible around the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, but that he is disparaging the congregation when he looks at her from a social point of view, as it becomes visible around the election of ministers.

[174] Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 19 and 262.

[175] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 75.

[176] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 223.

[177] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 224.

ecclesiastical government that left little to no room for contributions from 'ordinary' church members.[178]

What insights does this description of Calvin's aristocratic tendency provide? The ministry of the Word is for Calvin fundamentally dominated by ordained ministry. This makes it effectively impossible to do justice to the charismatic structure of the church as found in the case of Bucer. This is further exemplified by the aristocratic tendency in the ecclesiastical government of the Genevan church. The procedure in the election of ministers as well as the leadership structure of the church prevent the charismatic structure of the congregation to flourish.

The aristocratic tendency of Calvin's church practice can perhaps be explained by the fact that the Genevan church is a people's church. The church in Geneva did not consist of members who joined voluntarily but was a mixture of dedicated Christians and members who participated in church life only out of duty.[179] Yet Calvin – unlike Bucer with his *Christlichen Gemeinschaften* – never chose to look for smaller communities of committed believers within the church. Instead, he permanently assumed a broad people's church that could only take its holiness seriously under strong ministerial leadership.

2.2.4 The Elder

In confrontation with the Anabaptists, Bucer came to believe that the church could not do without ecclesiastical discipline and without elders to help in this. Bucer and his Strasbourg colleagues regarded this elder as the equivalent of the New Testament elder, although the city council of Strasbourg continued to take a different view and prevented the ministry from flourishing in a way Bucer envisioned.

Even though Calvin and Farel had already hinted at the appointment of virtuous persons who could guard the life conduct of the members of the church during their first period in Geneva, it was not until after his return that Calvin made efforts to establish the ministry of the elder. During his time in Strasbourg, Calvin was immersed in Bucer's views on church discipline and the ministry of the elders.[180]

In the Dutch Reformed circles, Noordmans' statement that Calvin checkmated the Pope with the creation of the ministry of the elder is part of the standard repertoire for emphasizing the importance of the elder. By his remark, Noordmans meant to indicate that Calvin broke Roman Catholic ecclesial hierarchy in favour of collegial church government. Noordmans' statement is symbolic of the high esteem in which the ministry of elder is held in Dutch

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[178] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 77-78; Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 415.

[179] That Calvin would have liked this to be different is shown by the fact that in his first period he was looking for a church made up of members who had consciously subscribed to the principles of the Reformation by requiring the inhabitants of Geneva to make a public confession.

[180] Selderhuis, *Calvin Handbook,* 39/40; Van 't Spijker, *Calvin*, 53-54.

Reformed Protestantism.[181] Another prominent Dutch theologian, A.A. van Ruler, could later even label the elder the true minister.[182]

However, the belief that the ministry of the elder plays a central role in Calvin's theology of ministry needs to be tempered, to say the least. Van der Borght has argued that the prominence of the ministry of elders in Dutch Reformed theology of ministry and practice is partly built on an inadequate translation of the word presbyter in Calvin's *Institutes*.[183] Dutch translations of Calvin's *Institutes* – of which that of Sizoo and De Niet are the most recent – translate the word 'presbyter' in the *Institutes* with 'elder'. This may be understandable, given the fact that the Latin word presbyter has its roots in the Greek word for elder (πρεσβύτερος) but that does not fully justify this translation. When Calvin uses the word 'presbyter', he clearly refers to the minister of the Word or the pastor, whereas he uses the Latin word 'senior' when referring to the ministry of the elder. By mistakenly translating 'presbyter' with 'elder' the impression is given that this ministry plays a major role in Calvin's ecclesiology, whilst in reality its contribution is rather small. Calvin only mentions the ministry of elders (seniors) eleven times in the entire fourth book of his *Institutes* and he limits its function to the administration of church discipline. Within the context of ecclesiastical discipline Calvin – in his exegesis of 1 Timothy 5:17 – does refer to the elder as a second kind of presbyter, but as a separate ministry it remains marginal.[184]

A second reason to nuance the belief that the ministry of the elder has a central position in Calvin's ecclesiology is the fact that the elder – unlike the minister of the Word – does not need to be ordained. In chapter 3.16 of book IV Calvin deals with the ordination of ministers. It is notable that the senior is absent, while the pastors, teachers and even deacons are mentioned. This conspicuous absence confirms that Calvin regarded the elder to be a different kind of ministry.[185]

This is not a mistake on Calvin's part, for the same is visible in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.[186] Unlike the pastors, the elders in Geneva did not

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[181] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 11.

[182] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 13. In view of this high esteem, it is therefore hardly surprising that BEM/m, in which the elder hardly plays any role, was not received well within Dutch Reformed circles. According to several Dutch Reformed theologians, this did not do justice to the legacy of Calvin who had exegetically founded the ministry of the elder. Van der Borght, 'De ouderling revisited', 127.

[183] Van der Borght, 'De ouderling revisited'.

[184] Van der Borght argues that where Calvin uses the word *Prestre* (the French translation of Presbyter) instead of the word *Ancien* in the French translation, he does so to emphasize the ecclesiastical nature of the jurisdiction. Van de Borght, 'De ouderling revisited', 136.

[185] Van der Borght, 'De ouderling revisited', 133.

[186] The first edition of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541 states that it is good to lay on hands, but that it is waived because of the necessity of the times. The 1561 edition is silent about it and refers to the danger of superstition.

need to be ordained. The elder is clearly distinguished from the pastors in the *Ordinances* and he fulfils a kind of intermediary function between the secular government and the church congregation. In this context Ganoczy even speaks of the elders as second-class assistants.[187]

A third reason to put Calvin's central position of the elder in perspective is found in his job description. Where the pastors possess the full ministry, the elders have a clearly defined task: church jurisdiction. The elders have no role in the proclamation or administration of the sacraments but are merely there to assist the pastors in the exercise of church discipline.

In this regard, Van der Borght cites two reasons why Calvin insists on the elder's ministry. On the one hand, the ministry of the elder prevents church jurisdiction from falling into the hands of the government. Through the ministry of elder, the government is still involved in ecclesiastical jurisdiction, yet ecclesiastical discipline remains an ecclesiastical matter. Partly for this reason, Calvin emphasizes the ecclesiastical character of the elder and the consistory. With a nod to Noordmans' statement, Van der Borght says that with the ministry of the elder, Calvin has checkmated the magistrate.[188]

On the other hand, the existence of the ministry of the elder and the consistory prevents the ministers from developing into autocrats with tyrannical traits, like the bishops in the Middle Ages. Therefore, Calvin entrusted the jurisdiction of the church to a council, in which not only the pastors but also the elders participated.

What can be learned from all this? The position of the elder with Calvin is ambivalent, to say the least. On the one hand, as a delegate of the council he is a layman, while on the other hand he seems to belong to the clergy. Ganoczy explains this ambivalence by stating that Calvin's doctrine on this point was not ready yet.[189]

The ambivalence in Calvin's view of the elder demonstrates at the very least, that the elder initially did not have the central place that is attributed to him in Dutch Reformed Protestantism. Calvin's elder concerns little more than an auxiliary ministry for the core ministry of the minister of the Word.

The subsidiary character of the elder underlines once more the aristocratic character of Calvin's doctrine of ministry. The ministers of the Word are the pivot around which ecclesial life revolves and the laity, in the persons of the elders, only have a function as auxiliaries and as an instrument to prevent abuse of power.

2.2.5 Calvin and the Magistracy

In seeking to bring Calvin's distinctiveness in relation to Bucer into sharper focus, it is also important to look at the differences between Strasbourg and Geneva. Like Bucer in Strasbourg, Calvin frequently clashed with the city council

[187] Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 135.
[188] Van der Borght, 'De ouderling revisited', 140.
[189] Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 324.

during his active years in Geneva. Yet Calvin had a greater influence on the magistracy in Geneva than Bucer had on the council in Strasbourg.

During Calvin's first period in Geneva, there was little evidence of his influence on the magistracy. In fact, Calvin and his fellow reformer Farel were exiled for not obeying the council's prohibition against leading a church service on Easter Day 1538. At that point the council did not want to go along with the ecclesiastical practice that Calvin and his colleagues were advocating. However, after Calvin returned at the request of the council in 1541, the situation changed remarkedly. Almost immediately after returning to the city, Calvin was heavily involved in the creation of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, in which the consistory was introduced as a body in which both church leaders and delegates of the magistracy had oversight over the morals of the city.[190] Eire states in his historical survey that with the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, Calvin established 'a greater degree of control over the city than he had enjoyed before, and placed the clergy in a privileged position, as co-administrators of the city'.[191] With this remark, Eire makes it seem as if Calvin, since his return to the city, had a great influence on the policy of the magistracy, when in reality the situation was much more nuanced. Nevertheless, Eire's remark shows that the situation in Geneva was clearly different from that in Strasbourg.

Naphy, in his description of the consolidation of the Reformation in Geneva, draws a picture of a reformer who was, together with his immediate colleagues, working step by step and purposefully to expand their influence. Earlier I spoke of the aristocratic trait that emerged in the creation and staffing of the Company of Pastors and the consistory.[192] Through a policy of effective appointment, Calvin and his colleagues were able to assemble a unified, determined, qualified body of men who collectively formed a strong and stable ecclesiastical structure that would not let itself be outmanoeuvred in the conflicts with magistracy that were frequent until 1555.[193] The creation of a secure ecclesiastical structure gave Calvin a firm grip on church life in Geneva.[194]

Two factors contributed significantly to the great influence Calvin and his colleagues had on the policies of the Geneva Council. First, it is worth remembering that the only available means of mass communication in Geneva was in the hands of the ministers. The councils and courts were largely in the hands of the magistrates, but these often remained invisible to the general public, while the preachers had free access to the pulpits in order to influence, or – in Naphy's words – even indoctrinate, the views of the people.[195] Examination of Calvin's sermons show that they were highly politically informed and also deeply involved in the daily affairs of Geneva, so that his sermons also

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[190] McGrath, *John Calvin*, 111; Van 't Spijker, *Calvin*, 68-69.
[191] Eire, *Reformations*, 299.
[192] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 72.
[193] See Naphy, *Consolidation*, chapters 3 and 6.
[194] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 75 and 222.
[195] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 153-154.

reveal some detailed aspects of the tensions in Genevan society.[196] The influence that Calvin and his colleagues exerted on Geneva from the pulpit cannot easily be overestimated.

A second important factor to consider is the large number of Protestant refugees who found shelter in Geneva. Most of these refugees came from France and some of them were highly educated and wealthy. Since the city council had been struggling for some time to get its finances in order, the wealth of the incoming refugees provided a welcome addition to the city coffers. One way of accessing the financial resources of these refugees was to grant them the status of bourgeois, which gave them the right to vote. From April 1555, the number of new bourgeois from the circle of refugees increased significantly. Indeed this put the city's finances back in order, but it also drastically changed the voting proportions. From 1555, the number of Calvin's supporters in the council increased dramatically and before long the magistracy consisted entirely of Calvin's followers.[197] From 1555 onwards, Calvin and his colleagues could continue to work in relative peace on the consolidation of the Reformation in a city in which consistory and city council acted in harmony.

The relationship between consistory and city council should also be seen in the light of Calvin's view of the independence of the church. While research on Calvin often claims that Calvin emphasized the independence of the church from government, Speelman argued that the reality was more nuanced. Calvin's ecclesiastical practice shows that he did not seek an independent church, but rather sought connection to the Swiss-Zwinglian model, as articulated by Zwingli:

> 'A Christian person is nothing other than a trustworthy and good citizen and a Christian city is nothing other than a Christian church.'[198]

In this model, the church was nothing more than a function of government. The authority in religious and ecclesiastical matters lay with the government, which employed church ministers as civil servants. Calvin never had an independent ecclesiastical organization in mind, evidenced by the fact that he purposely gave the government a central and authoritative place in ecclesiastical discipline. In Calvin's view all the inhabitants of Geneva automatically belonged to the (visible) church. Calvin's ecclesiastical practice, in which he sought close cooperation with the civil authorities, was thus not primarily based on pragmatic considerations but on the fundamental conviction that church and (city) state coincide.

What did this brief survey of Calvin's relationship with the magistracy yield? Like Bucer and his fellow church men in Strasbourg, in Geneva Calvin had to deal with a civil government with whom he regularly disagreed regarding church

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[196] Naphy, *Consolidation*, 160.

[197] McGrath, *John Calvin*, 121-122; Naphy, *Consolidation*, 191-199; Van 't Spijker, *Calvin*, 101.

[198] Speelman, *Calvijn en de zelfstandigheid,* 238.

organization and jurisdiction. However, where in the treatment of Bucer it was shown that the civil government in Strasbourg was increasingly taking control of the church, the opposite could be said of Calvin and Geneva, albeit with some exaggeration: Calvin and his colleagues worked systematically to expand their influence in Geneva, and from 1555 Calvin's followers were effectively in control within the city council. This effort was driven not only by pragmatic considerations, but by the principled conviction that church and state were intertwined.

This principled conviction and its practical implementation resulted in a people's church in which a small spiritual elite determined policy and the laity could have little input. As mentioned earlier, Calvin – unlike Bucer – never chose to look for smaller communities of committed believers within the church. Instead, he permanently assumed a broad people's church that could only take its holiness seriously under strong ministerial leadership.

2.2.6 Observations

Calvin's ecclesiology – like Bucer's – moves against the background of the continuum between Roman Catholic clericalism on the one side and Anabaptist egalitarianism on the other. Moreover, the same ecumenical sense of urgency is visible in Calvin's case as in that of his Strasbourg colleague and, like Bucer, he also actively participated in efforts to restore the unity of the church. However, unlike Bucer, Calvin's ecclesiology does not display a zigzagging between the two extremes, but rather a steady movement toward more clericalism.

Calvin did not have a high opinion of the congregation and, therefore, the charismatic structure of the church community receives much less attention in his case than in Bucer's. Instead, in Geneva, the church was characterized by aristocratic governance structure, in which only a small number of socially privileged lay members had a limited role as auxiliaries. The view that the elder played a prominent role within the church life of Geneva needs to be tempered, to say the least.

Unlike Bucer, Calvin never chose to advocate an autonomous course for the congregation independent of civil government. No doubt this also had something to do with the socio-political situation in Geneva. While Bucer had to stand by and watch while the civil government increasingly seized control of the church, the situation in Geneva shows the opposite trend: increasingly Calvin and his colleagues gained influence within the magistracy. The starting point for Calvin in Geneva always remained the people's church.

2.3 John Łaski (1499 – 1560)

The 'exotic and cosmopolitan' John Łaski is a remarkable figure within the Protestant Reformation who should not go unnoticed.[199] According to Diarmaid

[199] MacCulloch, D., 'The importance of Jan Łaski', 315; MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 254.

MacCulloch, Łaski had by the end of his life 'become more influential in the geographical spread of Reformed Protestantism than John Calvin'.[200] In 1555 John Łaski published his *Forma ac Ratio*, in which he retrospectively described the ideals and practices of the Strangers' Church in London.[201] Together with the historical reconstruction of the Strangers' Church by several scholars, it gives us a good impression of an early Reformed ecclesiology in practice.[202]

In what follows I will highlight the characteristic features of the ecclesiology of Łaski in relation to the ecclesial practice of the Strangers' Church. I will use Łaski's *Forma ac Ratio* as the main source.

Other than in the case of Bucer and Calvin, I will give less explicit attention to the continuum between the ideal types of Roman Catholic clericalism and Anabaptist egalitarianism. I consciously choose to do so, because this continuum is less visible in the case of Łaski than in that of Bucer and Calvin. For the latter two, both extremes formed a constant field of tension within which they had to manoeuvre based on their socio-political context. For Łaski and his *Forma ac Ratio* this is different. Because of the unique situation of the London Strangers' Church, Łaski did not have to relate explicitly to the two extremes in his *Forma ac Ratio*. This does not mean that the continuum does not play a defining role in the background, but rather that it is less suited to serve as an entry point for the treatment of Łaski's ecclesiology.

I begin this section with some brief reflections on the importance of Łaski for the purposes of this study. Next, I will dwell on the unique context of the Strangers' Church within which Łaski was able to do his work, followed by a brief sketch of Łaski's ecclesiological presuppositions. Once the specific circumstances of the Strangers' Church and Łaski's ecclesiological presuppositions are identified, it is possible to appreciate the ecclesiology of the *Forma ac Ratio*.

2.3.1 Why Łaski?

In my mind, there are two substantive reasons for elaborating on Łaski's theology of ministry. First, Łaski exhibits a high degree of kinship with Bucer and Calvin, while pursuing his own course on salient points. In the preface of the *Forma ac Ratio* Łaski says that he has taken the churches of Geneva and Strasbourg as examples for his church order.[203] Evidently, Łaski sees his ecclesiology in line with that of Bucer's and Calvin's. However, this should not give the wrong impression that Łaski offers little more than a summary or a

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[200] MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 254.

[201] For the text of the *Forma ac Ratio*, I use the edition of Abraham Kuyper. When referring to this edition I will use the name *Kuyper* in italics, followed by naming the volume in Latin numbers and the pages in question. For more information, see Springer, *Restoring*.

[202] Among others: Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*; Muylaert, *Shaping*; Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*.

[203] 'Nos id quidam in nostris Ecclesiis pro nostra virili conati sumus, sumpto exemplo a Genevensi et Argentinensi peregrinorum Ecclesia.' *Kuyper*, II, 50.

realization of Bucer's and Calvin's ecclesiological presuppositions. On the contrary, he can be considered an original thinker who creatively elaborated Protestant ecclesiological principles.[204]

In his ecclesiology, Łaski builds on the work of Martin Bucer. He became acquainted with the work of the Strasbourg Reformer when he was indirectly involved in the Cologne Reformation where Bucer designed a new church order.[205] Later in England, too, Łaski would maintain close contacts with Bucer, who was then exiled from Strasbourg.[206] Focusing on Łaski means exploring one of the ways in which the ideas of Bucer became reality.[207]

Next, dwelling upon John Łaski's ecclesiology allows us to draw attention to some peculiarities of the sixteenth century Reformed ecclesiastical practice that are not found in Geneva or in the work of John Calvin and that seem to have disappeared as time has passed. To name only the most striking feature in advance: the practice of *prophetia* in the London refugee congregation is an example not only of the greater involvement of the entire congregation in the preaching of the Word than in Geneva, but also of the wider task of the elders and deacons compared to their Genevan counterparts. By examining the ecclesiastical theory and practice of John Łaski, we might recover some almost forgotten features of Reformed theology of ministry.

I have already quoted the words of Diarmaid MacCulloch, who wrote that by the end of his life Łaski had become 'become more influential in the geographical spread of Reformed Protestantism than John Calvin'.[208] Although his influence waned in the decades after his death, without doubt he helped to shape early Reformed Protestantism, especially in the Netherlands.[209] It was predominantly through the ecclesial practices of the Strangers' Churches in Emden and London that his ideas found their way across the Protestant Reformation on the continent.[210]

An additional consideration concerns recent research on John Łaski. In the last two decades, there have been several publications on the theology and work of John Łaski that enable us to gain a clearer view on part of the less known origins of Reformed theology of ministry. Especially the works of Michael Springer and Judith Becker are helpful in this respect.[211] Springer gives us a

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[204] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 35.

[205] See Van 't Spijker, 'Die Bedeutung', 245-260; Also: Springer, *Restoring*, 4.

[206] Bartel, *Jan Łaski*, 146.

[207] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 456-458, 471. See also Van 't Spijker, 'Die Bedeutung'. According to Becker, we must reckon with the possibility that Łaski mainly referred to Bucer for apologetic purposes. Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 30-31.

[208] MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 254.

[209] Graafland, *Gedachten*, 97.

[210] See Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities* and Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*; Selderhuis, 'Scheepke van Christus in een vreemde haven'; Muylaert, *Shaping*; Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 101.

[211] Springer, *Restoring*; Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*.

detailed analysis of the *Forma ac Ratio*, whereas Becker describes the ecclesiology of John Łaski in the light of ecclesial practice.

In summary: Łaski's influential ecclesiology deserves attention because of his creative adaptation of Reformed ecclesiological principles. Based on primary and secondary sources, it is possible to gain a realistic impression of the concrete ecclesiological practice of the London Strangers' Church.

2.3.2 The Strangers' Church in London

To appreciate church practice as Łaski describes it in the *Forma ac Ratio*, it is important to have some background knowledge of the unique context of Strangers' Church in London.

In the summer of 1549 John Łaski had to leave the East Frisian town of Emden permanently because of the imposition of the *Augsburg Interim*. After an initial attempt to return to his homeland to reform the Polish church had failed, Łaski, with positive testimonies of countess Anna, decided to set sail for London. Already in 1548, Łaski, being in England for diplomatic reasons, had been asked to stay to support the reformation of the English church. At that time, he was not yet ready to leave Emden, but with the coming into force of the *Interim* he made up his mind and left for London. In April 1555 Łaski arrived in the English capital.[212]

In London, Łaski would be leading a remarkable project. During the reign of the young king, Edward VI, there was more room for religious changes than during the reign of his father. An indication of this new openness to Reformation practice and theology were the appointments of Martin Bucer and Peter Vermigli as professor in theology at Oxford and Cambridge.[213] Another sign of the willingness to reform the English church was the creation of the so-called Strangers' Church of London. By the beginning of the 1550s, the number of religious refugees from Italy, France and the Low Countries was considerable and still rising because of the persecution taking place on the European mainland.[214] The evangelical Archbishop Cranmer seized the opportunity and allowed the refugees to organize their own ecclesial practice along Reformation lines in a church organization that was to a considerable extent independent.[215] One of the reasons for this remarkable creation – besides economic and pragmatic considerations – was that these communities would 'serve as a model of the best Reformed practice' and would 'influence the course of further reform in the English church'.[216]

The freedom the Strangers' Church experienced in these first years – the measure of it even surprised the refugees themselves[217] – made it possible for

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[212] Springer, *Restoring*, 44; Muylaert, *Shaping*, 26-27, 29-31.
[213] MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 255; Jürgens, *Johannes a Lasco 1499-1560*, 31-32.
[214] For detailed numbers and statistics, see Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*.
[215] *Kuyper*, II, 52.
[216] Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 45; Muylaert, *Shaping*, 34-35.
[217] Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 35.

Łaski and his fellow clergymen to organize the community according to their ecclesial principles.[218] In fact, this independence is exactly what distinguishes the Strangers' Church from other contemporary Reformed communities. Whereas Bucer and Calvin had to adapt their theological principles to the whims of the city council, Łaski and his fellow members of the church were by no means limited by the demands of any civil court. According to Łaski, the only responsibility of the civil government is to warrant the safety of the church.[219]

The flip side of this independence was the fact that the members could join the congregation only voluntarily. Membership was a deliberate choice and by no means an automatic fact or compulsory. By consequence, foreigners in London could not only join the church if they wanted to but could also leave the community to join the Church of England when they did not agree with certain elements.[220] This voluntary trait, combined with the independence from civic government, makes the London Strangers' Church such an interesting phenomenon. [221]

In conclusion: The *Forma ac Ratio* owes its existence to the unique historical circumstances of the London Strangers' Church. The voluntary character and relative independence together formed the fertile soil for Łaski's ecclesiology. Judith Becker argues that it is the very voluntary nature of the Strangers' Church that prevented it from becoming more influential in the long run. Łaski's ecclesiology resembled in some ways a utopian ideal that could only be realized in the specific socio-political context of Edwardian England with its openness to continental Reformed Protestantism. The safe space that was granted to the Strangers' Church granted Łaski and his colleagues the opportunity to pioneer in the field of Reformed ecclesiological practice, but it should be remembered that the situation in London was exceptional.[222] On the continent the position of the church proved to be more ambiguous and ecclesial, and civil governing structures were at least correlated with one another, as would be the case in a later stage with the Reformed church in the Dutch Republic.[223] Therefore, it was simply impossible to copy and paste the ecclesial practice of the Strangers' Church to the situation of Reformed churches on the European mainland.

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[218] Bartel, *Łaski*, 138.

[219] *Kuyper*, II, 49.

[220] Pettegree shows how in 1553 only half of all the refugees in London had joined the Strangers' Church; Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 78.

[221] Judith Becker even says that the Strangers' Church in London, being an independent and voluntary community, exemplifies what a Reformed ecclesial practice ideally looks like. Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 3.

[222] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 546.

[223] Cf. Van Deursen, *Bavianen*, 31.

2.3.3 *Communio Corporis Christi*

Before I focus on the ecclesial practice of the Strangers' Church, it is necessary to make some general observations about the ecclesiology of Łaski. As I hope to demonstrate, the recurring emphasis on community in his ecclesiology greatly informed the *Forma ac Ratio*.

According to Judith Becker, the relationship between the church and the Lord's Supper is foundational for Łaski's ecclesiology.[224] In her research she argues that for Łaski the community of the church and the celebration of the Lord's Supper stand in a circular relationship to each other and are mutually dependent and foundational.[225] On the one hand, the community of believers can only celebrate the Lord's Supper because it has become the community of Christ's body *(communio corporis Christi)* through the redemptive work of Christ. On the other hand, it is exactly through the Eucharist that the community (again) becomes *communio corporis Christi.* Thus, there can be no celebration of the Lord's Supper without the community that was established through Christ's work. But it is equally true that there can be no community without the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The relevance of the Lord's Supper for the community of believers is exemplified by the admonition of the congregation that follows the actual celebration. After finishing the Eucharist, the minister takes the example of grain that became bread to underline the necessary unity of the congregation. In the same way that a multitude of grains has been made a new substance in the one bread, so the members of the congregation are made one by the Lord's Supper. The example makes clear that by celebrating the Lord's Supper the members of the community are joined in a new kind of communion.[226]

The pivotal importance of the Lord's Supper for the ecclesiology of Łaski demonstrates that no one can be saved without belonging to a specific community of believers. Community with Christ is only possible within the community of the church. Individual salvation is of secondary relevance, being the logical consequence of the communion one has with Christ through the *communio corporis Christi*.[227]

Becker shows how this emphasis on the concrete community distinguishes Łaski from other reformers. For Calvin, for instance, the community of believers is mediated through Christ. The individual believer lives in communion with Christ. This communion is realized by the work of the Holy Spirit and is underlined by the sacraments. The communion of the believer with Christ is grounded in Christology and pneumatology. This does not mean that the individual believer is alone. Through the communion with Christ, the individual believers are connected and mutually responsible. Still, there is no immediate

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[224] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 32.
[225] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 47.
[226] *Kuyper*, II, 168; Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 52.
[227] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 48.

relation between believers.[228] Things are different in the ecclesiology of Łaski. Not the confession of the individual believer is decisive, but the communal confession of faith by the entire congregation. The congregation is the community of Christ's body, and all the members together confess their faith. Unlike Calvin, the members of the congregation thus stand in an immediate relation to each other and share their gifts among each other.[229] The foundational relevance of the *communio corporis Christi* in the ecclesiology of Łaski makes clear that there is no salvation outside the concrete church.[230]

Łaski's emphasis on the importance of the community of believers is further accentuated by comparing his use of the doctrine of election with that of John Calvin. Both Łaski and Calvin can describe the church as the communion of the people that have been called by God.[231] Whereas for Calvin this calling eventually refers to the *decretum horribile* of God, for Łaski it refers to the concrete community of the church. Predestination is not aimed at the individual believer, but at the church as a community that is called out of the world to embody the gospel.[232]

Łaski emphasizes the pivotal importance of the community of believers in his ecclesiology. In this respect he differs from Calvin, whose ecclesiology and church practice reveal that the community of believers is of secondary importance.

2.3.4 Ministry According to the *Forma ac Ratio*

The *Forma ac Ratio* is a church order written for a church that is relatively independent of civil government and has a voluntary trait to it. In addition, the *Forma ac Ratio* is written by a theologian who strongly emphasizes the importance of community. With the unique historical circumstances of the Strangers' Church and Łaski's ecclesiological presupposition in mind, it is time to turn to the *Forma ac Ratio*.

The importance of community in the ecclesiology of Łaski is reflected in his treatment of the diverse ministries within the church. Especially in the election of the ministers the role of the congregation comes to the fore.

Before I elaborate on the practice of the election and ordination of the ministers, I will briefly look at the different types of ministers that Łaski

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[228] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 42.

[229] *Kuyper*, II, 326.

[230] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 41-43.

[231] Calvin in the Catechism of Geneva, in *Studienausgabe 2*, 44. For Łaski, see his definition in the *Compendium Doctrinae*, a confessional instruction to educate the members of the community. Łaski defines the church in the following way: 'Est Igitur Ecclesia coetus eorum qui voce Dei ex universa toto orbe hominum multitudine in populum illi peculiarum evocantur.' *Kuyper*, II, 294. For the distinctive ways in which Łaski uses the word *Coetus*, see Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 40-45; *Kuyper*, II, 295.

[232] Busch, 'Ekklesiologie', 66.

mentions. According to Łaski, there are fundamentally only two sorts of ministries: elders (or presbyters) and deacons.[233]

Although the elders can be further divided into three different types of ministries – ministers of the Word, elders, and the superintendent – they share essentially the same ministry.

The ministers of the Word were to instruct the congregation about doctrine, administer the sacraments and enforce ecclesiastical discipline together with the other elders. Unlike Calvin, Łaski does not distinguish between a doctor who teaches and a pastor who preaches.[234]

The elders were together with preachers responsible for ruling the church according to God's Word. The preachers and the elders are like the senate and are to 'maintain the true religion and enforce ecclesiastical discipline'.[235] The preachers and elders gathered every month in the so-called *Coetus* to discuss administrative and doctrinal matters.

The third type of elder was the superintendent. According to Łaski, Christ himself 'had ordained this office by commanding Peter to confirm the other brothers in the faith'.[236] The superintendent – who should be an ordained minister of the Word – is 'to supervise the congregations and their leaders, ordain and oversee the other ministers, maintain unanimous opinion and purity of doctrine, advise on matters of discipline, and defend the congregations against detectors'.[237]

The diaconate is the second sort of ministry and consists of laymen who are charged with the care for the poor. Their primary responsibility was to collect and redistribute alms, although they also served a disciplinary function, 'admonishing the other ministers who erred in accordance with the church's discipline'.[238] Springer points to the fact that the deacons in the London Strangers' Church were assigned more functions and responsibilities than in Calvin's Geneva.[239] According to the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, the only function of the deacons were to collect the alms and take care of the sick.[240] According to Łaski's *Forma ac Ratio*, the deacons were to help the preachers and elders during the Lord's Supper. Next, they should assist during the weekly prophecy, where they were even allowed to teach the congregation from the Word of God.[241] It was also the responsibility of the deacons to instruct the children of the congregation in the various catechisms, if the parents were unable to. Finally,

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[233] *Kuyper*, II, 51. For a discussion on the number of ministries in the ecclesiology of Łaski, see Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 80-87.

[234] Springer, *Restoring*, 65.

[235] *Kuyper*, II, 56; Springer, *Restoring*, 65.

[236] Springer, *Restoring*, 62.

[237] Springer, *Restoring*, 62.

[238] Springer, *Restoring*, 68.

[239] Springer, *Restoring*, 69.

[240] *Ordinances*, 256.

[241] *Kuyper*, II, 102.

the deacons had to attend the monthly meeting with the other ministers to discuss doctrinal matters and the church administration.

As already mentioned, the importance of the community is reflected in the election of the ministers. Unlike in the situation in Geneva, the entire congregation of the Strangers' Church took part in the election of the new ministers. Whenever a new minister was needed, the leadership of the church should announce the vacancy to the entire congregation and communicate the date of the forthcoming election. A week before the date of the election, the ministers of the Word would preach about the ministerial vacancy that was to be filled and the qualifications that were needed from a possible candidate. In the following week, the members of the congregation could nominate men they thought to be suitable by handing over their names to the ministers of the Word and to the elders. After these seven days, all the nominations were collected and on the basis of this result, all the ministers together selected the new minister. Preferably, but not necessarily, this would be the candidate with the most nominations. Once a candidate was selected, he was publicly examined before presenting him to the entire congregation for their approval. After this presentation, the congregation had an entire week to register their possible objections to the candidates with the other ministers. Once every complaint was properly dealt with, the new ministers could be ordained in front of the entire community.[242]

What does this yield for the purpose of this chapter? The important role of the community in the election of ministers in the Strangers' Church can partly be explained by the unique circumstances in London. Whereas, for instance, the elders in Strasbourg and Geneva were to a certain degree officials from the city council, the Strangers' Churches had the freedom to choose their own elders and deacons and give them a more ecclesial function than elsewhere in the Protestant Reformation.

Next to this independence from government interference, comes the fact that the Strangers' Church was a voluntary community of dedicated believers and religious refugees. Consequently, the level of engagement of the individual members of the community was higher than in other centres of Reformed Protestantism, where church and civil society coincided.[243] Because of this higher level of engagement, it was possible to create more independent ecclesiastical functions than in, for example, Strasbourg or Geneva.

In addition to these contextual explanations, it is important to keep in mind the creative and original ecclesiology of Łaski with its emphasis on community. His insistence on the communal character of the Christian faith helped to open

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[242] *Kuyper*, II, 52-69; Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 87-90; Springer, *Restoring*, 70-75.

[243] Graafland, *Gedachten*, 93-94. Van Ginkel follows A.A. van Schelven and points to the fact that many members of the community were refugees from the cities of Flanders, where they were used to have considerable influence on the city council, Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 180-181.

the door to a greater involvement of the entire congregation in the ruling of the church.

A final observation should be made regarding the ordination of the ministers. The newly elected ministers were to be ordained by ministers of the Word and elders together. There is no difference between a preacher and an elder regarding the ordination. The preachers were not ordained in a special way, nor was it impossible for an elder to ordain a minister of the Word. This proves that for Łaski the minister of the Word and the elder not only share the same ministry, but that they are equally important.[244]

2.3.5 Ecclesiastical Discipline

A considerable part of the *Forma ac Ratio* is devoted to the practice of ecclesiastical discipline. Already in Emden Łaski, under the influence of Bucer and Calvin, had experimented with the administration of church discipline. Once in London, Łaski had the opportunity to rethink the need and form of ecclesiastical discipline. At first sight there are many similarities between the practice of the ecclesiastical discipline of other reformers and that of Łaski, but a closer look shows different emphases that follow from the importance he ascribes to the community of believers.

The first remarkable emphasis concerns the aim of ecclesiastical discipline. Whereas Calvin and other reformers bind the church discipline to the Lord's Supper, Łaski does not make that connection. The ecclesiastical discipline according to Łaski is not in the first place a means to keep the Lord's table pure but is an instrument for the edification of the church. Whenever sinners are excommunicated, it is not because they make the congregation unclean, but because they are a potential threat to the health of the community. After all, when believers see that unchristian behaviour of other members of the community is not dealt with, they may be inclined to follow them in their ways.[245]

Already in the definition Łaski gives at the beginning of the treatment of the discipline this focus becomes clear: church discipline is a procedure based upon scripture that aims at keeping each member, as far as possible, in his or her ministry.[246] The goal of church discipline is thus that every member takes his or her place in the community and shares his or her gifts with the other members.

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[244] See Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 89; Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 181.
[245] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 57-60, 65; Strohm, 'Kirchenzucht', 167.
[246] *Kuyper*, II, 170.

Consequently, the main objective of the ecclesiastical discipline according to Łaski is not punishment, but mutual consolation and edification.[247] The community can only exist when the members of the community admonish each other in love and kindness and when they are prepared to be admonished by others.[248]

A second emphasis follows out of this. Łaski stresses the redemptive nature of church discipline more than other reformers. This becomes vividly clear in the public rite of reconciliation that ends with the preachers and elders giving their hands to the penitent member and embracing and kissing him, signalling the reconciliation with the church.[249] Busch speaks of a difference in perspective between Calvin and Łaski , the former being mainly concerned about the purity of the confessing church and the latter about the salvation of the sinner.[250] The administration of the ecclesiastical discipline according to Łaski is pastoral from the beginning to the end.

A third remarkable emphasis concerns the role of the laity in the process of excommunication. An unrepentant sinner was not to be cut off from the church by the ministers and elders alone, but only after unanimous consent and agreement of the entire congregation. In the *Forma ac Ratio* Łaski criticizes the Roman Catholic church for giving the powers over excommunication to popes and bishops, while Paul in his letters made it clear in his letter to the Corinthians that this was a right that belonged to the entire congregation.[251] The power of the keys was by no means restricted to the ministers of the church but belonged to the entire congregation. The only authority the ministers have is given to them by the entire congregation. Unlike other centres of Reformed Protestantism, the authority of the ministers in London does not derive from a civil government, but only from the community that chooses their own ministers.

Finally, it is characteristic for Łaski's ecclesial practice that all ministers, including the preachers, were subjected to ecclesiastical discipline that was administered by the *Coetus*.[252] Once every three months all the ministers (including the deacons) gathered for mutual consolation and admonition. The Sunday before it was scheduled, the meeting was announced to the congregation and every member had the possibility to make complaints about one or more ministers. During the meeting itself every minister was asked to leave the

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[247] Strohm points to the fact that, unlike Calvin, Łaski does not make a distinction between light and grave sins. The disciplinary measures against a sinner do not depend on the graveness of his sin, but on his attitude towards the pastoral admonitions. The fact that Calvin does make that distinction gives his treatment of the ecclesiastical discipline a judicial undertone. Strohm, 'Kirchenzucht', 157, n. 45.

[248] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 63.

[249] Busch, 'Ekklesiologie', 14; Springer, *Restoring*, 100; Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 106.

[250] Busch, 'Ekklesiologie', 143. Also: Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 56, 104-106.

[251] Springer, *Restoring*, 101-103.

[252] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 178; Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 91.

assembly, in order to give other ministers the possibility to talk freely about him. After his return, the minister was informed about the deliberation and possible admonitions were made.

What can be drawn from this? The charismatic structure of the church in Łaski's *Forma ac Ratio* comes to the fore in his treatment of ecclesiastical discipline. The aim of ecclesiastical discipline is mutual edification and consolation and thus serves the charismatic community of believers. The charismatic foundation of ecclesiology is also apparent in the pivotal role of the congregation in the process of ecclesiastical discipline. This can partly be explained by the unique situation in the Strangers' Church but is also a feature of Łaski's communal ecclesiology.

The fact that all ministers were subjected to administration of discipline of the *Coetus* is unique in contemporary Reformed Protestantism and shows three things. First, this *Censura Morum* underlines the fundamental equality of the different ministries we already signalled when speaking about the ordination of the ministers.[253] Next, Łaski points to the need for *Censura Morum*, because the leadership of the congregation is not in the hands of a single person, but rests with the assembled elders and ministers of the Word. Because ministers of the Word and elders share the leadership of the congregation, they should look after and take care of each other by mutual consolation and admonition. *Censura Morum* is a prerequisite for the edification of the church.[254] Finally, the involvement of the congregation in the *Censura Morum* once again shows the importance Łaski ascribes to the community of believers.

2.3.6 Prophecy

One of the most striking features of the ecclesial practice of the London Strangers' Church is the so-called *Prophecy*.[255] The *Prophecy* was meant to be a discussion on the recently held sermons during the weekday services of the congregation.

In the *Forma ac Ratio* Łaski distinguishes three kinds of *Prophecy* gatherings.[256] First, every Monday and Wednesday Latin lectures on the Bible were held by the Dutch-speaking branch of the community. The purpose of

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[253] Although Łaski does not use the term *Censura Morum*, it adequately describes what was going on in these assemblies. Later communities that were influenced by Łaski did use the term *Censura Morum*. See Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 90.

[254] Becker, *Gemeindeordnung*, 91.

[255] The roots of this London *Prophetia* are uncertain. Where some scholars point to the influence of Zwingli (Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 69), others reject a direct connection between Zürich and London and think of a direct link with Martin Bucer, who was in England at the time (Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 458). An interesting suggestion comes from Van Lieburg, who points to the influence of the elders Valérand Poullian, Richard Vaudeville and Jan Utenhove, who had become acquainted with the work of Bucer in Strasbourg (Van Lieburg, *De reformatorische profetie*, 14).

[256] *Kuyper*, II, 101-105.

these expositions was the edification of the educated members of the community, as well as the training of possible future preachers.

Next, every Tuesday the French-speaking part of the congregation gathered for doctrinal instruction in their own language. At the beginning of this meeting, a minister of the Word, an elder or any other designated member of the community gave an exposition on a biblical text. After he finished, another person also explained the text, followed by the next, and so on. When there was nobody left to explain the text, the one who had opened the meeting closed it. According to Łaski, the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit became visible in manifold explanations and the many admonitions and consolations that flow from it.[257]

The aim of listening to different expositions was to educate the community in the explanation of Scripture. It should be noticed that during this Tuesday meeting, not only the ministers of the Word could explain the Word of God, but also the elders and deacons and even some other designated members of the community.

Finally, the Dutch-speaking branch of the community organized weekday services in their native language on Thursdays. During these meetings, the ministers of the Word were to account for the sermons they had recently held. Members of the community were given the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about the sermons. To prevent chaos, the questions had to be given to the ministers or other designated persons in the week before the meeting was held.

The goal of these gatherings was threefold. First, they reinforced the beliefs of the community and promoted doctrinal unity among the congregation. Next, they exhorted the preachers to take their sermon preparations seriously. Finally, the meetings helped to defend against the proliferation of heretics and sects.

What is the relevance of this? The practice of *Prophecy* in de London Strangers' Church as described in the *Forma ac Ratio* teaches two things regarding Łaski's ecclesiology.

First, it again underlines the importance of the congregation in the administration of the church. The involvement of the community of believers is not restricted to certain formal procedures but concerns even the proclamation of the Word of God. Although the exposition of Scripture was mainly the task of the Superintendent and the ministers of the Word, every member could have a say in doctrinal matters. This becomes especially clear in the fact that even some designated members could explain the Word of God during the *Prophecy*

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[257] 'Manifeste enim conspicitur opulentia donorum Spiritus sancti in Ecclesia in concordi multarum interpretationum circa unum quemlibet scripture locus varietate et exhortationum simul ac consolationum multarum inde petitarum accomodatione.' *Kuyper*, II, 104. Usually, people refer to the Thursday meetings when speaking about the 'Prophecy' in the London Strangers' Church. (For example: Graafland, *Gedachten*, 95.) Though strictly speaking this is not correct, it is understandable, considering the greater freedom and role of the entire community during the Thursday gatherings, compared to the other days.

meetings of the French branch of the Strangers' Church. The difference between clergy and laity is ostensibly kept very small in the ecclesiology of Łaski.

The picture that emerges is that of an interpretive community under the leadership of ordained ministers. The Strangers' Church was a community of dedicated members who were united in a communal process of discernment.

Next, the *Prophecy* gatherings point to the fundamental equality of the different ministries. The preaching of God's Word was not a prerogative of the preachers, but also the elders and even the deacons played their part. The reference Łaski makes to the work of the Spirit in this respect shows us that ministry as such finds its basis in the abundance of the gifts of grace to the respective ministers. Only in mutual recognition of the gifts of the Spirit can the ministers together discern the will of God.

2.3.7 Observations

Although the continuum between the Anabaptist emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and Roman Catholicism does not seem to play a defining role in Łaski's *Forma ac Ratio*, the ecclesial practice of the Strangers' Church seems to be much closer to the Anabaptist end than to the Roman Catholic. The charismatic structure of the congregation is a defining element in the *Forma ac Ratio* and the concrete community of believers plays a much greater role in the Strangers' Church than in Geneva. The communities in London can be seen as embodiments of what Bucer had in mind in Strasbourg when he created the *Christlichen Gemeinschaften*: small interpretative communities of dedicated members who were united in a communal process of spiritual discernment.

It is also noteworthy that the elders and deacons are given a much larger role in the London Strangers' Church than in Strasbourg and Geneva. Whereas in both latter cities elders and deacons were affiliated with the magistracy, in London they were purely ecclesial functionaries. This independence from the civil government meant that the London church was able to interpret their role in its own way. It is striking that their role in the *Forma ac Ratio* is much closer to that of the minister of the Word than in Geneva, where they were both no more than auxiliary ministries to the ministry of the Word. Whether they thereby also fulfilled the ideal that Bucer had in mind with his church wardens cannot be said with certainty.

Finally, it is important to realize that it was precisely the uniqueness of the Strangers' Church that contributed to its limited influence. The independent and voluntary character of the Strangers' church prevented it from exerting more influence on the Reformed churches on the European mainland. In particular the emphasis on the importance of the community of believers was downplayed in Reformed churches, that assumed a correlative relationship between ecclesial and civil governing structures.[258]

[258] See also Graafland, *Gedachten*, 97 ff., who argues that the Dutch Reformed churches exchanged the ecclesial model from London, with its emphasis on the community, for that of Geneva with its aristocratic tendency.

2.4 Distinctive Aspects of Ministry in the Reformed Tradition

What did this cross section of Reformed theology of ministry reveal for the purposes of this study? It is now possible to answer the sub-question:

> *What distinctive aspects of theology of ministry in the Reformed tradition are to be processed in conversation with the theological voices in the remainder of this study?*

2.4.1 Continuum

Early Reformed ecclesiology travels the middle road between Roman-Catholicism and Anabaptism. Consequently, Reformed theology of ministry is located somewhere on the continuum between a clericalist approach on the one hand and an egalitarian one on the other. These approaches can be seen as ideal types and, as such, they can function as heuristic tools to identify various ecclesiological emphases.

In Bucer's case, there was a zigzag movement between these two extremes, while Calvin and Łaski were each at one end of the continuum. For Calvin, the charismatic structure of the congregation only played a marginal role in his ecclesiological practice, whereas for Łaski it was of decisive importance.

The answer to the question where on the continuum the concrete ecclesial practice is located, depends to a large extent on the socio-political context of the respective church. There appears to be a correlation between the socio-political context of respective churches and their ecclesiological practices. In the case of Bucer and Calvin, it is apparent that if the sacral community of the city state and the church coincide, the charismatic character of the congregation fades into the background to give way to an aristocratic form of church government. The creation of the *Christlichen Gemeinschaften* shows that Bucer was dissatisfied with this aristocratic tendency. With these communities he sought for a church form in which the charismatic character of the congregation was given due place within the structures of the city state as a sacral community.

For Calvin, this was different. In his second period in Geneva, he deliberately strove for an aristocratic structure of church government, partly motivated by his low opinion of the common people. No doubt this attitude was also prompted by the fact that in a people's church Calvin had to deal with a sociologically diffuse membership, many of whom were less involved in church practice.

In the case of Łaski, the situation was again quite different. The unique situation of the Strangers' Church allowed Łaski and his colleagues to implement the charismatic structure that he had had in mind from the outset. Much more than in Strasbourg or Geneva, church government in London was a matter for the whole congregation.

In the end, it was the Genevan church model that prevailed in the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands. The central place of the charismatic structure of

the church, as propagated by Bucer and Łaski, gave way to an ecclesiology with aristocratic traits emphasizing the clerical nature of the ecclesial ministry. This development can be explained by the socio-political context in which the Reformed churches (at least in the Dutch Republic) had to manoeuvre and which was characterized by a correlation between ecclesiastical and bourgeois elites.

However, the current post-Christian situation in which churches find themselves in Western Europe seems to have greater similarities with the situation of the London Strangers' Church than with that of Geneva or Strasbourg. More than ever, church communities have an independent and voluntary character. Therefore, there seems to be every reason to pay renewed attention to the situation of the Strangers' Church in London as described by Łaski in the *Forma ac Ratio*. In particular, the charismatic structure of ecclesiology and the resulting greater involvement of the community of believers in church life may receive a more eminent place in current Reformed church practice. Whether and how this is the case is to be clarified in the ensuing chapters' examination of the various theological voices.

2.4.2 Ecumenical Slant

A second important aspect is related to the previous one. The fact that early Reformed ecclesiology is situated on the continuum between clericalism and egalitarianism demonstrates that Reformed theology of ministry emerged in dialogue with ecclesial extremes and in doing so sought to take a *Via Media*. Travelling this middle road has ecumenical potential since it allows Reformed ecclesiology to occupy a mediating position between theological extremes.

The actual participation of Bucer and Calvin in the so-called religious colloquies shows that this was not just a matter of mere words. Reformed ecclesiology - at least if its sources are taken as a starting point - is to be deeply committed to the catholicity of the church.

2.4.3 The Elder and the Charismatic Community of the Church

A third comment concerns the position of the elder. Although the first contours of the ministry of the elder are already visible in the thoughts of Bucer, his ideas never became reality for a longer period. It is therefore problematic to draw far-reaching conclusions regarding the ministry of the elder in the case of Bucer.

Two possible variations of the ministry of the elder emerge in Geneva and in London. In the case of Calvin, the elder seems to be little more than an auxiliary ministry to the ministry of the Word, while Łaski places the elder (and the deacon!) much closer to the ministry of the Word. In the case of Calvin there is a qualitative distinction that manifests itself in the fact that the elder is not ordained, while Łaski seems to make only a gradual distinction. Again, it appears that Łaski and Calvin are at different ends of the ideal-typical continuum.

In any case, the cross section shows that the figure of the elder is less pronounced than is generally assumed.[259] At the very least, it can be said that the ministry of elder is a symbol of the input of the community of believers in the governance of the church. The position of the elder is, in a sense, a yardstick for the charismatic character of the congregation. Whenever the elder is regarded merely as an auxiliary office – as in Geneva – the charismatic level of ecclesiological practice is low. Whenever the elder is placed closer to the minister of the Word – as in London – the charismatic structure of the congregation seems to receive more emphasis.

With respect to the ministry of the elder, Reformed ministerial practice will find itself also somewhere on the continuum between clericalism and egalitarianism. Again, it will have to be taken into consideration that the current post-Christian context is seemingly more similar to the situation in London, than to that of Geneva and Strasbourg.

The cross section shows that the often-heard statement that the minister of the Word is nothing other than an elder with a special assignment, is historically questionable at the very least. If only the situation of London is kept in mind, this might be the case, but for Strasbourg and Geneva it certainly is not. To answer the question of the status of the elder and the distinctiveness of the minister of the Word, an appeal to tradition alone is not sufficient. It is necessary to make a theological assessment based on a conversation with Reformed tradition and other church traditions. In that conversation, the elder can be considered as a symbol of the charismatic structure of the congregation that should not be replaced by a clerical one.

2.4.4 Liturgical Rooting

A third comment concerns the liturgical role of ordained ministry. All three protagonists agree that the administration of the sacraments should be in the hands of the ministers of the Word. Even in the case of the Strangers' Church, the elders were not given the authority to celebrate the Eucharist. Clearly, Bucer, Calvin and Łaski saw the liturgical role of the ministry of the Word as one of its distinguishing features. So, from a Reformed perspective, ordained ministry is called into being by the Spirit working in the charismatic community of the church, but then takes root in the liturgy where the Christ event is celebrated.[260]

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[259] The observation that the elder played only a limited role at the beginning of the Reformed tradition seems to correspond in some ways to the new consensus that is cautiously emerging among New Testament scholars regarding ministries in the early church. In an excursus in the first chapter, I have already shared how several New Testament scholars believe that the ministry of the elder only played a marginal role in the early church. The term elder was primarily an honorary title and, moreover, a designation of the collective of *episkopoi*/house church leaders in a locality, but it did not refer to an independent ministry.

[260] Reference can also be made to recent New Testament research when it comes to the liturgical rooting of ministry. See: Gehring, *House Church*, 226. Wagner, *Die Anfänge*, 48-50 and Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, Chapter 2.

2.4.5 Interpretive Communities

One final comment flows from the emphasis on the charismatic structure of the congregation. Both Bucer and Łaski developed the idea of the church as an interpretive community that, under the leadership of ordained ministry, was searching for the meaning of Scripture in their context. The ministry of the Word, according to them, is not designed to make the interpretive activity of the community superfluous, but, on the contrary, to simulate and feed the communal process of discernment. This emphasis on the communal process of interpretation could play a role in the search for an ecumenically informed ecclesial ministry that serves an adequate and credible expression of the church's missionary calling in the secular culture of the Netherlands.

3. Striving for Unity
The Church: Towards a Common Vision and *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* on Mission and Ministry

This study is written in the belief that reflection on theology of ministry should not happen in isolation but needs to take place within the wider context of ecclesial ecumenism. Especially in view of the missionary dimension of ecclesial ministry, it is important to have an eye for the unity of the church. After all, Jesus himself connects both aspects – missionary vocation and Christian unity – in his high priestly prayer.[261] In pursuing a missionary theology of ministry, I therefore intend to give proper weight to ecumenical developments in this area while operating from a Reformed perspective. The objective here is not so much to pursue a dreamed institutional unity, but much more to contribute to a dialogical or plural unity, that is to communion in diversity.[262]

This means two things. First, taking ecumenical developments seriously involves humbly processing and, where possible, integrating fundamental insights from the ecumenical discussion on ecclesial ministry and mission. Interaction with other traditions, as is happening within the ecumenical movement, challenges one's own ecclesiology. This way one's own self-understanding grows, and the appreciation of other traditions deepens.[263] Second, an ecumenical attitude also means not being ashamed of one's own tradition. Ecclesial humility is different from a lack of theological self-esteem. Engaging ecumenically means cherishing fundamental insights of one's own tradition and bringing them with modest confidence into the ecumenical conversation.[264] Pursuing an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry, as is my intention, thus concerns a two-way street: on the one hand it is about learning from the ecumenical discussion, on the other hand it is important to let the Reformed voice be heard within the ecumenical conversation.

However, giving proper weight to ecumenical developments is easier said than done. The number of ecumenical dialogues has proliferated in recent

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[261] John 17:20-23.

[262] Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, 32; Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority*, 30.

[263] Cf. Best, 'Ecclesiology', 402. Also: Gosker, *Het ambt*, 76.

[264] Avis notes how the acceptance of the diversity of expressions of Christianity 'means recognizing that each manifestation of the Church may have something to teach the others and that our own preferred form may lack something that others can offer. That recognition leads to trying to understand each other better and therefore talking and even worshipping together.' (Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, 16)

decades.[265] From an ecumenical point of view, this could off course be considered a positive thing, but it rather complicates doing proper justice to all the developments on theology of ministry within the ecumenical movement. Hence, a selection of the material is required.

In this chapter I limit myself to two reports from the World Council of Churches in which theology of ministry is explicitly discussed, namely *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) from 1982 and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (CTCV) from 2013.[266] This choice deserves some explanation.

First, there are other ecumenical documents that are seemingly better suited for the pursuit of a Reformed theology of ministry. I am thinking particularly of documents that originated in Protestant contexts, for example the Leuenberg documents on ecclesial ministry.[267] The advantage of such an approach is that documents like these relate specifically Protestant themes more than other reports. The downside of it lies in its a priori limitation to churches from a single tradition. By opting for two WCC reports, it is possible, albeit in a limited way, for Reformed idiosyncrasies to be challenged by theological views from other ecclesial traditions.

Conversely, another possible objection concerns precisely the limitation implied by the choice of WCC documents. For although more than 300 churches are affiliated with the World Council of Churches, this does not necessarily mean that this organization is representative of world Christianity. This is the point made by German missiologist Henning Wrogemann. He argues that some of the ecumenical publications simply ignore numerically very important segments of world Christianity – mostly Pentecostal – and he argues for 'a polycentric understanding of Christianity'.[268] Although Wrogemann's plea for honoring world Christianity is to the point, it does not eliminate the need for limitation. I will, however, bear his caution in mind in, and will give it some attention under the section 'Apostolicity' (§3.3).

In discussing both ecumenical documents, I take my starting point in CTCV. This seems less obvious since BEM/m covers ecclesial ministry more extensively. Nevertheless, the choice is well justified. Unlike BEM/m, CTCV focuses not only on ecclesial ministry, but on ecclesiology in general. It was noted from various sides that a broader ecclesiological embedding was missing in BEM/m, leaving the convergence on ecclesial ministry a bit up in the air.[269] Instead, CTCV as a document is dedicated to broader ecclesiology, so the sections on ecclesial ministry are logically embedded in a broader ecclesiological framework. The disadvantage of not dealing with ecclesial ministry as

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[265] For a review, see: David Nelson/Raid II, *Ecumenism*, 57 ff.

[266] In referring to the BEM report, I will use the abbreviation followed by a slash and the part of the report I am referring to. So, BEM/m means the part of the report that discusses ministry. The letter 'b' refers to Baptism and 'e' to Eucharist.

[267] *Sakramente, Amt, Ordination*, 25 ff.

[268] Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 361 ff.

[269] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 186-187.

extensively in this document as in the Lima document is well covered, as CTCV explicitly refers to and builds on the convergence on ministry noted in BEM/m. Thus, in cases where CTCV is less comprehensive on certain themes, it is easy to fall back on what has been put forth in BEM/m.

My first concern in the current chapter is not to provide a meticulous account of the ecumenical understanding of ecclesial ministry, but rather to offer a missionary assessment of it.

Of course, since this study is written from a desire to be ecumenical, I am also, interested in the distinctive elements of ecumenical theology of ministry that might influence a reflection on Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective.

The sub-questions that concern me when analyzing CTCV and BEM/m are:

> *What are the missionary dimensions and intentions of ecclesiology that emerge in both reports and how can these be made fruitful for a Reformed theology of ministry?*

And:

> *What are indispensable elements of a theology of ministry that strives to be ecumenical?*

With these considerations and questions in mind, I choose the following route. First, I reflect on the missionary presuppositions of CTCV's ecclesiology. I do this by dwelling on the concepts of *koinonia* and *apostolicity*. With this analysis in hand, I then proceed to address the main themes of ecumenical theology of ministry separately.

3.1 BEM/m and CTCV: a Very Brief Historical Introduction

Before entering the analysis, a brief historical introduction is in order. Adopted by the World Council of Churches at its meeting in Lima in 1982, BEM can be considered the 'most significant ecclesiological development in the ecumenical context'.[270] Churches from different backgrounds and traditions found each other in a common understanding of Baptism, Eucharist, and ministry.

BEM is a so-called convergence text, meaning that it should not be read as a consensus that makes visible unity possible. Instead, the text discloses shared convictions and perspectives, but also persistent differences concerning Baptism, Eucharist, and ministry. The report should be seen as a stage towards

[270] Best, 'Ecclesiology', 408. For more background, see Gosker, *Het ambt,* and Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*.

the goal of visible unity.[271] The publication of BEM was followed by a long reception process in which churches were asked to respond to its contents.[272]

From the analysis of the responses received by the World Council of Churches in the reception process following the publication of BEM, it became clear to the Commission on Faith and Order that further study was urgently needed in three areas: the relationship between Scripture and tradition (1), the question of sacrament and sacramentality (2), and the understanding of the church itself (3).[273] In the following years, especially since the fifth world conference of the Word Council of Churches of 1993 in Santiago de Compostela, the latter area became the central theme of ecumenical work. This culminated in a new convergence text on ecclesiology that was published in 2013: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.[274]

In the preface of CTCV, Dr. John Gibaut and Dr. Vasilios, the director and moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, introduce the text by stating that the reflection on the nature and mission of the Church in a situation of ecclesial division has given the impression that various confessional ecclesiologies are irreconcilable. With this in mind, agreement on ecclesiology has been identified as the most elemental theological objective in the quest for Christian unity.[275]

3.2 *Koinonia*

To obtain a proper understanding of the ecclesiological and missionary presuppositions of CTCV, it is helpful to reflect on the concept of *koinonia* as used by the report. I do so by first briefly demonstrating that *koinonia* is a bearing concept in the report. In the next step, I aim to convey through a brief historical overview that the concept is firmly rooted in ecumenical deliberations. Next, I want to reflect from a missiological point of view on the term *koinonia* based on an eschatological critique of the concept. Finally, I want to explore how the concept functions missiologically in CTCV.

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[271] BEM/Preface, ix. On BEM as a convergence text, see also Gosker, *Het ambt*, 22-23.

[272] 'By the year 2000 BEM, translated into almost 40 languages, had become the most widely studied of all ecumenical texts. It had received official response from about 190 churches (and many more from other sources) and had been studied in faculties, lay academies and church education classes around the world.' Best, 2010, 408. A detailed discussion of the reception process is given by Gosker, *Het ambt*, 158 ff.

[273] Best, 'Ecclesiology', 409.

[274] Best, 'Ecclesiology', 409-410; Koffeman, 'Ecumenical Reference Text', 222, ff. See also the historical note that follows the CTCV report: CTCV, 41-46.

[275] CTCV, vii-viii.

3.2.1 *Koinonia* as a Bearing Concept in CTCV

CTCV is built on 'a robust *koinonia* ecclesiology'.[276] The term *koinonia* is introduced immediately in the first section of the report as God's original purpose with creation: mankind is created to live in communion (*koinonia*) with one another and with God. Even in a fallen world, this *koinonia* remains the gift by which the church lives and the gift that God calls the church to offer to humanity.[277] By framing it this way, the concept of *koinonia* is meant to carry a distinctly missionary undertone.

This presumed missionary undertone of the term is further emphasized when it is stated that the 'biblical notion of *koinonia* has become central in the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the Church'. After giving a few biblical examples, the report states that as 'a divinely established communion, the Church belongs to God and does not exist for itself. It is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom.'[278]

Fundamentally, the *koinonia* that CTCV refers to is rooted in the Trinitarian doctrine. The church participates in the *koinonia* of the triune Godhead. The Trinity is the source and focus of the *koinonia* and therefore the church is both a divine and a human reality.[279]

The concept is further is rooted in the liturgy. Especially the celebration of the Eucharist, 'serves as a dynamic paradigm for what such *koinonia* looks like in the present age'.[280] *Koinonia*/communion with God and fellowship with Christians of all times and places is experienced in the liturgy. The liturgical roots and the missionary undertone of the term come together, by stating that the church, strengthened and nourished by the liturgy, 'must continue the life-giving mission of Christ in prophetic and compassionate ministry to the world and in struggle against every form of injustice and oppression, mistrust and conflict created by human beings'.[281]

3.2.2 Historical Background, Content, and Popularity

Since the last quarter of the 20th century, the term *koinonia* has emerged as the most adequate description of the church – in part due to influential theologians

[276] Gibaut, 'The Church', 138. For more background information on the concept of *koinonia*: Best, 'Ecclesiology', 412; Koffeman, *In Order*, 93-96.
[277] CTCV, §1.
[278] CTCV, §13.
[279] CTCV, §23.
[280] CTCV, §67.
[281] CTCV, §67.

such as Boff, Tillard and Zizioulas – within ecumenical circles.[282] In the process of handling responses to the BEM report of 1982, *koinonia* emerged as a concept that could be used by Faith and Order to pursue a convergent vision of ecclesiology.[283] In particular, the Canberra statement of 1991 gave a decisive impetus to place the concept of *koinonia* at the centre of ecclesiology and the search for unity. Section 1.1 of the statement reads as follows:

> The purpose of the Church is to unite people with Christ in the power of the Spirit, to manifest communion in prayer and action and thus to point to the fullness of communion with God, humanity and the whole creation in the glory of the kingdom.[284]

The fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993 was also dedicated to *koinonia*. The theme of the conference was 'Towards Koinonia in Faith Life and Witness' and the message prepared afterwards reads:

> The koinonia we experience drives us to seek that visible unity which can adequately embody our koinonia with God and one another.

And:

> The deeper koinonia which is our goal is for the glory of God and for the sake of the world.[285]

The two study documents on the church published by the Faith and Order commission - *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998) and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005) – that both can be seen as preparation for CTCV, also put *koinonia* at the centre of ecclesiology.[286] Clearly, the ecclesiology of *koinonia* is fully embedded in the ecumenical debate in the recent decades.

In terms of content, the concept of *koinonia* is intertwined with an emphasis on a social reading of the doctrine of Trinity. *Koinonia* refers first to the internal relationships of the persons of the Triune Godhead. The church is a community

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[282] For a more detailed account, see: Sagovski, *Ecumenism*, 18 ff; Flanagan, *Community, Diversity and Salvation*, 27 ff. For Boff's ecclesiology, see: Doyle, 'Social Doctrine of the Trinity'. For the theology of Tillard, see: Flanagan, *Community, Diversity and Salvation*. For the communion ecclesiology of Zizioulas, see: MacDougall, *More than Communion*, 63 ff, and Volf, *After our Likeness*, 73 ff.

[283] Sagovski, *Ecumenism*, 42; Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 186-187.

[284] *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*, 1.1.

[285] *Message from the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, 1993*, section 4 and 5.

[286] See for *Nature and Purpose*, by way of example the ending of the opening chapter: 'The church is not the sum of individual believers in communion with God. It is not primarily a communion of believers with each other. It is their common partaking in God's own life whose innermost being is communion.', 10. Also in *Nature and Mission*: 'The biblical notion of koinonia has become central in the quest for a common understanding of the nature of the Church and its visible unity.', 8.

of persons participating in this inner-trinitarian *koinonia*. This participation in the divine *koinonia* is established and finds its richest expression in the Eucharistic act. *Koinonia* ecclesiology is thus characterized by two main theological foci: the doctrine of the Trinity and the practice of the Eucharist. Trinitarian communion and Eucharistic communion together inform the imagination and practice of ecclesial communion.[287]

The popularity of the term *koinonia* in ecumenical circles can be explained by the high degree of flexibility that characterizes the concept. Brian Flanagan notes how in many cases the term functions more as a theological slogan than a well-defined systematic theological concept.[288] The lack of a strong and clearly defined meaning, combined with theologians and churches adopting their own interpretation of the concept, make *koinonia* broadly applicable.[289] Moreover, more than the concept of "One" from the Nicene creed, the concept of *koinonia* allows for a comparative evaluation of unity: churches may be "more" or "less" in *koinonia* with each other.[290]

3.2.3 Theological Use and Critique

Although the use of the concept of *koinonia* has come under criticism in various ways – for example because of its somewhat shaky Scriptural foundation[291] –, I focus here on the criticism that is most important from a missiological perspective.[292] Nicholas Healy, and more recently Scott MacDougall, have drawn attention to the flawed eschatology that tend to plague *koinonia* ecclesiologies. The implications of this for the relationship between church and world are profound.

Healy notes that in *koinonia* ecclesiology, the true identity or reality of the church is found in its participation in the inner Trinitarian *koinonia*. The primary reality of the church lies in its Eucharistic participation in the inner-trinitarian community.[293] In light of this primary reality, the visible community

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[287] MacDougall, *More than Communion*, 13.

[288] Flanagan, *Communion, Diversity and Salvation*, 30. This flexibility is is at the same time its weakness. It is not inconceivable that the term is and will be 'used in a slovenly and overgeneral fashion to paper over ecumenical cracks' (Sagovski, *Ecumenism*, 4). The occasional lack of precision should not come at the expense of a basic shared understanding of the concept, to avoid dialogue partners having an entirely different meaning in mind when using the same word (Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 449).

[289] Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 445: 'On the one hand, the approach can promote work for equality and freedom within a non-hierarchical communal expression of the primary ecclesial reality (Boff and Hodgson). It can be used, on the other hand, to argue for the restoration of a close-knit, liturgically-oriented community around its bishop (Tillard).'

[290] Flanagan, *Communion, Diversity and Salvation*, 31.

[291] See: Lincoln, 'Communion'.

[292] MacDougal lists the main criticisms in his study. MacDougal, *More than Communion*, 33 ff.

[293] Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 443.

is of derivative value. The true reality of the church is logically and ontologically prior to its external expression in the church. As a result, the focus of ecclesiology is on its primary reality and this functions as the criterion against which the secondary reality, the concrete ecclesial practice as external expression, is measured.[294] The similarity to sacramental theology, with its corresponding emphasis on the inner, invisible *res* and the outer visible *signum* is obvious.[295]

Moreover, Healy observes that *koinonia* ecclesiologies are often characterized by an inherent universalism, which assumes that the divine *koinonia* is a universal possibility. The church is a 'visible expression of a universal, invisible and salvific reality that is already present throughout the world but which as yet remains largely hidden.'[296] In an intensified way, the church embodies the *koinonia* in which the whole of creation shares, albeit not completely. Such a conceived *koinonia* ecclesiology can therefore be world affirming because the world shares in the same *koinonia* structure that is intensely visible in the eucharistic communion of the church.

The danger with a *koinonia* ecclesiology conceived this way, according to Healy, is that it implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) assumes a realized eschatology, while leaving other eschatological perspectives from the Christian tradition wanting. In contrast, both a historically oriented and an apocalyptic eschatology emphasize the ongoing conflict between the present world and God's coming world.[297] The dividing line in this conflict does not run along the border of the church, but right through it.[298] The 'church is, and will remain, imperfect until the eschaton'.[299]

MacDougall shares Healy's observation that *koinonia* ecclesiologies often presuppose a problematic relationship with the world because they assume a flawed eschatology. Based on his analysis of what he sees as the representative *koinonia* ecclesiologies of Zizioulas and Milbank, he, unlike Healy, sees the main problem of these *koinonia* ecclesiologies not so much in the fact that they almost erase the boundary between church and world, but rather in the opposite, namely that they presuppose a strong contrast between church and world. The *koinonia* ecclesiologies of Zizioulas and Milbank both assume a form of realized eschatology and localize the church respectively *beyond the world* and *over*

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[294] Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 444.
[295] Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 444-445.
[296] Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 445.
[297] Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 446.
[298] Another danger of a sacramentally conceived *koinonia* ecclesiology, according to Healy, is that hardly any reasons remain for people to participate in the community of the church. Since the communities of the world also participate in the divine *koinonia*, albeit in a less intensive way, by implication the particularity of the church disappears from view. Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 447-448.
[299] Healy, 'Communion Ecclesiology', 451.

against the world.[300] MacDougall speaks of a tendency towards neo-platonic metaphysics which apotheosizes the church in the case of *koinonia* ecclesiologies. The church as a neo-platonic ideal owes its existence to its participation in divine being and is much less seen as a concrete socio-historical phenomenon in the world. As such, little or no justice is done to the intrinsic value of concrete ecclesial communities and all emphasis is placed on the vertical axis as expressed in the Eucharist. As a result, much attention is often given to ecclesial structures and the hierarchical dimension of the church, as the church is seen as an emanation of the divine being. An abstract ideal of church unity is used to suppress dissent and prevent change.[301] In such a conceived ecclesiology, the *missio ecclesiae* in the world consists of an intense focus on internal devotion and the main missionary objective is self-propagation.[302] Mission aims at the churchification of the world through the transmission of an ecclesial culture and its practices.

MacDougall argues that *koinonia* ecclesiologies need to be recalibrated eschatologically. A *koinonia* ecclesiology with a sound tension between the already-and not-yet character of the kingdom can prevent the church from retreating into itself and focusing only on its own structures and rituals.

It is important to note that both Healy and MacDougall do not reject the concept of *koinonia* as such but draw attention to the limited eschatological presupposition that characterizes many *koinonia* ecclesiologies. A one-sided present-oriented eschatology results in a *missio ecclesiae* that ultimately has nothing else in mind but the churchification of the world. It is therefore necessary to broaden the eschatological imagination of *koinonia* ecclesiologies in such a way that the tension between the already and not-yet of the kingdom can be made fruitful for the mission of the church.

3.2.4 Missiological Use of *Koinonia* in CTCV

Healy and MacDougal's critical analyses make sense, and their warnings should be taken to heart. However, since Healy and MacDougal focus their criticisms on *koinonia* ecclesiologies in general, it is not yet said that the ecclesiology of CTCV suffers from the same shortcoming. The question is therefore whether CTCV is also characterized by a one-sided eschatology and a corresponding self-referential conception of mission?

In §33, CTVC explicitly states that the church is an eschatological reality that lives in anticipation of the coming kingdom but is not yet its full realization. The next section then explicitly refers to the tension between the 'already' and 'not yet' of the kingdom: on the one hand, there are visible signs of the new life as expressed in the *koinonia* that God gives, but on the other hand, people are for the time being subject to the conditions of this world and therefore to the

[300] These designations are the respective titles of the chapters on Zizioulas and Milbank in MacDougall's study.

[301] MacDougal, *More than Communion*, 36-40.

[302] MacDougal, *More than Communion*, 196.

reality of sin. MacDougal therefore rightly argues that in CTCV there is 'an extended and relatively nuanced treatment of eschatology that is absent from most communion-ecclesiological treatments'.[303]

However, this explicit focus on the eschatological proviso regarding the church in CTCV does not necessarily mean that it permeates the rest of the document. The missionary approach to the concept of *koinonia* at the beginning of CTCV suggests otherwise. In §1, CTCV states that all human beings have an inherent capacity for *koinonia* which, although thwarted by human sin and disobedience, is nevertheless part of God's creation. There is a clear point of contact between church and world in the ontological structure of *koinonia* in which they both share. Consequently, the relationship between church and world is not one of antithesis, but one of difference in intensity. The *koinonia* in which all humanity shares, albeit incompletely, is embodied in an intensified way in the church.

The church is a communion in the Triune God and, as a reflection of the inner-trinitarian *koinonia*, she is called to serve God's grace and the purpose of creation, that is, to praise and glorify God.[304] The organizational structures of the Christian community need to be seen and evaluated in light of God's gift of salvation in Christ – i.e. its participation in divine *koinonia* – as celebrated in the liturgy.[305] Echoing Healy, it can be argued that the church in CTCV has a primary reality consisting in participation in the triune Godhead, as manifested in the liturgy, and a secondary reality consisting in its earthly manifestation in the world.

When it comes to the church's mission in the world, its internal life in Eucharistic worship, thanksgiving and intercessory prayer is paramount.[306] The *missio ecclesiae* lies primarily in embodying 'the mystery of salvation and the transfiguration of humanity'.[307] As a divinely established community, the church does not live for itself, but is missionary by nature and called 'to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom'.[308] This strong connection between mission and the internal life of the church as it emerges in CTCV illustrates that the *missio ecclesiae* lies fundamentally in an intense focus on internal devotion as a means of self-propagation. The quote from the study document *Church and World* at the end of the report clearly illustrates the predominantly self-referential nature of mission according to CTCV:

> As the body of Christ, the Church participates in the divine mystery. As mystery, it reveals Christ to the world by proclaiming the

[303] MacDougal, *More than Communion*, 31.
[304] CTCV, §23 and §25.
[305] CTCV, §26.
[306] CTCV, §4.
[307] CTCV, §26.
[308] CTCV, §13.

> Gospel, by celebrating the sacraments (which are themselves called 'mysteries'), and by manifesting the newness of life given by him, thus anticipating the Kingdom already present in him.[309]

All this does not mean that there is no room for evangelism or mission that does not necessarily consist of an emphasis on the liturgy of the church. Several times CTCV refers to evangelism, solidarity with the poor, confrontation with the powers that oppress human beings, open proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and the promotion of justice and peace.[310] This gives CTCV a somewhat ambiguous tone in missionary perspective.

CTCV tries to interweave the mission of the church with the liturgically rooted concept of *koinonia*. The church that lives from the *koinonia* it receives in the liturgy – especially in the Eucharist – may in turn offer this *koinonia* as a gift to the world. The report continues this line in §52 by focusing the ministry of *episkopè* not only on the internal life of the church but by also giving it a role in the mission of the church.[311] From the ministry of Word and sacraments runs a line to the world. The report explicitly refers to Christian service organizations that fall under the *episkopè* of the church. This way the CTCV report tries to bridge the gap between church and world, without losing the distinctiveness of the church. The church is not a regular NGO, but, while serving the world, it bears witness to the secret from which she lives: the self-donation of Jesus Christ.

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[309] CTCV, §58.

[310] CTCV, §4, §25 and §59.

[311] In this context, it is interesting to refer to Stewart's discussion of the role of bishops in the early church (Stewart, *Original Bishops*). Stewart's take is particularly inspiring because he not only points to the liturgical roots of the *episkopos*, but also has an eye for the line that runs from the Eucharist to the world. According to Stewart, the *episkopos* should be considered the leader of the home congregation. Following Hatch (Hatch, *The Organization*, 40 ff.), Stewart sees the origins of the function of *episkopos* in the Hellenistic world, where officers with the same name in particular performed a financial function. According to Stewart, by analogy, the *episkopos* of house churches should be seen particularly as leaders with administrative and charitable functions. Their main task was to oversee the Lord's meal. This meal was celebrated on Saturday evening and was a so-called *Sättigungsmahl* rather than a mere ritual celebration. During this meal there was an excellent opportunity to give charity to those in need. By the time of Ignatius, the move of the Eucharist from Saturday evening to Sunday morning took place, with the meal aspect fading into the background in favor of the religious/ritual aspect. (Stewart, *Original Bishops*, Chapter 2)

According to Stewart, it would be good if this function were brought back into the spotlight. To quote Stewart: 'When I speak of recovering the episcopate, I am referring to the role of the *episkopos* in ensuring that the poor are recognized within the eucharistic community, and also to a recognition of the eucharist as the means to model and to bring about economic and social justice, including the distribution and redistribution of goods within the Christian society as a mirror to the world, and as a means to focus the church's caritative ministry.' (Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, A Concluding Unscientific Postscript)

The heart of the church lies in the liturgy – especially the Eucharist – but its scope is wide.

CTCV's missionary ambiguity can also be shown by focusing on its use of the term *missio Dei*. CTCV mentions *missio Dei* only once, and the concept hardly plays a role in terms of content either. The term *missio Dei* was originally intended to avoid an ecclesiocentric approach to mission, but in CTCV, mission is almost subsumed by the church. Moreover, CTCV lacks focus on God's activity in this world. It is chiefly the church that acts by aligning its structures and actions to the inner-Trinitarian *koinonia* in which it participates. CTCV takes a church-centred approach to mission, in which there seems to be little room for contextual forms of mission and of a church going out into the world.

By way of conclusion, I note that while CTCV pays lip service to eschatology that is mindful of the tension between the already and not-yet character of the kingdom, its substance is based on a lopsided form of realized eschatology in which the church, in the Eucharist, experiences the divine *koinonia* already now. This eschatologically one-sided ecclesiology can barely do full justice to the *missio Dei*, because its *missio ecclesiae* is mainly focused on its own liturgical acts. As the church embodies in an intensified way the *koinonia* that underpins all creation, its mission consists of an increasing emphasis on the liturgy as the place where *koinonia* with God is experienced. Likewise, the considerable attention to ecclesial structures that characterizes the document, as will become visible below, seems the logical consequence of a lopsidedly realized eschatology.

The given analysis moreover raises the question whether the strong intertwining of ecclesiology and the doctrine of the Trinity is fruitful. A supposed rooting of the church in inner-trinitarian relations sometimes seems to rely more on speculative thinking, than on biblical-theological considerations. Biblically speaking, the link between the doctrine of the Trinity and ecclesiology might more properly be located in the mission of God in the world in which the church participates, rather than in the Eucharistic participation in the divine relationality through the liturgy.[312]

All this does not mean that the concept *koinonia* is unsuitable, but rather that it needs to be supplemented in missionary and eschatological terms to be made fruitful for a theology of ministry based on the *missio Dei*. From a missiological point of view, the line running from the Eucharist - as an expression of divine self-donation - seems promising because from the outset it focuses the liturgical life of the church on the world. However, if the liturgy of the church becomes an end in itself, much of its missionary potential is lost again. In eschatological terms, the report's lopsidedly realized eschatology needs to be complemented by a futurist eschatology that can put present and contemporary structures - including those of the church - under the critique of the coming kingdom.

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[312] See McDougall, *More than Communion*, 50 ff.

3.3 Apostolicity

Alongside the concept of *koinonia*, the term apostolicity can also help clarify the missionary presuppositions of CTCV. The term refers - if only etymologically - to the original mission of the apostles in which the church participates. Moreover, in the form of apostolic succession apostolicity is closely linked to the ecumenical conversation on ecclesial ministry.[313] Apostolicity and the intimately related concept of apostolic succession are therefore ideally suited as entry points for a missionary review of the ecumenical discussion on ministry.

I take the following steps. First, I briefly reflect on what CTCV says about apostolicity and compare it with what earlier BEM/m has put forward about the concept. I then want to consider in more detail the fundamental critique that missiologist John Flett has made of the use of the concept of apostolicity in the ecumenical tradition. I end with some conclusions with a view to reading the CTCV's sections on ecclesial ministry.

3.3.1 Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession in CTCV and BEM/m

CTCV deals explicitly with the concept of apostolicity, albeit in an ambiguous way. The report implicitly links the concept of apostolicity to the *missio Dei*. The Father sent the Son, and the Son then chose the apostles whom he appointed as the foundation of the church and overseers of the mission of the church. However, although CTCV thus gives the impression of associating the concept of apostolicity primarily with the church's mission in the world, the same section turns its gaze back inwards. It states that the church is called to be faithful to this calling, and unreliability in worship, witness or service contradicts the church's apostolicity. The order here is significant: worship comes first when it comes to apostolicity. Thus, the concept of apostolicity is first and foremost a yardstick against which to measure the inner life of the church. This is underscored by the fact that in the same section, CTCV also brings up apostolic succession as a means of serving the church's apostolicity. Apostolicity, according to CTCV, is thus closely related to the structure of ordained ministry.[314]

This link between ordained ministry and apostolicity is explicitly discussed in a later section. There the report notes that in addition to the scriptural canon, dogma and liturgical order, ordained ministry plays an important role in preserving apostolicity. Succession in ministry is meant to serve the apostolic continuity of the church.[315] The report then elaborates on the link between apostolicity and ministry but limits itself mainly to discussing points of

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[313] 'The concept of apostolic succession is perhaps the most difficult and deepest ecumenical problem concerning ministry.', Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 302. For a helpful account of the concept of apostolicity in the ecumenical discussion, see: Burkhard, *Apostolicity*, 165 ff.

[314] CTCV, §22.

[315] CTCV, §46.

contention. Some churches see historical episcopacy as an expression of apostolic succession, while others reject the concept of apostolic succession or ministry in general. CTCV refers to BEM/m when it states that the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon 'may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it'.[316]

In the matter of apostolicity, CTCV is thus characterized by a certain ambiguity. On the one hand, there is a clear missionary connotation, but this is almost instantly undone by the strong emphasis on the internal life of the church, especially in ordained ministry. The same ambiguity is visible when it comes to the apostolicity of ordained ministry. On the one hand, succession in ministry is emphasized as an expression of the church's apostolic continuity, but on the other hand, churches that have difficulty with this are also given leeway.

In the section on succession in ministry, CTCV explicitly refers to BEM/m through a quotation that sounds somewhat optional: the threefold ministry *may* serve as an expression of unity and a means for achieving it. In doing so, CTCV does not seem to do full justice to the more directive language used in BEM/m.

BEM/m discusses the concept of apostolicity under the heading: apostolic tradition. According to BEM/m, apostolic tradition in the church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the gospel, celebration of baptism and the Eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibility, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.[317] 'Apostolic' is understood by BEM/m as being faithful to the apostles, both substantively and formally. This does not, however, mean that the missionary dimension is completely side-lined. The report explicitly states that apostolic succession is an expression of continuity with Christ's own mission in which the church participates.[318]

But almost immediately, BEM/m then links apostolicity to ordained ministry. Ordained ministers have the task of preserving and actualizing the apostolic faith. The orderly (lawful) transmission of ordained ministry is therefore a powerful expression of the continuity of the church. One could argue that the link between apostolicity and ministry makes sense, since BEM/m is a report on ecclesial ministry. However, the mode of substantiating this connection shows that BEM/m also focuses apostolicity primarily on the internal life of the church.

BEM/m favours the historical episcopate. Under particular historical circumstances, the succession of bishops, together with the transmission of the gospel and the life of the community, became a means of expressing unity with

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[316] CTCV, §47. The quote is from BEM/m, §22 and refers strictly speaking to the threefold ministry and not to the ministry of the bishop as such. I will return to the issue of threefold ministry in a separate section.

[317] BEM/m, §34.

[318] BEM/m, §35.

the apostolic tradition.[319] Although BEM/m notes an increasing acknowledgement that continuity with the apostolic tradition has also been maintained in non-episcopal churches as well - ordination, for example, is always done by ministers authorized to do so[320] - this observation does not diminish the importance of the episcopal ministry. On the contrary, churches that are not familiar with the episcopate are invited to recognize the episcopate as a sign of continuity and unity, albeit without thereby indicating that their ministry is invalid.[321] CTCV suggests that there is a higher degree of openness in BEM/m than is actually the case: historical episcopacy is the norm, other forms are condoned. By firmly linking apostolicity to a particular structure of ministry BEM/m, even more than CTCV, focuses the concept on the inner ecclesial life and structure rather than on the mission of the church in the world.

This brief overview of what CTCV and BEM/m express about the concept of apostolicity demonstrates a few things. First, both BEM/m and CTCV mention the missionary roots of the concept of apostolicity but refrain from giving it substance. Second, in discussing the concept of apostolicity, BEM/m and CTCV focus mainly on the inner life of the church as expressed especially in the structure of ordained ministry. Third, there has been a cautious development: gradually there has been reduced emphasis on historical episcopacy as the norm for ensuring the church's apostolicity.[322]

3.3.2 A Missiological Critique of the Ecumenical Concept of Apostolicity

To assess the use of the concept of apostolicity in CTCV and BEM/m, it is helpful to listen to John Flett's radical critique of the ecumenical understanding of apostolicity. Flett wants to rethink the concept of apostolicity from the perspective of world Christianity. In listening to Flett, I want to respond somewhat to Wrogemann's warning that world Christianity should also have a place in ecumenical considerations.

Flett notes how the concept of apostolicity in ecumenical circles is seen through the lens of the schism of the European Reformation. In the light of the opposition between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, apostolicity is defined as faithfulness to the apostolic tradition, as handed down in a historical process in a continuous way through institutional orders and forms. Apostolicity then refers to the cultivation of the original apostolic faith and therefore includes notions of historical continuity, stability, order, and ministry.[323] Through discussion of the main ecumenical documents, Flett shows that within ecumenism, apostolicity is first defined in terms of the practices and

[319] BEM/m, §36.
[320] BEM/m, §37.
[321] BEM/m, §38.
[322] Creemers ('Ambt en apostoliciteit', 31) already notes this development in the NMC-report. He observes how the link between apostolicity and episcopacy has gradually disappeared.
[323] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 50-53 and 57 ff.

institutions belonging to the apostolic tradition before identifying their significance to the permanence and service of Christ's mission, as a second step. Such a conception of apostolicity emphasizes (ecclesial) culture as the way in which continuity is ensured, argues Flett.[324]

This view of apostolicity is problematic for several reasons. First, it is questionable from a historical point of view. The ecumenical view of apostolicity assumes that the historical line from Palestine to world Christianity runs through Europe, whereas another reading, in which there is more room for Christian communities that barely play a role in this Eurocentric story, is also possible or even required. At the very least, scholarly research makes it clear that there is no such thing as a 'cohesive and lineal Christian history.'[325] Within the ecumenical discussion, however, this is largely ignored as reference to the historical and cultural origins of structures is increasingly omitted in favour of a sterile discourse on a now universally accepted understanding of ministry and *episkopé*. The curious - and problematic - consequence is that issues of structure and order are immune from the very hermeneutical reflection that is being applied to the canon and sacraments.[326]

Second, the ecumenical concept of apostolicity negatively affects the church's mission. Indeed, when apostolicity is defined as referring to a distinct church culture, mission puts church unity at risk because it potentially brings a range of other cultures into the ecclesial body. As such, mission carries the risk of relativizing institutions, structures, artefacts, symbols, and gestures that are deemed necessary to ensure the church's apostolicity. That this is not an imaginary danger is evidenced by the fact that the appeal of the 20th century missionary movement to reincorporate mission into church practice and ecclesiology resulted in a critical attitude towards existing structures. From an ecumenical point of view, the response to the challenges that cross-cultural mission posed to the churches in the 20th century was to make church structures and practices – i.e., a church culture – sacrosanct with an appeal to apostolicity. The direct consequence of this view of apostolicity – here Flett follows Hoekendijk – is that mission dilutes into proselytism, whereby new believers are initiated into church culture through a process of inculturation, rather than having their own culture renewed in the light of the gospel. At the deepest level, this results in mission degenerating into a form of the widely despised colonialism. Indeed, the logic seems obvious: first, a particular ecclesiastical culture created in Europe is declared normative in order to then impose it on churches in other cultures.[327]

Third, an ecumenically understood form of apostolicity does not do justice to the diversity of world Christianity. Within ecumenism, there is generally mention of diachronic and synchronic diversity, with apostolicity referring to

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[324] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 17.
[325] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 95.
[326] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 59.
[327] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 139 ff.

the diachronic aspect and catholicity to the synchronic.[328] Although catholicity refers to the universal scope of the gospel as manifested in cross-cultural mission, nonetheless, this diversity is not done justice because it is viewed through the lens of an apostolicity that emphasizes uniform historical continuity. By attributing cultural diversity entirely to catholicity (which is constrained by a historically uniform apostolic tradition), apostolicity – and its associated institutions, rituals, and artefacts – is rendered immune to cultural influences. The diversity of the world church is defined as a diversity of gifts and vocations, rather than cultural diversity which would, after all, jeopardize the unity of the apostolic church.[329]

These three objections prompt Flett to rethink the concept of apostolicity from the reality of the world church. He does so partly by connecting with Hoekendijk's insight that the church is a function of the apostolate and as such cannot be reduced to a specific culture or history. On this basis, he engages with the three - in his view - main theorists of world Christianity, Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako, who make it clear - without explicitly mentioning the concept - that the apostolicity of the church implies continuity only insofar it crosses cultural boundaries. The main example cited is Acts 15, where the council of Jerusalem pronounced that there was no need for believers from the gentiles to become culturally Jewish.[330]

Flett examines the New Testament roots of the concept of apostolicity. Using the characteristics of the first apostles, Flett shows that apostolicity points to the church being bound to Jesus Christ beyond itself. The church finds its identity beyond itself, in the history of Jesus Christ. In this resides the possibility of conversion and the possibility of multiple Christian histories. The church's proper externality is that of Jesus Christ himself, meaning that the crossing of cultural boundaries is an immediate consequence of the identity of the church on this ground.[331]

The church's apostolicity and its continuity through history can only be said to have existed when the gospel crossed cultural boundaries and was appropriated into the language, thought forms and structures of this other culture. These cultures did not remain as they were but were turned towards Jesus Christ and redeemed in a process of conversion, and as such were also enabled to be expressions of the gospel in local structures. Summing up, Flett states:

> Faithfulness to its apostolic foundation means that the church must move beyond the borders of its own particular history to proclaim the gospel of history's redemption. Nor is unity institutionally secured. Unity is a living event in which the one body seeks the full stature of

[328] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 76 ff.
[329] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 58-59, 72.
[330] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 241 ff.
[331] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 320.

> Christ. It is a matter of maturity in Christ and so of humbling every cultural pretension to the law of love. Apostolicity, as this participation in the sending of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit, and so in the sending of the apostles is the hermeneutic of discipleship. Apostolicity is true in this plurality. Recognizing this directs us again to the richness of the gospel, for only the Lamb that was slain is able to set the voices of every tongue, nation and tribe in their proper harmony.[332]

Flett calls attention to the missionary roots of the concept of apostolicity and the cultural diversity that naturally flows from it. Instead of the concept of apostolicity proclaiming a particular historically grown structure to be necessary, it brings ecclesial cultures under the criticism of the mission of Christ.

Flett's plea for ecclesial plurality and contextualization of ecclesial practice is justifiable from a missionary point of view. Yet the radicality of his argument is not entirely satisfactory. Indeed, when it comes to fleshing out the content of the concept of apostolicity, he is reticent. Flett's definition of apostolicity refers mainly to the act of cross-cultural appropriation and much less to the content of what is transmitted. Apostolicity, in terms of content, means that the church finds its identity in the story of Jesus Christ, but what exactly this story entails Flett does not make clear. In fact, within the parameters of his approach, he cannot be more specific, because any given description would only be a limited cultural expression of it, which cannot be imposed on Christians and churches from other cultural backgrounds. The question remains, however, whether more needs to be said about the content of apostolicity.[333] After all, what is the story of Jesus? And would it also be conceivable that churches have lost their 'externality' in Christ, despite the insistence on their part that they are still Christian? Flett's argument somehow raises the question of considering instruments - local, supra-local and perhaps even universal - that guarantee the church's externality. However, these instruments will then have to be legitimized theologically, from the *missio Dei* and not from a somewhat conjectural reading of history.

In this context, I also refer to Van de Borght's distinction between a diachronic, synchronic, and eschatological aspect to apostolicity.[334] The diachronic aspect refers to the continuity of the apostolic faith and alludes to Flett's externality of the church in the story of Jesus. However, apostolicity also has a synchronic aspect that refers to the calling to search for truth in communion with other churches.[335] This search can only be fruitful if there is a basic trust that finds expression in the mutual recognition of the instruments

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[332] Flett, *Apostolicity*, 336.

[333] See also: Bevans, S.B., 'Apostolicity', 105.

[334] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 333-334.

[335] In his frugal critique, Bevans also points this out by arguing that Flett's approach should be flanked by a conception of catholicity that emphasizes dialogue. Bevans, S.B., 'Apostolicity', 105.

meant to ensure apostolicity. To me, it seems inevitable that the legitimacy of different forms of oversight will be discussed in that context. But these conversations should not be conducted on the basis of a contested reading of history, but from the viewpoint of the mission of Christ. The eschatological aspect can also be helpful here because it refers to the fact that the full truth will only be revealed in the future and that all truth claims are therefore provisional. This notion should stimulate a humble attitude.

3.3.3 Ecumenical and Missional

Where does this leave us regarding the ecumenical discussion on ecclesial ministry?

First, Flett's analysis is consistent with the observation that CTCV and BEM/m associate apostolicity mainly with the internal life of the church. Both reports pay lip service to the missionary roots of the concept of apostolicity but do not elaborate on it. This observation corresponds to the strongly self-referential missionary focus of CTCV as seen in the discussion of the concept of *koinonia*. Only when the missionary calling of the church is given a rightful place in its movement towards the world and beyond its own borders can justice be done to missionary roots of the concept of apostolicity. Flett convincingly argues that apostolicity does not serve a particular church culture, but the *missio Dei* in which the church participates.

Consequently, theology of ministry will have to take its starting point in the subservience of ordained ministry to the missionary calling of the church in the world and not in assumed normative historical structures or narratives. Flett quite rightly calls attention to the non-existence of a 'cohesive and lineal' Eurocentric history of the church as seems to be assumed in ecumenical documents. From a Western point of view, it is tempting to regard the Greco-Roman Christian tradition as normative, but this in no way does justice to the multicultural and global origins of Christian faith and the church. In the first centuries A.D., there were thriving Christian communities in Africa, the Middle East and Asia that were culturally distinct from the church in the Roman Empire and some of which exist to this day. Christianity was not introduced to Africa and Asia only during the colonial period but had already gained a foothold in these continents in the first centuries of our era. World Christianity is thus not a modern 'invention', but a given since the very earliest beginnings of church history. Ignoring this fact is an expression of the fact that Western-oriented churches have wrongly made their own culture the standard to which Christian communities in other cultures should conform.[336] This calls for a form of intercultural theology that takes seriously the cultural, linguistic, political, religious, social, economic, institutional, and historical diversity of different Christian expressions, not only at a global level, but also at a national and local

[336] For an overview of these forgotten Christian communities, see: Jenkins, *The Lost History* and Bantu, *A Multitude*. In the first chapter of his book, Bantu provides a helpful overview of how the identification of Christianity and Western culture came about.

level. After all, in western European countries and certainly in its major cities, world Christianity is not a remote phenomenon, but is often around the corner.[337]

However, the comparison between the two reports also showed that there is a development within the WCC that is slowly moving away from the emphasis on the ministry of the bishop. The quasi-normative link between apostolicity and episcopacy has been abandoned in favour of more open approach. Apparently, even within the WCC, the notion that structure is not decisive is increasing.

3.4 Elements of Ordained Ministry in the Ecumenical Discussion

With the fundamental considerations from above in mind, it is time to review the key elements of ministry from CTCV and BEM/m. In doing so, I am not so much interested in a relatively simple catalogue of facts, but rather in exploring the way these elements can contribute to reflection on Reformed theology of ministry.

As said, I take my starting point in the CTCV report, but will read it against the background of BEM/m. At the end of this section, I will address some elements that are discussed in BEM/m but not in CTCV.

3.4.1 Charismatic Structure

I start with the charismatic character of the church according to CTCV and BEM/m. This way the *raison d'être* of ordained ministry according to both reports is highlighted. After all, if every member of the congregation has received gifts – which is expressed by the designation 'charismatic character' – then the question why some of them are ordained, while others are not, is significant. What is the rationale for ordained ministry?

CTCV brings up ordained ministry within the framework of the calling of the whole people of God.[338] All members of the church are called 'to be a prophetic people, bearing witness to God's word; a priestly people, offering the sacrifice of a life lived in discipleship; and a royal people, serving as instruments for the establishment of God's reign'. Yet within the circle of his disciples, Jesus already laid the foundation for community leadership. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the early church appointed some believers to have specific authority and responsibility. The task of these ordained ministers is to assemble and build up the Body of Christ through the proclamation of the Word, the

[337] For a short introduction to intercultural theology with some foundational texts, see: Flett/Wrogemann, *Questions*, 175-212. For an extensive discussion, see Wrogemann's three-volume introduction to Intercultural Theology. (Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*; Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*; Wrogemann, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations*)

[338] CTCV, §19.

ministry of the sacraments and in leading the life of the congregation in worship, mission, and diaconate.

All members of the community are interrelated and cannot do without each other. Ordained ministers remind the congregation of their dependence on Jesus Christ as the source of their unity and mission. They can fulfil their calling only if they receive recognition, support, and encouragement from the church.

Further on CTCV characterizes the church as a body built up by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts.[339] This diversity calls for coordination by a ministry of *episkopé*. CTCV thus reiterates the charismatic nature of the church: the ministry of *episkopé* flows from the charismatic structure of the church. Clearly, the ministry of *episkopé* is not intended to make the contribution of the laity redundant, but on the contrary, to provide the proper conditions that will make it possible for the laity to use their gifts in the service of the church and its mission.

CTCV's emphasis on the charismatic nature of the church can be seen as supplementing BEM/m's writing on the subject. Chapter one of BEM/m underlines the fact that all members of the church community have received gifts of the Holy Spirit and should use them for building up the community and for service to the world. However, BEM/m has been criticized for the fact that this theme seems to play no role in the rest of the report. As an ecclesiological foundation, the charismatic structure of the church should have influenced the BEM/m's statements on ordained ministry, but this does not seem to be the case.[340]

The emphasis on the charismatic character of the church seems entirely consistent with what emerged in the treatment of genesis of Reformed theology of ministry. For Bucer and Łaski, ordained ministry was rooted in the charismatic community of the church and thus in pneumatology. Still, a caveat is in order here. CTCV §19 states that ordained ministers remind the community of its commitment to Jesus Christ. The exact phrase used by CTCV is as follows:

> Ordained ministers remind the community of its dependence on Jesus Christ, who is the source of its unity and mission, even as they understand their own ministry as dependent on him.[341]

My concern is with the words after the comma. One cannot draw too big conclusions from a parenthetical phrase, but the impression is still given that ordained ministry is primarily founded christologically and not pneumatologically. In other words, ordained ministry according to CTCV seems not so much embedded in the charismatic structure of the church but should be – in line with BEM/m – seen primarily as a form of Christ-representation. This way, the principled difference between laity and clergy is confirmed and

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[339] CTCV, §52.

[340] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 186-187.

[341] CTCV, §19.

ordained ministry seems to stand opposed to the charismatic community. Emphasizing the charismatic nature of the church on the one hand and grounding ministry christologically on the other makes CTCV ambiguous at this point.

3.4.2 Threefold Ministry

A second element is closely related to the issue of apostolicity and concerns the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. CTCV notes that this pattern has its roots in the New Testament and has gradually become widely accepted.[342] The report then states that churches may be able to reach a consensus as to whether the threefold ministry is part of God 's will for the church.[343]

CTCV builds on BEM/m in this matter. BEM/m claims that during the second and third centuries the threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon became established as universal pattern for ordained ministry and may also serve today as an expression of the unity of the church.[344] Whereas this threefold pattern initially referred to the local Eucharistic community, soon the bishops fulfilled their role in a wider area, and they began the exercise *episkopé* over several local communities.[345] BEM/m further states that the threefold pattern may also serve today as an expression of the unity of the church. The ministry of *episkopé* is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body.[346]

In dealing with the concept of apostolicity, the conjectural nature of this historical reading already emerged. It is helpful to elaborate on that a little. Van der Borght has argued that the argumentation of the report regarding the threefold pattern is rather unconvincing. First, the historical argument is weak, for it does not consider that the threefold pattern of the second century was something completely different from that of the fourth century. Second, the report does not mention the political factor of Constantianism and other possible influences in describing the development of the threefold pattern, making it seem that the evolution was something neutral or purely positive. This reveals a somewhat naive view of history.[347] Moreover, the central argument that the threefold pattern is the best way to express church unity is based on a selective reading of history. The report does not dwell on the presbyteral and diaconal tasks regarding the unity of the church, but only on the *episkopé*

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[342] CTCV, §46.

[343] CTCV, §47.

[344] BEM/m, §19. From a Reformed perspective, it is important to realize that BEM/m uses the word *presbyter* to denote someone other than the Reformed elder. By *presbyter*, the report means a minister of the Word and sacraments in the local Eucharistic community as opposed to the bishop, whose role functions as a ministry of oversight in an area consisting of several Eucharistic communities. See: BEM/m §21, 29, 30.

[345] BEM/m, §21.

[346] BEM/m, §23.

[347] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 259-260.

function as it comes to the fore in the ministry of the bishop. This way, churches are not so much challenged to accept the threefold pattern, but they are expected to accept the bishop as an expression of the unity of the church.[348]

The threefold pattern of ministry was, according to Van der Borght, a creative solution in the first centuries by a church that was keenly aware of its missionary calling. There is a considerable risk that structures and forms, which served well at one point, become rigid and develop into more of a hindrance than a benefit. He infers that the future is not in accepting old forms in order to achieve unity, but in seeking how churches together can take their missionary calling seriously.[349]

In line with Flett, Van der Borght argues that a Reformed theology of ministry should not take its starting point in a contested reading of history. Instead of looking for specific functions for historically transmitted ministries, Reformed theology of ministry should start with the fundamental tasks of ordained ministry.[350] Since, from a Reformed perspective, the fundamental tasks of ordained ministry all revolve around the ministry of the Word, this seems to be a basic premise for a contextualized structure of ministry.[351]

3.4.3 *Episkopé*

The *episkopé* function of ordained ministry has already been mentioned several times.[352] Although, in the ecumenical reports, *episkopé* is usually associated with the ministry of the bishop, it does not necessarily refer to this particular form. I will discuss the ministry of the bishop in a subsequent section, but here it is good to briefly discuss what is meant by *episkopé*. Three things emerge when it comes to the *episkopé* function of ordained ministry: authority, coordination and synodality.

3.4.3.1 Authority

CTCV first brings up the ministry of *episkopé* in the context of authority in the church. All authority in the church comes from Jesus. However, he allowed the apostles to share in his authority. The successors of the apostles 'in the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*) exercised authority in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the eucharist, and in the pastoral guidance of believers.' This way, *episkopé* is clearly associated with authority. But this authority is firmly embedded.

First, CTCV makes it clear that the authority is bound by the ministry of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and the pastoral guidance of the believers. Next, CTCV makes clear that authority in the church 'must be

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[348] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 260.
[349] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 260.
[350] See § 3.3.3.
[351] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 285-286.
[352] For this, see: Brinkman, *A Reformed Voice*, 197-209.

understood as humble service, nourishing, and building up the *koinonia* of the Church in faith, life and witness'. Jesus' action of washing the feet of his disciples is used as the example par excellence of this serving authority without domination or coercion.[353] Clearly, authority in the church is something completely different from mere power.[354]

CTCV also deals with the relation between ordained ministry and the community that is subjected to its authority. It states that the authority of ordained ministry is neither only personal, nor only delegated by the community, but a more nuanced description is necessary. Authority should be considered a gift of the Spirit for the service of the church done out of love, in which the whole community participates. The reception of the guidance and teaching of the ordained ministers by the community testifies to the authenticity of ministerial leadership. The report speaks of relation of mutual love and dialogue. The exercise of authority can call for obedience on the part of ordained ministry, 'but such a call is meant to be welcomed with voluntary cooperation and consent since its aim is to assist believers in growing to full maturity in Christ'.[355]

From a Reformed perspective, it is notable that CTCV closely links the authority and performance of *episkopé* function to the proclamation of the Word and the ministry of the sacraments. Also, the attempt to articulate subtly the relationship between ordained ministry and the congregation is consistent with how this is spoken of in the Reformed tradition of theology of ministry. However, the statements about authority mainly concern the way in which authority should be exercised rather than what this authority consists of in terms of content. It is important to flesh out the concept of authority when thinking through the theology of ministry from a missionary perspective, especially given that in a post-enlightenment culture, the concept of authority is likely to encounter resistance.[356]

3.4.3.2 Coordination

In §52, CTCV brings up *episkopé* in reference to the coordination of the various gifts and ministries given to the church by the Holy Spirit. The first part of that article reads as follows:

> The Church, as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God, is built up by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or ministries. This diversity calls for a ministry of co-ordination so that these gifts may enrich the whole Church, its unity and mission. The faithful exercise of the ministry of episkopé under the Gospel by

[353] CTCV, §49.
[354] CTCV, §50.
[355] CTCV, §51.
[356] For the troublesome position of authority since the Enlightenment, see: Verhaeghe, *Autoriteit*, 20 ff.

> persons chosen and set aside for such ministry is a requirement of fundamental importance for the Church's life and mission. The specific development of structures of episkopé varied in different times and places; but all communities, whether episcopally ordered or not, continued to see the need for a ministry of episkopé. In every case episkopé is in the service of maintaining continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life. In addition to preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments, a principal purpose of this ministry is faithfully to safeguard and hand on revealed truth, to hold the local congregations in communion, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the Gospel. Such guidance includes the oversight of the various Christian service organizations dedicated to bettering human life and to the relief of suffering...[357]

A few things stand out. First, *episkopé* is clearly associated with the charismatic character of the community. The ministry of *episkopé* is rather like a conductor of an orchestra making sure that the various instruments are in tune with each other. In this way, *episkopé* also serves the unity of the church.

In addition, the ministry of *episkopé* serves to preserve faithfulness to apostolic origins. *Episkopé* is meant to guarantee, what Flett calls, the externality of the church.

Next, CTCV argues that the form *episkopé* assumed may have varied by time and place. While the report between the lines expresses a preference for the episcopal design of *episkopé*, it does give leeway to churches that have shaped the function differently.

Finally, *episkopé* is explicitly associated with the mission of the church. The ministry of *episkopé* is partly intended to lead the church in witnessing to the Gospel. Moreover, this function also concerns the oversight of Christian welfare organizations. The missionary thrusts of the ministry of *episkopé* seem promising, but because they are embedded in an ecclesiology that is deeply focused on self-propagation, they are eclipsed by the other aspects of the *episkopé* ministry.

3.4.3.3 Synodality

CTCV also relates the exercise of *episkopé* to synodality or conciliarity. The report traces the root of the term synodality back to the Greek terms *syn* (with) and *odos* (way), suggesting it to mean a 'walking together'. With this in mind, the term synodality signifies that 'each member of the body of Christ, by virtue of Baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility' in the communion of the church. This way, the concept flows from the charismatic structure.

True to the *koinonia* ecclesiology of CTCV, synodality is explicitly related to the Trinity by saying that 'the quality of synodality or conciliarity reflects the

[357] CTCV, §52.

mystery of the trinitarian life of God, and the structures of the church express this quality so as to actualize the community's life as a communion'.

CTCV makes clear that the whole church is synodal/conciliar, at all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional, and universal. In the local Eucharistic community, synodality 'is experienced in the profound unity in love and truth between the members and their presiding minister.'[358] Despite emphasizing that synodality extends to all levels, the report is primarily concerned with the supra-local dimension. In sections 53–57 CTCV discusses the phenomenon of ecumenical councils and the ministry of primacy in the church. After noting that ecumenical synods are convened in crucial situations, 'to discern the apostolic faith in response to doctrinal or moral dangers or heresies', the report discusses the matter of who presides over these councils and then proceeds by handling the ministry of primacy. Finally, CTCV shares, without commenting on it, the observation that churches have different views about the participation and the role of the laity.[359]

When it comes to synodality, the report echoes sentiments that are consistent with Reformed theology of ministry. For example, synodality is implicitly related to the charismatic structure of the church. Considering the relationship between synodality and the charismatic structure of the church, it is only natural that from a Reformed perspective there should be an emphasis on the contribution of laity at church meetings.

The brief survey shows that the term *episkopé* in CTCV refers not so much to a specific ministry, but rather to an indispensable constituent of ecclesial ministry. Although the form of the *episkopé* function may vary by ecclesial tradition, its essential elements cannot be found wanting in a structure of ministry that want to be ecumenical. Moreover, the concept of *episkopé* is, with some refinements, well in tune with fundamental insights of the Reformed tradition.

3.4.4 Dimensions of Ordained Ministry

Another important element of ministry in CTCV and BEM/m concerns the different dimensions of ministry. Without saying anything else novel, CTCV explicitly refers to BEM/m here.[360] Therefore I limit myself to the treatment of BEM/m.

BEM/m states that ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial, and communal way. The commentary to this section explicitly links these dimensions to the episcopal, presbyteral, and congregational systems of church government.

[358] CTCV, §53.
[359] CTCV, §53.
[360] CTCV, §52.

3.4.4.1 Personal Dimension

BEM/m distinguishes between the local and regional level of the personal dimension of ordained ministry. Because BEM/m refers to the personal dimension of ordained ministry on a regional level primarily in terms of the ministry of the bishop, I will not discuss it here but in the next section.

At the local level, ordained ministry should be personal 'because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness'.[361]

The stress on the personal dimension of ministry can be considered challenging for churches from the Reformed tradition since the personal exercise of ordained ministry 'tends to be downplayed in Protestantism'.[362] This reluctance is most probably born out of fear of potential abuse of power by the person of the minister. However, notwithstanding Reformed reservations, the personal dimension of ordained ministry itself is present in the Protestant tradition. An emphasis on the personal calling of the minister, acknowledged by the church in the act of public ordination, has traditionally been an element of Reformed theology of ministry. The ordained minister owes his ministry to his personal calling and his words and actions are in the end not determined by the majority of a governing body. The personal dimension of ordained ministry underlines the freedom of the proclamation of the gospel that originates in God's initiative.

There is an important caveat to the personal dimension of ordained ministry, though. In Reformed theology of ministry, it is not the person as such who points to Christ, but only in so far as that person exercises the ministry of the Word. The person of the minister gains credibility and authority only to the extent that he is serving the proclamation of the Word.[363] I will return to this under the heading of representation.

3.4.4.2 Collegial Dimension

In the Reformed tradition collegiality is highly emphasized when it comes to the ministry of the church. Power in churches is not exercised by individual ministers but by a collegial body of ministers, elders and (sometimes) deacons. Fear of abuse of power resulted in a long tradition of collegial leadership of the faith community.

On first reading, it seems as if the BEM/m report fits this seamlessly. A more careful reading, however, reveals a different story. The collegiality the report refers to is not the collegiality of the Reformed church council consisting of ordained minsters, elders, and deacons, but the collegiality of ordained minsters among themselves. The report speaks of 'a college of ordained ministers'.[364] The

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[361] BEM/m, §26.

[362] Koffeman, *In Order*, 126.

[363] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 270.

[364] BEM/m, §26.

collegiality of the Reformed tradition is more likely to fall under what BEM/m calls the communal dimension of ordained ministry.

Mutual collegiality of ordained ministers in Reformed ministerial practice is not a given and in practice local ministers often work as solo pastors in their own congregation. There is, however, a clear example in the Reformed tradition of the collegiality the BEM report refers to. The Company of Pastors in Calvin's Geneva practically functioned in a way congruent with the BEM report. In analogy to this Genevan example, Van der Borght cautiously pleads for a collegial body of ministers that functions at the level beyond the local and that can work in the field of policy preparation.[365]

3.4.4.3 Communal Dimension

In addition, the BEM report speaks of the communal dimension of ordained ministry 'where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's active participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit'.[366] As said, the communal dimension of the BEM report corresponds most closely to the collegiality of the Reformed tradition. Reformed elders and deacons, who are elected by the congregation and represent the faith community, are continually involved in policymaking through the church council. Here, however, the caveat must be added that even within Reformed churches there is sometimes an aristocratic tendency, which in practice places the leadership in the hands of only a small, privileged group. Therefore, Reformed churches, too, must seek ways in which the communal dimension of the church can be best served. [367]

[365] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 273.
[366] BEM/m, §26.
[367] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 274.

3.4.5 The Ministry of the Bishop

The ministry of bishop has come up several times without giving a more detailed account. However, in a chapter on the ecumenical theology of ministry, a treatment of this ministry cannot be lacking. [368]

Since CTCV does not devote many words to this office, I limit myself to what BEM/m writes about it. BEM/m brings up the bishop by speaking of a personal dimension of ordained ministry at the regional level. It says: 'At the regional level there is again need for an ordained minister's exercising a service of unity.'[369] In light of the sections that follow in the report, this personal dimension of ordained ministry should be read as a plea for a bishop function in the church.

In section 29 BEM/m elaborates on the function of bishops. The key functions of the bishop are the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and the administration of discipline. They are, in a representative way, pastoral ministers of oversight, continuity and unity in the church.

The uniqueness of the bishop in BEM/m lies in two main areas.[370] First, they are, in communion with the presbyters and deacons, responsible for the orderly transfer of ministerial authority of the church. Next, they have responsibility for leadership in the church's mission.[371]

It is important to note that BEM/m does not attribute to the bishop any tasks that are alien to the Reformed concept of ministry. In fact, the bishop has the same task as the local minister, only at a regional level and in a representative

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[368] Since CTCV does not go into it too deeply and because it does not directly contribute to a missionary reflection theology of ministry, I do not address the question of primacy. The CTCV report discusses the ministry of primacy by first giving a brief historical reconstruction of its genesis and the controversies surrounding it and then proceeds by giving a description of the current situation. The fifth world council on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993 raised the question 'of a universal ministry of Christian unity'. The subsequent discussion showed a continuing disagreement but also signs of openness to the matter. Given the ecumenical sensitivity, the report argues that 'it is important to distinguish between the essence of a ministry of primacy and any particular ways in which it has been or is currently being exercised. All would agree that any such personal primatial ministry would need to be exercised in communal and collegial ways'. (CTCV, §§ 55-56).368 The report ends the discussion with the observation that there 'is still much work to be done to arrive at a convergence on this topic'. (CTCV, §57) Gosker notices how the matter of the primacy of the Pope is the most important neglected issue in the BEM report. Clearly, CTCV's considerations, however provisional, fill a gap. (Gosker, *Het ambt*, 86.) CTCV correctly argues that there is still a long way to go in terms of convergence on the issue of a ministry of primacy. Nevertheless, the observation that there is a distinction between the essence of such a ministry and the particular ways in which it has been or is currently exercised should be heard.

[369] BEM/m §27.

[370] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 286.

[371] BEM/m §29.

way. So, the case for a bishop is not necessarily at odds with Reformed theology of ministry.

First, because the bishop as proposed by BEM/m can be considered a minister of the Word, albeit with a locality that differs from that of a local minister. Next, any form of hierarchy is principally countered by the collegial and communal dimension of the ministry of the church.[372]

For ecumenical, practical, pastoral and missiological reasons, the plea for a bishop might be worth considering from a Reformed perspective. For ecumenical reasons the plea for a bishop might be taken seriously. Considering the Reformed tendency towards fragmentation, a supra-local ministry in the church could be welcomed as potential expression of the church's unity. This could work two ways. First, a ministry of unity would bind congregations of the own denomination closer together. Next, the ministry of a bishop would fit well with the majority of churches throughout the world.[373]

Also, for practical reasons the plea for a bishop might be heard. Presbyterial-synodal churches tend to experience a tendency towards more bureaucracy. In light of the increasing burden of time-consuming church meetings with limited result, it would be worth considering the pastoral and personal leadership of a bishop.[374]

There are pastoral reasons that might lend strength to the plea for a bishop. In many Reformed denominations the local ministers are left without pastoral oversight. The lack of *pastor pastorum* is felt whenever local ministers are struggling with the challenges of their ministry. A regional personal ministry could fill this gap by offering pastoral help and guidance.[375]

Finally, there might be a missionary reason to consider the ministry of a bishop. BEM/m report links the bishop to leadership in the mission of the church. The supra-local personal leadership of a bishop could help the churches in his region to join forces in missionary matters.

3.4.6 Ministry as a Focus of Unity

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the treatment of ecclesial ministry in CTCV is more concise than in BEM/m. Moreover, not all aspects discussed in BEM/m are reflected in CTCV. In the following sections, I deal with some defining aspects of ecclesial ministry in ecumenical discussion as covered by BEM/m but not reflected in CTCV. I start with ministry as a focus of unity.

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[372] Already in the introduction, I explained that while Kronenburg names the missionary motif in his study, referring to the example of Newbigin, he does not elaborate on it. (Kronenburg, *Episcopus oecumenicus*, 371, 372)

[373] Kronenburg, *Episcopus Oecumenicus*, 236-238.

[374] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 272. In Kronenburg's study, this falls under what he calls an ecclesiological motif. (Kronenburg, *Episcopus Oecumenicus*, 234-236)

[375] Kronenburg, *Episcopus Oecumenicus*, 227-231.

BEM/m strongly emphasizes ordained ministry as a focus of unity.[376] BEM/m presents the threefold pattern of ministry as a possible expression of the unity of the church. However, even when this pattern is not adopted, ordained ministry is valid as a focus of unity. According to the Lima report, ordained ministry can be considered a focus of unity because it assembles and builds up 'the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and caring ministry' in a representative way.[377]

This accent on ordained ministry as a focus of unity brings challenges to a Reformed theology of ministry for several reasons. First, ordained ministry in the Reformed tradition is not readily associated with unity. It is true that Calvin emphasizes that 'nothing fosters mutual love more fittingly than for men to be bound together' with the bond of ministry. Ministry, in the eyes of Calvin, can even be considered the strongest means of keeping unity.[378] Despite these words, the reformers showed a reluctance to give the unity function of ordained ministry any weight. This reluctance must be seen in the light of the sixteenth-century struggle between Rome and the Reformation, in which Roman Catholic bishops used the unity function of ordained ministry as a means to accuse the reformers of being schismatics. This background made it almost impossible for the reformers to develop the unity function of ministry in that particular period. Also later on the theme was never fully developed.[379]

Second, the emphasis on unity poses a challenge because the history of the Reformed tradition shows a constant tendency toward fragmentation. The Reformed emphasis on the pure proclamation of the word and the pure administration of the sacraments has unfortunately often come at the expense of the unity of the church. A key factor in this tendency toward fragmentation has been the fact that too little emphasis has been placed on the unity function of ordained ministry.[380]

Reflection on Reformed theology of ministry should take seriously the plea for the unity function of ordained ministry. This is entirely in line with the ecumenical the ecumenical slant of early Reformed ecclesiology.

3.4.7 Representation

In the second chapter BEM/m introduces the theme of representation by stating that ordained ministers are to be considered representatives of Jesus Christ to the community. This representational dimension is most apparent in the celebration of the Eucharist, where the ordained minister represents Christ's presidency at the table.[381]

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[376] BEM/M §8, §13, §14, §20, §21.
[377] BEM/M §13.
[378] Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.3.1.
[379] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 219, 420.
[380] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 219, 420.
[381] BEM/m §11 and §14; BEM/e §29.

Whereas Roman Catholic and Orthodox responses to BEM/m pointed out that the use of the concept of representation in the report was much too functionalistic and shallow, responses from the Reformed tradition revealed a reluctance to use the concept. From a Reformed perspective, the concept of representation easily carries the undertone of substitution, whereby the minister takes the place of Christ and differs ontologically from lay church members.[382]

The fact that criticism on the concept of representation comes from two sides may be explained by the fact that the report tries to find a middle road between a functional and a representative approach. It is functional in the sense that the report expresses the peculiarity of ordained ministry by pointing to its three interrelated tasks: teaching the Word, celebrating the sacraments, and guiding the community. It is representational in the sense that the ordained minister acts as a symbol of Christ, the apostles, and the unity of the church. Functional and symbolic language go hand in hand.

Reformed theology of ministry that wants to be ecumenical should reflect on the representational character of ministry seriously. Koffeman introduces Dorothee Sölle's careful distinction between representation and substitution into the discussion. An ordained minister does not replace or substitute Christ, as if Christ himself is absent, but he or she represents Christ in the sense that he or she continually points to him. Therefore, ordained ministry is 'fundamentally characterized by transparency and accountability' and it should be closely linked to the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.[383] The combination of functional and symbolic language of the BEM/m seem to align with this kind of transparent representation.

Koffeman adds a missiological argument to the discussion. In a missionary context of a secular society, Christians are more than ever challenged to represent Christ and his Gospel. Refraining from representational language could mean Christians are being too modest and reserved and might diminish the missionary strength of the church.[384]

Moreover, Van der Borght has shown how Calvin also wrestled with the representational character of ordained ministry. The Genevan reformer does not only use functional language to describe ordained ministry, but also uses words like 'vicar' (*quasi vicariam*) and 'instrument' to capture the essence of ministry. Apparently, a purely functional approach did not satisfy.

A related point flows from this representational character of ministry. BEM/m states that the representational character of ordained ministry is most visible in the celebration of the Eucharist. This way, ordained ministry is rooted primarily in the liturgy and mainly has a liturgical function. Here, it should be kept in mind that the term 'Eucharist' in BEM/m has a broader meaning than only the administration of the Lord's Supper as a part of the liturgy.[385] Eucharist

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[382] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 212; Koffeman, *In Order*, 121-122.

[383] Koffeman, *In Order*, 120-121.

[384] Koffeman, *In Order*, 120.

[385] BEM/E §27; Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 230; Koffeman, *In Order*, 85-86.

in BEM denotes the whole of the celebration of Word and sacrament, and thus includes the proclamation of the word. This way, the rooting of ordained ministry in the liturgy aligns with the Reformed belief that the church is born of the Word of God. Historically speaking, Reformed theology of ministry limits the administration of the sacraments to the ministry of the Word, thereby presupposing the liturgical rooting of ordained ministry, as opposed to the non-liturgical role of the other ministries.[386] Also in current practice, as became apparent in the introductory chapter, ordained ministry in Reformed denominations appears to be closely connected the liturgy.[387] The essence of church is visible in the liturgical acts of proclamation of the Word and celebration of the Eucharist, and therefore ordained ministry finds its origin here.

Following the suggestions of BEM/m, rooting ordained ministry in liturgy would mean that the minister's role as leader of liturgy ought to be given a more prominent place in Reformed reflection on theology of ministry.[388]

3.4.8 Ordination

One final aspect of BEM/m that I want to dwell on briefly is ordination. BEM/m states that ordination makes visible that the ministry owes its origin to Christ as the source of its commission and then explains the ministry through three words: invocation, sign, and acknowledgement.

Two remarks are in order here. First, it is notable that of the three terms used to describe ordination, two are part of what is considered an element of ordination in the Reformed tradition: invocation and acknowledgement. Invocation reminds those involved of the continual dependence of the ordinand on the work of the Spirit. Acknowledgement points to the indispensable role of the congregation when it comes to ordained ministry.

The one concept that seems alien to the Reformed tradition is the sign-character of ordination. Yet this need not be as problematic as it might appear at first glance. First, because while BEM/m speaks of a sacramental sign when it comes to ordination, it clearly distinguishes it from the universally recognized sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, as evidenced by the mere fact that much less attention is given to ordination than to Baptism and Eucharist. In addition, both Bucer and Calvin were ambivalent when it comes to the question whether ordination should be regarded as a sacrament. Van 't Spijker has shown how Bucer counted the laying on of hands as a sacramental ceremony, without equating it with Baptism and Eucharist.[389] In his treatment of Calvin's theology of ministry, Van der Borght showed that also for the Geneva reformer ordination

[386] See § 2.4.4
[387] See § 1.1
[388] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 231.
[389] Van 't Spijker, *Ecclesiastical Offices*, 405-406; Gosker, *Het ambt*, 117 and 139.

could also be counted as a kind of sacrament because this rite is offered by the Lord and is a true sign of spiritual grace.[390]

A second observation concerns what is missing from the sections on ordination. Van der Borght points out that it is also important to pay attention to what is not said. There is no mention in the report of the laying on of hands as a form of transmitting the gift of the Spirit. Nor does the report speak of a transmission of authority (*potestas*). This is important to note, because these would be two elements foreign to the Reformed theology of ministry.[391]

The articles on ordination challenge churches within the Reformed tradition to rethink the value and interpretation of their rite of ordination.

3.5 Conclusion

What has listening to CTCV and BEM/m yielded in terms of a missionary reassessment of a reformed theology of ministry? It should now be possible to answer the sub-questions:

> *What are the missionary dimensions and intentions of ecclesiology that emerge in both reports and how can these be made fruitful for a Reformed theology of ministry?*

And:

> *What are indispensable elements of a theology of ministry that strives to be ecumenical?*

3.5.1 Missionary Dimensions

I start with missionary dimension of both ecumenical documents. The analysis of CTCV has pointed out that the missionary dimension in ecumenical ecclesiology is one-sidedly focused on ecclesial self-propagation. This is caused by several underlying factors.

First, the *koinonia* ecclesiology that serves as the starting point of CTCV is implicitly determined by a one-sided present-oriented eschatology. The church of CTCV embodies in an intensified way the *koinonia* that underpins all creation, and consequently its mission seems to consist of an increasing emphasis on the liturgy as the place where communion with God is experienced. A theology of ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei* will have to strike the right eschatological balance between the 'already' and 'not-yet' character of God's kingdom. CTCV's line from the Eucharist - as an expression of divine self-donation – to the world seems promising since thus the liturgical life of the

[390] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 102-107, 366.
[391] Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, 352.

church is focused on the reality outside her own borders. However, if the liturgy becomes an end in itself, much of its missionary potential is lost again.

Furthermore, the ecumenical conception of apostolicity, based on a controversial reading of history, one-sidedly emphasizes an existing ecclesial structure as a condition for faithfulness to the apostolic origins of the church. The cross-cultural sending of the church into the world in the footsteps of the original apostles is accorded considerably less prominence. As a result, mission risks becoming the multiplication of culturally uniform communities. To prevent this, a theology of ministry in view of the *missio Dei* will have to take its starting point not in an existing church culture, but in the question to what extent its structures serve its (cross-cultural) mission in the world.

3.5.2 Missionary Intentions

The missionary premise of CTCV is a church with a mission primarily focused on itself. Not surprisingly, missionary intentions do not really materialize in the report.

That is not to say that there are no missionary intentions at all. In several places in - especially CTCV - there are explicit missionary intentions such as evangelization, solidarity with the poor, confrontation with the powers that oppress people, open proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and promotion of justice and peace.

However, I am thinking especially of what the CTCV says about *episkopé*. An important part of *episkopé* - an indispensable element of church ministry - is overseeing the coordination of the church's witness. *Episkopé* in the church is not intended to make the contribution of the laity superfluous, but rather to create the right conditions that allow the laity to use their gifts in the service of the church and its mission. But all in all, the ecclesial ministry within the ecumenical movement is primarily (and in fact fundamentally) focused on the inner life of the church.

3.5.3 Relevant Points of Attention

The intention of this study is to be ecumenically informed. To that end, the treatment of BEM/m and CTCV have also provided important insights regarding various components of theology of ministry.

I already mentioned the concept of *episkopé* which refers not so much to a specific ministry, but to indispensable elements of ecclesial ministry: authority, coordination and synodality. In this vein, the concept can also be made fruitful for a Reformed theology of ministry.

The various dimensions of ecclesial ministry - personal, collegial, and communal - can also be helpful in developing an ecumenically informed theology of ministry. From an ecumenical perspective, elements such as ministry as a focus of unity, representation, and ordination will need to be processed within a Reformed theology of ministry.

Moreover, the liturgical rooting of ecclesial ministry seems consistent with how ministry is spoken of in the Reformed tradition and therefore deserves to be taken seriously. Finally, churches within the Reformed tradition might consider reinstating the ministry of the bishop. However, even without the specific ministry of bishop, it is possible to give *episkopé* a place in an ecumenically responsible way, as increasingly pointed out in ecumenical discussion on ecclesial ministry.

Both reports also assume the charismatic structure of the community, but unfortunately this element does not fully emerge because ecclesial ministry is connected to Christology rather than to pneumatology. The emphasis of both reports on the threefold ministry structure is also ultimately unconvincing. Instead of taking its starting point in an existing structure, theology of ministry that wants to be missionary will have to take its starting point in how far it serves the church's mission in the world

4. WALKING WORTHILY
The Missional Ecclesiology of Darrell L. Guder

Having dwelt on ecumenical theology of ministry in the previous chapter, my aim is to focus on Reformed ecclesiology in the next two. I intend to do so by discussing two Reformed theologians who have dealt with ecclesial ministry intensively. In this chapter I turn my attention to the American missiologist Darrell L. Guder and in the next chapter I listen to the Dutch systematic theologian Bram van de Beek. Both theologians have reflected on theology of ministry, but from a very different perspective. Guder wants to systematically think through ecclesial ministry from the perspective of the missionary vocation of the church, while Van de Beek is highly critical of the concept of *missio Dei*. Listening to two very different voices helps to forestall one-sidedness. Moreover, listening to Van de Beek helps to remain alert and bring potential vulnerabilities of re-thinking ecclesiology from the perspective of the *missio Dei*.

In this chapter, however, I first focus on Guder. My aim in this chapter is to answer the following sub-question:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Guder's theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

For several reasons, Guder seems a suitable conversation partner in the search for an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective. His reflections on theology of ministry have been guided by the question to what extent it serves the *missio Dei*. Since it is the mode in which the *missio Dei* concretely shapes the life of the church, the concept of witness is central in Guder's ecclesiology. Ecclesial ministry is to be subservient to the formation of faithful Christian witnesses and witnessing communities. Guder's only drawback might be that he writes primarily for an American readership, which may make some of his thoughts less suitable for the Dutch context. Being conscious of this, however, makes it possible to overcome its most serious disadvantages.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. After a brief introduction of Guder, I dwell on his ecclesiological and missional presuppositions before reflecting extensively on his theology of ministry. I conclude the chapter by asking how Guder's thoughts can contribute to a thinking through of Reformed theology of ministry.

4.1 Darrell L. Guder – an Introduction

Let me first share a few brief biographical notes and furnish a list of Guder's main publications.

4.1.1 Biographical Notes

Darrell L. Guder (born in 1939 in Ventura, California) studied theology in Germany. [392] After finishing his PhD at the university of Hamburg he served as an ordained minister in the North of Germany. Having served as a minister of Christian education in his home congregation in California from 1967, he returned to Germany in 1971 to join the faculty of the diaconic college of the church of Württemberg, where he taught theology and education and helped redesigning the curriculum. After four years in Württemberg, Guder returned to America and joined the parachurch organization Young Life in 1976. In 1991 Guder accepted the post of Benfield Professor of Evangelism and Mission at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. After his work in Louisville, Guder further worked as a missiologist at Columbia Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary. In 2015 Guder formally retired as a professor.

Guder has been working both in the European and in the North American context. Because of this, Anglo-Saxon and continental European influences come together in his publications. During his stay in Germany, Guder developed a strong affinity with post-war German Protestant theology, while not neglecting his own American background.[393] Particularly Karl Barth should be referred to as the German-speaking theologian who exerted the most influence on Guder. In almost all his publications Guder refers to the ecclesiology that Barth designed in his *Church Dogmatics*.[394]

Besides German theology, Newbigin's name should also be mentioned. For Guder Newbigin is undoubtedly the most important theological figure, and he calls him his 'mentor since 1960'.[395] All Guder's publications display strong affinity with Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology. Yet, Guder does not simply copy Newbigin's thoughts but attempts to develop them in his own way.

Finally, the seminal volume *Missional Church* and the ensuing discussion should be referred to. Inspired by Newbigin, Guder and the other authors of

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[392] In addition to Guder's own remarks, I have used the brief sketch of Flett/Congdon ('Darrell L. Guder', in: Flett/Congdon, *Converting Witness*, 1-3) for these biographical notes.

[393] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, xiii. His affinity for German theology is further apparent from the fact that he is the translator and editor of theological works by Otto Weber, Eberhard Jüngel and Eberhard Busch. (Busch, *The Great Passion*; Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*; Weber, *Foundations*)

[394] Barth is – in Guder's opinion – one of the few systematic theologians who made 'mission, missional purpose, and missional vocation a pervasive and shaping them of his theological project'. Guder, *Called to Witness*, 61.

[395] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, xi. Elsewhere Guder calls himself a student of Newbigin: Guder, *Called to Witness*, 106.

Missional Church were searching for missionary ecclesiology for churches in North America. The thoughts developed in this volume still exert influence on the discussion on missionary ecclesiology. Therefore, I briefly reflect on this book in a separate section.

4.1.2 Publications

Guder is probably most famous for the editing and co-authoring of *Missional Church* in 1998. I will dwell on this volume in § 4.2.1. Here I mention Guder's other works. I list the publications most relevant for the purpose of this study.

In 1985 Guder published *Be My Witnesses*.[396] In it, Guder fights against what he calls the 'benefits/mission dichotomy', i.e., a sharp separation between the benefits of the gospel and the mission for which they were given.[397] This separation resulted in a church that does not take mission seriously. Guder pleads for churches that are 'being, doing, and saying the witness to the gospel'.[398]

In *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* from 1999 Guder elaborates on what is means for a church to be incarnational. Incarnational ministry is defined as the understanding and practice of Christian witness that is rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.[399]

In 2000 Guder published *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. The book was meant as a sequel to *Be My Witnesses* and was well received.[400] It has long been considered a textbook in Western missionary ecclesiology. As the title indicates, Guder is of the opinion the church needs nothing less than a conversion if it wants to be a church that is true to its calling in the Western world.

In 2015 a collection of articles from Guder was published under the name *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*. By identifying the underlying theme of the diverse studies as 'Trinitarian Missiocentricity', Guder makes clear that his thoughts in the book revolve around the question of *missio Dei*.

Finally, I mention three articles that are important in view of this study. In 2015, Guder published an article on the implications of a missional hermeneutic on theological education.[401] Next, Guder wrote an article on a multicultural and translational approach in a book discussing different visions of mission in 2016.[402] The article on Reformed theology, mission, and ecumenism in the *Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology* should also be mentioned here.[403]

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[396] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*.

[397] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 10 and 21 (among others).

[398] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, vii; Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 164 (among others), Guder, *The Incarnation*, 32.

[399] Guder, *The Incarnation*, xii.

[400] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, vii-viii.

[401] Guder, 'The Implications of a Missional Hermeneutic for Theological Education'.

[402] Guder, 'A Multicultural and Translational Approach'.

[403] Guder, 'Reformed theology, mission, and ecumenism'.

4.2 Worthy Witness – Ecclesiological Presuppositions

As a preliminary step, it is important to dwell on Guder's ecclesiological and missional presuppositions. By way of introduction to Guder's ecclesiology, I start with a brief discussion of *Missional Church*. Next, I dwell on the concept of 'witness', before focusing on what Guder calls 'reductionisms', and on what he considers to be the concrete missionary shape of the church. I conclude with some reflections of my own.

4.2.1 Missional Church

The volume *Missional Church*, published in 1998, was a joint effort of several authors who were all connected in the 'Gospel and our Culture Network' (GOCN). This network emerged as a North American counterpart of the British 'Gospel and our Culture' movement that was initiated by Lesslie Newbigin. James Edward Lesslie Newbigin (8 December 1909 – 30 January 1998) was a British missiologist, who, after spending much of his career as a missionary and bishop in India, focused his intellectual energy on thinking through the challenges of Western culture from a missionary perspective.

Upon his return in 1974 to Great Britain, after years of working as a bishop in Madras, Newbigin was deeply shocked by the state of the church in his own country. In his eyes, Christianity in Great Britain was characterized by a lack of faith in the gospel and an inability to recognize its own syncretic traits. From 1977 onwards the relationship between gospel and culture became a dominant theme in his theological work.[404] While participating in the British Council of Churches, Newbigin initiated a conference on the relationship between gospel and culture. Newbigin wrote the preparatory booklet *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches* and during the process the 'Gospel and Our Culture' movement came into being. The movement's aim was to reflect on the thorny issues that are involved in communicating the gospel to the Western culture.[405]

Under the leadership of Georg Hunsberger, the 'Gospel and our Culture Network' in North America emerged in the late 1980s, with the purpose of translating Newbigin's challenging insights into the North American context. The discussions within the network were grouped around three corners: *gospel*, *culture* and *church*.[406] As a result of these discussions, the first major volume of

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[404] For Newbigin's development since his return to Europe, see Goheen, *As the Father*, 102-114.

[405] In Newbigin's own words: 'GOC has never understood itself as primarily a critique of our culture, but as an effort to clarify the issues involved in communicating the Gospel to this particular culture… GOC… is only in a secondary sense a critique of contemporary culture. It is about the truth of the Gospel, about trying to unmask the illusions which obscure that truth, about helping churches to be more articulate and credible witnesses to the Gospel.' Cited from Goheen, *As the Father*, 108.

[406] The three corners were based on Hunsberger's triangular model of gospel-culture relationships, which Hunsberger shared in his ground-breaking article 'The Newbigin Gauntlet'.

the network was published in 1996: *The Church between Gospel and Culture*.[407] After this publication the Gospel and our Culture series saw the light of day and the network received a three-year grant from the Pew Charitable Trust. The grant made it possible for the network to reflect extensively on the questions concerning missional ecclesiology, culminating in the publication of *Missional Church*.[408]

As said, *Missional Church* was a joint effort of authors from different ecclesial backgrounds. All contributors shared the conviction that the answers to the crisis of the North American churches are not to be found at the level of method and problem solving. Rather, the root problem of churches in America is the Western ecclesiocentric approach to mission that was (and to a large extent possibly still is) characteristic of churches that are shaped by the Christendom legacy. The authors propose a different approach to mission and ecclesiology altogether. Instead of an ecclesiocentric model, they propose a 'profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of mission'. Mission should not be regarded as just one activity of the church but should instead be considered the result 'of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation'.[409] This theocentric entry point reshuffles all the accents of traditional Western ecclesiology. The church is no longer viewed as the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness.[410] The authors of *Missional Church* emphasize the countercultural nature of the church for the sake of mission: 'Its differentness is itself a witness to the gospel.'[411]

The argument of *Missional Church* resonated highly among theologians and church leaders in the Anglo-Saxon world and its publication marked the beginning of a still ongoing conversation on missional ecclesiology.[412]

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[407] Hunsberger/Van Gelder, *The Church between Gospel and Culture*.

[408] For a more extensive review of the genesis of the movement, see Guder, *Missional Church*, 3-14. Also: Reppenhagen, *Auf dem Weg* and Van Gelder/Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 41-65.

[409] Guder, *Missional Church*, 4.

[410] Guder, *Missional Church*, 5. For a summary of the book, see Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 129-132.

[411] Guder, *Missional Church*, 119.

[412] For a review of the discussion, see Reppenhagen, *Auf dem Weg*; Gelder/Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, Doornenbal, *Crossroads* and Goheen/Sheridan, *Becoming a Missionary Church*, part 2. Whereas Gelder/Zscheile speak of the Missional Church Conversation, Doornenbal refers to the Missional Church Movement and defines it as a network of theologians and church leaders whose activities are focused on 'cultural research (such as the impact of postmodernity), theological reflection, and the church renewal necessary for the recovery of the church's missionary identity' (Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 4). He further states that, generally speaking, 'many leading voices in the Missional Church Movement are academics, belonging to mainline churches – indeed many of them are ordained – and they often stand at a (critical) distance from postmodern culture, and from popular culture and religion in general'. (Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 5)

Central elements from Missional Church recur in Guder's ecclesiology, I am thinking in particular of the focus on *missio Dei*, the importance of reflection on Western culture and the emphasis on the countercultural character of the church. In a way, Guder's own work since the publication of *Missional Church* can be seen as an outworking of its basic principles.

4.2.2 Witness

For Guder, the concept of witness is central when it comes to the missionary vocation of the church. He is greatly influenced in his understanding of witness by Karl Barth's ideas on it as expressed in Church Dogmatics IV.3.2. To appreciate the task and role of ecclesial ministry as Guder sees it, it is necessary to zoom in on his reflection on the Christian as a witness.

According to Guder, the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that it can 'be witnessed, experienced, reported on, and passed on'.[413] It is best to let Guder himself speak about what the concept of witness entails.

> The concept of witness, as we find it used in a variety of ways in the New Testament, describes the essence of the Christian experience from Easter onward. The New Testament cluster of terms based on the root for "witness (martyr-), in a broad diversity of forms and nuances, defines comprehensively the missional calling of the church in the New Testament. Mission is witness. In particular, evangelistic ministry, as the core of mission, is most appropriately defined and explained in terms of witness. The concept of witness provides a common missiological thread through all the New Testament language that expounds the church's mission. It serves as an overarching term drawing together proclamation (*kerygma*), community (*koinonia*), and service (*diakonia*). These are all essential dimensions of the Spirit-enabled witness for which the Christian church is called and sent.[414]

A few things emerge from this quotation. First, the concept of witness does not merely denote one aspect of the Christian life among others but defines the believer's existence in its totality. It is 'the essence of the Christian experience'. Therefore, it is impossible for someone who considers herself to be a Christian not to also consider herself to be a witness at the same time.

Furthermore, according to Guder, the entire missionary vocation of the church can be subsumed under the heading of witness. As he himself puts it: 'mission is witness'.

The term witness can have different meanings. It can refer to the event of salvation history itself, but also to its written record in the Bible and finally to the testimony of believers who respond to the gospel. Either way, the concept is concerned with God's redemptive deeds as they find their heart in the Christ

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[413] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 53.

[414] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 53. Italics in original.

event.[415] The entire missionary endeavour of the church should thus be related to the works of the triune God as centred in and around Jesus Christ. Missionary action in the world through witnesses and witnessing communities, is acting *from* and *with a view to* God's salvific act in Jesus Christ.

Mission as witness has a heart in evangelism, that is, in the communication – verbal or otherwise – of the saving power of the Christ event. But from the heart, the concept of witness fans out broadly into proclamation, community, and service.

> Witness is the divine vocation of the church (its "sentness" or mission), which is to be worked out in the entire range of actions of the church both corporately and individually (the missions of the church).[416]

It is precisely in this latter area that there appears to be a major weakness in the Protestant tradition, because in it witness has often become narrowed down to the verbal communication of the gospel in the worship service of the church:

> "Proclamation" as the primary form of witness has tended to narrow the understanding of witness to that which is oral, that which said in a particular place (churches) by particular people (preachers or priests) at particular times (formal services of worship).[417]

Another important aspect of New Testament understanding of witness is its plurality. The canon gives space to the catholicity of the church by allowing for a multicultural witness to the gospel. Two citations can prove this point:

> From the outset of the Christian movement, the intention was the formation of witnessing communities that were both visibly united in their submission to the Lord Jesus Christ and, at the same time as diverse as the plurality of human cultures.[418]

> Although diverse organizational forms existed, there was no doubt that, everywhere, each distinctive community embodied an expression of the one people of God formed by the Holy Spirit to be the witness to Jesus Christ.[419]

This plurality does not mean that concept witness is incoherent. Guder lists seven criteria that credible witnesses and witnessing communities must meet.

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[415] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 62.
[416] Guder, 'A Multicultural and Translational Approach', first section.
[417] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 61-62.
[418] Guder, 'A Multicultural and Translational Approach', sec. The Missional Project. See also: Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 54.
[419] Guder, *Missional Church*, 226.

First witness is to be *theocentric* because God 'is the author, the subject and initiator of the events to which then Christian witness is given'. Witness is to be *Christocentric* because it 'emerges from the encounter with the risen Christ'. Witness is to be *pneumatological* because it is dependent on the Holy Spirit, 'both in its initiation and its continuation'. Witness is to be *historical* because it contextually relates to a particular story. Witness is to be *eschatological* because it needs to keep a healthy balance between the 'already' and 'not-yet' character of God's kingdom. Witness is to be *ecclesiological* because 'God's Spirit forms a community for mission'. Finally, witness is to be *multicultural and ecumenical* because 'the gospel may be translated into every language and lived out in every culture'. [420]

Guder's emphasis on the missionary nature of the church as witnessing communities, also relates to how he perceives the church's apostolicity. In 1985 Guder still took the classic definition of apostolicity as a starting point by saying that it referred to the passing on of 'the teaching and preaching of the apostolic college of the first century and remaining faithful to that heritage'.[421] However, from 1998 onwards he chooses another point of departure. Instead of reading the Nicene marks of the church as static adjectives, Guder proposes to follow Charles van Engen's suggestion to read them as adverbs, thereby underlining their dynamic nature. The church would then be seen as unifying, sanctifying, reconciling, and proclaiming.[422]

This way apostolicity refers to 'the commitment to and practice of the apostles' mission, which comprises both the apostolic message as well as the apostolic incarnation of the gospel in community'.[423] According to Guder, apostolicity should be explained in the active sense of the New Testament verb from which it is derived, and which means 'to be sent out'.[424] Apostolicity therefore has primarily to do with faithfulness to the mission for which the apostles were equipped and sent out.[425]

Guder even goes one step further and suggests reading the Nicene marks in reverse order. By reading the Nicene marks this way, the apostolic mission of the church becomes the starting point of ecclesiology, and the three other marks should be interpreted in the light of the apostolicity of the church. The catholicity of the church then refers to the global and cross-cultural mission of the church.[426] The holiness of the church has to do with the church's fitness for

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[420] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 63-70.

[421] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 88.

[422] Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 66-70. Stephen Bevans suggests that instead of adverbs, the Nicene marks might better be called verbs, since they 'describe what the church does, and not just how it does it'. Bevans, 'Catholicity', 38 n.1.

[423] Guder, *Missional Church*, 256.

[424] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 84.

[425] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 52.

[426] Guder, *Missional Church*, 257-258; Guder, *Called to Witness*, 85-86.

service in the world.[427] The oneness is a necessary condition for a church that takes her missional calling seriously.[428]

In summary, in Guder's ecclesiology the concept of witness is central. Witness is the mode in which the church participates in the *missio Dei* and is faithful to its apostolic origin. By referring to the Christ event, the term 'witness' prevents mission from being understood so broadly that there is no focus, and everything can be understood as mission. At the same time, the breadth of the term – as revealed in the seven criteria that witness must meet – prevents the church's mission from being narrowed to mere verbal communication of the gospel.

4.2.3 Reductionisms

In the history of the (Western) church, the central concept of witness has been compromised in various ways. In his *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Guder devotes one chapter to the fundamental translatability of the gospel.[429] This fundamental translatability is given by the historical nature of the biblical narrative, culminating in the scandal of particularity of Jesus Christ.[430] The effect of this particularity of the gospel is that there is no specific culture that should be regarded normative for the communication of the gospel.[431] Therefore, the gospel can be embodied in any language and in any culture in a unique and appropriate way.

However, in translating the gospel, the human desire to bring the gospel and God under control is a danger that constantly lurks.[432] This danger manifests itself whenever a community (or culture), in a particular context, assigns its own formulations of the gospel ultimate authority and sees itself as the perfect embodiment of the gospel. The consequence of this human desire to bring the gospel under control is that one is no longer aware of one's own limitations in understanding the gospel. Here Guder speaks of 'reductionism': a reduced and distorted gospel is given ultimate authority. In his words:

> Reductionism is at work when we as human witnesses are no longer aware of our own reductions of the gospel. It is present when we argue supreme authority of rightness or a finality to our formulations.

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[427] Guder, *Missional Church*, 258-259; Guder, *Called to Witness*, 87.

[428] Guder, *Missional Church*, 260-264; Guder, *Called to Witness*, 87-88.

[429] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, chapter 4.

[430] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 81.

[431] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 69.

[432] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 76. Guder equates this desire with the biblical teaching about sin: 'One can interpret the biblical teaching about human sin as the constant attempt to bring under human control what we are not qualified to control.'

> A reductionist view assigns an authority to a reduction that ends up making it into a distortion.[433]

According to Guder, Western Christianity since Constantine has not escaped the danger of reductionism. In the fourth century, the essence of Christianity was by and large considered dogmatically defined in a final and valid sense by the church fathers and the creeds. From that time onward, becoming a Christian meant becoming a bearer of Western Christian culture that was viewed as God's design for Christian existence.[434]

In Guder's work, he discusses several interrelated and recurring reductionisms. I will treat the three most important reductionisms: *soteriological* reductionism, *eschatological* reductionism, and *ecclesiological* reductionism.

Soteriological Reductionism – By soteriological reductionism Guder means the development in the history of the Western church in which salvation is increasingly limited to an individual matter: 'The fundamental evangelistic question is assumed to be "Are you saved?"'[435]

In this line of thinking the gospel is mainly about the benefits the individual believer receives because of responding to Christ's call, whereas the missionary vocation of the Christian as a witness disappears into the background.

In his *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* Guder elaborates on Karl Barth's interpretation of Christian witness in *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2. §71.[436] In this section Barth shows how in Reformed soteriology the emphasis has come to lie on the *beneficia Christi* –the benefits of Christ. Melanchthon's statement in his introduction to the Loci Communes is well known: *hoc est Christus cognoscere beneficia eius cognoscere*.

Barth shows that in Protestantism these benefits are broadly approached in two ways: either the benefits of Christ are recognized in the social progress and/or righteousness offered by the gospel, or the benefits are seen in the forgiveness of sins, in the assurance of God's love and eternal life in heaven, and in the powerful action of the Holy Spirit who leads the believer here and now in this life. In both cases believers are the ones on whom Christ bestows benefits.

The problem is, however, that in the biblical conversion and vocation narratives these 'benefits' hardly play any role. For Abraham, Moses, the prophets, the disciples, and Paul, it was not so much their experience of heavenly grace and the salvation of their souls that mattered most, but rather their commissioning by God. Of course, they experienced the benefits, but these were at the service of their vocation and therefore not in the foreground.

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[433] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 101.
[434] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 9.
[435] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 120.
[436] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 121-131.

Following Barth, Guder concludes that one of the deepest distortions of the gospel is the fact that the benefits of Christ and the calling of the believer to be a witness have been separated.[437] The churches in the West have reduced the salvation offered by the gospel to an individual matter in which the believer is no longer commissioned but is only a consumer of a religious commodity. This individualized salvation has become the focus of the churches in the West and has broadly defined its structure and objectives.[438]

Eschatological Reductionism – During the first centuries of the church, the central eschatological shape of the gospel gradually became distorted and reduced. Jesus' message concerned the inbreaking reign of God, and the early church confessed him as the one who brings that reign into human reality. The proof of this inbreaking reign is visible in the church as the community that publicly points to God's reign. The final consummation and the end of history are still in the future, but the Christian community is so energized and focused by its confidence in God's future that its life in this world is already transformed and informed by the gospel of Jesus' resurrection.

In the course of history, this radical and transformative anticipation of God's coming reign was replaced by an individualistic emphasis on Christ's Second Coming at the end of time and his threatening judgement that determines where each individual soul will spend eternity. The biblical emphasis on the resurrection of the body was replaced by the Hellenistic concept of the immortality of the soul. This changed the essence of Christian eschatology and eliminated the biblical emphasis 'upon the integrated wholeness of the human person as body, spirit, and soul. Life now was understood not so much as faithful witness in hope but as wearisome and often anxious preparation in this vale of tears for what must come hereafter. Salvation is a question of "where one spends eternity" rather than the larger biblical witness to the restorative and salvific reign of God breaking in now, whose consummation is yet to come.'[439]

Ecclesiological Reductionism – Soteriological and eschatological reductionism together resulted in a distorted view of the church. The fundamental soteriological and eschatological tension between the 'already' and 'not yet' of the kingdom of God was replaced by the belief in 'the "already consummated eternal Kingdom of Christ," represented on earth by the church and its sacraments'.[440]

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[437] 'The benefits of salvation are separated from the reason for which we receive God's grace in Christ: to empower us as God's people to become Christ's witnesses. This fundamental dichotomy, between the benefits of the gospel and the mission of the gospel, constitutes the most profound reductionism of the gospel.' Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 120.

[438] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 133.

[439] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 68-69.

[440] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 108-109.

Consequently, the church was no longer viewed as a community called to witness to God's inbreaking reign, but as an 'institute of salvation' or a 'salvation agency' that concentrates on the provision (or withholding) of the benefits and assurance of salvation.[441]

The reduction of salvation to a manageable factor gradually resulted in its reification. In a process that lasted centuries, salvation gradually became a churchly mediated commodity that was conveyed by the administration of the sacraments. In Baptism and Eucharist, grace was reified and mediated from the church to the believer, just like money is transferred from one bank account to another. Thus, over time, the sacraments became essential to one's salvation and a very powerful weapon in the hands of the medieval Christian church as it 'managed' and 'administered' salvation.[442]

The management and distribution of this reified salvation is a continuing pattern that persists even today, although the situation has radically changed. Whereas in the pre-Enlightenment situation there was a tight relationship between church and state, with the church functioning as the state's religious department, nowadays there is an equally tight bond between church and market that results in a reductionist view of the church.[443] According to Guder, this partnership between church and market manifests itself not only in the reification of salvation, but also in the entrepreneurial structures of Western churches. Speaking about churches in the United States, Guder observes how 'the value systems and operating systems of the large American cooperation have become the dominant model for the institutional church'.[444] Christian religion has become big American business.[445]

With his treatment of the reductionisms of the church since Constantine, Guder seems to join the choir of theologians who empathically distance themselves from the life and practice of the church during Christendom. However, like his teacher Newbigin, Guder maintains a more nuanced position.

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[441] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 92. Guder prefers to use the German word *Heilsanstalt*.

[442] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 112.

[443] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 113.

[444] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 196. See also: Guder, *Called to Witness*, 37, 69, 71, 107, 157-158.

[445] 'In a fascinating twist in the English language, we now speak in secular America of "corporate mission," and we mean by that term the goals, achievements, and products a corporation intends to generate. AT&T, General Motors, and IBM all have their missions now. Conversely, churches now speak of their facilities as "plants"; they have "staff" and describe pastoral responsibilities with terms like "chief of staff" and "executive pastors." Churches and Christian organizations have accepted the secular reductionist redefinition of mission: we work with goals and objectives and measurable results as if it were more than obvious that this is what Christ meant we were to do when he defined our calling and sending as witness.' Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 197-198.

While rejecting the reductionism that originated in the era of Christendom, he is explicitly opposed to what he calls reckless 'Christendom bashing', since this is based on an oversimplification, as if Holy Spirit has left the earth around the fourth century with the rise of Constantine.[446] As such, it discounts important movements 'as the Celtic mission of St Patrick and the Iro-Scottish mission that it fostered, or the Slavic mission of Saints Methodius and Cyril, or even the missional ministry within European Christendom of the Franciscan and Dominican movements'.[447] For Guder it is clear that 'God has not been absent from Christendom but has been graciously and powerfully present through our long history.'[448]

Fearless criticism of Christendom should be accompanied by a sense of gratitude for God's faithfulness in the past. Following Barth, Guder thinks the Christendom legacy should read 'critically and positively as both a sequence of accommodations to the world for the sake of acceptance and survival, and as a promising reflection of the incarnation, an anticipation of a world totally subject to God and his Christ'.[449] Christendom should therefore not be treated 'as a model to be copied but as a set of case studies with complex negative and positive learnings to offer'.[450]

Regarding the missional nature of the church, one example of God's presence in Christendom is worth mentioning. Guder explicitly points to the radical Reformation as an important exception, 'within which the rejection of Western Christendom was linked with an articulate sense of missional vocation'.[451] Anabaptism in general also offers more groundwork for the missional interpretation of Scripture than other streams of the Reformation.[452]

4.2.4 Worthy Living

Whereas the previous section focused negatively on the reductionist view of the church, this section focuses positively on what Guder sees as the main mission of the church in the world. If the church should not be considered an institute of salvation, then what should the church be? What is the primary mission of the church in the world? What does the witness of the church look like?

Guder notes how the New Testament barely knows evangelistic or missional imperatives.[453] Instead, the writers of the New Testament pay attention to the formation of a community that embodies the gospel. Apparently, the church's

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[446] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 80.

[447] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 67.

[448] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 69.

[449] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 15-16. Elsewhere Guder talks about a 'combination of critique and receptiveness that is appropriately modest'. *Called to Witness*, 33.

[450] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 38.

[451] Guder, 'Implications', 293. See also what Guder together with Reppenhagen writes in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 550.

[452] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 93.

[453] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 127.

mission should not be equated with sweeping campaigns and evangelistic programmes, but with the basic question what it means to be church. The imperatives that do have a place within the New Testament are all aimed at the lifestyle of the various congregations and appeal to them to 'walk worthily' to their calling in the world. Guder refers to texts as Eph. 4:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:12; Phil. 1:27 and suggests the New Testament texts should be read as documents that were originally address to small communities that were seeking to discern what it meant to lead a life worthy of their calling.[454] Guder:

> 'Walking worthily' appears to be a key description of the life and conduct of these communities as they continue the apostolic witness that is the very reason for existence. They are to walk worthy of God, of his call, of the Lord, and of the gospel of Christ. The missional congregation, then, may be defined as the community that walks worthy of the calling to which it has been called.[455]

'Walking worthily' refers to the congregation's appropriate response to the gospel by ways of living that correspond to and give evidence of her calling to be a witness of the gospel. For example, the calling to witness to God's love for the world means that walking worthily refers to living lovingly together. Another example: the calling to be agents of peace means that the worthy walk refers to living together peacefully and as peacemakers. In other words, the purpose of the calling should determine the character of the respondent's life and action.[456]

Here, Guder is loyal to Newbigin (and David Bosch) in his appreciation of Anabaptist ecclesiology. When referring to the supposed Anabaptist influence on David Bosch, in the co-authored concluding chapter to the 20th anniversary edition of Bosch's *Transforming Mission*, one can read words, unmistakably written by Guder:

> There is in the ongoing development of missional theology a pronounced concern for the 'worthiness' of the church's public life, challenging dominant consumerism as one of the many forms of cultural captivity that betray the legacy of Constantinian establishment. Where Western churches continue to define themselves in terms of the benefits they provide their members, it is no wonder that church shopping and market-driven churchly activism are such dominant characteristics of Christian communities. It is then truly counter-cultural when the missional community stresses its vocation

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[454] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 32.

[455] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 130. Guder does not cease to emphasize the missional importance of 'Walking worthily'. See, Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 29, 204, 219; Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 58, 84; Guder, *Called to Witness*, 14, 18-19, 32, 59-62, 76-77, 82, 87, 88, 116-119, 130ff; Guder, 'Implications', 290.

[456] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 117.

> to be a fellowship of witnessing Christians who gather to be discipled, to be equipped and formed for their sending, their apostolate in and with the world.[457]

Guder frequently uses Newbigin's concept of the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel to make his point. Christian congregations in the West should not capitulate to the consumerism of their surrounding culture and thereby treat the gospel as a product that needs to be sold, but instead they should focus on their lived-out testimony to the gospel. The local community should live the gospel incarnationally.

> To put it in another way, the structures of the church are to incarnate its message in its setting.[458]

The Word of the gospel must always be embodied in the life of the Christian community. The gospel cannot be adequately captured in creeds or theological statements, but it dwells in the community of the church.[459] Also, the church should live out the gospel incarnationally, i.e., rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.[460]

Guder also uses Karl Barth's image of the congregation as a parable of the gospel. The church is a parable of the kingdom in the sense that it shows the world what God's kingdom looks like. In Guder's words:

> The divine reality of the gospel as event comes first, and in response to it, in interaction with it, as witness to it, the church represents parabolically and provisionally what this good news is all about.[461]

The confessing, witnessing and missionary community is the parable of the gospel of Jesus Christ and reflects its truth in the world in which it is sent in its actions, its communication, its visible dependence and its equally visible fallenness. By understanding itself as a parable of the gospel, the missionary community can practise its vocation with the appropriate and necessary combination of modesty and conviction.[462]

4.2.5 Evaluation

I conclude this section on the ecclesiological and missionary presupposition with some reflections of my own.

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[457] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 550.
[458] Guder, *Missional Church*, 227.
[459] Guder, *The Incarnation*, 22.
[460] Guder, *The Incarnation*, xii.
[461] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 140.
[462] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 141.

4.2.5.1 Community of Contrast?

I start with the critique that has emerged from various sides about the church as a countercultural community. For convenience, I summarize the criticisms under a *missiological* and a *cultural* one.

The missiological critique on the church as a community of contrast boils down to this: The great emphasis on church as a contrast community ultimately comes at the expense of the public task of the church and its members in Western culture. The danger that lurks for churches that use the counter-cultural model is 'that the community focuses on its own integrity, the quality of its community, the authenticity of worship and does not move into the world'.[463]

While this sounds valid, it seems less applicable in Guder's case. Guder's concept of worthiness does not allude to a pattern of church behaviour that takes shape independently of the surrounding culture, but rather emerges from a deep interaction with the context. In other words, being countercultural is not a condition a church must meet, but rather a possible outcome of its missionary vocation that exists precisely by being engaged with the surrounding culture. A citation may help to clarify this point:

> Much of their formation as witnessing communities necessarily had to focus upon what that worthiness actually looks like when translated into the demands, challenges, and realities of a particular context.[464]

Instead of being inwardly focused, the worthiness and thus the countercultural character of the church in Guder's case refers to the interaction between church and culture. Thereby, it is important to note that Guder's emphasis on the countercultural character of the church should be complemented by his commensurate emphasis on the incarnational character of the church. The Christian community should be constantly looking for ways in which it can adapt to its surrounding culture in order to make the gospel visible in its own context. Being church is, as it were, a balancing act in which the ecclesial community seeks to be incarnationally attuned to its context, but at the same time seeks to be countercultural if the values of the world cannot be reconciled with the gospel.[465] In the words of Guder:

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[463] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 125.

[464] Guder, 'A Multicultural and Translational Approach', sec. The Nicene Marks, Cultural Diversity, and Translation

[465] In his well-known collection of essays, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, the British missiologist Andrew Walls refers to this balancing act when he introduces two principles (or opposing tendencies) that both have their origin in the gospel, namely the pilgrim principle and the indigenizing principle. Whereas the pilgrim principle creates a critical distance between church and culture by reminding Christians that they have no abiding city in this world, the indigenizing principle tells them that Christ accepts them with their cultural conditioning. Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 7 ff.

> However they are configured, they will constantly struggle with how to be in and not of the world, how to relate to their culture as a sent but still alternative community, how to incarnate Jesus Christ where they are.[466]

Here, it is important to recall that witness according to Guder, should be Christological, otherwise the balance may tilt to either side. For example, if the principal motive for walking worthily is to achieve missional attractiveness in this world by being a countercultural community, then the church risks losing sight of what should be considered the source, the continual motivation, and the goal of her worthy walk, namely her relationship to Jesus Christ. Indeed, also within the New Testament there is a sharp antithesis between the community of the church and the world, but the distinctiveness of the Christian community is grounded positively in the gospel, and not negatively in rejecting the ways of the world.[467]

From a cultural perspective Kathryn Tanner also criticizes the emphasis on the church as an alternative society. In her *Theories of Cultures,* she refutes that a Christian community can be defined by drawing a sharp cultural boundary. In the first place, it is never clear how such a community would exclude certain practices. Moreover, it is not always clear on what side of the boundary a certain practice would fall. On top of that, boundaries are never fixed and change over time. Finally, sharp cultural boundaries are not necessary to establish a distinctive way of life. For example, early Christians did not establish a Christian identity by exclusion, but by incorporating a moral code while at the same time changing its goal.[468] With these objections in mind, the cultural boundary between Christian and non-Christian ways of living cannot be easily drawn and are permeable. Consequently, Christian identity is 'essentially impure and mixed' and 'the distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not so much formed *by* the boundary as *at* it; Christian distinctiveness is something that emerges in the very cultural processes occurring at the boundary, in processes that construct a distinctive identity for Christian social practices through the distinctive use of cultural materials shared with others'.[469]

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[466] Guder, *Missional Church*, 240.

[467] See Volf, *Captive to the Word of God*, 75. Volf distinguishes between two distinct processes of finding identity for the church: 'Identity can be forged through two related but clearly distinct processes: either through a negative process of rejecting the beliefs and practices of others, or through a positive process of giving allegiance to something distinctive. It is significant that 1 Peter consistently establishes the difference positively, not negatively. There are no direct injunctions not to behave as non-Christians do. Rather, the exhortation to be different centers primarily on the positive example of a holy God (1:15ff) and of the suffering Christ (2:21ff). This is surprising, especially given the situation of social conflict in which the Petrine community was engaged. We expect injunctions to reject the ways of the world; instead we find admonitions to follow the path of Christ.'

[468] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 108-109.

[469] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 114-115. Italics in original.

Tanner is right that borders are changeable and permeable, and that Christian distinctiveness emerges at the boundary, but this is the very thing Guder will also endorse. Guder's counterculturality of the Christian community is not about the formation of a sociologically neatly demarcated community of people with their own subculture, but much more about the missionary faithfulness of the church. Guder uses the concept missionally as part of the process of reinforcing the faithfulness of the church's witness, not sociologically, as a means to create a community that relates antithetically to its context. The tension between the adjectives countercultural and incarnational in Guder ecclesiology refers to distinctiveness of a Christian way of life that is formed in a cultural process occurring precisely at the boundary between church and world.

4.2.5.2 Incarnational?

According to Guder, the church should live out the gospel 'incarnationally', i.e., rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So far, I have used the adjective 'incarnational' without further comment. Nevertheless, I think a few comments are in place.

Guder explicitly distinguishes between the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity and the incarnational mission of the church. He writes:

> An incarnational (adjective!) understanding of mission is precisely not a continuation of the once-and-for-all incarnation (noun!), but the continuation of the incarnate Lord's mission as he shaped and formed it. The incarnational witness of the community is not sinless, but rather embodies the reality of grace in its contrition, repentance, and forgiveness. (...) The incarnational character of the church is rooted, not in its alleged perfection, but in its submission to Jesus Christ.[470]

Clearly, Guder is aware that by using the adjective incarnational he is using terminology that actually belongs to Christology and not ecclesiology. When it comes to the incarnation, the Bible and the early church never refer to an act of the church or the believer, but always to the second person of the Trinity who became human. It is true that Paul uses words very reminiscent of the incarnation of Jesus Christ when he says that he became all things to all men, but remarkably, he himself does not make this link. This should make cautious.

Notwithstanding the clear distinction Guder proposes, it would be therefore better not to confuse theological concepts. When referring to the missional life of the believing community, the New Testament uses pneumatological language, instead of Christological. This is not meant as nit-picking. Words matter, and consistent use of them moulds and shapes actions. First, by consistently using Christological terms to describe the life of the church and the believer, there is the danger of unintentionally conveying meanings and Christologically overcharging church and Christian. In addition, the use of this

[470] Guder, *The Incarnation*, 23; see also Guder, *Called to Witness*, 117

adjective carries the danger of narrowing down Christian witness. Guder takes a broad view of the term when he states that it refers to the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus but strictly speaking the adjective refers only to the incarnation itself. There is a clear danger that indispensable elements of the story of Jesus fade into the background in favour of an unconditional identification with the cultural context based upon a one-sided emphasis on the incarnation. The story of Christ, however, tells not only of identification with the cultural context, but also of judgment and re-creation of the world and its culture.

To avoid inadvertently narrowing the witness of the church to a single element, it is vital to link it with the entire gospel narrative. It would be better to speak of Christ-oriented mission or some other word that links ecclesiology with the entire story of Jesus Christ. For example, Oliver O'Donovan refers to the church's vocation to recapitulate the Christ event as it takes shape in Advent, Passion, Restoration and Exaltation.[471] All four elements should play a role in church life, and none should prevail over the others. By recapitulating the Christ event the church proclaims the gospel to the world. In this way, the church's mission is clearly linked to the work of Christ without an unintended narrowing.

4.2.5.3 Instrumental?

Guder's ecclesiology is in its entirety centred on the *missio Dei* and all the church's life is focused on credible witness to the gospel (corporate) and the formation of credible witnesses (individual). Convincingly, Guder shows how the deepest essence of the church lies in its missionary vocation in the world. Nevertheless, it is worth making a small remark here in view of the discussion of ecclesial ministry. After all, if the entire life of the church is at the service of forming credible witnesses, the instrumental nature of the church cannot be but strongly emphasized. There is little against this, but it is important to remember that the church is just as much a sign and foretaste of the kingdom. In other words, the church is not only a school of learning, but also an oasis or a hospital, to use but two images, where people can catch their breath. Not to mention the fact that the church is foremost a community of worship.

It is good to highlight this at this point because this emphasis on the instrumental nature of the church also has potential implications for ecclesial ministry. After all, if the instrumental side of ecclesiology is strongly highlighted, its practice of ministry will also turn out to be primarily instrumental. This emphasis is understandable in a context where the church needs to learn to understand again what it means to be missional, but it can also lead to certain – non-instrumental – elements of ecclesial ministry being underplayed. Whether, and if so how, this is the case should be seen in the remainder of this chapter.

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[471] O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 174.

4.3 Word Equippers

If the primary mission of the church in the world is to walk worthily to its calling, then the essence of ministry should be derived from this principle. This is not merely a pragmatic issue, but has everything to do with the faithful witness of the congregation:

> Organizational formation is as much a form of translated witness as is the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages or the continuing exposition of the apostolic tradition in new cultural contexts.[472]

Ecclesial ministry should be subservient to the missional calling of the church. The main task of ecclesial ministry is therefore to equip the entire congregation for this purpose.

In the opinion of Guder, this principle has been regrettably lost in the history of the church. Ministry has become increasingly focused on the distribution of reified grace by a small priestly elite. Guder is keen on a recovery of what he thinks should be the essence of ministry: 'preparing the community for its missional vocation.'[473]

In this section, I discuss Guder's conception of ecclesial ministry. First, I listen to his historical analysis to then give attention to two interrelated principles that should guide the shaping of ecclesial ministry according to Guder. I conclude with some reflections.

4.3.1 The Genesis of an Unfortunate Distinction

Ecclesial reductionism has resulted in an equally reduced and distorted view on ecclesial ministry that assumes a clear separation of clergy and laity. Not entirely surprising and in line with Newbigin, Guder traces the roots of what he conceives as the distorted view on the ministry of the church back to the era of Constantine. In pre-Constantine Christianity the leadership of the church was described with a variety of terms and in a variety of ways. Structured leadership was a given to be sure, but the structures themselves were diverse because the necessary leadership functions were highly contextualized to their particular surroundings in order to help the different congregations in their missionary vocation.[474] Whatever they were called – apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors, overseers, bishops, elders or deacons – their work was subservient to the missional calling of the communities they led. These church leaders were therefore not considered to be mediators or distributors of heavenly

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[472] Guder, *Missional Church*, 222.

[473] See Guder, *Called to Witness*, chapter 9.

[474] Guder, *Missional Church*, 224-225: 'Each community appears to have arranged its structures of leadership for its particular mission: elders or overseers were chosen, apostolic emissaries were sent, qualifications of leaders for the communities were defined.'

grace but ministers of the Word who provided the necessary formation that equipped the saints for their general vocation.[475]

This situation drastically changed with the Christianization of the West. The apostolic mission to reach the ends of the world was largely considered to have been fulfilled in the era of Constantine. Mission was therefore no longer seen as the central task of the Christian community; instead, the church came to focus ever more upon the care and tending of the salvation of her members, who were – by definition – citizens of Christendom as a socio-political reality. The church's task was to proclaim the gospel within the Christianized world and, as the state's religious department, 'to ensure that everyone within these boundaries thought and acted in accordance with the church's dogma and strictures'.[476]

As a result of this development, ministry increasingly became the task of a very few privileged members that were part of a special spiritual estate.[477]

> In a Europe in which everyone lives within hearing range of the church bells, mission disappears from the theology of the church. But the theologies of office become ever larger and more complex.[478]

Thus, the distorted view on the essence of the church resulted in a clericalized ministerial practice that strongly emphasized the distinction between clergy and laity. The clergy became the special caste of Christians who managed the individual salvation of the church members. They did this with their growing spiritual power, with which they performed the churchly rites like Baptism, absolution, Eucharist, and the anointing of the sick. The New Testament *elder/presbyter* gradually evolved in the churchly *priest*. Although the word *priest* itself is etymologically connected to the *elder/presbyter* of the New Testament, eventually it became predominantly associated with the *hiereus/sacerdotes* of antiquity that performed sacred rites to supply the believers with divine grace.

In the end the priest, standing in the line of the essential historic succession of bishops, evolved into a dogmatically necessary human-divine institution for the salvation of the people. This way the separation between clergy and laity became a divinely sanctioned order, and ordination became a sacrament.[479] In short: the general vocation of every church member was radically downplayed in favour of the special vocation of the clerical elite belonging to a holy order that was necessary for the mediation of individual salvation.[480]

The sixteenth-century Reformation did not change the situation regarding ecclesial ministry, according to Guder. Admittedly, the reformers reoriented the

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[475] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 145-146.
[476] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 11.
[477] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 93.
[478] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 147.
[479] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 147.
[480] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 134.

understanding of ministry away from an ontological understanding of priesthood that is necessary for the spiritual wellbeing of the believers, towards a more functional understanding that focuses upon the upbuilding of the congregation and the believers.[481] Nevertheless, the fundamental dichotomy between clergy and laity remained in place. The definition of the church in the Augsburg confession, for example, emphasized 'the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, and thereby underlined the clerical nature of all gospel communication in the Reformation churches'.[482] The restriction of the preaching and the administration of the sacraments to the ordained clergy equally reifies the salvific power of the ministers, at least as seen and experienced by 'ordinary' church members.[483] The Protestant tradition therefore only pays lip service to the concept of the priesthood of all believers, and remains highly clerical due to its inability to refocus the church and its ministry upon the general mission of the church.[484]

The disintegration of Christendom in the 20th century did not automatically result in the disappearance of the distinction between clergy and laity. Notwithstanding the emancipatory developments of modernity, Christendom attitudes about ecclesial ministry are still present in today's church. To name but one example: although in the Reformed tradition deacons, elders and pastors are ordained with basically the same ordination rite, church members still look upon their pastors as belonging to a distinctive and privileged class.

On top of this lingering Christendom mentality comes a fundamental different approach to leadership within the church. Guder repeatedly points to the fact that the partnership of church and state has been replaced by an equally tight partnership of church and market.[485] The 'marketing' of the gospel has emerged as the dominant reaction to the end of Christendom and the perceived need to regain lost territory.[486]

This partnership of church and marketplace has its implications for the leadership of the church. Guder notes how churches, mirroring secular corporations, nowadays speak of their facilities as 'plants' and of their leadership as 'staff' with 'chiefs of staff' and 'executive pastors'. This vocabulary shows how churches and Christian organizations have accepted the distorted secular redefinition of mission that works with concrete goals and objectives and measurable results.[487] As a consequence, churches are supposed to be user-friendly, full-service and consumer sensitive, while ordered ministries are to be

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[481] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 148.
[482] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 11.
[483] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 156.
[484] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 134.
[485] See Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, ix, 5, 113, 196-198; Guder, *Called to Witness*, 37, 69, 71, 107, 157-158, 183.
[486] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 37.
[487] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 198.

a mix of behavioural therapists, organizational development experts and programme impresarios.[488]

Since it is significant in view of what follows, let me share a few brief observations. On first reading, Guder's historical overview of the development of the separation between clergy and laity seems convincing. However, a closer look reveals that he did not entirely escape the same oversimplification he rejected in his balanced treatment of Christendom. His overview seems to boil down to the observation that wherever mission disappears from the agenda, institutionalization lurks, and hierarchy enters the church. The versatility and diversity of the early missionary church made way for a divinely sanctioned institute.

But is it really that simple? The facts seem to be more nuanced. The gradual development of a clear distinction between clergy and ordinary church members did not only start with the rise of Constantine but can be traced back to the New Testament itself.[489] Admittedly, Constantianism intensified and accelerated the distinction, arguably even gave it an unbiblical twist, but post-dating the distinction, like Guder does, reveals a somewhat biased reading of history.[490]

Guder seems to reject every form of distinction between clergy and laity. His dislike of this separation is based on an alleged inevitability of ontological differentiation wherever the distinction between the two is kept alive. He sees this ontological differentiation in the case of the medieval priest who dispenses grace through the Eucharist, as in the current ministers who are considered

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[488] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 158.

[489] Although Von Campenhausen in his *Kirchliches Amt* assumes a questionable gulf between the charismatic approach of the Pauline congregations and the formalistic tendency of the Jewish presbyteral structure, his historical sketch of the developments in the 2nd and 3rd A.D. is convincing. At the very least, his argument shows that the distinction between clergy and laity and the concomitant ecclesiastical hierarchy is not only post-Constantine.

[490] David Bosch paints a similar picture in the seventh chapter of his *Paradigm Shifts*. He notes how the church 'moved from being a small, persecuted minority to being a large influential organization (...) the office of the believer was largely forgotten' (242). For a critique on this anti-institutionalist reading of the development of ecclesiology in the first four centuries AD, see Paas, *Church Planting*, 16-22. Paas criticizes David Bosch's reading of the development of the early church. Like Guder, Bosch sees the institutionalization of the church as a betrayal of the authentic charismatic community of the New Testament church. Institution seems to stand for everything that is wrong. Paas counters Bosch's aversion to institutionalism in five ways. Firstly, the Christian movement has always been characterized by a drive toward universality, catholicity, and objectivity of the church. 'Secondly, every movement will have to decide about the kind of structures it needs.' 'Thirdly, absolutizing the difference between movement and structure will lead to a view according to which structure (...) will be seen as a necessary evil.' Fourthly, the risk of a petrified church does not preclude any form of structure. Institutionalization 'must be accompanied by constant theological reflection and correction in the light of the Gospel.' Fifthly, a fundamental change in the socio-political context – as in the period of Constantine – forms the occasion for such theological reflection and correction.

spiritually special people. The question arises as to what distinguishes the specialized minister from lay church members. Does Guder's rejection of an ontological difference preclude any kind of distinction and result in an absolute egalitarian community? Even Guder would not go that far, as will be shown in the next section.

4.3.2 Two Interrelated Principles

Since Guder repeatedly makes the point that the distinction between clergy and laity should be put aside, this might give the impression that there is no place for ordered ministry whatsoever. However, that is not the case. Paul's exposition on ministry in Ephesians 4 (especially 4:11 and 12) and Markus Barth's interpretation of this text play an important role in Guder's thoughts on the interconnectedness of general and specialized ministry.

Regarding the question of the legitimacy of ordered ministry, Ephesians 4:11 and 12 show that work of ministry is carried out by the saints (i.e., the believers) who are equipped for this by a diversity of ministries. The purpose of the fivefold ministry is 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry' (Ephesians 4:12, NRSV). The understanding of ordered or specialized ministry should therefore be developed from the definition of the general ministry of the church, and not the other way around.[491]

> Special ordination is a subset of general ordination, and the vocation of the entire people of God precedes, surrounds, and shapes the vocation of its specialized servants.[492]

In this regard, Guder can even speak of the ordered ministry as *essential* and not merely as *beneficial*. The classical question whether ordered ministry belongs to the *esse* or the *bene esse* of the church is decided in favour of the former. Ordered ministry is essential for the church because it is the way God has chosen to provide for the equipping of the saints.[493]

It should be noted, however, that ordered ministry is not directly linked to the salvation of the individual, but to the mission of the church. Specialized ministers should therefore not be regarded as dispensers of salvation, but rather as equippers of witnesses to salvation.

Although he does not rule out the concept of *ordained* ministry altogether, Guder clearly prefers the vocabulary of *ordered* ministry and *specialized* ministry. The reason is that speaking of *ordained* ministry may give the impression that the ones being ordained 'are somehow spiritually special people who have a kind of salvation or relationship with God that normal Christians do not have'.[494]

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[491] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 204 and 206.
[492] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 142.
[493] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 210.
[494] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 211.

Guder's thoughts on the relationship between general and specialized ministry are based on two interrelated principles. First, the ministry of the church – either general or specialized – should be *mission oriented*. Second, the ministry of the church should be fundamentally *Word-centred*.

The two principles are interrelated because they both originate from a missional reading of Scripture. Guder frequently quotes the famous dictum from Martin Kähler, who said that mission is the mother of all theology.[495] The dictum makes clear that the New Testament, and all biblical-theological deliberations that flow from it, owe their existence to the fundamental missional challenge faced by small Christian communities in the early days of the church. The task of the scriptures was to deal with the problems and challenges of different churches in particular contexts, so that these communities could be faithful to their calling.[496]

In an insightful article, George Hunsberger has mapped out the conversation about missional hermeneutics. He categorizes the conversation according to four streams, each with its own emphasis. In doing so, he places Guder within the stream that particularly emphasizes the missional purpose of Scripture. The focus in this stream is not so much on the overarching biblical narrative of God's mission, nor on the locatedness of its readers, nor the paradigmatic way the New Testament writers addressed the people of their own time, but on the missional 'aim of the biblical writings, and the canonical authority by virtue of their formative effect'.[497]

For Guder, the New Testament texts find their interpretative key in the apostolic purpose to found and equip missional communities to continue the witness that had brought them into being. The collective purpose of Scripture, according to Guder, is the continuing formation of already missional communities for faithful and obedient witness.[498] The focus of a missional hermeneutic is an 'engagement with the Scriptures in which the interpretation of the texts serves the formation of gathered communities so that they can be sent in the world as Christ's witnesses'.[499]

4.3.3 Mission Oriented

With the end of Christendom, the churches are once again challenged to pursue their missional calling. Unfortunately, the drive to maintain Christendom, or even to return to it, is widespread, which is why leadership of the churches is mainly inwardly focused on maintenance:

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[495] Guder, *Missional Church*, 7; Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 21; Guder, *Called to Witness*, 5; Guder, 'Implications', 295.

[496] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 91.

[497] Hunsberger, 'Proposals for Missional Hermeneutic'.

[498] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 66.

[499] Guder, 'Implications', 285.

> 'It appears that maintenance leaders rarely equip saints for missional vocation.'[500]

At the same time, Guder observes that within the churches the question concerning missionary leadership and theology of ministry is surfacing. What does this mean in concreto?

4.3.3.1 The Missional Orientation of the Traditional Tasks

The missional orientation of ministry does not necessarily imply that specialized ministers should refrain from their traditional tasks, but it should involve a reassessment of the purpose of and the vision behind their activities. Specialized ministers will continue to administer the sacraments, to lead worship services, to preach and teach the Word, to care for the members of the church, but these activities will be grounded upon the concept of witness as the primary definition of the mission of the church.[501] Specialized ministers who lead in worship and interpret the sacraments through the spoken word are, by doing so, carrying out the equipping of the saints in its most sublime form. They should therefore constantly be asking questions like, "How are we equipping each other for our ministry in the world? How does our worship equip us? How do our study and small-group life equip us? How does our fellowship equip us? How does our recreation equip us? How does our administration of the sacraments equip us? How does our prayer equip us?"[502]

At this point it is important to remember that a missional congregation, according to Guder, 'may be defined as the community that walks worthy of the calling to which it has been called'.[503] The main question regarding specialized ministry is therefore how the missionary leadership serves the Christian community to 'walk worthily'.

4.3.3.2 The Individual Dimension of Missional Orientation

The missional orientation of specialized ministry also has an individual dimension. The gathering of the church is after all aimed at discipleship. Missional leadership must serve the gathered church by preparing each individual member for his or her apostolate.

> 'Missional leadership, centred on the Word, practised with evangelical collegiality, must serve the gathered church by preparing each member for his or her apostolate.'[504]

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[500] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 149.
[501] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 211-212.
[502] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 219.
[503] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 130.
[504] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 159.

Guder elaborates this point with the help of the three purpose statements Jesus makes in Mark 16:13-15: 'to be with Jesus', 'to be sent out to proclaim the message' and 'to cast out demons'. The first statement refers to the gathering of the church. The congregation gathers to be with Jesus in the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. The second statement shows that there is a direct connection between the gathering and the sending of the congregation. The church should always be aware that its gathering should serve the witnessing of the believers. The believers should be equipped to be witnesses in their specific place and function in society in order to embody the gospel in an understandable and faithful way. Finally, the last purpose statement teaches us that believers have the authority and power to challenge the modern 'principalities and powers' in rebellion against God.

4.3.3.3 Missional Structures

Church leadership is not just about equipping the community through traditional tasks or through the training of individual church members, but also has to do with how the church is given shape in a particular context. Ministers are called to lead the community in the search for faithful embodiment of the Christ event in their own context.

In *Missional Church* Guder drafted the article on Missional Structures. Although he wrote it with an eye on the situation in North America, Guder's thoughts are also relevant to the European context. In it, he argues that:

> The primary organizational challenge for the church is to find ways to structure the life of the particular communities so that they can carry out faithful witness in their places, always in responsible connection to the entire church around the world and cultivated by the ecclesial practices that God's Spirit provides.[505]

Borrowing Newbigin's vocabulary, Guder states that a mission community should always strive to be culturally bilingual, 'learning the language of faith and how to translate its story into the language of its context, so that others may be drawn to become followers of Jesus.'[506] If church communities take this seriously, it means that their structures could start to look very different from 'the inherited forms of parish in the Christendom paradigm'.[507] A somewhat lengthier quote from Guder may illustrate this:

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[505] Guder, *Missional Church*, 234. See also Guder, *Missional Church*, 224: '..., the scriptural records make abundantly clear that the church must have structures, and that the way these structures are formed is integral to the church's witness.' And: Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 161: 'What this means is that all formally structured offices of the church as mission community are defined in terms of that mission.'

[506] Guder, *Missional Church*, 237. Cf. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 65.

[507] Guder, *Missional Church*, 236.

> Christians may form themselves as an intentional mission community living in the same neighborhood, making lifestyle decisions that enable them to organize their daily lives and family interactions as a primary form of witness. But they may worship in their homes rather than own a church building. Christians may form themselves as a non-geographical community centered on a particular form of witness. Their calling may be to demonstrate the gospel in ministry to the homeless, to young people, to the elderly, to prisoners, to the terminally ill, or to an immigrant population. Such a vocation might mean that their congregation meets in a borrowed facility, a rented hall, or a storefront that welcomes their particular constituency. (...) A particular group of Christians may respond to the loneliness and isolation of the modern city and form themselves as a vowed intentional community, sharing several apartments in order to carry out a ministry of hospitality and friendship in the midst of the highly secularized world of professionals.[508]

The ecclesial community thus forms itself according to its cultural context. This is precisely where the task for leadership in the church lies, because however 'Christians structure themselves, they will have a missional leadership'.[509] The structural formation of the church for its mission should be the focus of ecclesial ministry. This calls for sensitive guidance and leaders who are aware of the social and historical context of North American Christianity to help the communities to see themselves accurately in their own contexts.[510] This directly affects the way church ministers are viewed:

> This missional ecclesiology will significantly shape the leadership of the missional pastor, whose identity we may best describe as missionary to the congregation, so that the particular community may become a mission community.[511]

The minister needs to be more than just an exegete of Scripture, she needs to be able to understand the cultural context of the respective community. Moreover, the minister must be able to lead the community in the communal search for a credible embodiment of the Christ event. Since the need for this may be less felt among the community, he is in a sense also a missionary who wants to convince people of a certain (biblical) vision.

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[508] Guder, *Missional Church*, 239.
[509] Guder, *Missional Church*, 239.
[510] Guder, *Missional Church*, 237.
[511] Guder, *Missional Church*, 241.

4.3.4 Word Centred

The second basic principle of Guder's theology of ministry is the fact that it is principally Word centred. The missional orientation and the centrality of the Word are closely connected to each other:

> The life of the New Testament churches was centered around their missional vocation and their formation to practice it. This is what discipling was all about. This formation happens as the biblical words work powerfully within the community.[512]

In line with the Reformed tradition, Guder emphasizes the fact that the five ministries of Ephesians 4:11 are all Word-related.[513] Guder approvingly quotes the words first uttered during the colloquy at Ilanz in 1526: 'The Christian church is born out of the word of God. It should remain in it and not listen to the voice of any stranger' (*Ecclesia progenitor est ex verbo Dei, nec audit vocem alieni*).[514]

4.3.4.1 Scriptural Formation

Throughout his work Guder underlines the importance of what he calls 'the Scriptural formation of the missional community'.[515] The church cannot go without Word-equipment and the primary task of ordered ministries is to equip the entire congregation for the work of ministry by interpreting and explaining the Word of God. In this way the congregation grows in her missionary task, because 'the apostolic scriptures became the Holy Spirit's instrument for the continuing formation of missional communities for their calling'.[516] Elsewhere, Guder puts it like this:

> The missional transformation of a congregation is directly related to the priority assigned to the Bible and to the way in which the Bible shapes that community.[517]

In this area, many pastors encounter the problem that while they can see that the cultural context and the church's place in it have changed, deeply ingrained church patterns and expectations make it hard to engage in biblical formation. After all, Christians whose focus is mainly on a church meeting their very needs are not eager for transforming biblical formation.[518] Therefore, it is vital for churches and their ministry to be shaped by the Bible. While missional

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[512] Guder, 'Biblical Formation', 62.

[513] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 209; Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 161

[514] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 98; Guder, 'Implications', 286-287.

[515] See especially the article with the same name in Guder, *Called to Witness*, 104-120. Also instructive is his chapter on 'Biblical formation and discipleship' in Barrett, *Treasure*, 59-73.

[516] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 150.

[517] Guder, 'Biblical formation and Discipleship', 61.

[518] Guder, 'Biblical formation and Discipleship', 61.

transformation cannot be planned, manipulated, or scheduled, it is clear that it can only come about when the Bible is central as a discipleship-shaping power.[519] The goal of this scriptural formation is to reach a level of biblical literacy that enables believers to be translators of the biblical narrative in their own cultural context. Believers should be culturally bilingual and able to speak both the language of faith, learned from biblical formation, and the language of the surrounding culture.[520]

In line with his rejection of the clergy–laity distinction, Guder states that the communication of the gospel is not a prerogative of ordained ministers. If Reformed Christians are to take their missional vocation seriously, then it should be emphasized that not only the elders, deacons and pastors are Word-equippers in their various ways but that all Christians are called to share in gospel communication and should be equipped to do so.[521]

One of the main causes of the problems that the church faces in the missionary encounter with secular society is the chasm between clergy and laity. If churches want to meet the missional challenges they face, then they must risk unchaining the Bible. Guder speaks of the risk of real biblical literacy in church communities rather than dependence on the learned few and of the risk of the 'freewheeling conversation about what the Spirit is really saying to the churches through these scriptures'.[522]

As to how this is given practical shape, Guder does not share much at first glance. In his contribution on Biblical formation in the volume *Treasure in Clay Jars*, he mentions how renewed attention to the centrality of the Bible is taking root in various congregations. There he cites examples of 'core congregations' focusing on Scriptural formation within a wider community, fraternities living committed to Christ, Bible colleges, Bible discipleship groups and other examples. However, he does not address how ordered ministers can concretely lead the congregation in this process.[523]

In an article on the scriptural formation of the missional community, he elaborates a bit more. He ends that article with some comments on the value of the practice of mentoring, a scriptural theme, in his view, rarely alluded to.

> Who can guide missional apprenticeship in the community? Who is worthy of imitation, that mimesis that is another central theme in the Pauline formation of the missional church?[524]

He refers to Karl Barth who, while not addressing ordered ministry in his *Church Dogmatics*, has a whole section on the gifts of mentors and apprenticeship, for

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[519] Guder, 'Biblical formation and Discipleship', 72; Guder, *Called to Witness*, 113.
[520] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 118; Guder, *Missional Church*, 237.
[521] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 151.
[522] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 151.
[523] Guder, *Biblical Formation*, 67 ff.
[524] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 120.

the formation of a faithful community. This focus on mentoring is consistent with how Guder describes Jesus' way of teaching. The disciples went to school with Jesus and were formed into disciples by him. In doing so, Jesus connects to a particular important tradition of Judaism:

> If a person was drawn to a particular teacher of faith, he could request to become that rabbi's student or disciple. In effect, he would "go to school" with that teacher, accompanying him, listening to and memorizing his teaching, and observing his interactions. As a rabbinic disciple, this person would learn to interpret the tradition and the Scriptures through the particular lens of his master. It was a process of formation, that drew together mentoring, apprenticing, and learning content.[525]

Guder also alludes to this idea in his little booklet on incarnational ministry, where he suggests that 'the story of the disciples and of their experience with Jesus on earth is the essential curriculum for the formation of the community that will carry on Jesus' ministry after Easter and Pentecost'.[526]

In this way, the way ordered ministry leads the community becomes clearer. An important part of the Biblical and Scriptural formation of the community by ordered ministry, according to Guder, is through mentoring, apprenticing, and learning content in the footsteps of Jesus. Ordered ministers are mentors, instructors, and teachers.

4.3.4.2 Fivefold Ministry and Collegiality

As said, Guder highly appreciates Markus Barth's commentary on Ephesians 4. Following Barth's explanation of 'the constitution of the church', Guder claims that the five ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4 should be regarded normative for ecclesial ministry.[527] Although the organizational dimensions of ordered ministries are subject to change and redefinition because of their contextual nature, Ephesians 4:11 summarizes 'what will always be true of all ministers of the Word.'[528] In every missional community the equipping power of the Word should be experienced in the five diverse ways as laid out in Ephesians.[529]

Guder sees the different ministries as five indispensable dimensions of the ministry of the Word. The ministry of the Word is *apostolic* 'by proclaiming the apostolic message and by forming the community as a sent people'. It is *prophetic* in that it challenges every culture with the claims of Christ. It is *evangelistic* because it 'equips the saints by showing us how to tell the story to

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[525] Guder, 'A Multicultural and Translational Approach', sec. The Holiness of Discipleship
[526] Guder, *The Incarnation*, 4.
[527] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 145.
[528] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 162.
[529] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 153.

those who have not heard it.'[530] And it is *pastoral* and *pedagogical* because it nurtures and cares for the believers.

Since the ministry of the Word is multi-dimensional, it requires multiple ministers to do justice to the diverse dimensions. Ecclesial ministry therefore cannot be a task for one person, and churches should refrain from using words that give the impression that only one person does the Word-equipping. Guder pleads for collegiality in the ministry of the church.[531]

Collegial ministry, according to Guder, 'is relational, takes place in networks of relationships, and demonstrates the nature of God's love through the way that these relationships actually work'. The collegiality of leadership of the congregation is in itself a testimony to the power of the gospel:

> If the community is to respond faithfully to its biblical formation, if it is to walk worthily of its calling, then the biblical formation that is the priority of missional leadership needs to be supported and fleshed out in the collegial relationships of equippers of the saints. (...) Missional leadership in the New Testament is expressly and intentionally collegial. Since it is a message of healing love, of reconciliation, new beginnings, and thus of transformed relationships, its witness is always and essentially relational.[532]

Collegiality, however, should not be restricted to ordained ministers, but affects the whole community of believers:

> 'The practiced collegiality of the missional leaders of the community will render questionable and ultimately passé the mind-sets of the old clergy-lay distinction.'[533]

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[530] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 153.

[531] Guder, *Continuing Conversion*, 164. Despite the Reformed emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, Guder claims that 'our members by and large look on their ministers, their pastors, as a distinctive and spiritually privileged breed' (Guder, *Called to Witness*, 156). Although this concerns a theological problem, a change can be pursued by the language that is used. 'We could examine our speech to see how many ways we violate or diminish the fundamental collegiality of missional vocation. We could refuse to use the term "solo pastor"; we could question what possible sense there still is in the use of the term "Reverend".' (Guder, *Called to Witness*, 156) Besides this clericalizing language, Guder also draws attention to the adopted language and values of the corporate world, which results in members being treated as customers and ministers as professionals who deliver a religious product.

[532] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 155.

[533] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 155-156.

4.3.5 Summary and Observations

In line with his missionary and ecclesiological presuppositions, Guder develops a theology of ministry that is entirely at the service of forming faithful witnesses to the gospel. Guder's specialized minister is a Scriptural equipper who focuses the congregation and individual members on their missionary calling as witnesses. The minister does so by seeing traditional ministerial tasks in light of the church's missionary calling. In addition, the minister leads the community and individual members as a mentor, instructor, and teacher in a process of Scriptural formation. Moreover, the task of ecclesial ministry is to guide the community in the search for a credible embodiment of the Christ event. Since the need for this may be less felt among the community, he is in a sense also a missionary who wants to convince people of a certain (biblical) vision.

4.3.5.1 Clergy and Laity

Regarding Guder's emphasis on the absolute equality between clergy and laity, the following can be said: From a Reformed point of view, Guder is right to dismiss any form of ontological difference between clergy and laity. His insistence on the priesthood of all believers clearly has its roots in Protestant ecclesiology. For Guder, however, it seems that any form of distinction between ministers and other members of the church nullifies its charismatic structure automatically. Reformers like Bucer, Calvin and Łaski did, however, maintain a distinction between ordained ministers and the laity. Instead of anchoring it ontologically, though, they interpreted the distinction pneumatologically with reference to the charisma of the Spirit. That is, ecclesial ministry for them was subservient to the very charismatic structure of the church. In response to the hierarchical order of medieval ministerial theology and practice, these reformers rightly called for a more functional understanding of ministry. However, this correction did not mean that ministers were nothing more than the sum of the tasks that belonged to their function. Whenever ministers operate within the boundaries of Scripture, they also represent Christ, who rules the church through the overseers appointed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 20:28). This does not make them spiritually a special breed, but it does make them ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). By interpreting ministry pneumatologically, the Reformers precluded a too radical instrumentalization of ministry and maintained a symbolic dimension to it.

4.3.5.2 Instrumentality?

In the discussion of missionary and ecclesiological presuppositions, I already mentioned briefly that a possible over-instrumentalization of ecclesiology may lurk in Guder's theology of ministry. The summary of Guder's thoughts on ecclesial ministry shows that this danger is not just imaginary. The purpose of Guder's ecclesial ministry is the education and instruction of the members of the church. The symbolic function of ministry is relegated to the background in favour of an instrumental view of ministry.

However, it is important to keep in mind that Guder develops his ecclesiology to counter a one-sidedly inward-looking form of church. Against the background of his opposition to a church focused on meeting the needs of its members, Guder's emphasis is understandable and called for. Nevertheless, it is important that the church and its ministry are not equated with their instrumental dimension.

4.3.5.3 Collegiality

Finally, a brief word on the collegiality of ministry. In true Reformed fashion, Guder emphasizes the collegial nature of church ministry. Collegiality, however, according to Guder, is not primarily intended to counteract possible abuses of power, but rather to tap into the reservoir of different spiritual gifts in the congregation. It is important to take this into consideration when developing a missionary Reformed theology of ministry.

4.4 Authority

Guder's recurrent emphasis on the role of the priesthood of all believers also has its implications for his treatment of the question of official authority. Although Guder treats the concept of ministerial authority extensively only in his book from 1985, references to authority in his later work do not indicate that there has been a fundamental change in his thinking on the subject. On the contrary, his argumentation in *Be My Witnesses* is completely in line with his later work on theology of ministry.

Guder develops his understanding of theology of ministry against the background of what he sees as a misplaced spiritual hierarchy that still lingers in the Protestant tradition. Based on their exciting teaching and preaching, stimulation of mind and even numerical growth, some Christians ministers are considered to be authorities upon whom 'ordinary' church members depend for their Christian identity. Guder even goes so far as to suggest that there is often even a sense that one's salvation is in some way related to the person of the charismatic leader/preacher. This way, even though Protestantism rejects hierarchy as a matter of principle, there seems to be a 'salvific sense about the authority that many Protestant clergy lay claim to and exercise'.[534] The aim of Guder's concept of authority is to preclude the establishment of a person or an office as a necessity of salvation.[535]

The lingering spiritual hierarchy greatly hampers the realization of the priesthood of all believers. After all, 'great biblical expositors do not necessarily equip the church to be an equipping community with a sense of shared call and responsibility for incarnation ministry in the world', since they often create undue dependence upon themselves, sometimes even resulting in various

[534] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 220-221.

[535] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 225.

questionable personality cults.[536] For the church to be a witnessing community and the congregation to become a priesthood of believers, it is necessary that ministers have a sound self-understanding.

The common understanding of authority is that it is a static definition or a characteristic, with often negative implications due to its association with arbitrary power. The pejorative undertone of the word 'authoritarian' illustrates this negative approach.

In order to develop a sound concept of authority, Guder takes his starting point in the etymological roots of the word authority in the Latin verb *augere*. The word family *augere*, *auctor* and *auctoritas* refers to those 'actions or functions that bring about increase, movement, flourishing and growth'.[537] This etymological origin of the word 'authority' shows that a person who exercises authority should not be understood in a static sense as someone with certain powers, prerogatives, and rights. Rather, his authority is oriented towards the growth and flourishing of other people. Authority is therefore not static or rigid, but relational and functional.

4.4.1 A Triad of Authority

To elaborate on his thoughts on official authority, Guder uses the concept of authority as developed by the German educational theorist Erich Geissler in his book *Erziehungsmittel*. Geissler defines his concept of pedagogical authority by means of a triad that consists of three important factors in the learning process, as is shown in illustration 1.

At the top of the triad is the so-called superior entity, which consists of the content to be transferred in a specific educational field. The lower point of the triad is the student who is supposed to grow towards mastery of the content of the superior entity. The line between the top of the triad and the lower point is interrupted, symbolizing the fact that the student does not have direct access to the content of the superior entity. The third point of the triad is the agent of the student's growth and as such the bearer of authority. He has a direct line with the top of the triad as well as with the lower point. Geissler's concept shows how pedagogical authority refers to a person who has an unbroken relationship to the content to be transferred and an unbroken relationship with the student. This unbroken relationship with the student makes it possible for the agent to be the mediator of the superior content to the student.

Geissler's concept can easily be applied to ministerial authority. The content of the faith, the scriptural witness, the means of grace and ultimately the 'knowledge of Christ' belong to the top of Geissler's triad. The church member

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[536] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 220.

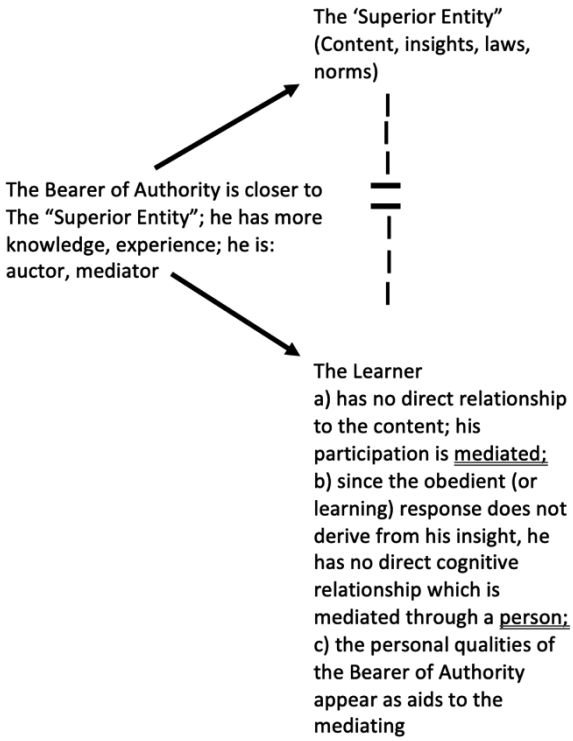
[537] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 101. Also, Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 221. In 2015 Guder discusses the concept of authority in relation to the missional authority of Scripture. Although the context is different, his substantive treatment of the word 'authority' is the same. This similarity in content underlines that the thinking of Guder is characterized by a high degree of consistency.

that grows in his or her faith is represented by the lower point of the triad. The minister is the third point of the triad. As such he has an unbroken line with the content of faith but also an unbroken line with the church member. Guder stresses this double connectedness of the minister. The unbroken line with the content of faith shows that ministerial authority is not innate but conferred. Rather than being essential, authority is an element of the function of ministers. Guder calls ministerial authority an outworking of the Word, which ministers proclaim, expound, and demonstrate.[538]

Not only should the minister have a profound knowledge of the content of faith, but he should have a close connection with the church member who is growing in faith as well. Guder emphasizes the importance of the latter connection, because only trust and mutual openness facilitate the equipping process. The quality of the interpersonal relationship between the minister and the church member is therefore of equal importance to the qualifications of authority in a technical or academic sense.[539]

Guder uses Geissler's model to introduce a dynamic concept of authority. Rather than being a fixed given, the relationship between the person bearing authority and the person accepting authority can turn around over time. Since authority functions as a channel for increase of spiritual growth, the bearer of authority makes himself or herself progressively superfluous in the process. Because of this dynamic nature, there is no room for a fixed hierarchical structure.[540]

Illustration 1: Diagram of Geissler's Concept of pedagogical authority



[538] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 146.
[539] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 223.
[540] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 223.

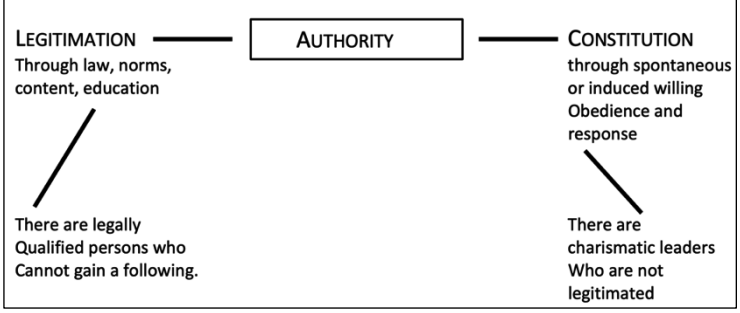
4.4.2 Legitimation and Constitution

To explore this concept of authority further, Guder uses a second model introduced by Geissler, as shown in illustration 2. Geissler speaks of the 'legitimation' and the 'constitution' of authority. The 'legitimation' of authority refers to the formal process of education, the attainment of certain standards of knowledge and experience, and the passing of examinations in order to obtain the appropriate certification of an individual as a bearer of authority. The 'constitution' refers to the willingness of the students to submit themselves to the authority of the legitimized teacher. Without the willingness to accept his or her authority, even the most highly educated person could not function as a teacher.

Guder applies Geissler's 'legitimation' and 'constitution' also to ecclesial ministry. The 'legitimation' of the authority of specialized ministry is regulated in the churches through various orders of candidacy and education for ministry. Without legitimation, an alleged authority figure might just as well be a demagogue or heretic, or a charismatic figure who demands allegiance of the people but does not really serve them as an equipping minister.[541]

This use of the concept of legitimation can also be linked with Guder's view on ordination. Earlier, in *Be My Witnesses*, Guder had explained that ordination only has a rightful place when it is considered as an expression of the church's examination of the gifting and calling of the specialized ministers. The theologies and practices of ordination err when they consider ordination to mean a kind of admission to the special spiritual caste of people who have salvific powers because of their relationship with God.[542]

Illustration 2: Geissler's Diagram on Legitimation and Constitution of Authority



The constitution of authority must also have its place, though. Being qualified does not automatically lead to acceptance. The ministry of the church is therefore equally dependent on the confirmation and acceptance of the church at large and more specifically by a particular congregation of Christians who are willing to submit to the authority of the minister. Apart from that willing acceptance there can be no ministry because ministerial authority does not only require legitimisation but also constitution.

[541] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 224.

[542] Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 211.

4.4.3 Observation

With his application of Geissler's concept of authority to ecclesial ministry, Guder makes a valuable contribution to the question of the nature and scope of the ministerial authority. Guder wishes to prevent anchoring authority in the person or the office of the minister. His argumentation contains valuable insights that deserve attention.

The triad of authority helps to illuminate important aspect of ministerial authority. First, by using Geissler's concept, Guder insightfully makes clear that any form of authority can only be based on the Word. In Guder's own words: 'Ministerial authority is an outworking of the Word.'[543] The minister has authority only insofar as he operates within the bounds of the Word. This way, Guder is arguing entirely within the lines of Reformed theology of ministry.

Another important aspect Guder illuminates by using the work of Geissler is the relationship between ministry and congregation and its expression in ordination. The concept of legitimation elucidates that the minister is in some respect above or opposed to the community in the sense that he or she possesses gifts, knowledge, and skills that the congregation needs in order to grow in missionary faithfulness. At the same time, the community needs to be willing to place itself under the authority of the minister. The rite of ordination in the church can be seen as a recognition of the gifting, calling and education of its ministers.

In a way, Oliver O'Donovan makes the same point, and his use of words may be helpful here. According to O'Donovan the authority of the minister is 'appealing to the authority of a truth which stands above it and seeking to place the hearer in an equality of perspective with the teacher'.[544] In this context, O'Donovan points to Paul, whose 'aim is to make his hearers independent of himself, to direct them to the gospel of Christ'.[545] Interpreting the Word is thus an activity of the entire community of believers who bow together under the Word. In doing so, however, the community makes use of ministers in whom it has recognized the charismatic gifts of scriptural interpretation.

One comment is in order here, however. As noted earlier, Guder emphasizes the instrumental character of ecclesial ministry. Ecclesial ministry is at the service of equipping believers for their missionary calling in society. This instrumental emphasis is also evident in his understanding of authority. Not only is it significant that Guder derives his concept of authority from an educational theorist, but also in terms of content his thoughts are mainly pedagogical. Although Guder speaks of means of grace and knowledge of Christ, Guder's notion of authority may give the impression that it is about content that must be transferred. Authority seems entirely at the service of equipping believers and Christian communities.

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[543] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 146.

[544] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 172

[545] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 173.

It is understandable that Guder chooses this emphasis, given his opposition to a Christendom understanding of church that focuses on the needs of believers. Guder is therefore right to call attention to the pedagogical side of authority, as it is directed towards understanding and insight into the truth of the gospel, but the political dimension of ecclesial authority does not seem to have a role in his thoughts. I am thinking here of the administration of ecclesial discipline, which is also a thoroughly missionary matter.[546] In the words of O'Donovan: 'Discipline exists to enable the church to live a public life of integrity'.[547] Actually, it is rather remarkable that Guder devotes no consideration to this dimension of ecclesial ministry, since he does emphasize that the church is a countercultural community. Although this counterculturality may not concern a sociologically neatly demarcated community of people with their own subculture, it does however involve a missionary faithfulness that can be seriously damaged by behaviour that contradicts the message of the gospel. In that light, it would have been expected that Guder would elaborate on exactly what authority entails in this area as well.[548]

Anyway, the Christian community thus also has a political dimension since biblical insight and obedience to the Word of God do not always align. In the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, the church acts in a political way to protect the integrity of its witness to the kingdom of God. A Reformed theology of ministry in view of the *missio Dei* will also have to incorporate this aspect of authority.

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[546] Cf. Van Swigchem, *Missionair karakter*, 107-108.

[547] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 169.

[548] Hans Schaeffer, in his *Kerk om te vieren* (*Church to celebrate*), also brings up O'Donovan when it comes to the authority of ecclesial ministry. (Schaeffer, *Kerk om te vieren*, 108-11) In his *The Desire of the Nations* O'Donovan relates the authority of the church to the rule of Christ. (O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 159, 169 ff.) The church is a political society ruled by the ascended Christ. However, this rule cannot be identified with any particular order of ministry. To positively interpret the structure of ministry, the church must distinguish between the catholicity of the church and its order. Catholicity points to the scope of the Spirit's mission that is always larger than the church's ordered structures. The church and its structures are called to catch up with this mission of the Spirit. The church's ordering can then be seen as a recapitulation of the Christ event, as expressed particularly in the sacraments. In the words of O'Donovan: 'The sacraments provide the primary way in which the church is 'knit together', that is, given institutional form and order'. (O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 172) In this way, the church's authority in its (sacramental) acts rests in Christ's authority over the world as it is.

In view of ecclesial authority, it is important to note that O'Donovan – and in his footsteps Schaeffer – closely relates the authority of ministry and the liturgy of the church. This is consistent with the liturgical rooting of ministry, as highlighted in the previous chapter, and therefore seems a promising way to reflect on ministerial authority form a Reformed perspective.

4.5 Education of Ministers

Guder's thoughts also have their consequences for the education and training of future ministers. In the eyes of Guder, theological education in the current situation is most frequently aimed at the formation of professional clergy who can serve the church by supplying a commodified spirituality, whereas the church's educational strategies should be aimed at the preparation of servant leaders of missional communities.[549]

Since he has explicitly dealt with the questions surrounding theological curriculum in his academic career, Guder certainly has the right to speak when it comes to the education of future ministers. As the first professor of missional and ecumenical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, Guder was given the task to develop a curriculum in missional and ecumenical theology.[550]

Guder's thoughts in this matter can be divided into two categories. The first category focuses on what Guder considers to be the required shape of the traditional theological disciplines. The second focuses on the practical and spiritual formation of future ministers.

4.5.1 Missional Scaffolding of Theological Disciplines

Soon after Guder had taken up the task of developing a new curriculum, the question surfaced how the missional theology he pursued related to the classical disciplines of theological education like biblical theology, systematic theology, church history and practical theology.[551] In developing a new curriculum, Guder and the writers of *Missional Church* used the term 'missional' as a conceptual tool to address the widespread omission of mission from the Western theological education.[552] Guder uses the image of a scaffolding to make his point. The term missional is…

> … a kind of 'permanent scaffolding' surrounding and holding up our theological disciplines. We would not need that scaffolding if our theological work were shaped by the *missio Dei*, if the entire doctrinal enterprise were, in diverse ways, truly focused upon the formation and equipping of the church for its apostolate. If mission were truly the mother of our theology, if our theological disciplines were intentionally conceived and developed as components of the formation of the church for its biblical vocation, we would never need to use the term 'missional.'[553]

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[549] Guder, 'Implications', 289.
[550] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 165.
[551] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 166.
[552] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 166.
[553] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 168.

Guder goes on to show how this scaffolding affects all traditional theological sub-disciplines.

Regarding biblical theology as a theological discipline, Guder points at the necessity of a missional hermeneutic. As mentioned earlier, the different books of the biblical canon were all written and intended for communities that understood themselves as called and sent to be witnesses to the gospel. Still, biblical theology as an academic discipline is often not missional and therefore the conceptual missional scaffolding remains necessary.[554]

In view of systematic theology, this approach means – following Karl Barth and Otto Weber – that its particular role is to scrutinize the church's exposition of God's word in its preaching and teaching to assess if it is faithful to the gospel.[555] Guder observes how especially here the missional scaffolding is much needed, since it is still common to do systematic and doctrinal theology without any attention to the fundamental and central importance of the *missio Dei*.[556]

In terms of teaching church history, this means two things. First, with the marginalization of the churches in the West and the growing awareness that Christianity is a world phenomenon, Church history can no longer be considered a Eurocentric enterprise. While church buildings and seminaries in the Global North are threatened with closure, churches in de Global South are struggling to meet the housing and organizational needs of their expanding numbers.[557] Next, church history should be taught as 'missional church history', meaning that it should 'investigate the church's missional faithfulness as she moves from one paradigm to another over the course of time'.[558]

Furthermore, a radically missional rethinking of practical theology has two major consequences. First, the reductionist dichotomy between doctrinal theology and pastoral theology is overcome and the theological inferiority complex of practical theologians can be laid to rest. 'Missional theology seeks to think the faith in terms of its practice, and to practice the faith in terms of its meaning and purpose.'[559] Next, practical theology equips the congregation to deal with questions like, 'What is the conduct worthy of the local church's calling? How does the church cope with the calling of mortality? How do church members engage their neighbours with different faiths?' Whenever a congregation takes its missional vocation seriously, questions like these will inevitably come up.[560]

All considerations mentioned above show that Guder's design for the theological curriculum moves within Schleiermacher's framework of academic theology. Guder does not question the fundamental *raison d'être* of

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[554] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 168-169.
[555] Guder, 'Implications', 294.
[556] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 169.
[557] Guder, 'Implications', 291.
[558] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 169.
[559] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 176. Also, Guder, 'Implications', 296.
[560] Guder, 'Implications', 296.

Schleiermacher's theological encyclopaedia. In lieu of a complete overhaul of the traditional curriculum, Guder chooses to emphasize particular accents within the existing framework.[561] Guder's use of the word 'scaffolding' underscores his starting point: the building of the traditional curriculum does not need to be dismantled, but it does need renovation.

The key accent placed by Guder is the Reformed emphasis upon biblical studies, including biblical languages, exegesis, biblical history, and biblical theology.[562] The other theological disciplines should be profoundly affected by this Reformed starting point.

4.5.2 Spiritual Formation of Future Ministers

Alongside the discussion of the content and the shape of the theological curriculum, there is also the question of the purpose of theological education.

The roots of Western theological education are, in Guder's view, defined by the ancient partnership of throne and altar, by the privileging of the Christian faith and the church, and by the assumption that the European context embodied the reign of God as the final intention for human history. With its origins in Christendom, Christian education was from the outset seriously influenced by the church's partnership with power, wealth, property, and social prestige. Implicitly the task of theological formation was maintaining the *status quo* of the *corpus Christianum*. Instead of missional service, the goal of education was theological mastery, which resulted in a class of semi-nobility called clergy whose primary task was the maintenance of the powerful and institutional church.[563]

Although the Reformers made some necessary corrections, they did not reclaim the essential missional nature of the church.[564] To this present day, theological education in the West is viewed through Christendom lenses, even though the churches have been marginalized.[565] The only difference is that whereas in the Christendom era the clergy were trained to be divinely ordained in a hierarchy that maintained the power and the wealth of the institutional church, nowadays future ministers are trained to be spiritual professionals who serve as members of the 'staff' or as 'executive pastors'. In the words of Guder:

> Our theological academy tends to center its attention on the competencies and skills of our graduates. That is the intentional outcome of our educational efforts. We are educating professionals to be pastoral or ministerial leaders of our congregations. We see ourselves as parallel to law schools and medical schools. In fact, those

[561] Guder, 'Implications', 288.
[562] Guder, 'Implications', 288.
[563] Guder, 'Implications', 292-293.
[564] Guder, 'Implications', 293. The radical Reformation is the exception, according to Guder.
[565] Guder, 'Implications', 294.

> of us teaching in universities call ourselves 'Divinity schools' and march very intentionally to the drum of the secular guild.[566]

Both in the Christendom era and in the current post-Christian period, mission has disappeared from the agenda of the theological education. Getting mission back on the agenda will have consequences for the way future ministers are trained.

A glance at the original apostolic mission shows that the educational strategy of the early church was not to produce professional successors or ordained ministers, but that the apostles were focused on the gathering and sending of communities that would continue the witness to the gospel of Christ. Their process of formation 'was that of disciples of a rabbi who formed them for their apostolic calling'.[567]

Since the current situation of a marginalized church in the West is in many ways similar to the situation of the apostolic time, the church should take the educational strategy of the apostolic mission as its starting point. Theological education of future ministers should be focused on the formation of biblically informed equippers of the saints, rather than professional ministers who are considered experts in the organizational maintenance of existing churches. The learning goals should be oriented to the communities served by the graduates as their equippers, rather than as their professional ministers.[568]

Given that the learning goals of theological instruction must be attuned to the actual congregations in which future ministers will serve, it is only logical to give these intended communities a significant role in theological instruction as well. Theological education is not meant be confined to an ivory tower of academic complacency but should be embedded far more in the concrete lives of actual churches.

> When students carry out their theological formation in intentional communities that integrate academic discipline with the corporate practices of spiritual growth, then their capacity truly to be equippers of the saints for the work of service is greatly enhanced. Such missiocentric integration of theological formation needs to be pursued energetically, especially in the context of the post-Christendom West.[569]

Sadly, Guder does not dwell on this stimulating statement. He only refers to a promising first experiment with a learning cohort, without going into details.

Despite a little vagueness concerning the concrete form of the interaction between academy and congregation, Guder's point is clear: theological education should be aimed at and formed by the actual church that knows itself

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[566] Guder, 'Implications', 288.
[567] Guder, 'Implications', 288.
[568] Guder, 'Implications', 289.
[569] Guder, 'Implications', 297.

to be called to witness. Theological education, in Guder's view, is intended to promote the witness of the concrete Christian congregation and its members. Remembering Guder's insistence on the importance of the priesthood of all believes, it is no surprise that he states that the faithfulness of the lay apostolate of the church is the test of missional theological education.[570]

4.6 Conclusion

What has listening to Guder has provided in terms of reflection on theology of ministry from a missionary perspective? It is now possible to formulate an answer to the sub-question I formulated at the beginning of this chapter:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Guder's theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

I start with the missional dimension to then reflect on the missional intentions in Guder's ecclesiology.

4.6.1 Missionary Dimensions

All of Guder's ecclesiology has a very emphatic missionary dimension. The church's mission to the world is not just one aspect among others but defines its very being. Focusing on the *missio Dei* keeps the church from being overly concerned with its own efforts and potentially focuses its attention on the Spirit's agency in this world in which the Christian community may participate. In addition, the focus on the *missio Dei* in this world helps to counteract an individualistic reduction of the gospel that is only concerned with the spiritual dimension of human existence. Guder's ecclesiology with its emphasis on the role of the community of the church seeks to offer a holistic alternative to a reductionist view of the church in which the members mere consumers of a spiritual commodity.

For Guder, witness is the mode in which the church (and thus its ministry) participates in the *missio Dei*. By defining the missionary dimension of ecclesiology through the concept of witness, Guder clarifies that the mission of the church is always *born out* and *focused on* the Christ event. This provides focus without narrowing the actions of the church to mere verbal communication of the gospel.

This gives ecclesial ministry overall a missionary dimension. The very work of ecclesial ministers is permeated by the missionary calling of the church. This is evident, for example, in the fact that the traditional tasks must be thought through from the church's vocation to be missionary.

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[570] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 175.

4.6.2 Missionary Intentions

Regarding the missionary intentions of ecclesial ministry, Guder also provides valuable insights. The intent of ecclesial ministry should be the formation of faithful witnessing communities and faithful witnesses. In so doing, Scripture, read as a missional document, is the primary instrument. Where communities and individual Christians, mentored, instructed, and taught by their ministers, take the missional character of the Bible seriously, they cannot but be formed into faithful witnesses of the gospel. The missionary intentions of ecclesial ministry fall into a *communal* and into an *individual* category.

Ecclesial ministry falls into a *communal* category in the sense that ministers are called to lead the congregation in the formation of incarnational communities that embody the various elements of the Christ event in the world. Guder summarizes this under the calling of the congregation to 'walk worthily'. This worthy walk has two sides: on the one hand, it means consciously seeking to be a contextually relevant embodiment of the gospel, but on the other hand, it also entails not shying away from being countercultural when contextual cultural values contradict the gospel. The yardstick here is the Christ event.
Moreover, Guder creatively makes the charismatic structure fruitful for the missionary calling of the church, as evidenced by his positive approach to collegiality. Collegiality as an ecclesiological concept is not primarily meant to counteract possible abuses of power, but positively to tap into the reservoir of different spiritual gifts in the congregation.

Ecclesial ministry also falls into an *individual* category since ministers are called to equip individual believers to be witnesses of the gospel in their own places in society. When it comes to equipping believers, Guder refers several times to the way Jesus led his disciples through mentoring, apprenticing and content learning as a model the church should follow.

To summarize: Guder's ordered of specialized minister is a Scriptural equipper who focuses the congregation and individual members on their missionary calling as witnesses. The minister does so by seeing traditional ministerial tasks in light of the church's missionary calling. In addition, the minister leads the community and individual members as a mentor, instructor, and teacher in a process of Scriptural formation. Moreover, the task of ecclesial ministry is to guide the community in the search for a credible embodiment of the Christ event. Since the need for this may be less felt among the community, he is in a sense also a missionary who wants to convince people of a certain (biblical) vision.

4.6.3 Relevant Points of Attention

Other relevant points for thinking through Reformed theology of ministry from this chapter are Guder's thoughts on authority and education of ministers. Concerning authority, Guder's thoughts help bring into sharper focus what it specifically implies. His Scripture-based view of authority is helpful in

developing Reformed theology of ministry. However, it needs to be complemented by a political dimension of authority.

Regarding education of future ministers, Guder offers some valuable insights. I am thinking particularly of his design for the theological curriculum and the fact that theological education should be embedded far more in the concrete lives of actual churches.

In the course of the chapter, a potential weakness also emerged. All his ecclesiology and his theology of ministry is focused on the formation of witnesses and witnessing communities. This way, the instrumental aspect of the church receives great emphasis. Given Guder's opposition to a consumerist church, this is understandable and called for. However, it is important to remember that the church is not only a school of learning, but just as much a safe haven for lost souls or a hospital for (spiritually) injured people. Not to mention that the church is fundamentally a community of praise and worship. The emphasis on the instrumental side of ministry is understandable in a context where the church needs to learn to understand again what it means to be missional, but it can also lead to certain - non-instrumental - elements of ecclesial ministry being underplayed.

5. GUARDING THE CHURCH
Bram van de Beek's Theology of Ministry

Having discussed the missionary ecclesiology of Darrell L. Guder, I now want to listen to an entirely different voice. In this chapter I want to focus on the ecclesiology of Dutch theologian Bram van de Beek. Whereas Guder develops his ecclesiology and understanding of ministry from the *missio Dei*, Van de Beek, on the contrary, is critical of the concept and designs a highly sacramental ecclesiology. By consciously giving space to a critical voice, I want to avoid possible one-sidedness.

Van de Beek is more than just a counterbalance though. He is an interesting interlocutor for other reasons as well. Van de Beek unfolds his ideas not only in small publications, but they are embedded in a series of voluminous and interrelated studies on dogmatic topics. One such study involves a weighty book on ecclesiology and pneumatology. Consequently, his thoughts on ecclesial ministry do not have to be plucked from everywhere but are mainly concentrated in one book. Moreover, it means that Van de Beek's ecclesiological thoughts are embedded in a comprehensive theological structure. The advantage of this is that his ecclesiology and theology of ministry can be expected to show a clear coherence.

Another reason why Van de Beek is a suitable dialogue partner has to do with his ecumenical commitment. From 1998 onward, Van de Beek displays a clear catholicizing tendency in his theology. Particularly in his ecclesiology, this is evident in an understanding of church that seems to be a combination of Roman Catholic and Reformed elements. This is especially significant in view of the development of an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry.

As a theologian Van de Beek does not shy away from provocation. In the Dutch theological landscape, he is a striking voice that always elicits reactions. Van de Beek's sometimes remarkable theological positions call for reflection. In the pursuit of an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry for the Dutch context, one simply cannot ignore Van de Beek.

The question I seek to answer in this chapter is:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Van de Beek's theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

I begin this chapter with a brief biographical and theological introduction to Van de Beek. I then turn to his ecclesiological presuppositions, and finally focus on his theology of ministry.

5.1 Bram van de Beek – an Introduction

I start with a brief biographical introduction of Van de Beek and an overview of his publications. With good reason, Van de Beek can be labelled a prolific writer. I therefore limit myself to his most important works and those publications that are relevant for the purpose of this study.

5.1.1 Biographical notes

Bram van de Beek was born 9 October 1946 in the Dutch village of Lunteren and grew up in a pietistic Reformed church tradition.[571]

After finishing his theological education at the university, he was ordained a minister in Lexmond in 1970, followed by consecutive moves to congregations in Vriezenveen and Raamsdonkveer.[572]

Van de Beek earned his doctorate in theology in 1980 with a thesis on the human person of Christ.[573] In 1981 he was appointed professor of dogmatics, biblical theology, and church order at Leiden University.[574] Van de Beek exchanged his position at Leiden University for a position as Professor of Christian symbolism at the *Vrije Universiteit* Amsterdam in 2000, before formally retiring from this position in 2010.[575]

5.1.2 Publications

I already mentioned Van de Beek's doctoral thesis on the human person of Christ. In the early years of his career as professor of theology, Van de Beek stood out by his balanced treatment of the questions on suffering, guilt, and God in his book *Waarom?* (Why?).[576] In this period, Van de Beek also published books on Pneumatology and Miracles, inter alia.[577]

In light of the subject matter of this study, it is particularly interesting that Van de Beek was involved in the creation of a new church order for the newly

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[571] For an extensive biography of Van de Beek, see De Kruijf, 'Bram van de Beek'. Although later in life Van de Beek was no longer formally affiliated with the pietistic *Gereformeerde Bond* (Reformed Union) within the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, he retained an affinity with his pietistic background.

[572] Theology was not the only field of interest for Van de Beek. In 1974 he earned a doctorate in the natural sciences with a thesis on bramble berries.

[573] Van de Beek, *De menselijke persoon van Christus*; De Kruijf, 'Bram van de Beek', 18-19.

[574] In the early years of his career as professor of theology, Van de Beek stood out by his balanced treatment of the questions on suffering, guilt, and God in his book *Waarom?* (Why?). Van de Beek, *Waarom?*

[575] A Festschrift with more than 50 contributors and containing almost 1000 pages, offered to him in honour of his 65th birthday, bears witness to the influence Van de Beek had as a theologian throughout his theological career. Van der Borght/Van Geest, *Strangers and Pilgrims*.

[576] Van de Beek, *Waarom?*

[577] Van de Beek, *De adem van God*; Van de Beek, *Wonderen*.

unified Protestant church that was to be established.[578] Echoes of this involvement can be seen in a collection of essays published under the name *Tussen traditie en vervreemding* (*Between tradition and alienation*), in which he is explicitly concerned with the church's ministry.[579]

In 1998 Van de Beek published the first part of a series of dogmatic monographs under the overall title *Speaking of God*.[580] The first part – *Jezus Kurios* – sets the tone for the rest of the series, by way of positing a radical Christological starting point for all theology. In 2002 he published a monograph that dealt with the place of Israel in Christian theology, followed by volumes on eschatology in 2008, on ecclesiology together with pneumatology in 2012, on creation in 2014 and finally on God the Father (patrology) in 2017.[581]

However, Van de Beek not only publishes voluminous and academic tomes, but also regularly produces more concise and essay-like books explaining his ideas for a wider audience. With a view to the subject of this study, I particularly mention his more popular publications on ecclesiology and on eschatology.[582]

With a view to Van de Beek's view on ministry, I will draw particularly on his 2012 book on ecclesiology (*Lichaam en Geest*), and his smaller publications on the subject (*Is God terug?* and *Thuis*). However, to understand his presuppositions, the earlier volumes of his dogmatic series are also essential.

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[578] However, several proposals did not make it through the assembled synod and Van de Beek turned his attention to other matters. De Kruijf, 'Bram van de Beek', 23; Van den Broeke, 'Living Law', 638-639.

[579] Van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding*.

[580] Remarkably enough, in the preface to the summarizing volume *Speaking of God*, Van de Beek has this series begin in 1996 (Van de Beek, *Spreken over God*, 5) He does not explicitly mention that he is referring to his book on creation (Van de Beek, *Schepping*), but there seems to be no alternative. If we assume that Van de Beek is not mistaken in his retrospective, it cannot be otherwise than that he retroactively lets the series *Speaking of God* begin with a treatment of the doctrine of creation. This is notable for two reasons.

First, in his 1998 book on Christology (Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios*), Van de Beek makes it clear that Christian theology should begin with Christology. Explicitly, he names *Jezus Kurios* as the opening volume of a theological series.

In addition, the choice of 1996 is also striking for substantive reasons. While it is true that his book on creation already contains pointers to a radically Christologically oriented theology, the tone and content of the treatment of creation differs from his later approach. Finally, if his 1996 book is taken as a starting point, the Speaking of God series would contain two volumes on creation, since Van de Beek published a separate volume on creation in 2016.

With these considerations in mind, I do not consider 1996 to be the first volume of his Speaking of God series, but rather a conclusion to his first period and a prelude to his second.

[581] In the order that I have mentioned them: Van de Beek, *De kring om de Messias*; Van de Beek, *God doet recht*; Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*; Van de Beek, *Een lichtkring*; Van de Beek, *Mijn Vader, uw Vader*.

[582] Van de Beek, *Hier beneden is het niet*; Van de Beek, *Is God terug?*; Van de Beek, *Thuis*.

5.2 Ecclesiological Presuppositions

5.2.1 Development

Before dwelling on Van de Beek's ecclesiological presuppositions, it is useful to comment briefly on his theological development. Van de Beek's theological work – also his thoughts on ecclesiology – can be divided into two distinct phases.

The first period, which lasted through the first half of the 1990s, was characterized by a positive-critical search for a credible articulation of the Reformed tradition in the Western culture. Even though at this stage he distances himself from his teachers Van Ruler and Berkhof in certain respects, his theology can still be seen as a continuation of the positive-critical theology of these theologians. Critical is Van de Beek in this period in the sense that he, based upon his reading of the Bible and the Christian tradition, questions and rejects several Western cultural and scientific axioms.[583] Positive is Van de Beek in this period because he positively appreciates certain historical and cultural developments and tries to integrate them into his theology.[584]

In this period Van de Beek deals with ecclesiology in several publications. I already mentioned the collection of essays *Tussen traditie en vervreemding* earlier. In it, Van de Beek discusses the ministry of the church in three separate articles.[585] He takes his starting point in the general ministry of all believers. The special ministries of the elder and the pastor are in fact nothing more than specializations of the general ministry of all believers. Ministers do not represent God, but they come from and remain dependent on the congregation, and they are elected solely based on their special expertise.[586] Thus, the minister has no special connection to God that the ordinary member of the congregation does not have.[587] For this reason, in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands

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[583] To name just one example: in his book on miracles, Van de Beek criticizes the Western mathematical mode of thinking that originates in Descartes' epistemology. In the end, says Van de Beek, this Cartesian mode of thinking, with its aprioristic axioms and logically designed systems, has led to a culture that aims to control the world and each other, with violence and suppression as a consequence. Van de Beek, *Wonderen*, 222-227.

[584] Again, just one example: In his work on pneumatology Van de Beek discusses the work of God's Spirit in creation. He writes that it is possible for humans to discover God's will based on experiences of hope, of salvation and of blessing. It is true that this is human – and therefore limited – knowledge, but this does not alter the fact that our human knowledge – including our ethical knowledge – increases throughout history. See Van de Beek, *De adem van God*, 193.

[585] Van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding*, 85-97 ('Het pastoraat in de gemeente'), 115-125 ('Ambt en avondmaal') and 126-132 ('Over protestantse reacties op de ambtsvisie van het rapport over doop, eucharistie en ambt van de Wereldraad van Kerken').

[586] Van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding*, 86-87.

[587] Van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding*, 116.

ministry is not for life, but there is periodic resignation. That this does not apply to the minister of the Word has nothing to do with a supposed *character indelibilis*, but with the simple fact that he depends on it for his livelihood and, moreover, that he has received an expensive education.[588] In this period, Van de Beek clearly approaches ministry in a purely functionalist way: it is one of the many tasks that must be done, or it is one of the many charismata that exists in the congregation. In the end, every ministerial structure is therefore purely pragmatic.[589]

In 1987 he continues this line of thought. Van de Beek develops an ecclesiology within the framework of his book on pneumatology. He also opts for a purely functionalist approach to ministry. It does not matter whether ministry is episcopal, presbyterial or democratic, as long as it builds up and holds together the church as the body of Christ.[590] People are needed who take responsibility for the organization, proclamation, and service in the church.[591]

Because Van de Beek chooses a purely pragmatic and functional approach to ministry in this period, he does not develop a detailed ministerial structure. One should act according to the situation and tradition and not get too attached to it.[592]

Van de Beek's second period begins with the publication of the first volume of his series *Speaking of God* in 1998. In this period Van de Beek radically takes his starting point in a Christology that is completely focused on the cross. From the cross as God's judgement on this world, there is no place for a positive approach to the world and its history. After the crucifixion of Christ, history is over and the church as the body of Christ has no structural role in the affairs of the world. The church's calling is to celebrate eternal life around the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

Unfortunately, Van de Beek offers no explanation as to why he has arrived at a radically different approach, so the reason behind it can only be conjectured. That said, there are three areas where the break is particularly apparent.

First, the positive appreciation of culture and its developments gives way to a highly critical stance towards Western civilization. This new critical attitude is clearly marked in his inaugural address at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* in which he radically discards any form of progress optimism.[593]

Second, Van de Beek's second period is characterized by a strong emphasis on the early church and patristics. From 1998 onwards his books are full of quotations from church fathers, while the reformers are quoted much less. The present post-Christian ideological and religious plurality, combined with the fact that the church must find its way amid different cultures, implies that

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[588] Van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding*, 88-89.
[589] Van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding*, 131.
[590] Van de Beek, *De adem van God*, 108.
[591] Van de Beek, *De adem van God*, 109.
[592] Van de Beek, *Tussen traditie en vervreemding*, 131.
[593] Van de Beek, *Ontmaskering*.

patristic texts from the early church, when Christians had to deal with a similar situation, are extremely relevant in current Western culture.[594]
Third, the second period is marked by overtly catholic tendencies. Particularly in his ecclesiology, and then especially in his theology of ministry, Van de Beek deliberately moves toward a Roman Catholic understanding of church and ministry. Moreover, his theology of ministry in this period exhibits a strong desire for ecclesial unity.

Since this chapter focuses on Van de Beek's theology of ministry in the second period, his critical stance towards culture, combined with his predilection for patristic theology and his tendency towards Roman Catholic ecclesiology, will appear frequently in the following sections.

5.2.2 Christological and Eschatological Presuppositions

In his second period, Van de Beek distances himself from his earlier functional ecclesiology and instead opts for a sacramental view on the church. To understand and appreciate Van de Beek's theology of ministry in this period, it is vital to have some knowledge of its eschatological, Christological, and sacramental presuppositions and the resulting dichotomy between church and world. Therefore, I will start by introducing Van de Beek's Christological, eschatological, and sacramental ecclesiology.

The two following citations from Van de Beek's book on the church may well serve as entry points to his ecclesiology.

> The liturgy, in particular the Eucharist, is the heart of ecclesial life. Whoever has a function in the Eucharist needs to be ordained.[595]

> The Church is the community of people who no longer belong to themselves but to Christ. They find their identity in him. They do no longer belong to the reality of this world, but to the eschatological reality of Christ.[596]

The first quote shows how Van de Beek concentrates the essence of ministry on the Eucharist. For Van de Beek, theology of ministry is grounded in a sacramental view of the church.

The second citation makes clear that this sacramental view of the church in turn is developed from an eschatological and Christological perspective that

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[594] Van de Beek, *Ontmaskering*, 7.

[595] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 239. 'De liturgie is het hart van het kerkelijk leven, en dan in het bijzonder de Eucharistie. Wie in de Eucharistie een taak heeft, moet worden geordineerd.' All citations translated from Dutch to English in this chapter are my own.

[596] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 13. 'De kerk is de gemeenschap van mensen die niet meer aan zichzelf toebehoren maar aan Christus. Zij vinden hun identiteit in Hem. Zij behoren niet meer tot de werkelijkheid van deze wereld, maar tot de eschatologische werkelijkheid van Christus.'

creates a sharp contrast between church and world. From this sacramental, eschatological, and Christological ecclesiology Van de Beek develops a provocative theology of ministry, at least from a traditional Reformed perspective.

Van de Beek develops his ecclesiology from Christology, because only in Christ it is visible how God is present in this world. In Christ one can see that God's presence in this world is cruciform. That does not mean that the Holy Spirit has no role in the doctrine of the church, but only that ecclesiology cannot be developed from pneumatology.[597] It is the other way around. In the words of Van de Beek:

> The church is the place where the coming of God in Christ is celebrated and lived. In the present world Christ's presence always has the form of the cross. So it is with the church: the heart of her existence is the Eucharist as the commemoration of the death of Christ (...) It is about Christ and if we seek expression of his Spirit, then it is in the church. If we discover to our astonishment that the church is God's paradoxical presence in this world, then we are automatically pushed towards the Spirit of Christ. God is present in the greatest desecration. That also applies to his Spirit.[598]

The order is Christ → church → Spirit. From God's acts in Christ, we can speak about the church, and from Christ's presence in the church we can speak of the Holy Spirit. This implies that we cannot speak about the Holy Spirit apart from the church. Statements concerning the general work of God's Spirit in creation are not untrue in themselves, but they originate in a wrong paradigm. By speaking of the work of the Spirit apart from Christ's presence in the church, pneumatology is likely to be separated from Christology and will end up in an optimistic anthropology. Wherever the Spirit is separated from Christ, one can see the tendency not only to consider the Spirit as some kind of cosmological power but, even worse, to identify him to a large extent with the human spirit.[599] According to Van de Beek, a pneumatology apart from Christology can easily

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[597] Here Van de Beek clearly chooses a radical different point of departure than in his pneumatological ecclesiology of 1987.

[598] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 10. 'De kerk is de plek waar Gods komen in Christus wordt gevierd en geleefd. In de huidige wereld heeft Christus' presentie altijd de gestalte van het kruis. Zo is het ook met de kerk: de kern van haar bestaan is de Eucharistie als het gedenken van de dood van Christus. (...) Het gaat om Christus en als we expressie van zijn Geest zoeken, dan is dat in de kerk. Als we met verbazing ontdekken dat de kerk de paradoxale presentie van God in de wereld is, dan worden we vanzelf in de richting van de Geest van Christus gedrongen. God is aanwezig in de grootste ontluistering. Dat geldt ook voor zijn Geest.'

[599] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 395.

lead a life of its own and result in an idea of progress that is alien to the way the New Testament and the early church speak of Christ.

Van de Beek's aversion to the idea of progress is grounded in the view of Christology he developed in his book *Jezus Kurios*. In this book Van de Beek rejects the thought that God's acting in Jesus Christ initiates a steady positive development.

Van de Beek perceives the roots of the theologically grounded idea of progress in an Antiochian Christology that only speaks of God and humanity in abstract terms. The main representative of the Antiochian school, Nestorius, assumes in his doctrine of Christ a clear distinction between the human and the divine nature. Since God is eternal, he cannot be born as a finite human being. Although God has committed himself in the Logos to the finite human being Jesus Christ, this is not a matter of ontological unity.

This Christological distinction also has its repercussions for the vision on human nature. A human being cannot appeal to a sacramental or ontological unity with God but is called to a relationship with God that measures up to God's relationship with Christ. For Nestorius, the Christian life is not about mystical experiences, but about a moral life that can be seen and judged by others. The moral relationship between Jesus and God calls for a moral shape of the Christian life.[600] According to Van de Beek, this emphasis on the moral life proves that the Antiochian school thinks 'enlightened' and optimistic about possible human progress.[601] He sees the same line of rational theological thought in the history of theology whenever theologians speak or think optimistically about humanity and its development.

Van de Beek clearly has a closer connection to another line of theological reasoning that is far less optimistic about human possibilities. He repeatedly quotes the Roman bishop Zephyrinus, who said: 'I know one God, Christ Jesus and apart from him no other who is born and has suffered.'[602] Zephyrinus' statement makes clear that we cannot begin with general definitions of God and humanity apart from God's revelation in Jesus Christ. God is the crucified God who does not dwell far above but enters this world in Christ and takes the responsibility of human guilt and suffering upon himself.[603] As becomes clear in Jesus Christ, God did not come to ameliorate us morally, but to carry the burden of our totally perverted existence.

In *Jezus Kurios* Van de Beek increasingly concentrates the meaning of Christ around the cross. Christ's death on the cross is the decisive event of history because in his crucifixion God brings justice to the world. Resurrection, ascension, and Parousia are all determined by the judgement that took place in the crucifixion of Christ. Christ is only present in this world as the crucified

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[600] Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios*, 18-19; Van de Beek, *Spreken over God*, 39.
[601] Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios*, 24.
[602] Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios*, 14 (first time); Van de Beek, *Spreken over God*, 26.
[603] Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios*, 31.

Christ, because the resurrection and what follows took place on the other side of this world.[604]

Van de Beek further elaborates on these thoughts in his book on eschatology, *God doet recht* (*God does justice*). The crucifixion of Christ is the beginning of the eschatological day of the Lord. God's kingdom has arrived when God pronounced his judgement on the world in the cross of Christ. The resurrection immediately followed the death of Jesus. From a worldly perspective there is a distance in time, but from God's perspective the crucifixion of Jesus is the moment of his glorification. Easter is the day of the revelation of this resurrection to us, but with the death of Jesus the resurrection of the dead had already been realized.[605]

Crucifixion, resurrection, and Parousia should not be considered as separate events that are somehow ontologically connected, but they are one single event that, from a human perspective, has a chronological dimension. The different moments should therefore not be separated because together they form, each from a different perspective, the one *Kairos* of God's decisive reign. In earthly time the different moments appear in a certain order, but the 'when' is completely secondary to 'what' takes place.[606]

Here also Van de Beek concentrates the meaning of Christ around the cross. Not all moments that appear to us in a certain order are equally accessible to us. Resurrection, ascension, and Parousia are not visible to us because they took place in different categories of time rather than our earthly time. We can only speak and think of these moments with faint images. The only way in which God's kingdom is visibly present in this world is in Jesus who died on the cross.

Also, from the perspective of the cross, history is shown its proper place. In the words of Van de Beek:

> After the coming of the Son in the world it is over. The rest is no time in which anything can happen. It is only waiting for the end that is no longer fulfilment, but disposal.[607]

Essentially, world history is nothing more than the waiting room for eternity. There is no room for developments that are, theologically speaking, of any value. With this view Van de Beek has radically denied all possible ideas of progress.

Critical questions can be raised about Van de Beek's Christological and eschatological presuppositions. For, although he may be right in his claim that the Spirit predominantly resides in the church as the place where God's

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[604] Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios*, 240.

[605] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 159.

[606] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 160-161.

[607] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 111: 'Na de komst van de Zoon in de wereld is het afgelopen. De rest is geen tijd meer, waarin nog iets gebeuren kan. Dat is alleen nog maar wachten op het einde, dat geen vervulling meer is maar opruiming.' In his smaller preparatory book on eschatology 'Hier beneden is het niet' (Van de Beek, *Hier beneden is het niet*, 28), Van de Beek put it like this: 'With him history is over.'

eschatological reality breaks through, his one-sided ecclesial containment of pneumatology does not seem to do justice to the Scriptural witness concerning the Spirit and to the theological weight of his work in the world.[608]

To begin with, the identification of attention to the Spirit's work outside the church and progress optimism is too simplistic. Another line is in fact conceivable where in the Spirit is seen as an 'incredibly benevolent force' that announces itself in certain redemptive moments and situations that become signs of the coming kingdom. These moments and situations are not to be confused with the final consummation but are nevertheless reasons for the church as a community to praise God.[609] The work of the Spirit in world and culture can be seen as a Christ-centred forcefield in which righteousness, mercy, and liberation from oppressive and destructive forces are at work, not only in visible churches but also in other religious and secular settings.[610]

Moreover, it is also theologically unwise to confine the work of the Spirit within the bounds of the church since this makes it hard to explain how people from outside the church come to faith in Christ. If the Spirit does not work outside the boundaries church, non-believers can only come to Christ by themselves. This would contradict the *sola gratia* character of the Reformed doctrine of salvation, which Van de Beek himself adamantly underwrites in other places. The Holy Spirit is better seen as the one who within and outside the walls of the church points people and cultures to the centre of history, namely Jesus Christ.[611] Admittedly, the church, being born of and always focused on the Christ event, occupies a central place in this, but it should not be considered the only place where the Spirit works. Christian communities need theological resources that enable the necessary spiritual discernment, rather than a blatant disregard of the Spirit's work in the world based on fear of supposed progress optimism.

Van de Beek's Christological and eschatological presuppositions further lead to a view in which also history seems to have no theological value. Here as well it should be argued that Van de Beek's line of thought is one-sided. Even if Van de Beek would be right in his fear of misplaced and dangerous identifications of the work of the Spirit and historical developments, should this fear necessarily lead to a denial of theological meaning of history? For instance, theological reflections of earlier generations in and on specific historical situations and events contributed to a new or deeper understanding of the doctrine of the church and could for that reason alone be considered theologically meaningful as the claim of witnesses from the past. If it is true that since Christ's cross and resurrection all history is meaningless, then that would also have to apply to the early apostolic church, but arguably Van de Beek would not deny the theological relevance of the council in Jerusalem that settled the delicate issue of circumcision because of certain historical events. Apparently,

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[608] See Versteeg, 'Het eschatologische-pneumatisch karakter', 67.
[609] Van der Kooi, *Incredibly Benevolent Force*, 139-143.
[610] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 238 and 308.
[611] Van Helden, *Reformed Modernity*, 291.

even after Easter there were historical developments that made new theological insights possible.

The same point could be made about later theological developments. Andrew Walls argues that the missionary cross-cultural process in history did not distort Christian doctrine, but, on the contrary, enriched it and led to new discoveries about Christ.[612] For example, the doctrine of 'Trinity and incarnation sprang from the need to think in a Christian way about issues that had arisen out of the cross-cultural diffusion of the faith.'[613] Clearly, historical developments can be sources of previously unimagined theological knowledge.

At the very least, these two examples make clear that Van de Beek's view of the theological irrelevance of history should be nuanced. With the bathwater of misplaced ideas of progress and identifications of the Spirit with human achievements, he unfortunately also throws out the baby of theologically relevant developments. Theology according to Van de Beek seems to take place in a platonic world of ideas.

5.2.3 A Sacramental View of the Church

In Van de Beek's view, nothing of theological value can happen after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. But what about the church? The church, according to Van de Beek is the place where believers can celebrate the eternal life that is realized in God's acts in Christ. The church is a sacrament of God's eschatological reality.

Van de Beek emphasizes the fact that in the church Christ himself is present. The church is correctly called 'the body of Christ' because Christ dwells in her through the Holy Spirit. He admits that this presence is of a different category than his *anhypostatic* presence in the incarnation when the Son took on humanity without a specific individuality. However, Van de Beek does claim, out of a concern that Christ's presence in the church should not be denied, that the union between the Son and the church has an *anhypostatic* dimension to it. One cannot speak of the church without speaking of Christ. This *anhypostatic* dimension of ecclesiology is especially indicated by the Pauline concept of 'being in Christ'. The church and the believers no longer live in themselves, but Christ lives in them. They do not have their own identity apart from Christ, but they belong to Christ.[614]

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[612] 'Christian theology moved on to a new plane when Greek questions were asked about Christ and received Greek answers, using the Greek scriptures. It was a risky, often agonizing business, but it led the church to rich discoveries about Christ that could have never been made using only Jewish categories such as Messiah. Translation did not negate the tradition but enhanced it. (...) Looking back, all the signals could be seen there in the Scriptures; but only the Greek questions and consequent processes of thought made them explicit'. Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 80.

[613] Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 79.

[614] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 19-21; Van de Beek, *Spreken over God*, 157.

In and through the church believers are united to Christ and that explains the central place of ecclesiology in Van de Beek's theology. He notes how Reformed theology after John Calvin departed from the sacramental view of the church and steadily downplayed the importance of the church, either because of a pietistic individualism or because of a one-sided focus on God's kingdom and the world that reduced the church to a mere instrument.[615]

In contrast to post-Calvin Reformed ecclesiology, Van de Beek pleads for a return to a sacramental view of the church. Reformed ecclesiology should take seriously the notion that the church is the mother of the faithful that begets and nourishes them. Just as there is no life without a mother, there is no life as a child of God without the church.

His sacramental view of the church is grounded in Van de Beek's theology of Baptism and Eucharist. Sticking to the image of a mother that begets and nourishes her children, one could analogically see Baptism as the moment of the birth of the Christian life and the Eucharist as the necessary nourishment for believers.[616] According to Van de Beek, in the history of the church there is a radical change in the view on the sacraments because of the sacramental theology of Augustine. In the pre-Augustinian era, the sacraments – only Baptism and Eucharist – were viewed as an expression of the eternal life to which the believers belonged. Baptism and Eucharist were considered celebrations of the eternal life that transferred the believer from this world to the heavenly liturgy. The church departed from this eschatological view of the sacraments in the late fourth century, when the church changed the direction of the sacraments. No longer were participants considered to be taken up in the reality of eternal life, but from then on it was the other way around, participants were endowed with spiritual grace for this life coming from heaven. Sacraments were henceforth considered to be means of heavenly grace that enabled Christians to be a community of faithful believers that seek to influence this world.[617] The sacraments – including other rituals as marriage, ordination, etc. – were reduced to means of specific spiritual grace for a specific calling or a new state of life.[618]

In the view of Van de Beek, the church should return to the New Testament and the early church view of the sacraments when Baptism and Eucharist were fundamental for the ontology of the Christian as a new creation.[619] Christians should consider themselves to be a new creation. Although they remain people made of flesh and as mortal as other human beings, they know that biological death is not the most relevant aspect of their existence. Far more important is the fact that they belong to Christ and have eternal life in community with him.

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[615] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 22.
[616] Van de Beek, *Is God terug?*, 92.
[617] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 359-360.
[618] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 266-267.
[619] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 267.

Ontologically speaking, Christians are a new creation, although their appearance is still earthly.[620]

Other than in the Reformed tradition, Van de Beek does not make the connection between Baptism and God's covenant with his people, but he links Baptism with God's eschatological intervention in this world through his Son. An unintended result of Reformed covenantal theology is that the eschatological perspective of Baptism disappears into the background in favour of a historicizing view on God's acts in the church. Baptism risks becoming not much more than an outward sign of our church membership, which in turn is nothing more than a sociological statement.[621]

According to Van de Beek, the New Testament speaks differently about Baptism. Through Baptism humans are being placed in the eschatological reality of God's acts in Christ. Being baptized means dying with Christ and being buried with him in his death. Baptism is not so much the outward affirmation of God's promises to us, nor the gift of supernatural grace, but it means participation in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Being baptized means being placed into a new life, and therefore the New Testament uses participation language instead of forensic language.[622]

As in Christology, this means that the one baptized participates in the single event of God's eschatological acts, although from a worldly perspective these divine eschatological acts have distance in time. The existence of the believer is incorporated with Christ into the glory of redemption, and he shares in the community of saved humanity, but in the life of the flesh this has a chronological dimension.[623]

In this earthly life God's eschatological reality in which the believer participates has the form of the cross. God's intervention in this world became visible in the suffering of Jesus Christ and in the same way it becomes visible in

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[620] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 379.

[621] Van de Beek, *Hier beneden*, 56-57. Next to this objection, Van de Beek claims that the Reformed view on the sacraments places a one-sided emphasis on the faith of the person being baptized. The Reformation may have rejected the Roman Catholic idea of *gratia infusa*, but also in the Reformed forensic doctrine of free grace 'grace' can become a substance that is alien to the views of the biblical authors. 'Grace' can become a mediating power between Christ and the believer. The question how a human beings can share in this mediating 'grace' is answered by pointing to faith. Faith is an instrument for receiving God's mercy. Rome, with her ecclesial mediated *gratia infusa*, has too much ecclesiology in her theology. The Reformation, with her emphasis on forensic grace and personal faith, has too much anthropology in her theology. Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 213.

[622] Van de Beek, *Hier beneden*, 58; Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 212.

[623] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 188.

the life of the believer. The believer and the church no longer belong to the structures of time.[624]

Like Baptism, Van de Beek radically links the Eucharist to God's eschatological reality. The Eucharist is an eschatological feast. Here eternal life is celebrated. One can even see it as a piece of heaven on earth, although that would be saying too little and is thought from the wrong perspective. It is much more the place where people from the world are being brought to celebrate the community with God. It is the place where Christians are at home.[625]

In the celebration of the Eucharist the church participates in the heavenly liturgy and is therefore lifted out above earthly reality. The Eucharist is the eschatological feast in which the church already participates. In the same way that a wedding banket serves as a closure and affirmation of the marriage that took place, so the Eucharist serves as the (proleptic) closure and affirmation of history.

Van de Beek thus pleads for a radical eschatological reorientation of the sacraments. Baptism and Eucharist are expressions of the eternal life in which Christians participate. The ontological status of the believer has changed by his baptismal transfer from this world to God's eschatological reality and this new status is nourished by the Eucharist. This eschatological reorientation leads to a view of the church that emphasizes the real presence of Christ. The church is not a mere instrument, but the actual place in this world where Christians – through Baptism and Eucharist – already participate in the eschaton. The church is the place where believers, who died to the world, share in the eternal life and are at home in the presence of Christ. In this world, though, this participation is always cruciform. Van de Beek's cruciform, eschatological, and sacramental ecclesiology demands that Christians renounce any form of power and that they are prepared to be aliens that can even be persecuted.[626]

Some evaluative comments may be helpful here. Van de Beek's sacramental view of the church is rooted in his eschatological approach of the sacraments. Van de Beek pleads for a radical eschatological character of the sacraments, but this leads to a dichotomy between church and world that is too sharp. According to Van de Beek, by participating in the sacraments, believers are placed in the

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[624] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 200. Because Baptism marks the participation in God's eschatological acts, it is not about individual redemption, but about the new reality of God that exceeds the confession of the individual. The eschatological event extends to circle around the believer. Therefore, it has been customary since the beginning of church history also to baptize children. The children of believing parents are being born in the new reality in which their parents live. See Van de Beek, *Hier beneden*, 58.

[625] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 388. 'De Eucharistie is een eschatologische maaltijd. Hier wordt het eeuwige leven gevierd. Men kan het zien als een stukje hemel op aarde, maar dat is eigenlijk te weinig gezegd en vanuit een verkeerd perspectief gedacht. Het is veeleer de plaats waarheen mensen uit de wereld overgebracht zijn om de gemeenschap met God te vieren. Het is de plek waar christenen thuis zijn.'

[626] Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 375.

eschatological reality of God's acts in Jesus Christ. After Baptism, the reality of the present world and the chronological dimension of the believer's earthly life have become meaningless. This way, the transference from this world to Gods eschatological reality is like entering a new and fixed ontological state of being that is an unalterable given. The believer is taken out of the world and consequently the chronological course of his biological life is of no ontological and theological value. Van de Beek does admit that this new ontology is cruciform in this world, but this does not alter the status of the believer. This way, God's eschatological reality and the reality of this world are, in the view of Van de Beek, almost two parallel dimensions. The church is like a drop of oil in a glass of water: like oil does not mix with water, so the church does not mix with the world. Sticking with the comparison, the believer is like a drop of water changed into a drop of oil by Baptism. He or she no longer belongs to the world. The picture of the New Testament seems more nuanced. Baptism and Eucharist have a clear eschatological dimension, but not because participants are ontologically transferred from this world to God's eschatological reality, but because the force of the eschaton thrusts itself upon them through the work of the Spirit. Indeed, the believer is a new creation, but this is not an ontological statement, but a pneumatological one. Therefore, being a believer is not a fixed given and does not refer to a self-contained ontological status but means entering a battlefield where conflicting forces compete. Luther has described this state of being with his lapidary words that a Christian is *simul iustus et peccator*.

Van de Beek's Christological and eschatological presuppositions, moreover, show some striking similarities to what was said in the chapter on ecumenism about the one-sided realized eschatology of the *koinonia* ecclesiologies. The primary reality of Van de Beek's church lies in its the Eucharistic participation in the eternal life of Christ and the visible community in the world is only of derivative value. This resemblance is logically explained by his emphasis on the Eucharist as an expression of the eternal life in Christ, which, while not eliminating the focus on a historically oriented eschatology completely, does not seem to give it a proper theological role. The balance tilts toward the "already" character of the kingdom and the "not-yet" character fades into the background.

5.2.4 Church and World: *Missio Dei*

A logical consequence of Van de Beek's sacramental ecclesiology based upon its Christological and eschatological presuppositions is a sharp distinction between church and world. Van de Beek recognizes the same optimistic idea of progress he rejected in his books on Christology and eschatology, in the ecumenical developments since World War II. The theology of the World Council of Churches, sustained in its own way by theologians like Barth, Berkhof and Van Ruler, displayed an inherent optimism with regard to the development of history and shared the axiomatic assumption that the church should be focused on the

well-being of the world.[627] Van de Beek summarizes this optimistic theology by the term *missio Dei*: God is the God who is sending and sent to let his own world share in his love.[628] Although the exact meaning of *missio Dei* varies, the basic assumption that the church has a calling to the (political) reality of the world is common to all variations. According to Van de Beek, the term *missio Dei* is an expression of a kingdom theology with a strong utopian character, namely the ideal of perfect justice and peace to which people are committed and which encounters strong resistance in this world.[629]

In the view of Van de Beek, this concept of *missio Dei* and the resulting views on the relationship between church and world are fundamentally wrong. They imply two things. First, it assumes that the church knows what is good for the world and should use her influence to achieve her ideals. Next, these views on the relationship between church and world assume in some way that the church is a bridgehead in the world from where God's kingdom is established. Both implications will, in the eyes of Van de Beek, eventually revolve around the question of power.[630]

The view of the church as a bridgehead in the world has its origins in the Constantinian revolution of the fourth century when the church became one of the competing political ideologies in the world.[631] Van de Beek deplores this fourth-century revolution and pleads for a return to the early church's view on the relationship between church and state that, based upon Baptism and Eucharist, assumes a sharp distinction between the reality of the world and the reality of the church. The church should not be considered the beginning of God's kingdom on earth, but rather the place where eternal life is celebrated.

According to Van de Beek, the concept 'kingdom of God', like the concept 'son of man', was confined to a time when Jesus could only speak of the reign of God indirectly. With the full realization of God's eschatological reality in the cross, it is no longer necessary to speak indirectly. Speaking of the advent of the kingdom of God after Good Friday means denying the full coming of the kingdom in Jesus and the eschatological reality of the church.[632]

Not surprisingly, Van de Beek refers with approval to Stanley Hauerwas' view on the church as 'a countercultural social structure' and to his description of Christians as 'residents aliens'. The church does not aim to change society or

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[627] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 100-107.
[628] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 108.
[629] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 109, 126.
[630] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 121-122.
[631] Van de Beek *Lichaam en Geest*, 123; Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 359 ff.
[632] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 126-129.

to offer a political alternative, because she is herself an alternative community. The church is essentially different.[633]

The church is the new creation in Christ and Christians participate in the already realized kingdom of God. Although cruciform, the church is the visible manifestation of God's kingdom in this world. In the end, it is all about the church. Creation is aimed at the church and the glory of the church is the completion of creation.[634]

Clearly, Van de Beek's fear of progress optimism also surfaces in his discussion of the relationship between church and world and the concept *missio Dei*. His theological presuppositions seem to make it impossible for him to approach the concept of *missio Dei* open-mindedly. Without extensive historical or theological justification he rejects the concept as an expression of Western utopian thinking. In doing so, he views the concept entirely in a Western optimistic perspective without, on the one hand, considering the fact that developments within the WCC have not stood still since the 1960s and, on the other, without substantially addressing recent theological literature on *missio Dei*.[635] The result is a caricatured description that does not do justice to the concept, nor does it advance the theological conversation. Indeed, the concept of *missio Dei* can just as well be read as a firm theological correction of a

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[633] Van de Beek criticizes Hauerwas on the fact that the latter chooses ecclesiology instead of Christology as a starting point for theological deliberation. According to Van de Beek, Hauerwas' vision on the church therefore lacks the proper foundation in Christology that characterized the ecclesiology of the early church fathers. Van de Beek *Lichaam en Geest*, 135-137.

[634] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 140-45.

[635] In his in-depth analysis of the term *missio Dei*, John Flett has demonstrated that concept can indeed be used to pursue a variety of culturally and politically fashionable goals that are not rooted in the Trinitarian self-donation. However, Flett argues that is a result of conceptual misinterpretation. He points out that this misunderstanding is predicated on supposed gulf between the Divine acts and the Divine being that is unwarranted. The result of this gulf is that the mission of the Son and the Spirit (God's economy) are considered to be something that does not belong to God's being (God's *aseitas*). As if God had to disregard His own aseity to take the counternatural step of the mission of the Son and the Spirit. However, God's mission of the Son and Spirit is not a second step to God but is constitutive of his being. This means that mission - the *missio* of *missio Dei* - not only belongs essentially to God's being (even without being eschatologically limited), but also that it is essentially bound to the persons of the Son and the Spirit. However, because initially the concept was not clearly defined and identified as belonging to God's being, the *missio* of *missio Dei* could be detached and used as a legitimation of all kinds of ecclesial missions that were not founded in the Trinitarian Godhead. *Missio* took a life of its own and could subsequently be ideologically charged.

Thus, Van de Beek may be correct in arguing that the term has been misused in a utopian sense, but he fails to discount the fact that content-wise there is no room for it. See: Flett, *The Witness of God*, 9-10, 196 ff.; Also: Flett, 'A theology of *missio Dei*'.

misplaced self-indulgence of Western churches that considered themselves indispensable in the unfolding of God's kingdom in the world.

Van de Beek traces the distorted picture of the church as a bridgehead of God's coming kingdom in the world back to the fourth century. He joins the choir of theologians who consider the Constantinian revolution as ecclesial equivalent of the fall of humankind. Unfortunately, he also barely substantiates this negative reading of Christendom. This way, Van de Beek cannot escape the impression that he is using simplistic ideal types in his treatment of the early church and the Constantinian revolution, whereas the reality seems to be far more ambiguous. After all, true as it may be that the church after the edict of Milan in general neglected some fundamental aspects of her being, a more positive reading of Christendom is also possible.[636] Instead of the purely negative judgement of Van de Beek, Christendom could also be seen as a mixed blessing, being an expression of the church's response to the changed political circumstances. Van de Beek's treatment lacks nuance.

Finally, Van de Beek misrepresents the Scriptural witness regarding the kingdom of God. To dismiss all statements about the coming kingdom after cross and resurrection as a failure to recognize its presentic character remains unpersuasive. Of course, Van de Beek is right that in the Christ event the kingdom is *already* there, but at the same time the book of Acts, the epistles, and the Apocalypse bear witness that after easter and Pentecost the kingdom is still *coming*. So, it is not there yet. Even Jesus himself speaks in the parables of the kingdom using images of growth and leavening? Surely these images do not seem to presuppose a singular event that only has chronological extension in human perception but appears to be about a steady development that in itself actually takes time. Van de Beek's view of the kingdom unilaterally emphasizes the 'already' nature of the kingdom and eschatologically overcharges the church by regarding it as the earthly manifestation of the kingdom. It may be consistent that Van de Beek speaks of a churchification of the world. However, in doing so, mission ultimately boils down to evangelism or even proselytism. Van de Beek's

[636] O'Donovan, for example, has suggested that Christendom should be seen as a claim of historical witnesses. He writes: 'Christendom, then, offers two things: a reading of those political concepts with which Scripture furnishes us, and a reading of ourselves and of our situation from a point of observation outside ourselves but not too far outside (...) Christendom is a response to mission, and as such a sign that God has blessed it. It is constituted not by the church's seizing alien power, but by alien power's becoming attentive to the church.' O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 194-195. See also the critique of Stefan Paas, who argues that by classifying all of Western history under the category of modernity, Van de Beek creates a shadowy bogeyman, rather than clear spectacles. (Paas, 'In gevecht met de moderniteit', 2) Moreover, in his book on uprooted Christian communities, Jenkins makes a sober observation: 'Christians might bemoan the persistence of church-state affiliations, but without such alliances there might today be no Christians left to experience those regrets.' (Jenkins, *The Lost History*, chapter 7, section: States and Nations)

ecclesiocentric thinking does not help the practice of and reflection on mission because it 'revolves around an illegitimate center'.[637]

5.2.5 Summary

A short summary of Van de Beek's presuppositions may be helpful here. Van de Beek's ecclesiology is highly Christological and eschatological. Fear of misguided ideas of progress prevents him from developing an ecclesiology based on pneumatological considerations. According to Van de Beek, the doctrine of the church should take its reference point in the doctrine of Christ, more specifically in his crucifixion. Because of this reference point, the church is always cruciform.[638]

Van de Beek's ecclesiology is also highly eschatological, in the sense that the church is the embodiment of God's eschatological reality in the world. There is no room for historical progress towards the eschaton that is enabled or supported by the church. Van de Beek departs from an optimistic view of history and instead denies the chronological time of this earth any theological value.

Van de Beek's ecclesiology is highly sacramental. By Baptism Christians are transferred from the chronological reality of this world to the eschatological reality of God's kingdom and in the Eucharist, they celebrate the eternal life together. In the church Christians are at home in the presence of Christ.

Van de Beek's ecclesiology assumes a clear distinction between church and world. Because of his eschatological orientation, Christians are essentially strangers on earth, and they should consider themselves to be part of an alternative community. If they had to choose between committing themselves to the common good of this world or to the life of the church, Christians should have to choose the latter.[639]

5.3 Keeping the Church Focused on Christ

With Van de Beek's presuppositions in mind, it is possible to properly assess the value of his theology of ministry. In the following sections I will dwell successively on the essence, the task, and the structure of ordained ministry according to Van de Beek.

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[637] Hoekendijk, *The Church*, 332.

[638] In his book on the church Van de Beek mentions four aspects of a cruciform church. A cruciform church is a church that suffers. First, the church suffers with Christ. Next, the church suffers from the suffering of the world. Third, the church suffers because she does not fear naming the sins of the world. Finally, the church suffers because of her own iniquities that are the cause of Christ's crucifixion. See Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 24-27.

[639] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 126.

5.3.1 Sacramentally Focused Ministry

The following citation – as already mentioned – can serve as an entry point for a discussion of Van de Beek's theology of ministry:

> The liturgy, in particular the Eucharist, is the heart of ecclesial life. Whoever has a function in the Eucharist needs to be ordained.[640]

This citation shows how, according to Van de Beek, the essence of ministry is concentrated in the Eucharist. This Eucharistic concentration of ordained ministry is in accordance with Van de Beek's sacramental view of the church. If the sacraments – and specifically the Eucharist – are the heart of the church as expressions of the eternal life in which believers participate, then consequently, theology of ministry should take these as a starting point.

It is, therefore, consistent with Van de Beek's ecclesiological presuppositions when the question whether a person should be ordained as a minister of the church depends on whether she has a function in the Eucharist. One can perform all kinds of functions within the church – supportive, administrative, or financial – but only the question if one has a function in the Eucharist determines if one should be ordained.[641]

In the view of Van de Beek, this sacramental concentration has always been the defining characteristic of Reformed theology of ministry. He notes how in Reformed circles the essence of ministry is not sought in the proclamation of the Word, but in the administration of the sacraments. Contrary to what is often assumed, also in Reformed Protestantism ordained ministry is connected to the authority to administer the sacraments and not so much to the proclamation of the Word, according to Van de Beek.[642]

From this authority to administer the sacraments flows a derivative sacramental status to the proclamation of the Word. If performed by ordained ministers, the proclamation of the Word is the way in which the kingdom of heaven is opened.[643] This sacramental authority is the difference between ordained ministry and pastoral work or other ministries in the church. Proclamation of the gospel can be done by every Christian, but it only has a sacramental character when ordained ministers do it. In the words of Van de Beek:

> Speaking a good word about Jesus, proclaiming the gospel, can be done by anyone, but ministering the Word of God in the congregation,

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[640] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 239. 'De liturgie is het hart van het kerkelijk leven, en dan in het bijzonder de Eucharistie. Wie in de Eucharistie een taak heeft, moet worden geordineerd.'

[641] 'This also applies to such simple things as scaring away the insects with a fan from the cup of wine.' Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 239.

[642] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 205.

[643] Van de Beek refers to question and answer 83 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which speaks of the keys of the kingdom. Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 205.

> with judgment and absolution, requires a thorough training as well as a ministerial appointment by the church, with corresponding screening. That ministerial character is no different from that of the priest in the Roman Catholic Church: only a priest may pronounce absolution and perform consecration in the Eucharist.[644]

Only when performed by an ordained minister in a liturgical setting is the proclamation of the Word about presenting Christ. Again Van de Beek:

> If a lecturer in exegesis explains a text or lectures on a section of the Bible, it is not yet proclamation of the Word. This also applies equally to a Bible study. It only becomes proclamation of the Word when the Word is ministerially proclaimed in the liturgical setting of the congregation. (...) Preaching the gospel is something every Christian can do: Telling people what faith in Christ means. This can even take the form of a sermon on the soapbox or in a congregational meeting. But ministering the Word is reserved for the ordained minister. It has a sacramental character...[645]

Still, this proclamation of the Word only has a derivative sacramental status and should not be regarded as a third sacrament next to Baptism and Eucharist. Rather, the proclamation of the Word is an integral and indispensable part of and flows from the Eucharist.[646]

Ordained ministry, in the view of Van de Beek, is thus about sacramentality.[647] This sacramentality should be rightly understood, however. The sacramental status of the ordained minister does not originate in the endowment of supernatural grace in ordination – which would be an expression of the Augustinian view on the sacraments – but in the fact that the minister has

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[644] 'Een goed woord spreken over Jezus, verkondiging van het evangelie, kan iedereen doen, maar het Woord van God bedienen in de gemeente, met oordeel en vrijspraak, vraagt een gedegen opleiding én een ambtelijke aanstelling door de kerk, met daarbij behorende screening. Dat ambtelijke karakter is niet anders dan dat van de priester in de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk: alleen een priester mag de absolutie uitspreken en de consecratie in de eucharistie verrichten.', Van de Beek, *Thuis*, 42.

[645] 'Als een docent in de exegese een tekst uitlegt of een lezing houdt over een bijbelgedeelte, dan is dat nog geen verkondiging van het Woord. Dat geldt evenzeer voor een bijbelstudie. Verkondiging van het Woord wordt het pas als in de liturgische setting van de gemeente het Woord ambtelijk verkondigd wordt. (...) Prediking van het evangelie kan ieder christen doen: aan mensen vertellen wat het geloof in Christus betekent. Dat kan zelfs in de vorm van een preek op de zeepkist of in een gemeentesamenkomst. Maar bediening van het Woord is voorbehouden aan de geordineerde ambtsdrager. Het heeft een sacramenteel karakter...', Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 204.

[646] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 205.

[647] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 205.

the central role in the celebration of the Eucharist as the celebration of the eternal life in Christ in which Christian participate.

Van de Beek thus roots ecclesial ministry firmly in the Eucharist. In doing so, he takes a logical step considering his presuppositions. Moreover, at first sight, this choice seems consistent with the fact that Reformers such as Bucer, Calvin and Łaski also connected ecclesial ministry to the liturgy. After all, also for them, only ministers of the Word are entitled to administer the sacraments, and this authority does not belong to the elders and deacons.

However, from a historical and theological point of view, there are some comments to be made about this choice. In Van de Beek's sacramental approach to ecclesial ministry, the emphasis is fundamentally different from that of the mentioned Reformers. In the historical chapter it was shown that Bucer abandoned the sacerdotal order of the Roman Catholic church and instead chose to ground ecclesial ministry within the order of salvation. For the Strasbourg reformer, ecclesial ministry did not originate in a sacramental ecclesiology, but in the charismatic structure of the congregation.[648] Bucer's Genevan tributary Calvin strongly emphasized the Word character of ecclesial ministry by reducing the fivefold ministry of Ephesians to the two word-focused lasting ministries of pastors and teachers. The heart of ecclesial ministry, according to Calvin, is the proclamation of the Word. For Calvin and Bucer, ecclesial ministry is centred on the charismatic upbuilding of the church through the proclamation of the Gospel and not on a sacramental ecclesiology concentrated in the Eucharist. Van de Beek's sacramental approach seems to be heading for a theology of ministry that emphasizes primarily Christ representation and thus the principled difference between laity and clergy. Whether this is actually the case must be seen in the remainder of this chapter.

Van de Beek's tight binding of ecclesial ministry to the celebration of the Eucharist is also theologically - or ecumenically - one-sided. In the chapter on ecumenism, it was shown that the reference to the Eucharist in the ecumenical reports does not restrictively concern the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but rather concerns the whole of the liturgy, i.e., also the proclamation of the Word. The liturgy involves the entire celebration of Word and sacraments and is at the service of the Gospel and the Church's witness to it in the world. It is theologically incorrect to separate the sacraments and the proclamation of the Word and to subordinate one to the other. Giving the proclamation of the Word only a derivative status does not give due place to the centrality of the preached gospel. By one-sidedly emphasizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper in his ecclesiology, the scope of ordained ministry risks being limited to the walls of the church where the ecclesial minister performs an almost esoteric ritual for a select group of Christians. The liturgy, as a public act, is intended not to open heaven for Christians alone but also to proclaim the kingdom of God in the world.

[648] It is at least remarkable that Van de Beek, who develops his theology against a Reformed background, does not mention Bucer in his treatment of theology of ministry.

The result of all this is a highly introspective type of ordained ministry. Because the essence of ministry is concentrated in the sacraments as expressions of God's eschatological reality, it is only logical when Van de Beek hardly sees a role for ordained ministry in the centrifugal missionary movement towards the world. Witnessing of the kingdom, or for that matter, equipping the Christian community and its members to be its witnesses in the world is not to be considered a task of ordained ministers. The focus of the ordained minister is entirely on the liturgy where he leads people into the presence of Christ through the administration of the sacraments.

5.3.2 Representation

The sacramentality of ordained ministry is, according to Van de Beek, about presenting Christ. Van de Beek uses bold words to describe this representation. Van de Beek states that if one has to do with an ordained minister, one has to do with God himself. This is not a clericalization of the gospel but belongs to the heart of it: God is truly present in his church and gives concrete forgiveness or concrete judgement. In the eyes of Van de Beek, that is, not an invention of the church in later centuries but is given with God's concrete presence in Christ and the forgiveness of sins in his death that is commemorated in the Eucharist.[649]

Protestant theologians have often hesitated to speak of representation, and if they did so anyway, they tied the concept to the proclamation of the gospel. Roman Catholic theology of ministry, on the other hand, emphasizes the personal aspect of representation. Van de Beek wants to hold both approaches together, but he explicitly emphasizes the personal dimension of the representation.[650]

In the person of the minister God himself is present, not by way of incarnation, but by way of inhabitation.[651] Therefore Van de Beek can write that if one has to do with an ordained minister, one has to do with God himself. The blessing of ordained ministry is the fact that Christ is present in it.[652] Although being a minister is an exceptional position and a high responsibility that requires nothing less than a divine calling, the church can do with nothing less.[653]
Earlier in his book he referred to the heresy of Docetism to underline the necessity of representation. The representation of ministry should not be taken to narrow, as if the minister only represents Christ when performing the liturgy. On the contrary, according to Van de Beek, the minister represents Christ with the totality of his life, and he detects a docetic Christology at the heart of a theology of ministry that assumes a distinction between the person and the function of the minister. A faithful minister cannot confine his ministry to office

[649] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 262.
[650] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 207.
[651] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 263.
[652] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 246.
[653] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 208.

hours.[654] Just as a docetic Christology denies the bodily existence of the second person of the Trinity and thus puts the real presence of God in Jesus of Nazareth at stake, a docetic theology of ministry that focuses on the function of the ministers at the expense of the personal aspect threatens to deny the real presence of God in the church through the person of the minister.[655]

From this personal dimension of ministry flows the fact that the ordained ministers should be examples to the congregation. They should not only preach the gospel, but also live in a way that people are being taken up in a life that no longer belongs to themselves but to Christ. This gives them a special responsibility, and therefore they should be overseen and held accountable, more than ordinary church members.[656] Ordained ministers do not have an immunity status because the sacramentality of ordained ministry is not an isolated phenomenon but should be seen in conjunction with the two other instruments to keep the church centred on Christ (i.e. Scripture and confession).[657]

The anti-docetic rhetoric of Van de Beek also works the other way around, however. His rejection of ministerial Docetism also points at the fact that the minister is an ordinary human being, just like the other members of Christ's body. Therefore, it is not right to burden him or her with extraordinary demands like the Roman Catholic celibacy or the Eastern Orthodox obligation for ministers to be married.[658]

There is another element to the personal focus of Van de Beek's theology of ministry. At the end of his treatment of theology of ministry, Van de Beek mentions three prerequisites for potential ministers: they should guard the apostolic tradition, they should be lawfully ordained, and they should be irreproachable. All other conditions, like education and age, are of secondary importance and only serve to answer the decisive question whether a potential minister can keep the church in line with the apostolic witness and lead her in this respect.[659]

Since the central question is if a potential minister can keep the church centred on the apostolic witness, there is also room for a variety of expressions in different cultures. According to Van de Beek, Christian have always adopted to the cultural peculiarities of their context as long as these did not prevent them to serve Christ.[660]

This cultural adaptivity, combined with the central question if a candidate can keep the church centred on Christ, leaves the door open to women and practising homosexuals in ministry. In a patriarchal culture where women

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[654] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 208.
[655] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 208.
[656] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 213.
[657] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 215, 280.
[658] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 209.
[659] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 270-271.
[660] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 273.

cannot have a leading position, the church should not demonstratively appoint women in ministry. In a culture where women do have leading positions, they can be called to ministerial positions. In the discussion on women in ministry, all kinds of details are discussed and biblicistically put forward, but the to and fro between different positions usually leads to nothing because each argument can be countered in some way.[661] The same applies to homosexuality, according to Van de Beek. In the ancient Middle East homosexuality was strongly condemned, and therefore the church did not appoint homosexual priests. In a society where homosexuality is accepted as a mature relation between two adults, homosexual men and women can serve in ministry. Gender and sexuality are irrelevant when it comes to the question of who is fit to lead the church and who is not. In every situation, the decisive question is this:

> 'Who is in this situation the best candidate to lead the congregation in faith.'[662]

How to assess Van de Beek's view on representation? Although Van de Beek wants to hold Protestant and Roman Catholic view on representation together, the balance tilts towards the personal approach. His bold claim that in a minister one has to do with God himself, his reference to the heresy of Docetism, and finally his insistence on the decisive question who is best fit to lead the church in the given context, all demonstrate that the personal dimension of ministry prevails in Van de Beek's approach. The minister represents Christ *personally*.

This leads to a remarkable combination of Roman Catholic and charismatic ministerial approaches. The rather pragmatic focus on personal qualifications seems to fit better in a Free Church, with charismatic ministerial practice, and its emphasis on the apparent charisma of the minister, rather than in a Roman Catholic institutional and hierarchical ecclesiology. This is even more remarkable, since, as will be shown, Van de Beek explicitly disassociates himself from the Free Church model.[663] This shows that Van de Beek's theology of ministry cannot easily be labelled in a specific direction and has an elusive twist to it.

Furthermore, Van de Beek's insistence on the concept of personal representation does not seem to be a logical consequence of his sacramentally focused ecclesiology. One would think that the emphasis on the sacraments as expressions of the eternal life in which the believers participate would downplay the importance of the personal aspect of ministry. After all, if Baptism and Eucharist are the only visible expressions of the eternal life, what else would be needed? But, according to Van de Beek, the sacramentality of Baptism and Eucharist somehow extends itself to the person of the minister.

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[661] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 271-272.
[662] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 272-273.
[663] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 227.

He makes this claim without satisfactory elaborating on why and how this is the case. Why is it necessary for ministers to represent Christ personally, when Christ is personally present in the sacraments as the only expressions of eternal life? Does the celebration of the sacraments depend somehow on the sacramentality of the minister, rather than on the act itself? Following Van de Beek's view of the sacraments, sacramental ministry must mean that the minister is in some way an expression of eternal life himself, not only when he is celebrating the sacraments but all the time. That would mean that somehow eternity is embodied in the person of the minister and he himself would be an expression of the eternal life in which the believers participate. This way, ministry almost appears to be a third sacrament. However, this contradict his own pre-Augustinian definition of the sacraments that focuses entirely on Baptism and Eucharist.

The apparent pragmatic approach of Van de Beek is remarkable in another respect, too. Delicate questions, like women and practising homosexuals in ministry, are pragmatically solved by the simple question if one is fit to lead the congregation. The answer to this question depends on the given context. This may be *contextual*, but is it contextual *theology*? Matters of exegesis and biblical theology do not play a role at all, because, in the eyes of Van de Beek, they never lead to anything. Therefore, he does not even discuss the relevant literature on these questions.[664]

Van de Beek seemingly pragmatic approach to these questions can be seen as a result of his view on history. In the previous section, it was apparent that Van de Beek considers history and historical developments as theologically irrelevant. Since this is the case, it could be argued that historical developments like emancipation of women and homosexuals are theologically neutral. They only have a cultural or a psychological meaning, but they are theologically irrelevant and therefore are not decisive for the question if a person is fit for a certain ministerial position. In Christ, cultural expressions of gender and sexuality are stripped of theological value. What remains is a purely pragmatic question. As in his broader ecclesiology, theological deliberation on ecclesial ministry does not relate to cultural developments since they are essentially irrelevant. Instead, theological reflection takes place in a sort of ecclesial safehouse where only the pragmatic question is decisive.

But is that what contextual theology is about? It may of course seem like an attractive and simple approach to deal with complicated questions, but it is not convincing. Surely, an opponent of women (or practising homosexuals) in ministry would not agree that matters of gender and sexuality are theologically neutral, probably not because of some cultural development, but because these matters have everything to do with the apostolic witness as written down in Scripture. Would not the witness of the apostles and its ecclesiological expression in the early church, combined with the doctrinal and personal succession Van de Beek highlights so much (see below), justify a further

[664] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 272, footnote 360.

exegetical and theological deliberation? And, conversely, might it not also be the case that issues such as gender and sexuality present the church with questions that can yield new theological insights?

Therefore, the choice of Van de Beek to refrain from exegetical and biblical elaborations, or for that matter, theological discernment in general, in matters like these does not do justice to the necessary theological discernment and results in a pragmatism that has little to do with genuine contextual theology.

5.3.3 Ordination

Given his sacramental orientation, it may be no surprise that Van de Beek is also willing to call ordination a sacrament. His argumentation is original, though.

As shown earlier, Van de Beek rejects the Augustinian view of the sacraments in which they were reduced to a mere means of specific spiritual grace for a specific calling or a new state of life, instead of being expressions of the eternal life to which the believers belonged. According to Van de Beek, ordination cannot be regarded as a sacrament if one takes the pre-Augustinian view on the sacraments as a starting point.

But if one, mistakenly, sees a sacrament as a sign and seal of the promises of God, as Reformed Protestants tend to do, then one should also consider ordination to ministry a sacrament. Ordination then is a means of specific spiritual grace for the specific calling of ministry. Yet it is precisely in Reformed circles that this sacramental approach of ordination is rejected. This rejection of the sacramentality of ordination implies a stronger conception of the sacraments than their Augustinian definition suggests. Apparently, even in the Reformed tradition it is realized that the sacraments are about Christ's *presentia realis* and there is a reluctance to tie this presence too strictly to the ordained minister, out of fear for too much accumulation of power. This line of thinking goes back to Calvin, who, did not object to a sacramental conception of ordination but rejected is out of fear of abuse.[665]

Since the situation has drastically changed and ministry no longer seems to have any authority, Reformed churches should again emphasize the Augustinian sacramental view of ordination. Doing so they would come close to the Roman Catholic view of ministry as a sacrament, i.e., a visible sign of the bestowment of God's grace.[666]

If one considers ordination a sacrament in the post-Augustinian sense, then it should be regarded a 'Dauersakrament', i.e., a ritual that does not need repeating. The Protestant tradition has retained this aspect, as is evidenced by the fact that the laying on of hands is only performed during the first instalment of an ordained minister. One is being ordained for life. Van de Beek even speaks of a *character indelibilis*. When someone deliberately abstains from his ministry, that should be regarded as a disregard of God's call.

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[665] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 263-264.

[666] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 264.

In discussing personal representation of the minister, I have already put my finger on the ambiguity of Van de Beek 's theology of ministry. His emphasis on the sacraments as expressions of eternal life seems inconsistent with his emphasis on the personal representation of the minister. Yet Van de Beek, fearing ecclesiological Docetism, places strong emphasis on the personal aspect of representation so that ecclesial ministry almost becomes a sacrament in itself. In his treatment of ordination, however, the pendulum swings the other way again. Instead of assuming that the sacramental nature of the ministry presupposes an equally sacramental ordination, Van de Beek rejects the sacramentality of ordination instead. Only with a flawed conception of the sacraments can ordination be considered a sacrament, according to Van de Beek. Apparently Van de Beek himself also recognizes that his view of personal representation cannot be consistently sustained. At this point, a tension emerges in Van de Beek's theology of ministry.

5.4 Guardians of the Church

The Eucharist is not only the starting point of theology of ministry, but also its focus. It is the task of ministers to keep the church centred on Christ. They are guardians of the church. The minister is the 'priest of Christ'.[667] This has two sides to it.

First, ministers have the task to bring the congregation to Christ and keep it centred on Him as celebrated in the Eucharist. The ministers should guard and feed the congregational flock they have been entrusted. Through instruction, catechesis, and personal admonition the ministers are to bring and keep the believers in community with Christ.[668] For Van de Beek, a minister of the church cannot be compared to a CEO. Ministers are *presbuteroi*, i.e., older people that have more wisdom and who have knowledge of the tradition. They are *episkopoi*, i.e., overseers who watch over the congregation. It would be a mistake to assume that ministry is about leadership and that ministers should have all kinds of leadership qualities. The modern concept of church leadership has more to do with current management theories than with caring for the congregation. The ministers of the congregation should be more like parents than like managers. Also, they should not be slave drivers who can abuse their power. Ordained ministry will only be meaningful when it does what it is supposed to do: keeping the church focused on Christ.[669]

Next, this Eucharistic focus is also visible in the historical continuity with the apostolic tradition, embodied by the minister. This historical continuity is a condition for the community with Christ in the Eucharist.

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[667] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 207.
[668] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 202-203.
[669] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 222-224.

In the celebration of the Eucharist the minister bridges the gap between Christ, who is in heaven, and the congregation, which is on earth.[670] There is, however, also a historical gap that needs bridging in order to keep the church centred on Christ. If the church, in celebrating the Eucharist, commemorates Christ's life and death, then certainty about the events surrounding his death and resurrection is necessary. Since Christ as a historical person lived almost 2,000 years earlier, a distorted picture of his life and work looms. At his point the concepts of *apostolicity* and of *apostolic succession* comes into play.[671]

In his book, Van de Beek devotes relatively little attention to the concept of apostolicity, at least when measured against the room he gives to the other *notae ecclesia*.[672] As far as Van de Beek is concerned, the concept should not be confused with the church's apostolate. The church's calling to witness to the gospel in the world was associated with the church's catholicity rather than apostolicity in the early church. Apostolicity, according to Van de Beek, only concerns church's faithfulness to the teachings of the apostles.

In line with this view of apostolicity, Van de Beek develops his theology of ministry in a chapter called 'keeping the church focused on Christ'.[673] From early on the church has developed three instruments to keep the church faithful to the teachings of the apostles: ordained ministry, Scripture, and confession. These three instruments should be taken together, because taken separately they each lead to arbitrariness. There is no ordained ministry without Scripture and confession, no confession without Scripture and ordained ministry, and no Scripture without ordained ministry and confession.[674]

According to Van de Beek, the awareness that Scripture can only be interpreted within the bounds of a ministerial and confessional tradition has been there within Protestantism from the beginning. Since the three instruments are inextricably connected to each other, it does not really matter in what order they are treated. Van de Beek begins his book by treating the churches' ordained ministry because it historically precedes the canon and the confession of the church.

Ordained ministry has thus been an essential factor of the church's identity from early on, as an institution that keeps the church centred on Christ. Initially, the apostles, as eyewitnesses of Jesus and his resurrection, fulfilled this role, but they handed this task over to the bishops and presbyters. The latter have since

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[670] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 207.

[671] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 195.

[672] For apostolicity Van de Beek only uses four pages, whereas he uses around 20 pages for the other *notae ecclesiae*. Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 29-96.

[673] I chose to translate the Dutch phrase 'De kerk bij Christus bewaren' with 'keeping the church focused on Christ'. The Dutch phrase is hard to translate and literally means something like 'keeping the church close to Christ'. I could have opted for this translation, but in my mind, it carries too much pietistic undertones, whereas for Van de Beek the phrase also – one could even argue predominantly – refers to the apostolic doctrines.

[674] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 195-196. See also: Van de Beek, *Thuis*, 120 ff.

then the task to hold on to the line of the apostles and to make sure that every new generation does so.[675] In the words of Van de Beek:

> That is also the essence of ministry: making sure the church remains faithful to the teaching of the apostles.[676]

From a Reformed perspective, Van de Beek's opinion that ministry, Scripture, and confession are of equal importance for the life of the church fails to recognize the central place of the Bible. According to Van de Beek, Scripture is but one instrument among others to keep the church centred on Christ. In the argumentation of Van de Beek, Scripture and ministry are of equal importance for the church because their origins can both be traced back to Christ. But in his treatment, Van de Beek does not do justice to the unique place of Scripture, and he equates the foundational ministry of the apostles with subsequent ecclesial ministries.

It is true that also from a Reformed perspective ecclesial ministry is considered an institution of Christ, but this does not automatically mean that there is a direct line from the apostolic ministry to the ministries of the church. Van de Beek's straight line in this regard church bypasses the unique role of the apostles, who were not only responsible for the transmission of faith but were themselves part of the revelation.[677] Their unique apostolic witness is the foundation of the church, and their ministries should be distinguished from the subsequent ecclesial ministries that build on the work of the apostles.

In my mind, this renders Van de Beek's idea of apostolic succession less suitable for a contemporary Reformed theology of ministry. Subsequent ecclesial ministry should not be confused with the foundational witness of the apostles as it is documented in the New Testament. Indeed, ecclesial ministry is an institution of Christ, just as the apostolic ministry was instituted by Christ, but, through his Spirit, he calls ecclesial ministers to keep the church centred on the foundational and canonical apostolic witness.[678]

This puts the equation of Scripture and ministry in perspective. Scripture and ecclesial ministry do not function on the same level as instruments to keep the church centred on Christ. In a Reformed ecclesiology, Scripture has priority. Ecclesial ministry is principally subordinated to Scripture as a written testimony of the foundational apostolic witness.

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[675] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 261.

[676] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 200.

[677] Cf. Hofius, O., 'Gemeindeleitung', 185: 'Die Apostel sind dem Neuen Testament zufolge *nicht* Träger eines *kirchlichen* Amtes. Sie sind vielmehr in einzigartiger Weise Jesus Christus als dem Herrn der Kirche zugeordnet und gehören in dieser Zuordnung wesentlich in das Geschehen der die Kirche begründenden und tragenden Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus mit hinein.' See also: Hofius, 'Die Einzigartigkeit'.

[678] This is not the place to elaborate on the relationship between Old and New Testament. Suffice it to say that the apostles saw their own witness completely in line with the witness of the authors of the Old Testament.

In the view of Van de Beek, the line of historical continuity almost automatically leads to the concept of *apostolic succession*. This concept is implicit in the pastoral epistles and explicitly elaborated by Irenaeus. In line with his broader theology of ministry, Van de Beek pleads for the personal aspect of this apostolic succession. There is not only a *successio doctrinae*, but also a *successio personarum*. In the church of the Middle Ages the focus was almost completely placed on this personal aspect of the apostolic succession, at the expense of the doctrinal aspect. In reaction, the reformers rejected the concept of personal apostolic succession and placed all emphasis on the doctrinal succession. As in the case of representation, Van de Beek wants to hold the doctrinal and personal aspect together. In keeping the church centred on Christ, one cannot do without people who are accountable and who received their responsibility from others who before them carried this responsibility. Van de Beek approvingly points at the early church, where only the bishop had the authority to ordain new ministers, as he was the one with the final responsibility of making sure the church is led by the Spirit.[679]

In line with his focus on the personal dimension of ecclesial ministry, Van de Beek stresses the personal aspect of apostolic succession. This is in line with his identification of the apostolic ministry and subsequent ecclesial ministries. According to Van de Beek, ecclesial ministry flows from Christ's institution of the ministry of the apostles. As shown above, Van de Beek fails to distinguish the salvation-historical difference between the apostles and subsequent ecclesial ministry.

However, since there is no straight line from the apostolic ministry to the ministers of the church, his argumentation for personal apostolic succession hangs in the air. From a Reformed perspective, apostolic succession in the New Testament does not refer to the persons of the apostles, but to their testimony.[680] This does not deny the possibility of personal apostolic succession altogether, but it does show that another line of argumentation is needed.

5.5 The Bishop as the All-Embracing Ministry

As became clear, both in his view on the representational aspect of ministry, as in his thoughts concerning apostolic succession, Van de Beek explicitly points to the personal dimension of ordained ministry. This personal dimension is a

[679] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 261-262.

[680] Hofius, 'Gemeindeleitung', 186: 'Deshalb wissen jene neutestamentlichen Schriften, die bereits den Tod der Apostel voraussetzen, schlechterdings nichts von »Nachfolgern« zu sagen, die in das Amt der Apostel eintreten. Sie kennen eine »Nachfolge« der Apostel einzig und allein in dem Sinn, daß die kirchlichen Amtsträger in bewußter Bindung an das apostolische Christuszeugnis das Evangelium als das ihnen tradierte »Wort Gottes« in Verkündigung und Lehre unverfälscht weitergeben. In der strengen Bindung des kirchlichen Amtes an das Christuszeugnis der Apostel und in der unverkürzten Weitergabe des Evangeliums besteht – neutestamentlich gesehen – die »apostolische Sukzession«.'

remarkable feature for a Reformed theology of ministry but, according to Van de Beek, it flows from the fact that ministry is an instrument to keep the church centred on Christ and has its roots in the early church.[681] The personal dimension of ecclesial ministry most poignantly comes to the fore in his plea for the ministry of the bishop.

Van de Beek pleads for a model of single-headed personal leadership that implies a hierarchical structure. In his book he distinguishes between six different models of church order, which he treats in reversed chronological order.[682]

First, there is the *model of free Christian communities*. They usually do not have a church order and a low concept of ministry. Theoretically, every member can be a leader of the congregation, but in reality, there is often a strong leader who is not formally chosen and appointed. This model barely has any historical roots and is typical for a postmodern age with its emphasis on free choice. Van de Beek's antipathy towards this model can be read between the lines.[683]

Next, there is the *congregational model* with its focus on the community of its members. The relationship with other churches – which distinguishes it from the former model – is that of an association one can join or be admitted to. It is a typical bottom-up model. The advantage of this model is that all members are involved, but the flip side is the inversion of the classical approach to ordained ministry: ministry seems to be not much more than a means of getting things done within the congregation.[684]

The third model Van de Beek mentions is the *presbyterial-synodal model*. The local leadership of the church is in the hands of the presbyterium that consists of the ministers of the Word and the elders. Regionally, congregations are part of a synodal structure. The presbyterial type belongs to modernity. There is no single-headed leadership, but a shared responsibility. The downside of this type is that no one can be held personally accountable, and ministry becomes not much more than a task that needs to be done.[685]

In the *episcopal model* ordination plays an important role. Ministers are ordained in order to represent the tradition of faith and with it the presence of the Spirit in the church. The extent of the authority of the bishop depends on

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[681] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 246.

[682] According to Van de Beek, God's kingdom in this world inevitably takes shape institutionally, if one wants to avoid an amorphous chaos. Therefore, the church needs a church order. A church order is not the same as the regulations of an association, but it is an expression of the essence of the church: a reality that is called and held together by Christ. The focus of a church order should be on the ordained ministers and their responsibilities rather than on all kinds of technical regulations. Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 225.

[683] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 227.

[684] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 227-228.

[685] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 228-229.

the means by which he is chosen. In a true episcopal model, the other bishops appoint a new bishop. In other models, the bishops are chosen by the laity.[686]

The *papal model* is confined to the Roman Catholic church. The Pope is the single-headed leader of the church and represents Christ in his own person.[687]

Finally, Van de Beek mentions the *conciliar presbyteral-episcopal model*. As in the episcopal model, the bishop is the central person, but the collegiality with other bishops regionally and even internationally plays a greater role. Locally the bishop is assisted by ordained presbyters with whom he leads the congregation. Unlike the presbyterial-synodal model, the focus is not so much on the church meetings but on the person of the bishop and the presbyter. Therefore, this model is called *presbyteral* and not *presbyterial*.[688]

Since the essence of ministry according to Van de Beek is keeping the church centred on Christ, and given the roots of ministry in the early church, the *conciliar presbyteral-episcopal model* is most preferred: people with personal responsibility in consultation with others, with the primary task to keep the church within the faith and lead her in Christ in liturgy and life.[689] Because of this preferred model, Van de Beek pleads for the ministry of the bishop who is personally responsible.

Van de Beek gives six motives for the ministry of the bishop. Firstly, there is a *pastoral motive*. People need to be taken care of, therefore a person who looks after people is required. A bishop with personal responsibility is something other than a director of a board, but a is more like a shepherd who represents Christ.[690] Secondly, there is an *ecclesiological motive*, which has several aspects to it. First, it regards the aspect of catholicity. True catholicity is focused on unity, and this receives a face in a person that symbolizes this unity. Next, the geographical unity of the church is at stake. Finally, a focus on church meetings leads to bureaucracy, whereas personal responsibility delivers a church from unnecessary bureaucratic tendencies.[691] Thirdly, Van de Beek mentions an *ecumenical motive*. The ministry of bishops is a given in most of the world churches. For the sake of unity, it is important to keep this in mind. For the unity of the church, it would seem obvious to strive for a form that has been in use since the beginning of the church: ordained episcopacy.[692] Fourthly, there is a *cultural motive*. Although it may sound like a paradox, in contemporary culture people are looking for role models. The ministry of the bishop fits into this contemporary desire, especially since role models represent something coming from the outside.[693] Fifthly, Van de Beek mentions a *tradition motive*. The

[686] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 229-230
[687] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 230.
[688] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 230.
[689] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 246.
[690] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 247.
[691] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 247-248.
[692] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 248-249.
[693] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 249-250.

apostles handed over the care for the church to others, who in turn handed it over to the next generation. There is a succession of ministers to guard the tradition. They do not only take care of historical continuity, but also represent the Spirit who leads the church in truth.[694] Finally, there is a *revelation motive*. Ordained ministry represents Jesus Christ. Therefore, certain people are appointed who represent him personally. What Van de Beek exactly means by this, remains unclear. Is de representation of the bishop different from that of the presbyter? It would seem to contradict Van de Beek's sacramental ecclesiology if that was the case.[695]

Van de Beek's plea for a bishop is not only grounded in his view on ministry, but also on his reading of the historical development of ecclesial ministry. The picture of the New Testament is quite clear, according to Van de Beek. Next to the apostles, there are *presbyteroi* and *episkopoi*, who lead the congregation, and the deacons. The New Testament also speaks of widows, but they do not have a place in the leadership of the congregation.[696]

From the end of the second century the picture is drastically changed, and the triplet *bishop*, *presbyter* and *deacon* seem to be self-evident. The view of Ignatius from Antioch, in which the ministry of the bishop and that of the presbyter should be differentiated, became predominant. In that view the bishop has the actual authority, and he is the only minister who is allowed to ordain other ministers.[697] All the tasks the other ministers perform fall under his responsibility. The bishop is the all-embracing minister and others may perform certain specific tasks for him. Without a bishop, no minister can really function. Before speaking of the diversity of ministries, it must be clear what the ministry of the bishop entails. Only then it becomes clear which episcopal tasks can also be done by others.[698]

Van de Beek explains the transition from the New Testament picture of ministry to the second century Ignatian view by referring to the death of the apostles. The loss of the central authority of the apostles created a vacuum that needed to be filled. The diversification of the presbyter and the bishop provided for this by transferring the authority of the apostles to the bishops. Because the church was already accustomed to a tripartite leadership, this transition went without many problems. It was, according to Van de Beek, the natural course of things and he does not mention any substantiating literature for his theory but gives the credits for this view to an elder of the Reformed congregation of the Dutch town of Bodegraven.[699]

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[694] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 250.
[695] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 250-251.
[696] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 235.
[697] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 235.
[698] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 237.
[699] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 238. For relevant literature, see my excursus on a (new) consensus on ministry in New Testament scholarship in §1.3.4.

In the eyes of Van de Beek, it is obvious that ordained ministry is about a hierarchical order whereby the bishop is the all-embracing ministry. Around the bishop, there is a presbytery that can perform certain tasks that can also be done by the bishop. Next to the presbytery, there are the deacons who help with the work in the congregation.[700]

Regarding the difference between the bishop and the presbyter besides the hierarchical position, only the latter had the authority to ordain other ministers. All the other tasks can be performed by both ministries.[701] The deacons are ordained but are not part of the leadership of the congregation. They do not have the authority to administer the sacraments or to pronounce the blessing. Although they are ordained, they have a supportive function and fulfil all kinds of administrative functions. They also have a supportive function in the performance of the liturgy, and therefore they must be ordained. Because widows have no function in the liturgy, they do not have to be ordained.[702]

According to Van de Beek, the history of ecclesial ministry shows that the model of the bishop and presbyter has become standard. This model can be recognized in all denominations, except by the Reformed churches and most newer denominations.[703]

Moreover, Van de Beek's plea for the ministry of the bishop also opens possibilities with regard to the papacy. Van de Beek gives a brief historical overview of the creation of the papacy and admits that the Pope is latecomer in the history of the church. He also admits that the New Testament does not know a single-headed leadership for the entire church. Van de Beek believes that this does not mean that there is no room for the papacy. The ministerial structure is not a matter of *status confessionis*. The current situation of the Roman Catholic church and the Protestant churches ask for a reformation of the confession, of the authority of Scripture, but also of ministerial practice. Therefore, the Protestant churches should consider whether a return to Rome would be the appropriate step. Van de Beek refers to the council of Melanchthon, who said that for the sake of unity the Pope should be allowed his place if he would give way to the gospel.[704]

With his plea for a bishop, Van de Beek makes a remarkable move for a Dutch Reformed theologian. Within the Dutch Reformed world, the ministry of a bishop often evokes trepidation because it is easily associated with possible abuse of power. It is precisely the collegial aspect of the Reformed ministerial structure which is often thought to serve as a lock on the door of any unhealthy concentration of power. In this context, a plea for the ministry of the bishop as Van de Beek gives it will not easily win support.

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[700] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 238.
[701] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 238 and 269.
[702] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 238-239.
[703] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 240.
[704] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 254-261.

Nevertheless, Van de Beek deserves to be heard in the search for an ecumenically informed theology of ministry. In particular, his ecclesiological and ecumenical motifs demonstrate that Van de Beek's ecclesiology is fundamentally driven by a desire for church unity.[705] This desire for unity is most pronounced in the fact that Van de Beek would even consider giving the Pope a place, if that would serve the unity between the Roman Catholic church and the Protestant churches. Since the lack of unity is the Achilles heel of the Reformed churches – deeply divided among themselves despite ostensive similarities – a Reformed plea for a bishop like Van de Beek's needs to be taken seriously.

Yet, Van de Beek's argumentation seems insufficient. To begin with, it is noteworthy that a significant part of Van de Beek's plea consists of a historical argument. The historical development towards monepiscopacy seems to have a clear theological bearing. This is striking, since in other places Van de Beek denies that historical developments have theological significance. At this point, his argument is inconsistent.

In addition, it is rather remarkable – to put it mildly – that a renowned Reformed theologian, who places great value on biblical witness, should rely solely on the remark of an elder, however educated he may be, and does not relate to the exegetical and religion-historical literature that has appeared on the subject. Even more so because the trend within New Testament research seems to point in a very different direction.[706] Van de Beek's historical foundation of the episcopate does not make too strong an impression and seems to be based on little more than conjecture. With a hint of irony, one can observe a measure of agreement with the ecumenical documents on ministry, which also argue based on historical conjecture.

Moreover, Van de Beek's emphasis on hierarchy not only contradicts Reformed ministerial principles but also does not appear as strongly in the New Testament as in Van de Beek's conception.

While Van de Beek's the ecumenical argument may seem attractive, he does not sufficiently account for the fact that within the ecumenical discussion *episkopé* does not necessarily have to take the form of the ministry of the bishop. Consequently, the ecumenical necessity is also lacking.

Also, the tradition motif may sound attractive, but historical continuity does not necessarily have to find expression in the ministry of a bishop. Ordination by another ordained minister seems sufficient to express historical continuity.

The main rationale would then be the personal exercise of the bishop's ministry. In Van de Beek's argument, however, this can only be a pragmatic consideration and not a principled one. After all, the personal aspect of ecclesial ministry is closely connected to the liturgy, and from there *presbyters* as well

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[705] For a description of the development of Van de Beek's thoughts on church unity, see Van den Belt, 'Rome or Jerusalem?', 623-634.

[706] For relevant literature, see my excursus on a (new) consensus on ministry in New Testament scholarship in §1.3.4.

represent Christ personally. So, the revelation motif does not make sense since Van de Beek's ministry of the bishop cannot be essentially different from that of the *presbyter*. Only the focus and the work field of the bishop's ministry may be somewhat different from that of the presbyter. But that seems to be a practical rather than a principled matter.

This means that pastoral, ecclesiological, and cultural motives should be decisive in the question of whether there should be a bishop within a Reformed doctrine of ministry. Taken individually and collectively, these motives may indeed sufficiently clarify the desirability of establishing the office of bishop. However, this would require a broader and deeper reflection on these motives than Van de Beek gives.

5.6 Reformed Threefold Ministry

With his views on the bishop in mind, it is interesting to look at Van de Beek's thoughts on the Reformed threefold ministry.

In line with what emerged in the historical chapter of this study, Van de Beek observes that the Reformed elder did not have the same status in the early Reformed churches as in later periods. In Geneva the role of the elder was actually quite limited.[707] The high status of the Reformed elder mainly took shape in the Netherlands and in England.[708]

With the collapse of the *corpus Christianum*, the position of the elder also changed. On the one hand, the elder became the face of the ecclesial version of democratization. With the shrinking of churches and their place in society, however, it became harder to find elders. The elder increasingly resembled an administrator of a small society with all the related tasks.[709]

On the other hand, since the end of the 19th century, the elder became pivotal in the re-Christianization of society. Whereas the minister of the Word served inside the church, the elder served in the wider kingdom. Deacons played a subordinated role in Reformed theology of ministry, although they could also be seen as serving the wider kingdom.[710]

According to Van de Beek, this historical overview demonstrates that the Reformed elder and the deacon were initially aimed at maintaining the *corpus Christianum*. With the collapse of the Christendom culture, they increasingly became the symbols of the re-Christianization of society.

Looking at the Reformed diversity of ministry like this illustrates that her threefold ministerial structure was not much more than a cultural phenomenon within the Western cultural context that loses significance with the collapse of

[707] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 240.
[708] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 242.
[709] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 242-243.
[710] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 243-244.

Christendom. This is no loss, according to Van de Beek, because it does not belong to the essence of the church.[711]

Here, Van de Beek's Christological, eschatological, and sacramental presuppositions come in. The Reformed diversity of ministry is in his eyes an expression of a boundary crossing of the church that has developed since the fourth century: no longer the celebration of eternal life in the Eucharist as an orientation of the Christian identity is central, but the perspective of the kingdom of God that conquers the world.[712]

That does not mean that there is no place for elders or deacons in Van de Beek's view. The single-headed leadership of ordained ministry does not rule out other ministries. As Calvin already made clear: governance should not be in the hand of one person. But Van de Beek pleads for a terminological differentiation between ordained ministers (bishops and presbyters) and synergetic ministries (elders and Reformed deacons). Only ordained ministers have the responsibility to act on behalf of Christ, whereas the sole task of the synergetic ministers is to help the ordained ministers.[713]

Van de Beek emphasizes the auxiliary character of the synergetic ministries out of fear that otherwise ecclesial ministry will eventually be viewed as representing the community instead of Christ. He notes how this is already the case in the mainstream of the Reformed tradition with as logical consequence that ecclesial ministry is in the end more like an administrative board or a team of trainers rather than representatives of Christ. When ministry is viewed in this way, then conflicts and dissension loom, as in the case of the first letter to the church of Corinth.[714]

Just how should Van de Beek's view of the threefold structure of Reformed ministry be assessed? First, his remarks about the modest status of the Reformed elder are to the point. As emerged in the historical chapter, the elder in Calvin's Geneva indeed does not have the place that is attributed to him by much of present-day Reformed ecclesiology. Indeed, the Genevan elder was little more than an auxiliary ministry to the fundamental ministry of the Word. Van de Beek's terminology – *synergetic ministries* – may sound a bit artificial, but that does not take away from the validity of his point.

However, according to Van de Beek, the Reformed diversity of ministry was not much more than a disposable cultural phenomenon within Western society and as such an expression of a boundary crossing of the church that has developed since the fourth century. Of course, it may be true that the concrete shape of the Reformed ministry of the elder differed through the ages and was adapted to a variety of cultures, but that does not justify its easy dismissal as a purely cultural phenomenon. Properly speaking, any form of ministerial practice is to be contextually conditioned, unless one assumes that mission merely

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[711] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 244.
[712] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 244.
[713] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 246.
[714] Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest*, 246.

concerns the imposition of a particular ecclesial culture. So, the question is not whether there is cultural adaptation, but what theological motives and considerations lie behind it, and what those same considerations might have to say in a different context.

This is precisely where I think Van de Beek misses the mark. He sees the elder as a pawn in the church's attempt to influence the world. Apart from the fact that Van de Beek's explanation assumes a rather unwilling reading of Christendom, this is open to debate. Historically, Van de Beek may be right that the elder functioned as a bridge between church and world - e.g. also in Geneva - , but it does not do justice to the ecclesiological motives that shaped the idea behind the ministry of the of elder. Admittedly, Van de Beek does give the Reformed elder a theological place, but only as a means of preventing abuse of power. By reducing Reformed presbyterate to this function, Van de Beek fails to recognize the charismatic starting point of Reformed theology of ministry. The Reformed elder and deacon are not only necessary to ensure that there is no excessive concentration of power, but they are an expression of the charismatic structure of the congregation, which is built through a variety of gifts of the Spirit. Particularly in Bucer's and Łaski's case, it became clear that these two offices were created to reflect the charismatic nature of the congregation. Certainly, in London, the elders and deacons were not pawns of the church for the preservation of the *corpus Christianum*, but rather expressions of the fact that ecclesiology wells up from pneumatology. This is where the strictly Christological approach to ecclesiology causes Van de Beek to distance himself from the origins of Reformed ministerial doctrine.

5.7 Conclusion

The question I sought to answer in this chapter is:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Van de Beek's theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

To answer this question, it is important to keep in mind that Van de Beek was selected in part because of the need for counterbalance. Out of concern for an optimistic view on human progress, Van de Beek is highly critical of the concept of *missio Dei*. His critical stance helps to highlight possible weaknesses of an overemphasis on *missio Dei*. This way, Van de Beek has a marked function in this study.

5.7.1 Missionary Dimensions

Van de Beek assumes a sacramental ecclesiology in which the Eucharist is an expression of eternal life. In his view of the church, the 'already' aspect of the

kingdom is strongly emphasized, leaving the 'not-yet' aspect reserved for the world beyond the borders of the church.

Because of this one-sided eschatological orientation, Christians are essentially strangers on earth, and they should consider themselves to be part of an alternative community. In missionary terms, all Van de Beek's focus is on the church. It is even dangerous for Christians to be focused on the world, because very quickly a form of Western progress optimism lurks. Out of this concern, Van de Beek rejects the concept of *missio Dei* altogether. He rightly points out the dangers of an easy identification of the kingdom of God with Western cultural optimism but does not do justice to the development the concept has gone through nor to its theological content. By explicitly rejecting the use of the concept of *missio Dei* because of a supposed idea of progress, Van de Beek not only dissociates himself from the ecumenical movement, but also fails to address the missionary challenge. At best, his strong Christological concentration can be read as a reminder that missionary action of the church should be focused on the Christ event.

5.7.2 Missionary Intentions

In light of Van de Beek's rejection of the concept of *missio Dei*, it is not surprising that there is hardly any mention of missionary intentions for ecclesial ministry. The most important task of ordained ministers is to open heaven for the believers in the church in the celebration of the Eucharist. Attesting to Jesus outside the walls of the church is something every Christian can and should do. Mission boils down to evangelism. However, making Christ present can only be done by the ordained minister in the liturgical setting. The only missionary intention of ordained ministers lies in bringing and keeping believers in the church in Christ's presence and in maintaining the church as an alternative community that as such is the light of the world.

5.7.3 Relevant Points of Attention

With his catholicizing ecclesiology and theology of ministry, Van de Beek encourages an ecclesiological imagination that contributes to ecclesial unity. Van de Beek's theology of ministry is completely suffused with the desire for ecclesial unity. From 1998 onwards, Van de Beek travels the Reformed *Via Media*, although he seems increasingly inclined to take the exit to Rome. This results in a theology of ministry with remarkable elements, at least from a Reformed perspective. Van de Beek's ecclesiology has clearly pronounced Reformed features, but also bears clear Roman Catholic traces. It can be read as a passionate attempt to develop an ecumenically acceptable Reformed ecclesiology.

This way, his treatment of ecclesial ministry helps to think through certain blind spots within traditional Reformed theology of ministry. I am thinking primarily of the close connection between ministry and liturgy. Van de Beek rightly points to the liturgical rooting of ministry, even if he, in doing so, places

a one-sided emphasis on the Eucharist. The way he designs his theology of ministry from the liturgy helps to reflect on elements of ecclesial ministry that have remained underexposed or controversial in the Reformed tradition. Here, I refer in particular to the sacramental nature of ministry as a form of Christ representation. Although Van de Beek is also one-sided on this point, his plea can be read as an important warning against a theology of ministry that is too lopsidedly instrumental. In other words: Van de Beek's plea for the symbolic dimension of ecclesial ministry needs to be theologically processed with a view to developing an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry. Finally, his plea for a bishop challenges Reformed churches to think about the ministry of a bishop from different motives.

An important difference between Van de Beek's approach to ecclesial ministry and that of the Reformers I discussed in the historical chapter is that Beek develops his theology of the ministry not from pneumatology, but from his idiosyncratic Christology that centres primarily around the cross. In doing so, Van de Beek not only gives too little credit to a fundamental ecumenical insight, but also does not do justice to the Reformed belief that the church is a charismatic community.

6. Innovating and Conversing
Michael Moynagh's Reflections on Church Leadership and Ecclesial Ministry

In the previous two chapters, I discussed two Reformed theologians' views on theology of ministry. Guder as a missiologist and Van de Beek as a systematic theologian have each contributed in their own way to the development of an ecumenically informed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective. In this chapter, it is my intention to establish a link with the concrete practice of the church and its mission by listening to a theologian who has reflected on the church's missionary practice. It is, for several reasons, obvious to make this link, since reflection on theology of ministry is, albeit sometimes only implicitly, done with a view to ecclesial practice. While of course any form of systematic-theological reflection essentially emerges from and focuses on the practice of the Christian life, this is perhaps most visible for reflection on ecclesial ministry because any theological choice about ecclesial ministry permeates the concrete practices and structures of the church. Since, by making theological proposals, this study seeks to contribute to the concrete missionary practice of Reformed churches in the Netherlands, it is important to give attention to the factual and often messy questions and challenges that live at the ground level of the church. In a very minimal way, this has already been done in the introduction where I have mapped out the concrete questions emerging from ecclesial practice that are on the agenda of churches. In this chapter, I want to strengthen the link with practice a little more by listening to Michael Moynagh, a British theologian, whose work is highly informed by missionary practice in England.

Of course, I am aware that listening to a theologian, however rooted in practice he or she may be, is not the same as giving space to church practice. Nevertheless, I believe the choice is justified because the systematic-theological approach of this study calls for limitation. By listening to Moynagh, I can allow space, albeit modestly, for the messy and sometimes ambiguous reality of the church.

Michael Moynagh – who is a member of the UK Fresh Expressions team – does not, strictly speaking, develop a theology of ministry. However, that does not mean that his thoughts are not grounded in theological arguments or can help reflection on theology of ministry. In the context of this study, Moynagh's thoughts deserve particular attention because they are rooted in the conviction that the church is called to participate in the *missio Dei*.

The question I seek to answer in this chapter is:

How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Moynagh's reflection of church leadership and theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?

The structure of this chapter is as follows. After a brief introduction of Moynagh, I first address his general theological and social-scientific presuppositions. In a subsequent section, I focus specifically on ecclesiological presuppositions before turning to his views on ecclesial leadership and the education of future church leaders. I conclude by asking how Moynagh's thought can contribute to a renewed reflection on Reformed theology of ministry.

6.1 Michael Moynagh – an Introduction

To begin, let me share a few biographical notes and list Moynagh's most important publications.

6.1.1 Biographical Notes

Moynagh is a minister within the Fresh Expressions stream of Anglicanism and serves as director of Network Development and Consultant on Theology and Practice. He started his ecclesial career as a curate at Emmanuel Church in London, before being appointed parish priest in Wilton.

Moynagh is sometimes referred to as the 'theologian of fresh expressions of church.'[715] In addition, he is also associate tutor at Wycliffe Hall,[716] Oxford, and senior research fellow with the Career Innovation Company.[717]

Moynagh's reflections on ministry are born out of and focused on practice, that is, the ecclesial practice of the new church communities and denominations dealing with this new phenomenon. For this study, this implies two advantages. His empirical disposition (especially in the context of new missionary communities) and eclectic theology are an interesting complement to Guder and Van de Beek's ecclesiological reflections. Next, Moynagh's specific focus on new church communities is very useful for this study of a contextual reading of Reformed ministry in a post-Christian culture. Moynagh astutely brings together insights from missionary practice and employs them for the development of an ecclesiology in view of a post-Christian culture.

6.1.2 Publications

For the purpose of this study, I will only use Moynagh's books that relate to ecclesiology and ecclesial innovation.

In 2012, Moynagh, together with Philip Harold, published a voluminous study on the theology and practice of new ecclesial communities titled *Church*

[715] https://freshexpressions.org.uk/theology/
[716] https://www.wycliffe.ox.ac.uk/staff-profiles#/
[717] https://www.careerinnovation.com/

for Every Context.[718] In it, Moynagh developed a theological rationale for what he perceived to be a global trend.[719]

In 2014, Moynagh published a more practical book on the same subject: *Being Church, Doing Life*.[720] Whereas in his 2012 book he primarily had a theologically educated audience in mind, he writes his 2014 book primarily with an eye toward church practice and for a theologically uneducated readership. *Godsend, A Handbook for New Christian Communities*, was published in 2021 and is even more focused on the practice of ecclesial communities.[721] The book is intended as a practical toolkit for the formation of new Christian communities.

In 2017, another book on new ecclesial communities was published: *Church in Life*.[722] Many of the threads from his 2012 book reappear, but in *Church in Life* Moynagh looks, more than in *Church for Every Context*, at the implications of the Fresh Expressions movement for existing churches and denominations. *Church in Life* is less exclusively focused on new ecclesial communities and in it Moynagh thinks through the implications of innovation and mission for ecclesiology.

I will take *Church in Life* as a starting point for this chapter and will only refer to the other books if they offer supplementary views on ministry and ecclesiology that cannot be found in *Church in Life*.

The outline of this chapter is as follows. I start with elaborating on Moynagh's theological and social scientific presuppositions. Next, I will proceed with a section on his ecclesiological presuppositions. Finally, I will dwell on Moynagh's thoughts on ministry.

6.2 Theological and Social-Scientific Presuppositions

Moynagh is affiliated to the Fresh Expressions movement in the United Kingdom. This movement is historically linked to the *Mission-Shaped Church* report of the Church of England that was published in 2004.[723] The report introduced the term *Fresh Expressions* for the first time for a wide audience and

[718] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*.
[719] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, ix.
[720] Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life*.
[721] Moynagh, *Godsend*.
[722] Moynagh, *Church in Life*.
[723] *Mission-Shaped Church*. Moynagh was involved as a consultant in the preparation of the report. MSC, xii.

was meant to offer a theological framework for the Church of England in mission as well as a missionary methodology.[724]

The report was a watershed moment in the Church of England, proposing that Fresh Expressions of church – Moynagh prefers the term 'new ecclesial communities' – were no longer to be considered an optional supplementary strategy but a necessary one as the traditional parochial system was no longer suited for the post-Christian missionary context.[725]

In a way Moynagh's work can be considered a theological reflection on and continuation of the proposal of the MSC report based on a significant amount of case studies. In his publications Moynagh weaves together theological reasoning and social scientific thinking in order to develop a theoretical framework of innovation that helps to understand the developments regarding new ecclesial communities. Theologically, his framework is informed by Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, whereas Moynagh draws on the concepts and language of complexity thinking to undergird his framework from a social scientific standpoint.[726]

6.2.1 Icons of God's Coming Reign

Although Moynagh explicitly states that his thinking is informed by Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, nowhere does he elaborate extensively on its substance. Rather, he uses the general thrust of Moltmann's thinking as a theological lens through which he looks at the new ecclesial communities.

Two quotations from Moltmann's book *Theology of Hope* might clarify Moynagh's use of Moltmann's thoughts. Moltmann works with the notion of God's future contained in his promises. He writes:

> Promise announces the coming of a not yet existing reality from the future of truth. Its relation to the existing and given reality is that of a specific *inadequatio rei et intellectus*. On the other hand, it does not merely anticipate and clarify the realm of coming history and the

[724] MSC, xi. In the words of the report the term Fresh Expressions 'suggests something new or enlivened is happening, but also suggests connection to history and the developing story of God's work in the Church' (MSC, 34). Moynagh, following the Fresh Expressions team, defines Fresh Expressions/new ecclesial communities as follows. They 'are: missional – in the sense that, through the Spirit, they are birthed by Christians mainly among people who do not normally attend church; contextual – they seek to fit the culture of the people they serve; formational – they aim to form disciples; ecclesial – they intend to become church for the people they reach in their contexts.' Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, xiv; cf. Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 3 and the key values mentioned on the Fresh Expressions website: https://freshexpressions.org.uk/fx-values/. Download date: 11 Nov 2021.

[725] Collinson, *Witnessing God's Mission*, 39. For a more detailed analysis and criticism of the report see pages 39-94.

[726] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*.

> realistic possibilities it contains. Rather, 'the possible', and therewith 'the future', arises entirely from God's word of promise and therefore goes beyond what is possible and impossible in the realistic sense. It does not illuminate a future which is always somehow already inherent in reality. Rather, 'future' is that reality which fulfils and satisfies the promise because it completely corresponds to it and accords with it. (...) To that extent 'promise' does not in the first instance have the function of illuminating the existing reality of the world or of human nature, interpreting it, bringing out its truth and using a proper understanding of it to secure man's agreement with it. Rather, it contradicts existing reality and discloses its own process concerning the future of Christ for man and the world. Revelation, recognized as promise and embraced in hope, thus sets an open stage for history, and fills it with missionary enterprise and the responsible exercise of hope, accepting the suffering that is involved in the contradiction of reality, and setting out towards the promised future.[727]
>
> It is from promise that there arises that element of unrest which allows of no coming to terms with a present that is unfulfilled. Under the guiding star of promise this reality is not experienced as a divinely stabilized cosmos, but as history in terms of moving on, leaving things behind and striking out towards new horizons as yet unseen.[728]

It is important to note, in view of the discussion of Moynagh, that the future Moltmann is talking about is not an extrapolation of past or present trends, nor does it concern scientific models of the future, but is entirely based on God's promises and the transcendent possibilities of God who made this world and its potentialities.[729] Elsewhere Moltmann makes a helpful distinction – which Moynagh himself however does not use – between *futurum* and *adventus*, the former referring to the future as it emerges from historical development, while the latter refers to a new reality that unexpectedly - that is, ungrounded in expectations from past or present - enters the present from outside.[730]

In the case of Moynagh, looking through the lens of Moltmann's theology means paying attention to the kingdom perspective of new ecclesial communities. God's future kingdom is a source of hope and contains possibilities for natural and human flourishing.[731] 'Jesus came into the world as the paradigm and instigator of God's promises kingdom' and new ecclesial

[727] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 72-73.
[728] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 89.
[729] Bauckham, 'Eschatology', 309
[730] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 25-26.
[731] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 29 and 63.

communities should therefore be viewed from this perspective as expressions and icons of God's coming reign.[732]

Moynagh contrasts his future-oriented ecclesiology with an incarnational approach. He notes how advocates of new types of church frequently appeal to the incarnation as an ecclesiological model: just as Jesus immersed himself in a particular culture to reach humanity, the church as his body is called to be present in the cultures of today's world.[733]

Although Moynagh feels this is a strong approach, he says this is only half the story. First, a purely incarnational approach risks losing sight of the kingdom dimension of the church. A kingdom-oriented ecclesiology does not surrender to the status quo but will seek innovation as an expression of the innovative kingdom promised by Jesus.[734] Next, an incarnational approach frequently restricts the incarnation to Jesus *coming* to earth. Moynagh pleads for a wider understanding of the incarnation in terms of the whole of Jesus' earthly and ascended life. By focusing on the key aspects of Jesus' life – his human and divine orientation, death and resurrection, ascension, and his work of bringing the kingdom to completion – it is possible to address themes that have been largely neglected in discussions on new ecclesial communities.[735] Moynagh's plea for a kingdom perspective echoes what I wrote in the chapter on Guder about the limited usefulness of incarnation as an ecclesiological model. His emphasis on the key-aspects of Jesus life is reminiscent of O'Donovan's idea of ecclesial recapitulation of the Christ event.

What does it mean to view new ecclesial communities from a kingdom perspective? For Moynagh, this kingdom perspective has everything to do with innovation. The processes of innovation of the framework he develops can be seen as avenues through which the Spirit brings the divine future into the present.[736] In his own words:

> Through innovation, the Spirit makes God's promised reign more tangible in the church's life. As a result, the church is changed – its identity moves on – and so are the lives of the people whom it serves.

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[732] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 7 and 415.

[733] Moynagh refers to the influential book *The Shaping of the Things to Come* from Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch and the *Mission-Shaped Church* report.

[734] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 174.

[735] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 160. What Moynagh means by these neglected themes becomes clear in treating the different key aspects of Jesus' life in relation to the church's essence. The church should hold her divine and human orientation together (incarnation), she should give herself away as Jesus gave himself away (crucifixion) and she should be focused on the future completion of God's kingdom (resurrection and Parousia). See Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 160-178.

[736] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 415.

> The Spirit enables the potentialities of God's future to transform the actualities of the present.[737]

The innovation of the new ecclesial communities is one of the ways through which the Spirit brings the 'the silk of the kingdom to the polyester of earth. How God's future shapes the present is rather like making a patchwork quilt.'[738] What this precisely involves can be seen by turning to Moynagh's framework of innovation.

6.2.2 Complexity Thinking

The social-scientific foundation of Moynagh's framework of innovation is made up of Complexity Thinking. Complexity Thinking seeks to describe behaviour that arises from the local, uncoordinated interactions of many participants.[739]

Moynagh contrasts management theories based on Complexity Thinking with management thinking based on a Newtonian model of science. The former has an organic view of organizations, whereas the latter has a mechanical approach to organizational life. Moynagh mentions seven differences between a Newtonian model of management and a management model based on Complexity Thinking:[740]

1. Instead of seeing organizations as machines, Complexity thinkers regard them as networks of conversations. Organizations can be understood by studying their multiple interactions.
2. Complexity Thinking sees novelty not emerging in an orderly, mechanical way but often by chance, through conversations.
3. In lieu of one-way, linear causation in the mechanical model, the non-linearity of complex organizations thrives by feedback, which moves back and forth. Feedback is how innovation spreads.
4. Organizations are messy and unpredictable, rather than being tidy and predictable as in the mechanical model.
5. Complexity Thinking shifts the emphasis from the top-down planning of the mechanical model to bottom-emergence.
6. A further difference between Newtonian and Complexity perspectives is that the latter emphasize how systems become increasingly complex. This increasing complexity enables them to adapt better to their environments.
7. Unlike the mechanical perspective, Complexity Thinking implies that change is more permanent than stability. Organizations will most likely thrive when there is a healthy balance between order

[737] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 29.
[738] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 99.
[739] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 14.
[740] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 21-26.

and change – what Complexity thinkers refer to as 'the edge of chaos'.

Inspired by Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and by Complexity Thinking, Moynagh develops a framework of innovation for churches in the West. The framework consists of six elements that should not be regarded as sequential stages, but rather as processes that coexist and intertwine with each other.[741]

1. The first element is **dissatisfaction**. Dissatisfaction is, theologically speaking, 'a God-given sense that a gap exists between the present and God's future, between current realities and the promised kingdom'. From a Complexity Thinking point of view dissatisfaction could be referred to as disequilibrium or instability.
   Dissatisfaction with the status quo is what pushes civilization forward. Seen from the standpoint of a theology of hope, it can be interpreted as 'prophetic dissatisfaction' that creates movement towards the kingdom. Therefore, the church should welcome dissatisfaction.[742]
2. The second element is **exploration**. Complexity thinkers believe that knowledge comes out of experience, and truths arise through interpretation of the immediate past. Insights thus develop in an experimental manner, through exploration that responds to dissatisfaction.
   Theologically speaking, this means that through interpretation of the immediate past, the Spirit brings the church insights from the future so that she can read reality from the standpoint of God's coming kingdom. Change, according to Moynagh, is 'a Spirit-led process of trial and error, which is a means of discerning God's rule'.[743]
3. The third element is **sense-making**. Since change emerges through a process of interpretation and trial and error, the challenge for an organization or a community is to make sense of what it is experiencing. A core element of sense-making is crafting a convincing narrative, as well as developing a language that forms and expresses the underlying mindset of the organization.
   Theologically, this sense-making occurs in the light of God's coming kingdom. One of the core tasks of the new ecclesial community is to craft a narrative that connects what is emerging from the kingdom to the team's God-given values and history.[744]
4. **Amplification** is the fourth element. It is, in the words of Moynagh, 'the process by which the Spirit multiplies and spreads small changes through positive feedback'. The basic idea behind it is that small things can have large effects. Moynagh refers to the parable of the mustard

[741] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 29.
[742] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 29-30.
[743] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 30-32.
[744] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 32-33.

seed to show how God's kingdom grows in the present reality from small beginnings.[745]

5. **'Edge of Chaos'** is the fifth element. It refers to the subtle balance between change and stability. In the words of Moynagh: 'Theologically, edge of chaos is about being open to what the Spirit is bringing from the future, while building on what the Spirit has done in the past.'[746]
6. **Transformation** is the final element. It is the result of the five previous processes working together in overlapping and interpenetrating ways. When new ideas and practices replace existing ones, the lives of those involved are being transformed. In the language of Complexity Thinking, these new ideas and practices are labelled under the name attractor, signifying a new direction of travel. Theologically speaking, the new attractor 'reflects the gravitational pull of God's approaching reign'.[747]

The six elements of Moynagh's framework are informed by the theological background of Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and the social-scientific background of Complexity Thinking. Through innovation within churches, God's future becomes tangible in the present, and this innovation is in turn born from a network of conversations.

6.2.3 Evaluation

Moynagh's insistence on the *adventus* nature of God's kingdom is helpful for an ecclesiology seeking to rediscover its place in God's mission and the world without getting stuck in entrenched patterns. Essentially, Moynagh is interested in a kind of eschatological imagination that helps to look at being church in a new way. In his book on eschatological ecclesiology, Scott MacDougal clarifies the theological role of eschatological imagination by naming four elements.

- First, by making the (invisible) future visible - as happens in eschatological imagination - the present is put under criticism. For churches, this means critically re-examining existing church structures in light of God's future.
- Next, eschatological imagination helps to discover the ultimate meaning of phenomena. Envisioning the ultimate significance of the church greatly influences the way ecclesial communities are viewed and experienced in the present.
- Also, eschatological imagination can help envisioning new life that can take shape in the present as an anticipation of the coming kingdom. Eschatological imagination stimulates alternative ways of being church.

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[745] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 33-34.
[746] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 34-35.
[747] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 35-36

- Finally, eschatological imagination is a breeding ground for hope. Churches faced with decline and marginalization may draw hope from imagining God's coming kingdom.[748]

Together, these four elements make clear that eschatological imagination from the kingdom perspective - as advocated by Moynagh - can be a powerful tool for rethinking ecclesiology - and hence theology of ministry.

Still, some cautionary questions can be asked. Moynagh's framework of innovation rests on two pillars. The first pillar concerns innovation as a theologically informed phenomenon that propels the church through change towards God's coming kingdom. The second pillar concerns the conversational nature of organizations. Together they support Moynagh's ecclesiological deliberations. For Moynagh, innovation and God's coming kingdom almost seem to be the same thing. Can every form of innovation effectively be identified as an expression of the kingdom? What are the criteria to determine whether this is the case? And is the opposite also true: that a lack of innovation demonstrates a lack of orientation toward the kingdom? It might seem that for Moynagh there is almost no situation conceivable in which the kingdom is served within existing ecclesiastical structures. The practical-ecclesiological question as to when and what kind of innovation is desired therefore needs further elaboration.

Furthermore, whether a social-scientific concept of innovation can be equated with a theological view of God's kingdom is open to debate. After all, the innovation of God's kingdom does not first and foremost concern organizational models and management theories, but the liberation of people and structures from the oppressive power of evil. Through the social-scientific emphasis on innovation and its identification with God's kingdom, Moynagh may unintentionally give the impression that God's future consists of renewed types of organization. Of course, organizational innovation and liberation from oppressive powers are not opposites *per se* and are often related, but that does not imply that they are to be identified.

These reservations are surely not meant to dismiss Moynagh's thoughts on innovation. They do, however, show that the innovation he is talking about needs further qualification and theological elaboration in order to be integrated into ecclesiology. The identification of innovation and kingdom must be put into perspective.

A final observation concerns the scope of Moynagh's framework. Moynagh develops his framework with new ecclesial communities in mind. Yet the question is legitimate whether Moynagh deems his ecclesiological considerations applicable only to this relatively small group of communities. His kingdom-oriented approach to ecclesiology suggests that Moynagh believes that innovation should take place not only in new ecclesial communities but also within traditional churches and denominations.

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[748] MacDougal, *More than Communion*, 144-146.

6.3 Ecclesiological Presuppositions

Alongside eschatological and social-scientific presuppositions, Moynagh's ecclesiological presuppositions are also important for understanding his concept of ecclesia ministry.

6.3.1 The Essence of the Church

First, it is important to reflect on the nature of the church. Clarity about this is important for older churches as well as for new church communities because it leads to the heart of what church is and enables a critical examination of both established traditions and emerging trends.

Traditionally, the church is defined by certain practices, such as the celebration of sacraments, the proclamation of the Word, confessional documents, and ministry. However, according to Moynagh, defining the church in this way does not do justice to the fact that these practices emerge from conversations. Moreover, the meaning of these practices changes through continuing conversations.[749]

In *Church in Life* Moynagh observes that from the 1960s onwards, a change is taking place, and the church is increasingly seen as a community whose members have certain practices in common. The emphasis is therefore increasingly on the communal aspect. Nevertheless, there remains a tension in the relationship between practices and community, as the former may come to predominate in answering the question whether a community really belongs to the church.[750] Moynagh follows Kathryn Tanner in her book *Theories of Culture* and proposes a different approach.

Tanner makes a case for a cultural approach to theology and Christian identity. She starts from a post-modern understanding of culture, in which culture is seen as the 'meaning dimension of social action'.[751] Based on this concept of culture, she wants to show that a Christian identity is much harder to define than thought from a post-liberal perspective. A Christian culture is, according to Tanner, not self-contained and autonomous, but porous and relational.[752] Even apart from the fact that the emphasis on the contrast between a Christian community and the world is empirically impossible to sustain, she argues that there are also theological reasons for Christians to be open to different cultures. First, Christian identity does not run along the border of social divisions (ethnic, gender, etc.). Next, the fact that every person – Christian or not – shares in the sinfulness of existence and in the possibility of receiving grace makes it almost impossible to draw a sharp line between Christians and non-Christians.[753]

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[749] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 112-113; Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 243.
[750] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 238-239.
[751] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 93.
[752] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 107.
[753] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 100-101.

This emphasis on culture leads Tanner to a renewed vision of theology. The church and Christian theology should welcome cultural diversity and resist the temptation to delineate Christian identity sharply by sociological categories or elaborate theological formulas. The latter is particularly important. Christian identity does not rest on commitment to a particular creedal conception, but on allegiance to the object or subject matter of the claims or forms of action at issue. When this is not the case, a particular conception, rather than God, becomes the centre of Christian identity.[754] This does not mean that creedal or confessional statements have no place, but rather that they deliberately leave room for multiple interpretations, so that Christians from different cultural backgrounds can relate to them.[755]

Thus, according to Tanner, the task of theology is not to provide an exhaustive account of Christian belief, but, as a cultural practice, to assist Christians in their concern for true discipleship.[756] What true discipleship looks like in practice is not a matter of agreement about beliefs and actions, but more of a shared sense of the importance of figuring it out.[757] The theologian may work creatively as a

> 'postmodern 'bricoleur' – the creativity, that is, of someone who works with an always potentially disordered heap of already existing materials, pulling them apart and putting them back together again, tinkering with their shapes, twisting them this way and that. It is a creativity expressed through the modification and extension of materials already on the ground.'[758]

Based on Tanner's reflections, Moynagh argues that the church can be seen as an ongoing discussion about practices. Practices such as the ministry of the Word, the sacraments and the structure of ministry are too vague and too controversial to be the norm for the concrete form of the church. At best, the church can reach a consensus on what is outside the boundaries of accepted church practice. But even these boundaries are not immutable and always call for discussion.[759] Moynagh argues for defining the church through its relationships instead of focusing on practices. Here he explicitly refers to the *koinonia* concept of the CTCV report of the WCC:

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[754] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 126

[755] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 83, 127 and 153.

[756] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 152

[757] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 153

[758] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 166.

[759] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 109-114; Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 239-240.

> The church has come to be seen not only in terms of its practices, but as a divinely established communion. The church is a fellowship centred on Jesus, whose members have certain practices in common.[760]

Following the MSC report, Moynagh argues that the church consists of four sets of interlocking relationships: with God, with the community, with the world and with the wider church.[761] By opting for this approach, Moynagh wants to provide an empirical basis for discourse on the church and to avoid a so-called blueprint ecclesiology. It is not the articulated practices and their theory that define the church, but the experienced relationships with God, the wider church, the world, and each other are constitutive of what church is.[762]

Furthermore, this relational approach also entails a note of purpose to church practices. Church practices do not exist for themselves but are meant to build up church relationships. Therefore, ecclesial practices should always be tested against the four sets of relationships.[763]

In this regard, it is vital to point out that one set of relationships should not take precedence over the others, not even the direct relationship with the triune God. After all, if one of these sets prevails, the danger lurks that the other sets of relationships will be instrumentalized.

> 'The four sets of relationships comprising the church not only interpenetrate each other, they are of equal importance and correct one another.'[764]

According to Moynagh, the relationship approach is specific enough to identify the church, yet open enough to allow for variation in the actual expressions of the church.[765]

Moynagh's view of the church corresponds to the conversational nature of organizations which he emphasized in developing a framework for innovation. Moreover, it coheres well with the ecumenical consensus on the concept of *koinonia*, as reflected in the CTCV report.

This emphasis on the conversational nature of the church – in line with Tanner's anthropological approach – also coheres with the picture of the community of the church that emerged in the ecclesiologies of Bucer and Łaski. The churches in the Christian communities of Strasbourg and the Strangers'

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[760] MSC, 99; Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 238.

[761] According to Moynagh, using the four words 'up', 'in', 'out' and 'of', as the MSC report does, is unfortunate, because they presume a rather one-directional view of these relationships. Moynagh prefers to speak of relationships, since they flow in two directions. Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 241. Also: Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 106-108.

[762] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 109-114; Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 241-242.

[763] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 110; Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 244.

[764] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 243.

[765] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 244.

Church in London were, in a sense, interpretive communities that collectively sought the meaning of the gospel in their specific situation.

Moreover, Tanner's approach may also be helpful in thinking through the concept of *episkopé*. In a side note, following Augustine, she speaks of the solidarity of love and common hope that defines the community of the church.[766] The church is, in her eyes, not a community with sharply articulated theological or cultural boundaries, but a community of people bound together by a shared love. Without referring to it specifically, Tanner may have been thinking of what Augustine writes in *De Civitate Dei* about a political community bound together by shared objects of love.[767]

In analogy to a political community, the church is bound together by 'common objects of love.' By loving God as he revealed himself in Jesus Christ, and as he is present in the life and liturgy of the church, people become part of a community that is not constructed to accomplish some particular tasks but is given in the very fact that they cannot but love him.[768]

This approach of shared love may be helpful for a theology of ministry. Ecclesial ministry then is meant to keep the community focused on the common objects of love. This means, on the one hand, that the minister will keep the community focused on these objects through preaching and pastoral care. On the other hand, the minister's responsibility is to keep a process of shared discernment going with regard to these objects of common love.

This approach could also be made fruitful in view of the role of the *episkopé* function of ministry in relation to church unity. In the chapter on ecumenical developments, it became apparent that ministry was a focus of unity for the church. The approach in which ministry is meant to focus the church on common objects of love gives practical substance to this. As a sign of unity, a minister is not in the first place a representative of a certain creedal conception, but rather a facilitator of the conversation about common objects of love. The vocation of ecclesial ministers of different denominations lies in the communal focus on the common objects of love.

6.3.2 Essence and Essentials

By defining the church in terms of the four sets of relationships, it may seem that church practices such as the sacraments and ministries are merely optional. Are the sacraments only for the good of the church or do they belong to the essence of what it means to be church?[769]

Moynagh argues that the binary distinction between *esse* and *bene esse* is too insufficiently nuanced to provide a satisfactory answer. Instead, he argues

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[766] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 124.

[767] Augustine, *City of God*, 19.24: '...a people is the association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love.'

[768] O'Donovan, *Common Objects of Love*, 19.

[769] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 244-245.

for the existence of two *esse*'s: the *essence* of the church and what is *essential* for the church to exist and flourish. Applied to the difference between relationships and practices, Moynagh argues that the four sets of relationships point to the essence of the church, while church practices such as the sacraments and ministry can be considered essential.

> 'Esse would define the church, essentials would enable the church to be the church and bene esse would be for the good of the church.'[770]

By way of example, Moynagh refers to marriage. Just as a marriage contract is essential to a legal marriage but is not the essence of a marriage relationship, so church practices are essential to the church without being the essence.[771] They are essential because they derive from Jesus and his community, they sum up essence of the church, and they are gifts that make possible and deepen the four sets of relationships.

In the tradition of the church, certain practices are considered essential to the church, namely the ministry of the Word, the sacraments and ministry. Moynagh wants to hold on to this by choosing the nuanced difference between essence and essentials, and at the same time he wants to substantiate this. Practices are essential when they enable the essence of the church to exist and mature. Precisely because they are essentials, they are also prerequisites.[772]

At first, this distinction seems to be helpful and to bring much needed levity to the conversation about church unity. Questions can be asked, however. Moynagh uses two distinct concepts with the same etymological roots to create a subtle distinction between *essence* and *essential*, but in doing so he ignores the fact that the two words have quite different connotations. If something is *essential* to a particular phenomenon, it is meant that it is necessary, but not automatically that it also belongs to its *essence*. The word *essential* thus has functionalist overtones: something is *essential* because it makes a certain phenomenon possible. Moynagh himself also points in this direction by speaking of practices as prerequisites and their note of purpose. However, this way important ecclesial practices such as worship, Baptism and Eucharist threaten to be over-instrumentalized. These practices do not just serve a relational *essence*, but they are concrete expressions of it. Worship, Baptism and Eucharist are more than conditions since they can just as well be considered the fruits of the interlocking relationships. Because the practices are expressions of the *essence* of the church, they are more than just necessary prerequisites; they are themselves part of the *essence* of the church.

The reverse is also true. The relational *essence* of the church that Moynagh is talking about is not just a spiritual reality that is deeply invisible, but it is tangibly manifested in the practices of the church. This is the point Hans

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[770] Moynagh, Church in Life, 245.
[771] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 245.
[772] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 249.

Schaeffer makes: An *essence* of relationships that is not perceptible in certain church practices is unthinkable.[773]

Schaeffer makes another important observation. Moynagh's equation of the four relationships may have the unintended consequence of overlooking the fact that the relationship with God, unlike the other three relationships, is constitutive of being church. The church is *creatura verbi* and owes its existence to God. If the church sees its practices merely as a way of expressing its relational essence, it runs the risk of losing sight of the fact that the specific liturgical practices - such as Eucharist, Baptism, and proclamation - are not merely human expressions of a relational essence, but rather divine instruments for calling the church into existence.[774]

This is not to say that Moynagh's considerations are unimportant. Just as loving God for the sake of his goodness brings many benefits, so it is with church practices.[775] Moynagh is therefore right to call attention to the fact that church practices produce certain effects in those who participate in them, and that these effects relate to the four dimensions he mentions.

Furthermore, the concept of four interlocking relationships can function as a heuristic tool to discern whether a specific church in its practices is still an expression of the *essence* of the church. Moynagh's relational model can serve as a diagnostic instrument to test the practices of the church on their faithfulness to the gospel.

6.3.3 Denominations, Maturity and Fruitfulness

In addition to the question of the essence of the church, there are some other aspects that are important for the purposes of this study I will address briefly. First, I focus on Moynagh's thoughts on denominations, ecclesial maturity, and the durability of the church.

6.3.3.1 Denominations

Moynagh's relational approach poses a challenge for church denominations. According to Moynagh, denominations are 'led to select creatively from the possibilities of tradition, and these selections distinguish them from one another'. The respective selections of the different denominations are linked to their distinctive identities and help 'to shape the four interlocking sets of relationships at the heart of the denomination. These relationships are partly expressed in denominational structures, habits, and norms, and thereby take on the characteristic of the denomination'.[776]

Moynagh argues that the identity of a denomination is situated on a continuum between an essentialist end and a narrative end. On the essentialist

[773] Schaeffer, 'Duurzame en solidaire gemeenschap', 90.
[774] Schaeffer, 'Duurzame en solidaire gemeenschap', 90.
[775] O'Donovan, *Common Object of Love*, 18.
[776] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 250.

end of the continuum are denominations that maintain that identity is based on certain core and necessary practices, such as confessional statements or certain types of leadership. On the narrative end of the continuum, identity arises through conversations and is based on the conviction that the story of the denomination is a part of the story of Jesus.

Denominations near the essentialist end risk having a utopian view of identity that does not actually exist in reality. According to Moynagh, they are liable to cling on to a view of themselves that is based on certain practices, even though reality may be increasingly at odds with this conception. Furthermore, they are prone to power dynamics wherein those with power define the denomination's identity with scant reference to those who have a different view.

The closer a denomination is towards the narrative end of the continuum, though, the more easily it will avoid these pitfalls. Narrative identities can, according to Moynagh, more readily adjust to changes in ecclesial relations and serve these relationships. These denominations offer 'narrative maps' 'that enable Christians to locate themselves within the story of God's dealing with the world. They offer vocabulary, practices, and emphases for navigating and recounting the experiential terrain of the Christian faith.' [777]

Following Healy, Moynagh argues that the story of Jesus is continued in the story of the church. The church's concrete identity is structured by the quest to discern how to follow Jesus Christ. In this quest, conflicts are to be expected, but these should not be avoided, because ongoing arguments are a vital part of the church's narrative.[778]

Denominations are being true to the relational view of the church when they base their identity on their evolving stories rather than on their specific practices. By doing this, denominations can welcome strangers and thereby express the hospitality of the kingdom.[779]

By contrasting the essentialist side and the narrative side of the spectrum so strongly, Moynagh may unintentionally create the impression that core and necessary practices, such as confessional statements or certain forms of leadership, are almost by definition opposed to the story of Jesus as embodied by denominations on the narrative side of the spectrum. In doing so, he gives too little weight to the fact that such practices are at the most fundamental level meant as embodiments of the story of Jesus. In a historical process of development, these practices have been shaped to express (fundamental aspects of) the gospel. In practice, therefore, they cannot be so easily relativized as Moynagh does. He does have a point, off course, when he challenges churches to evaluate their entire church practice in the light of the gospel narrative.

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[777] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 250-252. Quotation on page 252.
[778] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 253-254.
[779] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 255.

6.3.3.2 Maturity

Moynagh's reflections on the nature of the church also have consequences for the discussion of when a church can be considered a mature church.

As said, the church, according to Moynagh, is not constituted by adherence to particular truths or practices but by a shared discernment involving the four interlocking sets of relationships. This shared discernment is shaped by a conversational process within which difference are discussed and discernment occurs.

Moynagh uses Jesus' treatment of Judas as an example: even though Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, he remained in fellowship with him. He kept the conversation going. Faced by their differences, Christians can do the same. When believers maintain in dialogue in difficult situations, they thereby witness to inclusiveness of the kingdom.[780]

Moynagh uses Acts 15 as an example of ecclesial maturity. The maturity of the early church did not lie mainly in the assent to agreed doctrinal of ethical beliefs. It was all about managing difference, having conversations, listening to one another, to the wider church, to the context and to God directly, so that participants of the Jerusalem Council could discern the Spirit. Maturity, according to Moynagh, 'was about seeking the Spirit through conversational listening within the church's interlocking relationships. It is through this listening that the Spirit reveals the promises and demands of God's coming reign, thereby enabling the Christian community to be a more accurate portrayal of the kingdom'.[781]

6.3.3.3 Durability or Fruitfulness

In line with this kingdom-oriented ecclesiology, Moynagh argues for the concept of fruitfulness. Instead of putting all the cards on the durability or sustainability of a congregation, one should look at its fruitfulness. Whereas congregations that have existed for many years no longer appear fruitful, short-lived congregations can yield abundant fruit. Moynagh uses the Jerusalem church as an example of the latter. Although it existed only for a relatively short period, it was nevertheless highly fruitful. Whereas the concept of sustainability encourages the church to focus on itself, fruitfulness turns the church outward.

Moynagh's focus on fruitfulness can have a double benefit. First, it may help to free declining churches from a frenetic focus on sustainability that leaches energy away from the core of the gospel into all sorts of regulatory side issues. Second, it turns the church away from a focus on its own survival to the well-being of its context. Yet here, too, a cautionary comment can be made. Again, Moynagh may unintentionally create a contradiction that does not help the conversation. By contrasting durability and fruitfulness in this way, it seems as if they are mutually exclusive, whereas durability can also produce a great deal of fruit. For example, the very fact that 'most absolute church growth in Europe

[780] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 268-269.

[781] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 273. See Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 118.

still takes place in traditional churches and through old-fashioned intergenerational transmission of faith', can be considered a plea for durability.[782]

6.4 Church and Mission

Finally, it is also helpful to reflect on what Moynagh has to say about the missionary dimension of the church.

6.4.1 *Missio Dei*

Moynagh welcomes the fact that since the middle of the 20th century the concept of *missio Dei* has come to the fore in ecclesiology and missiology. Ecclesiology and mission are rooted in the activity of a missional and generous God.

The word 'activity' is too pale, though, since Moynagh goes further. Rather than speaking of sending, Moynagh, following Flett, proposes to use the word 'giving'.[783] God's sending to the world means nothing less than God giving himself entirely to humanity in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Mission and ecclesiology should be seen in the light of this divine self-donation, which is not merely an activity, but belongs to the character of the triune God. God's self-donation to the world flows out of his triune life.[784] Mission as divine self-giving is therefore rooted in God's character and consequently there has never been a time when there was no mission. 'God has been missional from all eternity.'[785] Therefore, mission is never a second step for God, as if he exists without giving himself to others. Of course, this also has consequences for ecclesiology, for a church longing to be in correspondence with God also cannot regard mission as a second step. Self-giving should also be a priority for the church.[786]

This missionary focus does not mean that other aspects of ecclesiology should be considered mere instruments of mission. Rather, mission as divine self-giving suffuses all other dimensions of ecclesial life as worship and fellowship, giving them the 'fragrance of being missional gifts to the world, just as the attributes of God acquire a missional flavour through the divine self-giving'.[787]

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[782] Paas, *Church Planting*, 183.
[783] Flett, *The Witness of God*, 198-202.
[784] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 144-145. See Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 126-128.
[785] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 144-145. See Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 125-216.
[786] Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 124-128; Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 146-147.
[787] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 147.

6.4.2 Church as a Gift

According to Moynagh, new ecclesial communities can be considered divine gifts to the world. He elaborates on the missionary implications of this by referring to the theological conversation on the nature of giving.[788]

Moynagh argues that the church is a gift that can only be properly received by being shared. As a gift to the world, it is in the nature of the church to be shared by others – by sharing the gospel, caring for other people, working with them for social justice and the well-being of creation. The church should not be an inward-looking club, but its members should enjoy God's gift by welcoming others.[789]

Offering what it has to others, the church invites recipients to enter a reciprocal relationship. Following Bourdieu, Moynagh stresses the reciprocal nature of giving that establishes an ongoing relationship. To avoid placing others under an obligation, churches may want to avoid being the initial giver, just as the disciples did not arrive as missional superheroes, but as empty-handed friends.[790]

Gifts are to be appropriate to the other person. When the church offers its gifts, it will ask how these gifts can be offered suitably to others. Specifically, this means that the church will invite people into a community that is accessible to them, both culturally and physically. The church gives part of its own body away in a way that others are able to receive it.

This self-giving does not mean that the church is in some way diminished. Moynagh uses the example of the Eucharist: just as Jesus is not diminished while giving himself away in the Eucharist, the church is enriched by sharing itself 'because others are drawn into its communal life'. The gift of being a new community with Jesus only becomes a gift when it is released, when recipients of the gift are allowed to receive community in their own way. New Christian communities are neither impositions nor means of control. They are gifts from God than can be freely welcomed or rejected, that are released into the hands of other people, and that can be accepted in the recipient's own way. 'The Spirit puts recipients in the driving seat.'[791]

Moynagh refers in this regard to the famous Reformed dictum – *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* – by stating that offering the church 'in the form of new communities, received in the recipient's own way, is a means by which the church can remain constantly reforming'.[792]

Another implication from rooting mission in the divine self-giving is the communal character of mission. Moynagh puts it like this:

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[788] For the church as a gift, see also Moynagh, *Church for Evert Context*, 127-128.

[789] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 148-149.

[790] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 149.

[791] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 151-152. The last sentence is a variation on the words of Andrew Walls, who says: 'The fundamental missionary experience is to live on terms set by others.' Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 41.

[792] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 153.

> Deriving its identity from the mission of the Son and the Spirit, the church as communion-in-mission takes its being from the divine communion-in-mission.[793]

Moynagh criticizes the 'gathered for worship, scattered for mission' model because it drives a wedge between the life of the community in worship and the life of the individual believer in the world. Instead, mission should always be mission in community.

Moynagh's reflections on the missionary dimensions of the church are completely in line with the ecumenically shared emphasis on the *missio Dei*. His thoughts on the church as a divine gift are particularly helpful in this regard because they establish a link between the Eucharist, as the heart of the liturgy, and the mission of the church in the world. Moynagh talks about the church being passed on *eucharistically* by the Spirit when she purposefully establishes new ecclesial communities to be culturally and physically accessible. In Moynagh's words:

> The church gives part of its own body away in a manner that other people are able to receive. Far from being diminished in this giving, just as Jesus is not diminished when he gives himself in the Eucharist, the church is enriched by this sharing of its body because others are drawn into its communal life.[794]

For Moynagh, the Eucharist as an expression of the Divine self-donation is not only the source of the church's mission but also its concrete mode. The church that is born of the self-giving love of God as manifested in the Eucharist is a community that exists because it gives itself away *eucharistically* to others.

This emphasis on the missionary power of the Eucharist sheds a refreshing light on ordained ministry. In both the historical chapter and the chapter on ecumenism, it was clear that ordained ministry is rooted in the Eucharist (broadly understood as the liturgy of the church). An objection might be that ordained ministry is thus confined within the walls of the church to preserve a *disciplina arcani*. That this was not the intent of the Eucharistic rooting of ministry was already clear, but Moynagh's considerations help to relate the missionary dimension of ordained ministry to its roots: the heart of the liturgy. The celebration of the Eucharist is – in addition to the celebration of communion with Christ – an act that visualizes that the church, as the body of Christ, can only exist by giving itself away. The celebration of the Eucharist - as an expression of God's self-donation in the *missio Dei* - will therefore draw the ordained minister to the missionary vocation of the ecclesial communion she is called to serve.

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[793] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 181-185. See Moynagh, *Church for Evert Context*, 135-150.
[794] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 152.

6.5 Guardians of the Conversation

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Moynagh is not developing a theology of ministry in the strict sense of the word. Moynagh is not concerned with developing a well-wrought theological concept of ecclesial ministry, but rather with reflection on the practical implications of his ecclesiological presuppositions for leadership within churches (both older churches and new ecclesial communities).

6.5.1 Ministry as Essential

To begin with, it is good to note that ordained ministry, like Baptism and Eucharist, is counted among the *essentials* of the church according to Moynagh. The four sets of relationships collectively constitute the essence of the church, but as prerequisites, the sacraments, the administration of the Word *and* ordained ministry are *essential* to the church.

Because they are at the service of the relational *essence* of the church, these prerequisites also have a note of purpose. For ordained ministry, Moynagh articulates this 'note of purpose' in the following way:

The priest enables the ecclesial relationships to exist by being the focal point of leadership in the congregation; without leadership, it is hard to imagine how these relationships would endure. The priest also sums up the four sets of ecclesial relations and helps them to flourish by representing God to the congregation and the congregation to God, representing the congregation to the world and the world to the congregation, and by connecting the congregation to the wider church, while the priesthood of alle believers speaks of a sharing of priesthood through relationships within the fellowship.[795]

Ordained ministry thus serves the four sets of relationships that Moynagh considers essential to the church, but as such it is also a prerequisite. However, Moynagh is true to his principles by leaving room for others to think differently about this. As an essential practice, ordained ministry is a long-standing dispute and an expression of the fact that the church is a 2000-year-old conversation.

As to why *ordained* ministry is essential Moynagh remains silent. This lack of elaboration leaves his view of ministry as essential rather hanging in the air. Why exactly is it essential?

Anyway, for Moynagh, being ordained brings a note of purpose to ministry. Ordained ministry does not exist for its own sake, but it is meant to build up the four interlocking sets of relationships. Therefore, ordained ministry should also be tested against the four sets of relationships.

6.5.2 Ministry and Conversation

The conversational nature of the church also comes to the fore both in the framework Moynagh designs for the emergence of new ecclesial communities and in his theological thoughts on leadership within churches. The

[795] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 247-248.

conversational nature of leadership permeates all Moynagh's arguments. This conversational nature, according to Moynagh, echoes the conversations in God's relationship with humanity and within the Trinity.[796]

Right at the start of the book Moynagh lays his cards on the table by introducing, under the influence of Complexity Thinking, a new model of leadership that replaces the old Newtonian model. In the context of the church, this means that the old Newtonian model, in which the leader (i.e., ordained minister) develops a vision and, with the help of a church council, implements it by finding the right people for each step in the plan, is replaced by a new model in which 'novelty can emerge through the contribution of anyone in the organization'.[797]

Moynagh illustrates this with the example of a committee meeting in which leadership can change several times within the group. Someone can take the leadership position by making a proposal, but then the leadership can be taken over by someone else who makes the necessary adjustments to the proposal. Leadership is thus not a static and formal fact, but a dynamic process in which all participants take part.[798]

According to Moynagh, this shift in leadership can also contribute to a healthier attitude among ministers. Ministers in a pastoral ministry face an increasing demand for leaders of change. They may consider themselves unfit as leaders to lead the community in the necessary changes, but by incorporating the contributions of others in their concept of leadership, ministers can indeed play a role in the change process. Innovation and change do not necessarily have to come from the minister themselves, but they can draw on the gifts of others who can generate and enable innovation.[799]

6.5.2.1 Sense-Making

Leadership as a dynamic process casts the role of the leader in new ecclesial communities in a different light. Instead of developing a vision and imposing it on a community, the leader helps the organization to make sense of what it is experiencing. This does not mean that the organization has no focus, but rather that developing a vision is a conversational group process, with the leader helping the team to make sense of what is happening. Thus, the leader's role is primarily in the area of sense-making.

Church leaders have an essential role in safeguarding the quality of the conversations in the process of sense-making. Although they are not responsible for everything that is said, they do have great influence. The leader's task is to encourage the participants and improve their conversations. Thus, the most crucial function of leaders is to safeguard the sense-making conversations.[800]

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[796] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 36.
[797] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 20-21.
[798] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 21-22.
[799] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 97.
[800] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 353.

The most important part of sense-making is 'to craft a narrative that connects what is emerging from the kingdom to the team's God-given values and history, however short that history is'. Here, the language used is very important because it forms and expresses the underlying mindset of the organization.[801] Thus, the leader must be able to help the team connect the narrative of the church to the kingdom of God and find the appropriate language to do so.[802]

Moynagh identifies three types of stories that can help a team and a community move forward. First, there are 'insightful stories' which describe how the teams expects its desired change to be accomplished. Next, there are 'inspirational stories' which persuade others to join the team. Finally, there are 'instructional stories' which describe what the team has learned.

6.5.2.2 Thinking along Moynagh's Lines

It is important to dwell on the activity of sense-making a little. Moynagh devotes relatively much space to the importance of sense-making in forming and sustaining a missionary team, but unfortunately relatively little space to the concrete ways in which leaders make sense of the reality around them. What might this, thinking along Moynagh's lines, look like in practice?

Kevin Vanhoozer's thoughts on the 'ministry of understanding' may be helpful here. He advocates that the pastor as a public theologian needs to see himself as a minister of understanding 'who helps the church grasp the meaning of what God has done, is doing, and will do in Jesus Christ, as well as what we are to say and do in response'.[803] Vanhoozer's ministering of understanding is very similar to the sense-making that Moynagh refers to. In this regard, Vanhoozer speaks of a threefold literacy needed to bring about understanding. First, ministers must be biblical literate and help others understand the Bible.[804] In addition, ministers must be cultural literate in order to thus 'to make sense what is happening in contemporary society' and 'to ensure that members of the church will be cultural agents' for Christ's kingdom.[805] Finally, ministers must also have human literacy, that is, they must know the people with whom they interact, which is best done by living among them.[806] This threefold literacy can help clarify what it takes to connect the story of the kingdom to the story of the church. However, how this is done deserves more elaboration.

Here it is helpful to briefly recall Moynagh's use of Tanner's description of the church as an ongoing conversation on practices. The task of theology, according to Tanner, is not to provide an exhaustive account of Christian belief, but, as a cultural practice, to assist Christians and Christian communities in their

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[801] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 32-33. Quotation on page 32.
[802] See also my 'Leading from the Liturgy', 62-64.
[803] Vanhoozer/Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 112.
[804] Vanhoozer/Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 113.
[805] Vanhoozer/Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 115-117.
[806] Vanhoozer/Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 118.

concern for true discipleship.[807] In an insightful article, she shows that Christian practices, like 'practices in general are fluid and processional in nature, working through improvisation and ad hoc response to changing circumstances'. Moreover, '(C)hristian practices are bifocal in nature, involving constant processes of negotiation with, and critical revision of, the practices of the wider society.'[808] The fact that Christian practices in the daily lives of Christians are often characterized by ambiguity, inconsistency and open-endedness necessitates theological reflection.[809] Through critical and reflective engagement with Christian practices, Christians and Christian communities are challenged to witness to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. This witnessing thus requires an intensive deliberative process of identifying what Christianity means.[810] Tanner summarizes it as follows:

> 'In short, sustained and explicit theological reflection helps establish Christian practices as a whole way of life by sharpening commitments; by guiding performance of Christian practices in the face of the ambiguities, disagreements, and shifting circumstances of everyday life; by contributing to the excellence of such practices by making them more meaningful and meaning-giving; and by imbuing them with a historical, contextual, and theological richness that might otherwise be lost from view at any one place and time, and thereby enhancing their resourcefulness to meet the challenges of that place and time.'[811]

And this is precisely where the role of the minister who is trained at a divinity school or seminary lies, for in her training she has been given the necessary theological tools to 'make comparably thorough and well-informed arguments on issues of Christian practice that presently concern them'.[812] When it comes to sense-making, in the line of Tanner, it is especially important for the leader to help the community question its own practices as to how they bear witness to God's action in Jesus Christ.

This has, off course, everything to do with the authority of the church leader. In her research on soteriological and ecclesiological views of practitioners in missionary community building, Annemiek de Jonge puts it this way:

> Essentially, this emphasis on sense-making redefines the leader from one who exerts authority and influence from a predetermined

[807] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 152
[808] Tanner, 'Theological Reflection', 231.
[809] Tanner, 'Theological Reflection', 232.
[810] Tanner, 'Theological Reflection', 233.
[811] Tanner, 'Theological Reflection', 234.
[812] Tanner, 'Theological Reflection', 239.

> vision, to one who facilitates a dialogical process in which meaning emerges from dynamics between group and context.[813]

De Jonge's point is not that the leader has no authority, rather that this authority is not localized in a predetermined vision but in a dialogical process. In doing so, she argues that the leader in question must develop the ability to understand and map a changing world. Thus, the authority of the leader is that of a guide who shows a group the way. This way, the leader can be seen as an interpretive guide who helps the community to understand the narrative of the kingdom in its context and find its place in it. This means that church leaders, based on their knowledge of and feeling for the Bible and tradition, should facilitate the interpretive dialogue within the community.

This is fundamentally a two-way street. Participating in public life as Christian communities and individuals automatically bring with it implicit and explicit interpretive activities to which the minister should attend carefully. This listening attitude is necessary to relate the normative Christian sources to the specific lives of the community and its members, so that the gospel can take shape in their reality.[814]

The leader plays a leading role in this process of interpretation, but it is fundamentally the community itself that must listen to what the Spirit says to the congregation.[815]

6.5.2 Managers vs. Entrepreneurs

A distinction that frequently recurs in Moynagh's thoughts on church leadership is that between managerial and entrepreneurial mindset. At this point, Moynagh's eschatological presuppositions surface.

The managerial mindset is, in Moynagh's view, characterized by facilitating the status quo. Managers make things work or make things work more smoothly, without fundamentally questioning the given situation.[816] They do this by working with a view of the future extrapolated from the present. They start with the potential of what is there and look for ways of realizing it. They translate their ideas into concrete goals, plans, timelines, and budgets to minimize the risk of failure.[817] In terms of Moltmann, it could be described as managers

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[813] Jonge, *Madeliefje tussen de straatstenen*, 201. 'In essentie herdefinieert deze nadruk op sense-making de leider van iemand die autoriteit en invloed uitoefent vanuit een voorgegeven visie, naar iemand die een dialogisch proces faciliteert waarin betekenis opkomt uit dynamiek tussen groep en context'

[814] The concept of the interpretive guide comes from Charles Gerkin (Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons*, 98 ff.) and is further developed by Richard Osmer (Osmer, *Practical Theology*).

[815] Roest, 'Een ander evangelie?', 21.

[816] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 63.

[817] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 78.

working with the *futurum*, as it emerges from visible developments in their own empirical reality.

Entrepreneurs (or founders) on the other hand work in a different way. Through the work of the Spirit, they are engaged in new opportunities that are still in the future. These new possibilities are gifts of the coming kingdom made present through the work of the Spirit. Because these are new, there are no generally accepted ways to engage with the opportunities. Entrepreneurs must therefore look for creative ways to realize these possibilities.[818] Entrepreneurs operate, in Moltmann words, with an *adventus* view of the future, in which a new reality enters the present from outside.

This also has implications for how authority is shaped. Managers, in their minimizing the risk of failure, always seek the approval of those who are more senior. Their authority is, at least formally, hierarchical: the authority they have is given to them from above.[819] Unlike that of managers, the authority of entrepreneurs is not hierarchically determined, but rather bottom-up and dependent on positive feedback from their environment. Moynagh rejects the myth of entrepreneurs being lone heroes. Successful entrepreneurs create teams around them or they were part of a team all along.[820]

Moynagh's distinction between a managerial mindset and an entrepreneurial mindset can be read as an implicit critique of what is perceived as the traditional vision of ecclesial ministry. Without saying so, Moynagh seems to associate the traditional view of church ministry with hierarchy and preservation of the status quo.

Entrepreneurship is not just reserved for new ecclesial communities. In addition to the founders who help the new ecclesial communities, institutional entrepreneurs are also needed to drive institutional change by generating a supportive culture for the new ecclesial communities. These institutional entrepreneurs can hold a variety of positions within denominations, but they are especially important when they are leading an existing congregation. By enabling and fostering new ecclesial communities within their denominations, they can lead existing congregations in discovering new ways of mission.

To make this more concrete, Moynagh distinguishes three types of institutional entrepreneurial leadership. First, there is *generative leadership* that helps to produce new ideas. Next, there is *enabling leadership* that encourages new ideas to take root and amplify, and that helps the churches to make room for them and to facilitate the church in carrying out its routine tasks while this transformation takes place. Finally, there is *administrative leadership* that loosens structures and procedures to accommodate the new.[821]

The process of institutional change is also marked by the absence of central control. This does not mean that there is no leadership, but rather that it is

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[818] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 79.
[819] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 71 and 78.
[820] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 71.
[821] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 96.

focused more on influencing outcomes than on controlling them. Denominational leaders who encourage the emergence of new church communities will not use top-down strategies, but rather work bottom-up on the side of the founders of these communities.[822]

Although he does not state it explicitly, it is possible to read between the lines that Moynagh believes that the entrepreneurs within the churches are to be valued over the managers. This becomes clear, for example, when he speaks of the inability of lay and ordained leaders who 'lack the skills and time to make the existing model of being church more fruitful'. In his eyes, the existing model of being church is missionally flawed.[823] To understand this, it is necessary to dwell a little on a distinction Moynagh makes in relation to the church.

6.5.3 Towards a New Model of Being Church

The church has, in the eyes of Moynagh, both a divine and a human orientation. The divine orientation of the church is expressed in the worship of the church and encompasses the life of the church in communion with Christ, while the human orientation is manifested in the mission of the church. The divine and human orientations come together when the church's communal life with Jesus draws on the missionary experience of sharing the hopes and needs of the world, while the mission of the church is informed by intentional worship and gathering around Christ. In the words of Moynagh:

> 'The connection of the two is noticeable, for example, when the congregation in worship is reminded of its mission, is equipped to undertake it, and prays for it.'[824]

In the now pre-eminent model of being church, says Moynagh, the divine and human orientation are separated from each other in a destructive way. This has to do with the fact that the churches are still based on the rural model that originated in the nineteenth century. This rural model was based on the idea that the church should draw close to the local population, physically as well as mentally. The church should be present in the life of each citizen through church buildings in all neighbourhoods and active participation in the social life of the public.

In a historical overview, Moynagh shows how in the nineteenth century the rural church model was applied to the church in the growing cities. However, this rural model lost relevance, mainly due to three developments. It was precisely in this period that the number of organizations and activities that competed with the social function of the church grew. Social welfare, education and leisure were increasingly becoming something that took place outside of the church. Also, the financial situation of the churches weakened considerably.

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[822] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 138.
[823] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 161.
[824] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 162.

Consequently, the focus of churches was on maintenance of buildings and organizations and less on outreach and presence in society. Moreover, the focus on the church buildings meant that the emphasis was increasingly on maintaining worship services and less and less attention was given to other forms of church attendance.[825]

Moynagh refers to statistical evidence that makes clear that the rural model – which still dominates church life – works against mission. The model assumes large congregations, but by doing so it discourages lay people from contributing to church life. Moreover, large congregations are not good at attracting unchurched people. For small groups, on the other hand, the opposite is true: lay people are encouraged to participate in church life, and unchurched people find a place more easily.

Overall, congregations are still concerned with maintaining their expensive buildings and their complex ways of life. All the attention focused on Sunday worship – choir or music group practices, sermon preparation, children's activities, building maintenance, etc. – leaves relatively little time and energy for missionary activities in the community.[826] The rural model causes existing churches to focus primarily on the divine orientation, thereby neglecting their human orientation.

Curiously, the result within the actual process of mission is just the opposite. Many missionary initiatives take their starting point in the needs and desires of their audience but succeed too little in building a bridge between the initiative and the worshipping community of the church. Where existing churches are mainly focused on the divine orientation, missionary initiatives, on the contrary, focus on the human orientation.[827]

The remedy to this predicament is not to make the existing model better, but to develop a new model altogether. With his relational ecclesiology, Moynagh pursues a church that has 'self-donation near the centre of Christian practice and thought'.[828] According to Moynagh, this means no less than a 'radical reimagination'[829] and a 'radical turn-about'.[830] In this turn-about, new church communities play an important role because, in Moynagh's view, they help the church in adapting to changing world and, moreover, have the potential to stop the decline of churches.[831] But not only pragmatic reasons play a role,

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[825] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 123-127.

[826] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 162; Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 79-80. Regarding church size, Moynagh (2017, 382) approvingly quotes Stefan Paas who points out that leadership becomes more distant, formal, and bureaucratic in congregations with more than 50 members: 'Large churches tend to be run by a relatively small percentage of their members, thus turning the majority into more or less passive consumers.' Paas, *Church Planting*, 262.

[827] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 163.

[828] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 409.

[829] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 409.

[830] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 411.

[831] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 121

because when denominations open themselves to innovation through new ecclesial communities, they make room for the coming of God's future.[832]

With this in mind, it is understandable when Moynagh favours ecclesial entrepreneurs – founders and institutional entrepreneurs – who can help the church make the transition from the rural model to the relational model in which self-donation is central. From a theological point of view, entrepreneurs can be seen as means for the Spirit in the ongoing construction of the new creation.[833]

Moynagh's plea for a church in which divine and human orientations are of equal importance and in which divine self-donation is at the heart calls for a vision of ecclesial ministry in which bottom-up leadership and innovation are central. After all, the church manager – at least according to Moynagh – can be expected to be more concerned with maintenance than with innovation. More than managers who defend the status quo, entrepreneurs have an eye for God's future, which contains unimagined possibilities. Ecclesial entrepreneurship should not only be reserved for new ecclesial communities but should have a place in all churches and denominations. Moynagh's three types of institutional entrepreneurial leadership can help concretize what he envisions.

6.5.4 Summary

Let me try to summarize what Moynagh says about ministry and leadership. First, it is clear to Moynagh that ordained ministry does not exist for its own sake but is meant to build up the four interlocking sets of relationships. Therefore, ordained ministry should also be tested against these four sets of relationships.
As far as the meaning of leadership is concerned, Moynagh emphasizes its conversational and entrepreneurial nature. The main task of the leader is to craft narrative that connects the story of the community and the story of the gospel. This calls for leaders with the authority of interpretive guides to lead their community in a communal process of discernment. In addition, Moynagh challenges church leaders - both in new church communities and in existing churches - to work with an *adventus* view of the future. This does not require hierarchical authority but rather a bottom-up approach where the leader is not afraid to explore new possibilities. The three forms of leadership within existing church structures that Moynagh describes - generative, enabling, and administrative - are additionally helpful for leaders within traditional church communities.

6.6 Vocation and Training

Understandably, Moynagh's considerations regarding church entrepreneurship also have implications for the vocation and training of entrepreneurs.

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[832] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 99.
[833] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 59.

6.6.1 Vocational Voyage

An important concept when it comes to Moynagh's vision of training ministers and pioneers is the so-called 'vocational voyage'. The vocational voyage refers to the process of discerning whether and how an individual is being called to start a new ecclesial community and consists of six (interrelated) elements.[834] As is the case with the framework of innovation, the vocational voyage is informed by hope. Referring to Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, Moynagh understands it theologically as a manifestation of hope in God and his coming kingdom.[835]

The vocational voyage starts with *prophetic discontent* that arises mostly from dissatisfaction with aspects of the existing church. Moynagh calls it *prophetic* discontent, thereby referring to the Old Testament prophets who combined severe critique with hope.[836]

The next element of the vocational voyage is *clarification*. It refers to the process of clarifying the person's call and it involves 'a series of internal, mental conversations in which individuals, led by the Spirit, explore opportunities, test out possibilities and improvise means to overcome obstacles'.[837]

The third element is *sense-making*. For a person to imagine a new role 'some degree of change in the meaning system that underpins self-definition'[838] is required. One needs a narrative that expresses and activates the change of identity. Sense-making refers to the process by which a person – guided by the Spirit – creates a story that makes the reorientation intelligible.[839]

The fourth element is *encouragement*, and it refers to 'a form of positive feedback that amplifies changes in self-perception'.[840] It builds on the conviction that identity is not constructed by individuals on their own, but through interactions with the social context.

The fifth element is a *reshaped identity*. Through the reorganization of priorities during the vocational voyage one's personal identity is changed. Moynagh cites the example of one Tim who has come to appreciate the priesthood differently. In the past, he saw himself as the leader, almost the ruler. But by paying close attention to the culture, he realized that the people to whom he wanted to relate were suspicious of leaders and experts. People saw themselves as experts. Based on these experiences, he came to see himself more as a spiritual counsellor and care worker and 'a servant who would be helped by the community to discern his contribution'.[841]

The final element of the vocational voyage is being on *the edge of chaos*. Prophetic discontent with the status quo leads a person into a new situation.

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[834] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 298.
[835] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 297.
[836] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 299-300.
[837] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 301.
[838] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 302.
[839] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 302.
[840] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 303.
[841] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 305.

This new order does not bring stability per se but generates an edge of chaos situation that creates room for new possibilities.[842]

As the fourth element makes clear, the vocational voyage is a social process involving feedback from others. Pastors, coaches/mentors, and overseers should encourage people on the vocational voyage. They can help by engaging in sense-making conversations that help potential founders understand what they are experiencing and to construct a theologically persuasive narrative. Next, they should help potential founders 'to dovetail their missional opportunities to their church, work, family and other commitments'.[843]

Moynagh's design of the vocational voyage for ecclesial entrepreneurs mirrors his framework of innovation with only a few adjustments. The exploration stage of the framework of innovation finds its counterpart in the clarification stage of the vocational voyage. Encouragement during the vocational voyage is the equivalent of amplification in the framework. The reshaped identity of the vocational voyage matches the transformation stage of the framework.

It is important to see that a vocational journey is also not an individual journey of discovery but must be embedded in a community of feedback and encouragement. Moynagh's renunciation of the entrepreneur as a lone hero was made clear earlier. This applies, then, not only to the moment when the entrepreneur is connected to a specific community as a leader, but also to the first cautious steps of his quest.

6.6.2 Training

From the description above it is clear that the vocational voyage that Moynagh describes has an emergent nature. This obviously has implications for the way the institutional church provides space and support for founders. As a last step, I dwell on Moynagh's thoughts on the training of ecclesial entrepreneurs.

Traditionally, the church uses a 'select, train and deploy model' for ordained and recognized lay ministry. Potential ministers are selected, equipped, trained, and then deployed. This model is so widespread and entrenched that even networks that focus on church plants, such as the Church of England, among

[842] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 305-306.
[843] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 308-309.

others, still use it. By way of example, Moynagh refers to the Ordained Pioneering Ministry scheme of the Church of England.[844]

However, Moynagh sees a danger in this approach. He argues that the approach is based on prayerful prediction in which the Holy Spirit guides participants through selection, training and deployment that have clear outcomes in mind.

The danger with this method is that founders who are trained in this way may be regarded as experts. Based on their selection and training, they are expected to possess certain characteristics that predispose them to succeed once deployed. This threatens to create an unhealthy gap between trained founders and ordinary people, preventing the latter group from giving their all in the process as they see themselves as unsuitable.[845]

According to Moynagh, the select–train–deploy approach made sense when there was clarity about the type of church people were being selected for. The same was true for church planters who reproduced a standard model of church. In both cases, selectors could predict the skills required. But new church communities are different. They have an unpredictable nature and vary greatly, which means the skills needed to start one also vary. It is much more difficult to predict the necessary gifts of founders.[846]

Moynagh feels that the predictive approach falls short in three ways. First, it fails to consider the variety of people who behave entrepreneurially. Next, it does not allow the possibility that a particular context may bring out entrepreneurial behaviour that the founders did not exhibit before. Finally, it does not take into account the potential of the team to provide complementary skills and personal qualities.

In the form of a rhetorical question, Moynagh asks if church entrepreneurship would be 'too varied, too context-specific, and too team-specific to predict who is likely to succeed.' According to him, predictions do not fit well with the emerging processes of new church communities.[847]

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[844] Earlier in *Church in Life* Moynagh referred to the Ordained Pioneering Ministry (OPMs) scheme when talking about transformation of the church. At that point, a sense of reserve can already be detected when he writes: 'They are provided with training supposedly appropriate for pioneering, before being deployed in contexts where they can help start a fresh expression.' The words 'supposedly appropriate' reveal the reservations he has regarding the usefulness of the pioneering scheme. Nevertheless, Moynagh values OPMs as a symbol and catalyst of change. He writes: 'Although Ordained Pioneer Ministers (OPMs) have led only a small proportion of fresh expressions, they have been an influential symbol of the institution's commitment to innovative church. Increasingly, they will provide a potential source of senior ministers with practical experience of the mixed economy. As OPMs seep into senior positions, they are likely to accelerate the momentum of change.' Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 118.

[845] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 310.

[846] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 310

[847] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 312.

Moynagh suggests an alternative approach that consists of encouraging, recognizing, and supporting. A local church, denomination or network might encourage people to consider whether they are called to founding new church communities, recognize them at various stages of their journey and provide them with ongoing training and other support. The vocational journey of the founders would thus be nurtured as it unfolds. Instead of predicting who is able to start a new church community, founders would be recognized as people in the process of discernment, as starters or as practitioners with a growing track record. Throughout the process, they would be offered training, coaching and other support appropriate to the moment. Recognition, expressed through this encouragement and support, could be gently withdrawn when God seemed to be leading the person away from this particular path.[848]

As an example of such an approach, Moynagh refers to the Methodist Pioneering Pathway scheme. This is an initiative of the Methodist Church that started in 2016 and includes lay and ordained people who have pioneering as their primary focus. The scheme consists of five elements of support:

1. Vocational discernment: individuals are being helped to discern whether they have a call and gift for pioneering ministry.
2. Membership of a community of practice: within a community of peer practitioners, pioneers can engage in the process of formation and development.
3. Coaching and mentoring: a coach/mentor accompanies pioneers on their journey of formation and practice.
4. Tutoring: a tutor advises on appropriate opportunities for learning for each individual pioneer.
5. A personal portfolio: pioneers will record their learnings, experience, reading and theological reflection in a personal portfolio.[849]

6.6.3 Evaluation

Moynagh's thoughts on ecclesial training are aimed explicitly at potential founders of new ecclesial communities. At first glance, therefore, his thoughts seem less relevant to traditional ministers. Yet the opposite may be true. Earlier I suggested that in Moynagh's view the ecclesial entrepreneur seems to be preferable to the ecclesial manager. According to him, the church is in dire need of a radical turn-about and therefore the need is less for traditional ministers who defend the status quo and more for entrepreneurs who are open to God's coming kingdom in an innovative way and hold together the divine and human orientations of the church. Moreover, a radical reimagination of church life will cause church communities to become much less predictable, making the 'select, train and deploy' model less useful.

[848] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 312.
[849] Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 106.

Even if the need for a radical turn-about is less felt, however, Moynagh's thoughts are worth considering. Continued secularization and the consequent changing role of the church mean that church communities are becoming much more diffuse and varied in any case, so a one-size-fits-all 'select, train and deploy' approach is losing its power.

The strength of Moynagh's model lies in the strong connection he makes between the training of candidates and the concrete practice of church life. Whereas theological training runs the risk of training candidates in an ivory tower, in Moynagh's model there is a focus on concrete reality from the start. This means that at the end of their training, candidates in Moynagh's model are probably better equipped to deal with the concrete challenges of daily practice than their equals who are trained in seminary or at the academy.

In Moynagh's model, the role of the academy and the seminary is not entirely clear. It is reasonable to think that they play a role in the ongoing training and support with which candidates are nurtured during their vocational journey. Yet it is precisely this aspect that deserves further elaboration because theological education involves more than training and coaching. Earlier I noted, following Vanhoozer, how biblical, cultural, and human literacy is a prerequisite for ecclesial leaders who long to connect the narrative of the community to the narrative of the gospel. Leaders need the necessary theological tools to provide thorough and well-informed arguments on issues of Christian practice. Developing practical skills is necessary, but thorough theological knowledge is clearly indispensable.

6.7 Conclusion

It is now possible to answer the question I formulated at the beginning of this chapter:

> *How can the missionary dimensions and intentions of Moynagh's reflection of church leadership and theology of ministry contribute to an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective?*

Again, I turn to the missionary dimensions and missionary intentions, before concluding with some general observations.

6.7.1 Missionary Dimensions

Moynagh's ecclesiological considerations are underpinned by eschatological-missionary presuppositions that culminate in a conception of churches as divine gifts to the world and manifestations of God's coming kingdom. *Missio Dei* and eschatology are fruitfully linked in a relational ecclesiology that also has potential in an ecumenical perspective.

In his conception of church as consisting of four sets of interlocking relationships, Moynagh explicitly refers to the *koinonia* ecclesiology of the

ecumenical movement. However, where *koinonia* ecclesiology in ecumenical reports runs the risk of being too unilaterally presentic-eschatological, Moynagh's church is embedded in an eschatology that has a healthy balance between the 'already' and 'not yet' nature of God's kingdom. Moynagh's combination of the Advent character of God's kingdom and his relational approach to being church is useful for an ecumenically informed ecclesiology that seeks to rediscover its place in God's mission and the world without getting stuck in entrenched patterns.

Moynagh additionally links to the ecumenical emphasis on the liturgy as the heart of the church by hinting at the Eucharist as an expression of God's self-giving in the *missio Dei*. The celebration of the Eucharist - in addition to celebrating communion with Christ - is an act that makes visible that the church, as the body of Christ, can only exist by giving itself away. By rooting the church in divine self-giving, Moynagh prevents the church from getting caught up in self-preservation. Mission is not a second step for the church but permeates every aspect of it without instrumentalizing it.

6.7.2 Missionary Intentions

Moynagh's reflections are intentionally focused on the formation of new ecclesial communities and the radical reimagination of being church. Consequently, ordained ministry is also focused on that.

Ordained ministry does not exist for its own sake but is meant to build up the four interlocking sets of relationships. Therefore, ordained ministry should also be tested against these four sets of relationships.

Moynagh further emphasizes the conversational and entrepreneurial nature of church leadership and ordained ministry. The main task of the leader is to craft narrative that connects the story of the community and the story of the gospel. This calls for leaders with the authority of interpretive guides to lead their community in a communal process of discernment. In addition, Moynagh challenges church leaders - both in new church communities and in existing churches - to work with an *adventus* view of the future. This does not require hierarchical authority but rather a bottom-up approach where the leader is not afraid to explore new possibilities. The three forms of leadership within existing church structures that Moynagh describes - *generative*, *enabling*, and *administrative* - are additionally helpful for leaders within traditional church communities.

One small point of critique concerns the fact that Moynagh hardly gives attention to the individual formation of Christians as disciples of Christ. His work focuses entirely on the creation of Christian communities and less on the general vocation of churches and Christians in the world.

6.7.3 Relevant Points of Attention

I conclude with a few general observations. First, Moynagh's ecclesial entrepreneur offers an example of what an alternative conception of ordained

ministry might look like. His emphasis on the conversational nature of the church and his bottom-up approach to leadership fit well with the current cultural context. Moreover, these aspects also correspond to the charismatic ecclesiology of Bucer and Łaski, in which the entire church community was much more involved in church matters.

Next, the strength of Moynagh's book is that he tries to keep older churches and new ecclesial communities together and aims to have them fertilize each other. In that spirit, therefore, Moynagh also sees a role for institutional entrepreneurship within existing churches. Although he does not explicitly state it anywhere, he gives the impression that in the current situation there is a greater need for ecclesial entrepreneurs than for traditional ministers. Opinions may differ as to whether this is the case, but the ongoing process of secularization and the ever-changing place of the church in society require the traditional place and role of ecclesial ministry to be reconsidered. Moynagh's reflections deserve attention in this regard. In a time of declining churches and marginalization of the Christian faith, Moynagh's entrepreneurial ecclesiology offers a hopeful perspective. The church need not bow its head but may see and seize unimagined opportunities here and now, while hoping for God's future.

Also, Moynagh's thoughts on the training of ministers deserve to be taken seriously. The 'select, train and deploy' method works less well in a context where church reality is increasingly diffuse and varied. In such a context it is important that potential ministers are rooted and shaped by church practice from the outset. The need and form of theological equipping requires further thought, though, for church leadership requires more than only practical skills. Finally, Moynagh advocates small Christian communities in which participant involvement is high. The rural church model with large church buildings and congregations discourages the active contribution of non-ordained church members and is counterproductive in missionary terms as unchurched people are not attracted. Large congregations with corresponding church buildings often spend a lot of time and energy on the design of their worship services and their oft complicated organization, but thereby risk neglecting their calling to be witnesses of the kingdom in the world. In other words, their focus is predominantly on satisfying the needs of Christian consumers.

7. SHARING THE BODY OF CHRIST
Towards an Ecumenically Informed Reformed Theology of Ministry from a Missionary Perspective

It is time to draw together all the insights gained, present my conclusions, and answer the research question:

> *How can an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ordained ministry serve the church's missionary calling in the Netherlands?*

My intention in this chapter is to map out presuppositions, principles, tasks, and themes of an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the pursuit of a contextually relevant theology and practice of ecclesial ministry for Reformed churches in the Netherlands. To this end, I will again use Lesslie Newbigin's distinction between the missionary dimension and the missionary intention I used at the conclusion of the chapters on contemporary theological voices. The structure of this chapter is as follows.

To freshen the memory, I will begin with a brief review of the path I have taken. This will be followed by a discussion of the missionary dimension of ordained ministry. This missionary dimension is reflected in the theological and ecclesiological presuppositions or axioms that form the backdrop of any form of theology of ministry. In discussing the contemporary voices, it proved necessary at every turn to first clarify their theological and ecclesiological presuppositions, because only thus justice could be done to their understanding of ministry. This makes sense since reflection on theology of ministry is embedded in a wider theological and ecclesiological framework. Therefore, it is critical to reflect on these presuppositions before proceeding to discuss tasks and themes of ordained ministry.

However, a second step is needed when it comes to the missionary dimension. The actual structure and practice of ecclesial ministry is guided not merely by general theological and ecclesiological presuppositions, but also by some guiding principles in the specific field of ecclesial ministry. These underlying principles do not necessarily derive directly from the theological presuppositions, but they are equally decisive for the ultimate design of ecclesial ministry. It is therefore important to map these principles too under the heading of missionary dimension.

An image that may be helpful in clarifying the difference between these presuppositions and principles is that of a house. The theological and ecclesiological presuppositions are like the foundation of a house. As a house is

built on an underlying invisible foundation that allows the edifice to stand firm and not subside, but also determines the form of the house, so the ecclesiological presuppositions lie beneath the surface and determine the final shape of the ministerial house. However, the appearance of a house is determined not so much by the underlying foundations as by the architectural style that becomes visible in the facade, in the walls, the windows, the doors and in the roof. The guiding principles are like the facade, the walls, the windows, the doors, and the roof of the ministerial house. They betray a particular architectural style peculiar to the Reformed tradition, although other influences may also be visible.

After dwelling on the missionary dimensions of ecclesial ministry, I then move on to missionary intentions. In doing so, I focus on what I believe should be the tasks of a missional ecclesial ministry. In part, the traditional tasks of ordained ministry will be discussed here, but I will also focus on activities that I deem important in view of the current missionary situation. In both cases, the central question will be to what extent the tasks discussed contribute to the church's participation in the *missio Dei*.

In a final section, I reflect on certain themes that, in varying degrees, should play a role in ecumenically sensitive theology of ministry. Along the route followed, a number of these themes of theology of ministry have emerged. Some of these themes are controversial, others less so. Here I am thinking of apostolic succession, the threefold structure of ministry, representation, authority, ordination, and the education of future ministers. It is my intention to explore these themes on the basis of the missionary dimensions and intentions I mapped out earlier.

The result of all this will not be an articulated ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective. After all, a blueprint theology of ministry would disregard the fact that the oft messy reality of ecclesial life is largely determinative for its ultimate structure. This is not a mere pragmatic caveat, but a fundamental theological premise. In this regard, Healy speaks of a practical hermeneutical circle in which ecclesial practice informs ecclesiology, and ecclesiology informs ecclesial practice.[850] Moreover, a blueprint theology of ministry would also contradict the historically demonstrable highly contextual nature of Reformed theology of ministry. Although there are distinctive patterns of thinking and theological instincts that allow it to be identified as such, Reformed theology of ministry does not concern a uniform design that is universally applicable.

I do hope, however, that the presuppositions, principles, tasks, and themes I chart in this chapter will be helpful for the pursuit of a concrete structure of ecclesial ministry from a Reformed perspective, both locally and supra-locally.

[850] Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 46.

7.1 In Retrospect

In chapter 1, I began with the challenges as they present themselves. Based on a brief survey of ecclesiological discussions in Reformed denominations in the Netherlands, it was shown that there are two major challenges for the Reformed theology of ministry. The first challenge concerns the need to rethink ecclesiology from the *missio Dei*. The second challenge concerns the need to develop an ecumenically informed theology of ministry. A review of the most relevant literature illustrated that there is a gap in this area.

To gain more clarity about what I mean by 'Reformed' I turned to the origins of Reformed theology of ministry in chapter 2. Here I paid attention to Bucer, Calvin and Łaski, because these three persons, each in their own way, stood at the bedrock of theology of ministry within the Dutch Reformed tradition. The result consisted of a cross section of Reformed theology of ministry in its initial stages, with a focus on the interaction between theoretical ecclesiology and ecclesial practice. A few things stood out:

It was apparent that Reformed theology of ministry is situated somewhere on the continuum between a clericalist approach on the one hand and an egalitarianist one on the other. Where exactly it is on this spectrum depends on the socio-political context and whether the congregation is organized around the voluntarist principle or, on the contrary, has the character of a people's church. Next, Reformed ecclesiology has an ecumenical slant, both fundamentally theological and in concrete practice. Also, it was also evident that the elder occupied a position less pronounced than is regularly suggested in Dutch Reformed circles, making the liturgical role the defining characteristic of ordained ministry. Finally, both Bucer and Łaski developed the idea of the church as an interpretive community that, under the leadership of ordained ministry, was searching for the meaning of Scripture in their context. The ministry of the Word, according to them, is not designed to make the interpretive activity of the community superfluous, but, on the contrary, to simulate and feed the communal process of discernment.

After listening to the past, I focused on the present. First, in chapter 3, I turned to ecumenical reports on ministry from the WCC. I took my starting point in the CTCV report because its statements on ministry are embedded in a wider ecclesiological framework than in BEM/m. I started with a missiological assessment and concluded that its *koinonia* ecclesiology and its missionary focus is mainly self-referential. Nevertheless, the discussion of both reports provided valuable insights for a Reformed theology of ministry that strives to be ecumenically informed. I am thinking particularly of the concept of *episkopé* that refers to certain indispensable elements of ecclesial ministry.

Then in chapter 4 I turned my attention to Guder's missionary ecclesiology and theology of ministry. Guder, as a Reformed theologian, can be considered as a disciple of Newbigin and Barth. In their wake, he thinks through ecclesiology from the *missio Dei*. For Guder 'witness' is the mode of the church's participation

in the *missio Dei*. The result is an ecclesiology that is strongly focused on the forming and equipping of witnessing communities in the world.

In chapter 5 I turned my attention to the Reformed theologian Van de Beek, whose idiosyncratic ecclesiology and theology of ministry was interesting for the purposes of this study precisely because of its catholizing tendency. Van de Beek's rejection of the concept *missio Dei* formed a counterweight that helped to highlight possible weaknesses of an overemphasis on the concept.

Finally, in chapter 6, I listened to Moynagh. He, too, wants to think through ecclesiology radically from the point of view of the missionary vocation of the church. Although Moynagh does not develop a theology of ministry in the strict sense of the word, his thoughts deserve attention because of their rootedness in ecclesial practice and their relevance for a church longing to be missionary in a post-Christian culture. Moynagh predominantly takes an anthropological approach to being church, emphasizing its conversational nature.

7.2 Missionary Dimensions: Presuppositions and Principles

Having travelled this path, it is now possible to identify the presuppositions, principles, tasks, and themes of Reformed theology of ordained ministry. Theological reflection on ecclesial ministry can only be rightfully understood against the backdrop of (albeit sometimes implicit) theological presuppositions or axioms. Furthermore, the actual structure of ecclesial ministry is determined by guiding principles, largely inspired by ecclesial traditions, or emerging from growing ecumenical consensus. Collectively, the presupposition and principles map the missionary dimension of ecclesial ministry.

7.2.1 Presuppositions

I begin by furnishing a list of four ecclesiological presuppositions or axioms that this research has yielded as the most important for an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective. These presuppositions are largely responsible for the missionary dimension of ecclesiology and theology of ministry. Without designing a whole theological framework of my own, there are four main ecclesiological presuppositions that are crucially important. An ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective needs to be firmly rooted in an ecclesiology that is *missional*, *contextual*, *eschatological*, and *ecumenical*.

7.2.1.1 Missional

The intention to reflect on theology of ministry from a missionary perspective demonstrates that this study is embedded in the ecumenical missionary consensus that gained a steadily growing foothold from the second half of the 20th century onwards. The concept of *missio Dei* – as it has developed since Willingen 1952 – highlights the fact that the church does not have a mission but

participates in the mission of the triune God in this world. Rooted in his divine being, mission is not and second step for God, and consequently mission cannot be a second step for his church too. By nature, the church participates in God's generous movement of love towards this world. In celebrating her liturgy, the church is constantly reminded of this divine generosity and thus determined by her divine calling to witness to God's love in the world.

Of course, this ecumenical missionary consensus is not an invention of the 20th century church; throughout its history, the awareness that the church is to be witnessing to God's kingdom has been preserved, even though at times this understanding may have only been a faint slumber. It is not without reason that apostolicity is one of the Nicene marks of the church. The term expresses not only faithfulness to the apostolic teaching, but also to the church's apostolic mission to witness to the gospel in the world across cultural boundaries.

What this mission implies for the church in the world can be qualified, with Guder, by the New Testament concept of witness. The term witness highlights that the church in its missionary dimensions and intentions is not self-referentially focused on its own preservation, but on the work of God in this world culminating in the Christ event. The church points away from herself to the triune God. In the Christ event, as described in the New Testament, it becomes apparent that God is concerned with the coming of his kingdom in this world. The church as a community is to be witnessing to this kingdom. Moreover, the concept of witness shows that the church does not optimistically see itself as the bringer of a divinely promised future in the form of steady social and cultural progress – Van de Beek's rightful objection – rather she refers to God's agency in the world that is not confined to her own community. In the world, the Spirit creates Christ-centred forcefields into which the church can obediently enter to bear witness to the gospel.

The missional presupposition thus precludes the church from being self-centred. On the surface, this premise may seem self-evident, but the practice of church life shows that the very temptation for churches and their ministers to be inward-looking and focus on cultivating and protecting a particular ecclesial culture is still strong.[851] Because the church participates in the *missio Dei,* and

[851] A rather telling illustration of this focus on the cultivation of an ecclesial culture is the uncomfortable relationship of the CGKN to the so-called missionary congregations. Initially these new (multi-cultural) congregations that had emerged from the missionary work of CGKN churches since the end of the 20th century were greeted with joy, but as time passed the question arose as to how the deviant forms and practices of these new ecclesial communities would affect the denomination as a whole and its individual traditional congregations. In 2010, there was even a proposal at synod to start a separate denomination for these missionary congregations. (Van 't Spijker, *To Participate*, 14) Although the synod rejected this suggestion, the discomfort remained. The 2019 synod decided to instruct the deputies on evangelization to 'guide the missionary congregations in forming and maintaining a Reformed identity and report on this at the next General Synod'. (*Besluiten (I)*, 76)

mission is therefore not a second step for the church either, it is essential that its ministry is thought through in terms of its service to the church's participation in the divine mission.

7.2.1.2 Contextual

At several points in this study, the contextual nature of ecclesiology has been discussed.

In the historical chapter I argued that Reformed ecclesiological practice was highly contingent on its socio-political context. The socio-political situation in Geneva differed quite radically from that in London, and consequently the ecclesiological practice of the respective Christian communities also diverged. This agility is a feature of Reformed ecclesiology, which does not so much assume a universally applicable format but is defined rather by patterns of thinking and different currents sharing certain characteristics.

The contextual nature of ecclesiology emerged again in the discussion of the various contemporary voices. Guder, Van de Beek and Moynagh emphasize the contextual nature of the church in their ecclesiologies. However, since for Van de Beek contextuality is primarily a pragmatic phenomenon as he considers cultural contexts to be theologically mute, what he has in mind by contextual ecclesiology seems less useful for a Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective. After all, contextual theology concerns more than just an adaptation of certain adiaphoric elements for the sake of reducing supposed cultural barriers. Guder, in contrast, speaks of the incarnational character of the church, referring to the fact that a church is called to interact with the surrounding culture in order to faithfully witness to the gospel. Moynagh also emphasizes the contextual nature of the Christian community. The church as a Christian community is a gift that is to be appropriate to non-Christians in the respective context. It needs to be accessible, both culturally and physically. Clearly, the contextuality of the church has a distinct missionary focus.

This contextual perspective should not be limited to the overarching level of different denominations having their own theology of ministry but extends to the local level within existing ecclesial denominations. The very possibility that different congregations in the same church denomination - even within the

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Clearly the synod perceived the cultural diversity of the mission congregations as a threat to the unity and the Reformed character of the denomination and responded by imposing a specific denominational cultural identity. This emphasis on the importance of the denomination's own culture is at odds with the missionary calling of the church to faithfully embody the gospel contextually and seems to boil down to a form of proselytism in which the newly emerging communities and their members are expected to become mere copies of the original. (Cf. The distinction of Martin Kähler between mission and propaganda. Mission, according to Kähler, means to sow and wait for the life God gives, whereas propaganda means imposing oneself to the other. The propagandist 'macht Wiederholungen, dessen was man selbst ist.' (Cited from Hoekendijk, *De kerk binnenste buiten*, 22))

same city - may contextually embody the gospel differently in their own cultural environment and therefore may also have quite a different structure of ecclesial ministry is not to be dismissed as a recipe for ecclesial chaos that should be avoided at all costs, but rather as a necessary proviso for the credible witness of the church. Only when Christian communities focus first and foremost on their own local context and are not *a priori* guided by a church culture from outside that particular context they can truly take root for the long term in their own environment.[852]

It is fundamentally this emphasis on contextuality, then, that prevents a uniform format of ecclesial ministry from being worked out in detail. Instead, it is better to consider the presuppositions, principles, tasks, and themes of a Reformed theology of ministry. When theologians or denominations nevertheless start from a ministerial blueprint and thereby declare a certain ecclesial culture normative, this is inconsistent with the contextual nature of the Reformed theology of ministry and, moreover, unnecessarily compromises the congregation's credible embodiment of the gospel. The contextuality of the church thus implies that the diversity of ecclesial expressions is not the result of a pragmatic approach that is tolerated as a preliminary step towards institutional uniformity, but rather a principled premise of an ecclesiology that, following in the footsteps of the apostles, is serious about trans-cultural faith transmission. Ecclesial ministry will have to serve the highly contextual nature of the church.

7.2.1.3 Eschatological

A third presupposition that emerged in the discussion of contemporary theological voices involves the need for a sound eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' character of the kingdom of God. The eschatological presupposition highlights that God's kingdom is both present and future and this should inform reflection on ecclesiology and theology of ministry.

In the discussion of the ecumenical *koinonia* ecclesiology in chapter 3 and in the discussion of Van de Beek's idiosyncratic sacramental ecclesiology, it appeared that an ecclesiology that one-sidedly emphasizes the 'already' nature of God's kingdom runs the risk of becoming self-referential in missionary terms. The church then is in danger of becoming the embodiment of the kingdom and mission is liable to boil down to verbal evangelization and recruitment of potential church members. However, churches will have to take seriously the *adventus* nature of the kingdom by making work of eschatological imagination in order to constantly rediscover their place in God's mission and the world. Sound eschatological imagination puts present realities under criticism, helps to

[852] Bantu and Jenkins make this point from a historical perspective. In their respective treatments of the history of non-Western Christianity they both point to the examples of the (almost) disappeared ecclesial presence in Nubia and North Africa to show that churches that are (too) little contextualized are in danger of becoming extinct. Jenkins, *The Lost History*, chapter 8, section 'Survival and Ruin'; Bantu, *A Multitude*, conclusion.

discover the ultimate meaning of phenomena and to envision new anticipatory ways of life, thereby stimulating alternative modes of being church.

On the other hand, in response, the 'not yet' character of the kingdom should not be over-emphasized at the expense of the 'already' character, as this risks over-instrumentalizing the church. After all, the church in its liturgy is also a place where the community of God can be experienced already.

To avoid a one-sided eschatological orientation, churches would do well to explicitly relate their practice to the Christ event as witnessed by the New Testament. In doing so, it is important that each element of the Christ event be given a place. For example, even though Guder takes a broad view of his preferred adjective 'incarnational' as also referring to the death and ascension of Jesus, unreflective use of it may unconsciously limit the missionary endeavour to a form of mere identification with a given context, whereas Christ's cross and His resurrection offer the possibility of critical distance or unimagined perspectives of hope. Van de Beek, on the other hand, chooses to design his ecclesiology one-sidedly from his view that in the cross of Christ all of history is finished, but in doing so he hardly gives credit to the positive and hopeful presence of Christians in this *saeculum* that flows from Christ's resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit. However, by focusing on all key aspects of Jesus' life – his incarnation, death and resurrection, ascension, and his work of bringing the kingdom to completion – it is possible for ecclesial communities to reflect the full scope of the New Testament understanding of the church in an eschatologically balanced way.

Churches will thus have to strike the right balance between the presentic and futuristic nature of the kingdom. The right balance seems best achievable where ecclesial ministry, rooted in the liturgy, directs the community doxologically to the perfect reality of the Triune God who revealed Himself decisively in the Christ event, on the one hand, and leads it in the missionary movement to a broken world yearning for hope, on the other. The heart of the church lies in the liturgy where the Christian community celebrates the Divine self-donation in Christ that is directed to the world.

7.2.1.4 Ecumenical

A fourth and final important presupposition concerns the ecumenical nature of (Reformed) ecclesiology. This ecumenical presupposition was reflected in the cross-section of early Reformed ecclesiological praxis already. Both Bucer and Calvin made efforts to restore the unity of the churches in the ecclesiastical tensions of their own time. Visible evidence of this are not only their participations in the various religious colloquies, but also their ecclesiology, which was situated on the continuum between clericalism and egalitarianism and precisely thus sought to accommodate the breadth of European Christianity at the time. Reformed ecclesiology has thus developed, if only from a historical point of view, in part from the longing for ecclesial unity amid theological divisions. Only if churches of the Reformed tradition take this ecumenical orientation seriously can they be faithful to their historical roots.

However, the desire to contribute to an ecumenically informed theology of ministry is most fundamentally driven by the belief that the missionary calling of the church is served by the unity of the church. A divided church is not only being disobedient to its Lord but also compromises its own credibility. Conversely, a church made up of different traditions and denominations reaching out to each other can be a powerful witness to the gospel that is, after all, at its deepest level about restored relationships. Ecumenical awareness and missionary awareness have therefore gone hand in hand since the emergence of the ecumenical and missionary movement at the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, it is important that ecclesiological reflection is done from a desire for ecclesial unity. This then concerns not so much a striving for theological or structural uniformity, but rather an ecumenical search of different ecclesial traditions and denominations for modes and instruments by which the faithfulness of the church to its apostolic origins can be safeguarded.

Another important aspect of this ecumenical presupposition is the notion of world-Christianity. The cultural diversity of world-Christianity and its theological processing is hugely important for a church that does not want to retreat into isolation with its accompanying ecclesiological hubris. Ecclesiology and ecclesial practice are therefore to be informed by the cultural diversity of world-Christianity. This is especially important because world-Christianity is no longer geographically distant, but rather nearby. In metropolitan areas like Amsterdam, with many churches of non-Western background, world Christianity is just around the corner. This calls for a form of intercultural theology on the national and local level, taking seriously the cultural, linguistic, political, religious, social, economic, institutional, and historical diversity of different Christian expressions.

In practical terms, the ecumenical presupposition means that churches and their ministers are called to look for opportunities to initiate or intensify connections with churches from other traditions and other cultures. This prevents theological reflection from taking place in ecclesiastical isolation and enhances the missionary impact of churches.[853]

[853] In this area, there are encouraging developments (at the national level) that demonstrate a growing longing for ecclesial unity in the Reformed denominations that I discussed in § 1.1.2. First, for example, after a long process of merger the NGK and the GKv jointly formed a new denomination on May 1, 2023. I also think of the National Synod held for the first time in 2019, attended by participants from 40 different denominations in the Netherlands, including members of the CGKN, PKN, NGK and GKv. However, there are opposite developments too. The synod of the CGKN decided in 2021 not to become an associate member of the National Council of Churches and to withdraw from the steering committee of the National Synod (*Besluiten (II)*, 19). The CGKN's decisions seems to be motivated by the same preoccupation with their own ecclesial identity that led the synod to impose the own ecclesial culture on missionary congregations. Besides the fact that missionary credibility is severely damaged by this counter-ecumenical decision, sectarianism also lurks.

7.2.2 Principles

In addition to the foundational theological and ecclesiological presuppositions, this study has also identified some theological guiding principles for ecclesial ministry. These principles have in part emerged in the preparatory historical chapter and relate to the Reformed substance of the intended theology of ministry. However, important principles for the form and content of ecclesial ministry have also been formulated in the chapter on ecumenism. In this section I address successively the charismatic structure of the congregation, the liturgical rooting of ecclesial ministry, the concept of *episkopé* as a structuring principle of theology of ministry, and finally ecclesial ministry as a focus of unity.

7.2.2.1 Charismatically Embedded

A first important principle concerns the embedding of ecclesial ministry in the charismatic community of the church. In Reformed ecclesiology, theology of ministry is developed from pneumatology and is entirely at the service of the charismatic structure of the church.

In the historical overview, this was evident in the treatment of Bucer and Łaski. Both emphasized that ordained ministry is not intended to make the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit superfluous, but rather to make them visible. In Łaski's case this was particularly clear in his view of ecclesial discipline that was aimed at mutual consolation and edification. The goal of church discipline is thus that every member takes his or her place in the community and shares his or her gifts with the other members. Calvin was less interested in the charismatic character of the church, but it should be remembered that he worked in situation where (people's) church and civil society coincided.

The people's church situation of Geneva has less in common with today's situation than that of the small community of dedicated members of the Strangers' church in London. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that in recent missiological literature the charismatic nature of the congregation has come to the fore again. In Guder's case, this was visible in his rejection of any distinction between clergy and laity for fear of an ontological difference between ordained ministers and other church members. In so doing, however, he loses sight of the fact that with the Reformers the distinction is not ontological but pneumatological: ordained ministry is, in their case too, precisely subservient to the charismatic community of the church. Also in Moynagh's case, there is an emphasis on the charismatic nature of community, although he does not name it as such. His emphasis on the conversational nature of the church naturally leads to an ecclesiology in which each member of the community has a distinct role.

Although the ecumenical reports also seem to start from the charismatic structure of the church, this theme does not really emerge. Indeed, it seems that both reports locate ecclesial ministry closer to Christology than to pneumatology after all. In this way, Christ-representation becomes central to ecclesial ministry and the distinction between clergy and laity is emphasized.

The same happens in the case of Van de Beek, because of his Christologically founded sacramental theology of ministry.

Reformed ecclesiology, however, embeds ecclesial ministry in the charismatic structure of the church. Ordained ministry is implied in and aimed at the charismatic community of the church. What this means in concrete terms for ordained ministry I hope to make clear under the section missionary intentions.

7.2.2.2 Rooted in Liturgy

The second principle concerns a fundamental premise of Reformed theology of ministry that has emerged at various points in the study, namely that ordained ministry is rooted in liturgy. Ordained ministry is called into being by the Spirit working in the charismatic community of the church, but then takes root in the liturgy where the Christ event is celebrated.

The Reformers discussed in chapter two rooted ordained ministry in the liturgy by giving only the ministers of the Word the power to administer the Word and the sacraments. The elder, central to the experience of many Reformed theologians, fulfilled no role in the liturgy at the beginning of the Reformation.

This liturgical rooting of ordained ministry has ecumenical potential. BEM/m and CTCV also root ordained ministry in the Eucharist. However, this should not be understood restrictively as referring only to the Eucharist, but rather as a *pars pro toto* for the whole liturgy. The ecumenical reports thus see the uniqueness of ordained ministry lying in the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. In this case, ecumenical thinking on ministry and Reformed theology of ministry seem to be in agreement.

Also Van de Beek develops an understanding of ordained ministry that is rooted in the Eucharist. However, since he develops this vision from a sacramental ecclesiology grounded in a one-sided Christology, the liturgical rooting he advocates seems less suited to a Reformed theology of ministry.

The liturgical rooting of ordained ministry can also be well related to the missionary dimension of the church. This can be seen, for example, in *The Church: Towards A Common Vision*. CTCV tries to interweave the mission of the church with the liturgically rooted concept of *koinonia*. The church that lives from the *koinonia* it receives in the liturgy – especially in the Eucharist – may in turn offer this *koinonia* as a gift to the world. The report then continues this line by focusing the ministry of *episkopé* not only on the internal life of the church but by also giving it a role in the mission of the church. From the ministry of Word and sacraments runs a line to the world. The report explicitly refers to Christian service organizations that fall under the *episkopé* of the church. This way the CTCV report tries to bridge the gap between church and world, without losing the distinctiveness of the church. The church is not a regular NGO, but, while serving the world, she bears witness to the secret from which she lives: the self-donation of Jesus Christ. The heart of the church lies in the liturgy – especially the Eucharist – but its scope is wide. Unfortunately, CTCV's *koinonia*

ecclesiology is otherwise mainly self-referential, so this liturgical-missionary impetus seems to be a mere wandering stone. Nevertheless, the impetus is promising.

A similar movement from the liturgy towards the world can be seen in Moynagh's work. He roots the church in the *missio Dei,* predominantly interpreted as divine self-donation. In a sense, the church as the body of Christ is a Eucharistic community that gives itself away to the world. Unlike the ecumenical reports, Moynagh does not explicitly root this in the liturgy but his emphasis on divine self-donation aligns well with them. In this context, Moynagh also explicitly defends himself against an approach in which the church is fundamentally a contrast community, because in doing so the gap between church and world becomes unnecessarily large and believers can only be witnesses of the gospel as individuals. Precisely as self-donation, mission is not an individual matter, but concerns the whole community of the church that collectively searches for credible and creative ways to be an appropriate gift to the world.

Rooting mission and the missionary dimension of ordained ministry in the liturgy helps to prevent the church from reaching out to the world in operations that are not anchored in the Trinitarian self-donation but in political or social motivations that happen to be fashionable. Moreover, thus the strength and distinctiveness of the church community is not sought in being an alternative community to a surrounding culture that is deeply depraved, but in the self-donation of God in Jesus Christ that permeates the whole life of the church.

By closely intertwining liturgy and mission, ordained ministry is prevented from focusing solely on preserving the community of the church. The heart of ministerial acting lies in the liturgy which, by being an expression of the divine self-donation, is directed to the world. In view of this, it is necessary that the public dimension of the liturgy and ecclesial ministry is emphasized more clearly within Reformed theology of ministry.[854]

7.2.2.3 Episkopé

A third important principle concerns the *episkopé* nature of ordained ministry. This aspect was highlighted in the treatment of both ecumenical reports. Although in episcopal churches the term primarily refers to the office of the bishop, ecumenically the term *episkopé* does not concern a particular structure

[854] James Smith offers a stimulating and very welcome treatment of the formative dimension of Christian liturgy aimed at unmasking and countering the cultural liturgies of post-Christian Western society and the formation of people that desires and embodies the Kingdom. See: Smith, *Desiring*, 133-214. For Smith, this has a clear missionary focus: 'Christian worship and formation, as practices of divine action, culminate in Christian action – being sent as ambassadors of another "city," as witnesses to kingdom come, to live and act communally as a people who embody a foretaste of God's shalom.' (Smith, *Imagining*, 151-152) (Italics in original) This way, the public dimension of liturgy takes its rightful place.

of ordained ministry, but rather indispensable elements such as authority, coordination and synodality. In essence, the term *episkopé* refers to the oversight necessary to ensure, in Flett's words, the externality of the church in Christ. Apart from the ecumenical reports, Van de Beek in particular places a strong emphasis on the need for this. However, because, like the ecumenical reports, he takes his starting point in an ecclesial structure that is based on a conjectural reading of history, his overall plea remains unpersuasive. The structure of *episkopé* will have to be legitimized theologically, from the *missio Dei* and not from a somewhat conjectural reading of history. I will return to the structure of ecclesial ministry later.

Moreover, the concept of *episkopé* shows that the ordained minister need not be a jack of all trades. The *episkopé* function of ordained ministry is embedded in the charismatic community of the church and, from its liturgical roots, aims to activate it. This is important to keep in mind when discussing the various tasks of ecclesial ministry: it cannot be the intention for the minister to take care of all these tasks herself. Rather, the concept of *episkopé* makes clear that the ordained minister has oversight over the life of the Christian community from her liturgical roots in the Christ event.

On a practical level, the concept of *episkopé* also provides space for the celebration of the Eucharist in new missional communities where no ministerial structure has yet been established. Within missionary initiatives and communities that develop under the responsibility of a congregation or denomination, certain community leaders can be given the exceptional authority to preside over the celebration of the Eucharist under the supervision of one or more ordained ministers. These celebrations fall under the *episkopé* of the ordained ministry of the congregation or denomination responsible for the initiative, even if an ordained minister is not necessarily present at the celebration. These leaders of missionary initiatives need not necessarily be ordained, for their exceptional authority falls under the *episkopé* of the church's ordained ministry. I am thinking, for instance, of the proliferation of house churches and small ecclesial communities that makes it impossible for an ordained minister to be physically present at every celebration of the Eucharist. If, under the responsibility of the ordained minister, the essence of the Eucharist as referring to the Divine self-donation and the externality of the community in the Christ event are guaranteed, the celebration can proceed even without her immediate presence.

By approaching *episkopé* in this way, the concept can also be made fruitful for a Reformed theology of ministry that wants to be ecumenical but does not want to assume the ministry of bishop. Reformed congregations and denominations would do well to examine their structure of ecclesial ministry from the concept of *episkopé*, i.e., they should ask themselves to what extent and in what way ordained ministry can guarantee the externality of the church on the one hand and activate the charismatic community on the other hand. Also, in ecumenical contacts with churches and denominations from other ecclesial

traditions, questions regarding ministry will have to focus on these two core elements of *episkopé* function.

7.2.2.4 Focus of Unity

A fourth principle emerged in the treatment of the WCC reports and concerns the idea that ecclesial ministry should function as a focus of unity.

The proliferation of Reformed denominations in the Netherlands shows that church unity is the Achilles' heel of Reformed ecclesiology. The primacy of truth often comes at the expense of ecclesial unity. Yet it is striking that Reformers such as Bucer and Calvin were intensely committed to church unity. An ecumenically informed Reformed ministry theology in the 21st century will need to take seriously this desire for unity from the sources of Reformed ecclesiology, if only to maintain its missionary credibility.

However, this does not automatically mean opting for a threefold pattern of ministry as an expression of ecclesial unity. In the chapter on ecumenism, it was shown that BEM/m presented the threefold structure as such. However, this pattern is based on a rather conjectural reading of history. In other words, the ecumenical emphasis on the threefold structure of ecclesial ministry is largely rooted in an explicit preference for a particular ecclesial culture mistakenly seen as normative, rather than in substantive theological motivations. Ironically, this way the emphasis on the threefold structure of church ministry may concern a quest for cultural uniformity that is just as damaging to missionary credibility as a lack of church unity. After all, apostolicity presupposes cultural appropriation not only of the gospel but also of the structures that embody it.

For the sake of missionary credibility, it is important to strive for a form of unity that does justice to the church's ecumenical calling and avoids the pitfall of a uniform ecclesial culture. The concept of *episkopé* can be useful here, since it presupposes a conversational process in which there is a communal search for what is understood by the gospel. This approach can also be made fruitful for the ecumenical dimension of ecclesial life. The chapter on Moynagh featured Kathryn Tanner's interpretation, highlighting the solidarity of love and common hope that defines the community of the church. In that light, the task of ministry, namely, to focus the church on common objects of love, gives practical substance to this. As a sign of unity, a minister is not in the first place a representative of a certain creedal conception, but rather a facilitator of the conversation about common objects of love. The vocation of ecclesial ministers of different denominations lies in the communal focus on the common objects of love.

Ecclesial ministry understood as a focus of unity thus does not concern an observation of a fact, but rather a calling for ordained ministers not only to promote the internal unity of their own congregation, but also to explicitly seek unity with other church communities in their own setting.

For the sake of convenience, let me summarize the presuppositions and principles before moving on to discuss what I consider to be the tasks of

ordained ministry: An ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective should be built on a balanced eschatology, while taking seriously the charismatic structure of the church, the liturgical rooting of ministry, its indispensable elements as expressed in the ecumenical concept of *episkopé* and the unity function of ecclesial ministry. Taken together, these presuppositions and principles account for the missionary dimension of ecclesiology and theology of ministry.

7.3 Missionary Intentions: Tasks of Ordained Ministry

From the discussed presuppositions and principles, it is possible to look at the main tasks of ordained ministry and thus uncover its missionary intentions. Unlike Newbigin, I do not limit these missionary intentions to those activities or institutional practices that take place exclusively beyond the borders of the church, but also to those tasks and responsibilities that are explicitly aimed at enabling and encouraging the centrifugal outreach of the church and its members to the world. Indeed, an activity or institutional practice can be intentionally missionary without taking place beyond the borders of the church.

This section concerns partly the tasks traditionally considered to belong to ordained ministry, but also some 'new' tasks that have emerged from the research. As for the traditional tasks, although they do not always have a clear missionary intention, they are given a distinct missionary focus from the presuppositions and principles of ecclesiology as outlined above.

7.3.1 Focusing on the Christ Event

Ordained ministers are responsible for ensuring the externality of the church in the Christ event. The main task of ordained ministry is to anchor the community of the church in the gospel as expressed the apostles and written down in Scripture.

This first task is closely linked to the concept of apostolicity and its twofold meaning. First, apostolicity refers to the content of the apostles' teaching and its use presupposes the notion that a church only is worthy of its name if it is faithful to these apostolic premises. In addition, however, the term also refers to the church's calling to follow the apostles and to engage in the process of cross-cultural appropriation of the gospel and the communities that embody it. This way, focusing communities on the Christ event in the wake of the apostles not only refers to the content of the gospel but also to the mode of its embodiment. In a sense, the other tasks are all elaborations of this fundamental task.

Both dimensions of the concept apostolicity were visible in the previous chapters. The historical chapter highlighted that, according to the reformers, God uses people to anchor the church in the gospel as written down in Scripture. From a traditional Reformed perspective, ordained ministry can be considered an instrument to beget and nourish faith in the gospel through preaching of the Christ event and its celebration in the sacraments. A similar emphasis was found

in the ecumenical reports, which state that ordained ministers are to be considered representatives of Jesus Christ to the community. As such, they constantly point the community, to Jesus Christ, especially in the celebration of the liturgy.

The most outspoken in this regard is Van de Beek who defines the whole task of ordained ministers as keeping the congregation focused on Christ. For Van de Beek, the modern concept of church leadership has more to do with current management theories than with caring for the congregation. Ordained ministry in his eyes will only be meaningful when it does what it is supposed to do: keeping the church focused on Christ. In his case, too, this task takes its shape from the liturgy. However, because of his Christologically founded sacramental ecclesiology, ecclesial ministries are closely linked to Christology, rather than to pneumatology, and are consequently only minimally subservient to the charismatic structure of the congregation. Moreover, he concentrates the task of ordained ministers one-sidedly inwardly as opening heaven to believers.

Guder also argues that ordained ministers should focused on and work from the Christ event. He summarizes their primary task under the title 'Word-equippers' and sees their authority as merely an elaboration of the Word. The church cannot go without Word-equipment and the primary task of ordered ministries is to equip the entire congregation for the work of ministry by interpreting and explaining the Word of God. Unlike Van de Beek, in his case this task also clearly has a missionary intention since Scripture is the Holy Spirit's instrument for the formation of missional communities. Missional transformation can only come about when the Bible is central as a discipleship-shaping power. Consequently, proclamation of the gospel does not concern a commodity for consumers but involves an enlistment of God in his mission. Anchoring the community in the Christ event by ordained ministers thus has a clear missional focus. This way, both dimensions of the concept of apostolicity have their rightful place in Guder's deliberations.

For Moynagh too, ecclesial leadership is related to the Christ event, although he uses less ecclesiological language. The most crucial function of leaders is to safeguard the sense-making conversations and she must be able to help the team connect the narrative of the church to the kingdom of God and find the appropriate language to do so. Here, too, both meanings of the term apostolicity are at play.

In conclusion, from the Christ event as made visible and audible in the liturgy, ordained ministers are called to proclaim the gospel to the congregation, call them to repentance, encourage, exhort, lead, and form them into disciples of Christ and witnesses of the gospel in the world. In essence, this is the overarching task from which the other tasks flow.

7.3.2 Activating the Charismatic Potential

The second task of ordained ministers is to activate the charismatic potential of the community. I have already mentioned that ordained ministry from a

Reformed perspective has pneumatological origins and is implied in the charismatic structure of the congregation. This charismatic embedding implies that ordained ministry is aimed at upbuilding the charismatic community. In the historical chapter it was shown that - especially in Bucer and Łaski's case - the task of ministers was to make visible and activate the manifold gifts of the Spirit in the congregation. The ecumenical reports also speak of the charismatic structure of the community and CTCV names as one of the components of *episkopé* the coordination of the diversity of gifts and ministries.

Guder and Moynagh also highlight this task of ordained ministers/leaders in the congregation. Guder's rejection of the lay-clergy distinction stems not from his fear of an ontological distinction alone, but also from his conviction that this is the only way to serve the charismatic character of the community. Also, his concept of authority shows that the ordained minister's deepest aim must be to make himself superfluous and stimulate the freewheeling conversation about what the Spirit is saying to the congregation. The goal of this is to reach a level of biblical literacy that enables believers to be translators of the biblical narrative themselves. Moreover, Guder emphasizes the charismatic nature of ecclesial ministry by seeing the concept of collegiality not only as a way to prevent possible abuses of power, but positively as a means to tap into the reservoir of different spiritual gifts in the congregation. From an ecumenical point of view, it would be better to use the term communality (see § 7.4.2.2) at this point, but that does not detract from his point.

Moynagh's conversational ecclesiology shows that leadership within the community can also lie with each participant, depending on time and topic. Leadership is not a static and formal fact, but rather a dynamic process in which all participants take part. For both Guder and Moynagh, this task is not only, or even primarily, aimed at upbuilding of the internal life of the congregation, but is at the service of forming a community that credibly embodies the Christ event in its own context.

A Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective will need to take this charismatic dimension of the church seriously. The church living out of the Triune self-donation should not ungratefully leave the gifts it receives from its Lord unopened or keep them eagerly to itself but should seek ways to energize the charismatic capacity of the congregation and its members in view of the church's calling in the world. Therefore, the task of ordained ministry is to activate and coordinate the charismatic potential of the community with a view to the credible embodiment of the gospel in its own context. The two following tasks can be interpreted as elaborations of this task.

7.3.3 Guiding the Interpretative Process

A third task flows directly from the previous one and concerns the understanding of the church as an interpretive community. This picture first emerged in the historical cross section. Bucer's *Christlichen Gemeinschaften* and Łaski's Strangers' Church can serve as examples of what such a community looks like in concrete terms. Although the ordained minister is ultimately responsible

for the ministry of the Word, the whole community has an active role in it. Especially the *prophecy* gatherings of the London Strangers' Church show the picture of a community that, under the leadership of the minister of the Word, was looking for the relevance of the gospel in its own context by a communal search for the meaning of Bible texts. In the Dutch situation, however, the Genevan model, in which the community had a much more passive role, became predominant, so that the notion that the church is an interpretive community has been largely lost.

The image of the church as an interpretive community surfaces again in today's post-Christian and missionary context. However, here the emphasis is placed on the fact that not only the Bible and the Christian tradition are objects of interpretation, but also the context in which the church community finds itself. Ministers are called to lead the community in the search for faithful embodiment of the Christ event in their own context. The structural formation of the church as a witnessing community that walks worthily of its missionary calling should be the focus of ecclesial ministry. Since being church can be considered a balancing act in which the ecclesial community seeks to be appropriately attuned to its context, but at the same time seeks to be countercultural if the values of the world cannot be reconciled with the gospel, sensitive guidance by minister is a prerequisite. Ministers need to be more than just exegetes of Scripture; they need to be able to understand the cultural context of the respective community. Moreover, ministers must be able to lead the community in the communal quest for a credible embodiment of the Christ event.

Moynagh speaks of a conversational process in which the narrative of God's kingdom and the narrative of the community are reconciled. Leadership as a dynamic process casts the role of the leader in new ecclesial communities in a different light. Instead of developing a vision and imposing it on a community, the leader helps the organization to make sense of what it is experiencing. This does not mean that the organization has no focus, but rather that developing a vision is a conversational group process, with the leader helping the team to make sense of what is happening. Thus, the leader's role is primarily in the area of sense-making. The most important part of sense-making is crafting a narrative. The leader must be able to help the team connect the narrative of the church to the kingdom of God and find the appropriate language to do so. In this regard, Moynagh's framework of innovation may be helpful by giving concrete shape to a process of eschatological imagination from the *adventus* nature of the kingdom, and thus allowing churches to rediscover their place in God's mission and the world without getting stuck in entrenched patterns. Churches faced with decline and marginalization may draw hope from imagining God's coming kingdom.

This way, the minister of the Word can be seen as an interpretive guide who helps the congregation as a community of interpretation to understand the Christ event in its context and find its place in it. This means that the minister, based on his knowledge of and feeling for the Bible and tradition, should

stimulate and lead the interpretive dialogue within the community. This concerns a two-way street. Participating in public life as Christian communities and individuals automatically bring with it implicit and explicit interpretive activities to which ministers should attend carefully. This listening attitude is necessary to relate the normative Christian sources to the specific lives of the community and its members, so that the Christ event can take shape in their reality. Ministers of the Word play a leading role in this process of interpretation, but it is fundamentally the church community itself that must listen to what the Spirit says to the congregation. Loosely following Augustine, it could be argued that it is the task of ordained ministry to keep the (newly formed) community focused on the common objects of love in a process of discernment.

Besides theological arguments, contextual arguments can also play a role here. In the present post-Christian era, in which churches are increasingly small communities that are moreover made up of dedicated members who are used to being heard and who are more aware of their context than in the past, the time has passed that the ministers of the Word were solely responsible for the interpretation of the gospel. Also, from a cultural point of view, it is recommended to take seriously the image of the interpretive guide.

In summary, the ordained minister's task is to help the community of the church as an interpretive guide in the exegesis of Scripture and context with a view to the congregation's credible embodiment of the Christ event.

7.3.4 Training Disciples

A fourth important task of ordained ministry concerns the equipping and training of church members to become faithful disciples of Jesus. There is a certain degree of overlap at this point with the task of interpretive guide, but where the latter is mainly focused on the communal discernment process, ordained ministry's equipping, and training concerns mainly the individual guidance of church members. After all, it is not only about forming witnessing communities, but also about equipping believers to be reliable witnesses of Christ in their own places in society.

Van de Beek and Guder are particularly mindful of this task. Van de Beek argues that ministers are to bring and keep the believers in community with Christ through instruction, catechesis, and personal admonition the ministers. For him ministers cannot be compared to CEOs, for they are *presbuteroi* - i.e., older people that have more wisdom and who have knowledge of the tradition - and they are *episkopoi* - i.e., overseers who watch over the congregation. Ministers of the congregation should be more like parents than like managers. However, since his ecclesiology is one-sidedly focused on the Eucharist, he does not give this personal dimension a missionary focus. Things are different in the case of Guder. According to him, ordained ministers are to be considered mentors, instructors and teachers who equip the life of the congregation to witness to the gospel in their own places. For this, Guder uses the image of Jesus himself as a rabbi. Again, Scriptural formation is central at this point and is thus about helping individual church members to seek the meaning of the Christ

event in their own lives. The aim is to make members of the congregation culturally bilingual; believers should be able to speak both the language of faith, learned from biblical formation, and the language of the surrounding culture.

In view of the still increasing secular and post-Christian status of Western Europe, Reformed churches and ministers in the Netherlands are no longer able to assume obvious cultural and ecclesial forms for the spiritual and missional formation of their members, but they should instead reflect on the crucial question of how they can creatively contribute to the cultivation of a Christian character for missionary witness in their own context. In this pursuit, ministers can draw on the wealth of insights and wisdom found in the (monastic) tradition(s) of the church and world Christianity.

It is also important to mention ecclesiastical discipline in this context. Indeed, the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline is not only aimed at keeping the witness of the ecclesial community with integrity, but also at the pastoral task of drawing individual believers to Christ. Of the reformers, particularly Łaski highlighted the pastoral aspect of ecclesiastical discipline as a tool to preserve each member in his or her ministry.

In summary, the task of ordained ministers is also to equip, encourage and exhort individual members of the church from the gospel with a view to them taking their place in society as credible witnesses of Christ.

7.3.6 In Church and World

For a large part, the tasks as I have presented them take place within the parameters of the church. Therefore, a critical observer might ask to what extent this theology of ministry is truly missionary. This is a valid question, and the answer has several elements to it.

First, the very fact that the various tasks as I have discussed here take place within the Christian community does not necessarily mean that they are not missionary. On the contrary, the presuppositions as I defined them in §7.2 ensure that the ultimate focus of ordained ministry cannot possibly be on cultivating and protecting a particular ecclesial culture. The church, as a communal embodiment of the gospel, is focused first and foremost on witnessing to God's kingdom in the world. In other words, the tasks as I have presented them above are eminently missionary since they are focused on the formation of a community and followers of Jesus who, in the concrete reality of the world, credibly embody the gospel.

Next, there is another principal aspect to this practical focus. If all the missionary weight is placed on the shoulders of ordained ministers, there is a significant danger that mission becomes clericalized. Here, the risk is that centrifugal missionary presence of the church community is reduced to a mere hobby of the ordained minister and a few enthusiastic members inspired by him. However, the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers and the associated charismatic nature of the church is crucial for the very purpose of mission: mission is not primarily a calling of ecclesial ministry but of the entire church community. Moreover, it could be well argued that non-ordained church

members represent the church and embody the gospel to the outside world in a more obvious way in their jobs, in their neighbourhoods or in pursuing their pastimes than the ordained minister, whose task is primarily, as such, to form the missionary community and its members. Put bluntly, apart from the Christian community, the non-ordained church member is the primary mission vehicle.

Of course, this does not mean that the ordained minister is imprisoned in the narrow but seemingly safe world of the church. To begin with, in a digital age, it is almost impossible for ordained ministers not to be in touch with world beyond the walls of the church, not to mention the number of encounters that automatically result from various civic and voluntary social interactions that are part and parcel of a (family) life in current society. Moreover, as a Christian, an ordained minister is also called to witness to the gospel in her surroundings. However, there are reasons why the ordained minister as a minister should intentionally reach out beyond the confines of the church.

First, beside this natural interaction with the surrounding culture, it would also be beneficial if the ordained minister deliberately performs certain ministerial tasks beyond the confines of the church. This could, for instance, include certain discussion groups, introductory courses, as well as participation in certain civic consultative bodies. By consciously making time and space for intentional interaction with people without Christian beliefs, the ordained minister is challenged to reflect on the content of the gospel. This reflection will only support his vocation as a facilitator of the interpretation process.

Second, the ordained minister's task is to guide the Christian community in the pursuit of a credible embodiment of the gospel in its cultural context. To this end, it is important for the ordained minister to immerse himself in the context of the local congregation in order to be sufficiently aware of modes of contextualizing the gospel. After all, to let the Christian community be a suitable gift for the context, it is important for the ordained minister to have knowledge not only of the congregation but also of the surrounding culture.

Of course, it is possible to differentiate between types of ordained ministry. Some ordained ministers will easily reach out beyond the walls of the church, whereas others find this more difficult. Missionary interaction with non-Christians is easier for some ministers than for others. Obviously, this also has to do with character. The example of the evangelist in the CGKN was mentioned in § 1.1.1. This evangelist is a full-fledged minister of the Word, only the focus of his work is more on and beyond the boundary of the church community than that of an 'ordinary' ordained minister. In view of the current missionary situation, such a distinction may bear fruit. However, it is important to emphasize that fundamentally this can only be a difference of emphasis. After all, by definition, ordained ministry is focused on the missionary calling of the church in the world.

7.3.7 Modes of Ministering

I conclude the section on the tasks of ordained ministry with a comment on the different modes in which ordained ministers can execute them. First, just to be sure, I repeat the remark I made above: the principle of *episkopé* highlights that the ordained minister is not necessarily the one who carries out all tasks mentioned. She is rather the one who has the oversight of and is responsible for the implementation of these tasks in the Christian community. The tasks discussed presuppose the charismatic community of the church.

In addition, Moynagh's thoughts can be helpful for what this means in today's post-Christian culture. He develops his framework of innovation with a view to new church communities, but also has in mind ministers working in existing congregations. This way, he tries to take the mixed-economy church seriously. Ordained ministers who are increasingly faced with missionary challenges as increasing secularization confronts them head on, may consider themselves incapable of adequately fulfilling the different kinds of tasks and work required of them. The classic ministerial tasks remain necessary, but at the same time, the current post-Christian missionary situation also calls for an entrepreneurial approach to being church, where mere proclamation of the gospel from the pulpit no longer suffices. Church leaders who have fewer gifts in this area can, according to Moynagh, play a clear role as *generative*, *enabling*, and *administrative* leaders. They can generatively help to produce new ideas and forms of being church. Or they can enable new forms of being church to take root by making room for them and facilitating the church in carrying out its routine tasks while this transformation takes place. Finally, they can help to loosen structures and procedures to accommodate the new forms of being church by administrative leadership.

In light of this, it is important for churches to consider the question of what form of ministry is needed in their context. Moreover, sufficient attention will also need to be paid to this in training and ongoing education.

7.4 Debated Themes

Having identified the missionary dimensions and missionary intentions of ecclesial, it is now possible to address certain themes that play a role in the (ecumenical) discussion on ecclesial ministry. I begin by dwelling on the concept of apostolicity, not only because it is the most controversial theme, but also because it shows that ecclesial ministry has from the beginning been at the service of the missionary vocation of the church.

7.4.1 Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession

The most important and deepest ecumenical problems concerning ministry are probably apostolicity and apostolic succession. Especially in the ecumenical discussion, these are hot issues because the paths between church traditions diverge on this point. Whereas the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican traditions emphasize the importance of personal apostolic succession,

within the Protestant world the concept is mainly defined as fidelity to apostolic teaching as reflected in Scripture.

For the development of a theology of ministry from a missionary perspective, the concept is also important because it refers - if only etymologically - to the original mission of the apostles in which the church participates. The concept thus has clear missionary overtones. This is also seen in ecumenical discussion, although it plays only a limited role in terms of content. Both BEM/m and CTCV mention the missionary roots of the concept of apostolicity but refrain from giving it substance. In discussing the concept of apostolicity, BEM/m and CTCV focus mainly on the inner life of the church as expressed especially in the structure of ordained ministry.

This focus on the internal structure of the church is even more evident in Van de Beek's case. He tries to link a personal approach to apostolicity with a substantive one, but in both cases the concept refers to the legitimate transfer of authority in the service of the Christological focus of the church and consequently on the internal life of the church.

Guder expresses a very different view. Whereas initially he saw the concept primarily as a yardstick for faithfulness to the apostolic witness, it has come to function for him more and more as the all-important quality of the church. Apostolicity for him relates particularly to the mission of the church and as such is a *nota ecclesia* that must permeate all other *notae ecclesiae*. Hence his proposal to read the Nicene *notae ecclesiae* backwards.

The chapter on ecumenism also featured John Flett's missiological critique on the ecumenical understanding of apostolicity. Flett seeks to redefine the concept of apostolicity. Whereas cross-cultural faith transmission and appropriation are given only limited space in the prevailing ecumenical understanding of apostolicity because the continuity of the church, conceived as a particular culture, prevents cultural diversity from being an essential part of the church's apostolicity, Flett's definition, on the contrary, starts from the diversity of world Christianity. Flett argues that trans-cultural faith transmission and appropriation should be constitutive of the concept of apostolicity. His central assumption is that the mere fact of world Christianity, as it is expressed in a plurality of forms of local appropriations of the gospel, has sufficient theological value to inform, and challenge established elements within the received Western tradition. A constructive definition of apostolicity must take this local appropriation of the gospel and the plurality of its expressions into account.

Flett's definition of apostolicity refers mainly to the act of cross-cultural appropriation and much less to the content of what is transmitted. Apostolicity in terms of content, according to Flett, means that the church finds its identity in the story of Jesus Christ, but what exactly this story entails he does not make clear. Flett's argument therefore somehow raises the question of considering instruments - local, supra-local and perhaps even universal - that guarantee the church's externality in the story of Jesus Christ. These instruments will have to

be legitimized theologically, from the *missio Dei* and not from a supposed normative traditional ecclesial structure.

In this context, I also referred to the distinction between a diachronic, synchronic, and eschatological aspect to apostolicity. The diachronic aspect of apostolicity refers to the continuity of the apostolic faith and alludes to the externality of the church in the story of Jesus. However, apostolicity also has a synchronic aspect that refers to the calling to search for truth in communion with other churches. This search can only be fruitful if there is a basic trust that finds expression in the mutual recognition of the instruments meant to ensure apostolicity. It seems inevitable that the legitimacy of different forms of *episkopé* will be discussed in that context. But these conversations should be conducted from the viewpoint of the *missio ecclesiae*. The eschatological aspect can also be helpful here because it refers to the fact that the full truth will only be revealed in the future and that all truth claims are therefore provisional. This notion should stimulate a humble attitude.

In summary, apostolicity and apostolic succession is about preserving the externality of the church as well as the missionary character of the congregation. In the broad catholicity of world-Christianity, Reformed churches are to participate in a dialogical catholicity – on a local, supra-local and universal level – and pursue common structures of *episkopé* that are instrumental to both the externality of the church in the Christ event and the missionary character of ecclesial communities.

7.4.2 Structure

An issue related to the concept of apostolicity concerns the structure of ecclesial ministry. Indeed, churches that emphasize apostolic succession often link this emphasis to a specific threefold (i.e., episcopal) structure of ecclesial ministry that is normative in ecclesiological terms. It is true that the ecumenical reports recognize the relativity of the threefold ministry structure by noting that even in those churches that have not maintained this ministry structure, the concept of *episkopé* may have been preserved in practice. However, that does not take away from the fact that the threefold structure is used as a normative starting point. In the chapter on ecumenism, it became apparent that this emphasis on a threefold ministry structure is based on a conjectural reading of history. Moreover, there is a considerable risk that structures and forms will become fixed and become an end in themselves. Instead of taking the starting point in old forms in order to achieve unity, churches should rather search for communal ways of taking their missionary calling seriously.

Conversely, of course, the same is true of the threefold ministry structure of the Reformed tradition. In the historical chapter it became clear that the elder has a much less prominent place at the beginning of the Reformed tradition than is often assumed in (Reformed circles). In Calvin's Geneva the elder does not in any case exceed the level of an auxiliary ministry, while also in Bucer's and Łaski's case the ministry of the Word is central. This is evident, for example, in the fact that only ministers of the Word are authorized to administer the sacraments.

The ministries of elder and deacon at the beginning of the Reformed tradition can be seen as expressions of the desire to take the charismatic character of the congregation seriously, not as attempts to relativize the centrality of the ordained ministry. The ministries of elder and deacon can be seen as yardsticks to guard the charismatic character of the congregation. In light of this, it is good that a distinction is made within Reformed ecclesiological literature between the ordained ministry of the Word and non-ordained ministers.

7.4.2.1 Contextually Shaped for Mission

The historical chapter showed that characteristic elements of reformed theology of ministry were differently patterned in Strasbourg, Geneva, and London. In other words, the final structure of ecclesial ministry was for an important part determined by context. However, this contextuality of ecclesial ministry is neither limited to this period nor confined to the Reformed tradition alone. To name three examples: 1. In its design, the early church largely conformed to the structure of the ancient household, with the *Pater Familias* taken for granted as the house church leader.[855] 2. As the church in de Roman Empire grew in the first centuries, it almost naturally mirrored the imperial diocesan structure, together with its associated hierarchy.[856] 3. In the 19th century, (Protestant) churches in the Netherlands were formed by the model of the voluntary association.[857] Thus, history alone suggests that the agility of ecclesial structures is a phenomenon that deserves to be taken seriously in order to be relevant. For instance, Moynagh clearly shows that stubborn adherence to the 19th century rural church model is counterproductive in missionary terms for contemporary churches.

In the pursuit of a contextual ecclesial structure, the starting point should be the missionary calling of the church in the world. Which (ministerial) structure is most suitable for churches in the Netherlands at this particular point in time is difficult to answer. The cultural landscape is geographically and generationally so diversified that there seems to be no specific organizational form that is most obvious. Moreover, there is a great deal of dissimilarity within the ecclesial realm itself, the effects of secularization being felt more strongly in some places than others. For example, church communities in so-called Biblebelt regions may be able to cope with traditional church structures for quite a while, while congregations in highly secularized areas are forced to seek alternative forms of organization.

Yet a trend is discernible in which small communities are becoming more prominent. These are not sociological developments, but missionary considerations. In particular, Moynagh advocates small communities in which all individuals involved participate in the search for a contextual embodiment of the gospel. He expressly distances himself from large church communities that

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[855] See Gehring, *House Church*.
[856] Singor, *Constantijn*, 376.
[857] Heitink, *Biografie van de dominee*, 116 ff.

are primarily focused on maintaining their expensive buildings and complex lifestyles. Although Guder is less adamant about this, for him the image of the church is also that of a relatively small community within which the priesthood of all believers can truly flourish. So, it seems that from a missionary point of view the emphasis is increasingly on the small and mobile group as the starting point for ecclesiology. This does not mean that large church communities have necessarily become obsolete, but it does mean that within these large congregations there must be an emphatic focus on creating small, close-knit, and missionary groups.

To be clear, the pursuit of a sound structure for the church and its ministries is not a matter of simple pragmatic considerations but concerns a thoroughly theological enterprise. In this regard, Van de Beek's emphasis on contextuality falls short, as he is concerned only with what he perceives to be theologically neutral issues. But there is no such thing as a disembodied gospel that can be preserved as a supra-historical kernel in a protective structure that is shaped entirely on the basis of purely practical deliberations. By definition, the gospel is always embodied and as such contextually enters a particular culture to reflect in its very structure the interpretation of the gospel. The contextuality of the church's structure is thus a theological premise. Rather than morphological fundamentalism, this means a degree of mobility in order to respond to the different contexts in which the church finds itself. Moynagh's relational and conversational concept of church can be helpful in thinking about the structure of the church, by considering whether the chosen structure does justice to all four relationships mentioned.

Furthermore, ecclesial embodying is not an easily applicable roadmap but requires a dialogical process in which the universality of the gospel's message of salvation is not sought in a uniform embodiment, but rather in a multiplicity of cultural expressions interconnected by an ongoing conversation about the gospel's normative content.

Finally, ecclesial agility and diversity should be embedded in a dialogical notion of catholicity in which forms of *episkopé* should be explored that guarantee the externality of the church in the story of Jesus Christ.

7.4.2.2 Personal, collegial, and communal

An important principle for the design of a church structure is that it should have personal, collegial, and communal dimensions. In the chapter on ecumenism, these three dimensions emerged as tools for finding the right balance between the personal and communal sides of ecclesial ministry. Although the terminology chosen is not quite in sync with what is common in the Reformed tradition, I choose to adhere to this threefold dimension because of ecumenical considerations.

From a Reformed perspective the personal dimension of ecclesial ministry could help to underline the freedom of the proclamation of the gospel that originates in God’s initiative. It is God who calls and empowers the person of the minister of the Word and in the end his words and actions are not determined

by de majority of a governing body, but she is free to proclaim the gospel in her own fashion. There is an important caveat to the personal dimension of ordained ministry from a Reformed perspective, though. In the end, it is not the person as such who points to Christ, but only in so far as that person exercises the ministry of the Word. The person of the minister gains credibility and authority only to the extent that he is serving the proclamation of the Word. I will return to this under the heading of representation.

In addition to a personal dimension, ecclesial ministry also has a collegial dimension. Unlike in the Reformed tradition, collegiality in ecumenical discussion refers not to the input of non-ordained members of the congregation, but to the collegiality of ministers of the Word among themselves. Mutual collegiality of ordained ministers in Reformed ministerial practice is not a given and in practice local ministers often work as solo pastors in their own congregation. However, the Company of Pastors in Calvin's Geneva practically functioned in a collegial way. It would be conceivable that a collegial body of ministers functions beyond the local level works in the field of policy preparation. In addition, the concept of collegiality could be made fruitful for specialty-based cooperation at the supra-local level, involving ordained ministers using each other's distinct qualities to serve the churches in a particular region.

The communal dimension, finally, corresponds most closely to the collegiality of the Reformed tradition. Reformed elders and deacons, who are elected by the congregation and represent the faith community, are continually involved in policymaking through the church council. However, even within Reformed churches there is sometimes an aristocratic tendency, which in practice places the leadership in the hands of only a small, privileged group. Therefore, Reformed churches, too, must seek ways in which the communal dimension of the church can be best served.

It is important to approach the collegial and communal dimensions as modes of taking seriously the charismatic nature of the congregation. Moreover, taking the collegial and communal dimensions seriously can be seen as a witness to the power of the gospel that is about relationality.

Considering the subservience of the church's structure to the missionary vocation of the church and the threefold dimension of ecclesial ministry, Reformed churches might consider moving toward establishing the ministry of bishop. This is not a matter of principle to the extent that *episkopé* can be ecumenically shaped responsibly even without the specific ministry of the bishop, but the episcopate could indeed be of service to the well-being of the church. The chapters on ecumenical discussion and Van de Beek highlighted ecumenical, pastoral, practical and missionary motives for this.

7.4.2.3 The Evangelist

Here is also the place to return to the ministry of the evangelist, as it appeared in the review of the discussion in the CGKN. The increasing secularization of the Netherlands and the concomitant growing sense of missionary urgency suggest

that the work of the ordained minister will increasingly resemble the task now assigned to evangelists in the CGKN. This seems not only a logical development because of the increasing missionary urgency but is also theologically fully justifiable. Ministry is always service to the Word, although it can fan out into a multitude of ministries. Both the evangelist and traditional pastors are ministers of the Word and thus share the same ministry. The distinction is not principled, but practical. The evangelist focuses on serving the Word among people who are not or less familiar with the gospel, or in church communities that only recently emerged, while pastors, as shepherds and teachers, focus more on the church context through pastoral guidance and equipping. Given the increasing marginalization of the church and the growing awareness of the missionary calling of the church, it is entirely understandable that the traditional minister of the Word is moving more in the direction of the evangelist, although some degree of difference may always remain.

7.4.3 Representation

In a theology of ministry that strives to be ecumenical, it is important to pay attention to the concept of representation. The concept is a delicate one within Reformed theology of ministry because it is quickly associated with a supposed Roman Catholic ontological conception of ministry in which the priest allegedly substitutes for Christ. Such an approach became visible in Van de Beek's case. Based on a sacramental ecclesiology, he places a strong emphasis on the representational dimension of ecclesial ministry. Although Van de Beek is one-sided in his approach, he does rightly call attention to the symbolic dimension of ecclesial ministry. Church and ministry are not only instruments, but also places where communion with God can be celebrated and the new eschatological reality - albeit broken - can be experienced. Van de Beek, however, approaches the concept of representation too massively as an inherent feature of ordained ministry. Certain qualifications of the representational character of ministry are needed that can help prevent an unhealthy distinction between clergy and laity. I am thinking particularly of the liturgical rooting of ordained ministry.

This liturgical rooting can be made fruitful for the concept of representation. The continuum between clericalism on the one hand and egalitarianism on the other may be helpful here. On the one hand, Reformed theology of ministry cannot do without the concept of representation because it points to the fact that in the proclamation of the gospel and the ministry of the sacraments Christ himself comes to the congregation through the words and actions of the minister. In the liturgy, the ordained minister, being commissioned by the Holy Spirit to bring the community of the church to faith, is a symbol of Christ. An ordained minister does not replace or substitute Christ, as if Christ himself were absent, but she represents Christ in the sense that she continually points to him. Where Reformed theology of ministry is content with

less, it does not do justice to the fact that God by his Spirit makes use of 'puny men risen from the dust' and that God himself is present in Word and sacrament.

On the other hand, a Reformed theology of ministry must guard against overcharging the concept of representation. From a Reformed perspective, the concept of representation easily reeks of substitution, with the minister taking the place of Christ and being ontologically different from lay members of the church.

Rooting ecclesial ministry in liturgy prevents the representational aspect of ordained ministry from becoming disconnected from the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Ordained ministry is symbolic only insofar as it moves within the bandwidth of the Christ event as celebrated in liturgy.

Moynagh's relational approach can also be helpful with regard to the concept of representation. Indeed, the representative function of ordained ministry is not one-sidedly limited to the relationship between ministry and congregation but concerns all four sets of relationships: The ordained minister's representative function concerns the relationship to God, the world, the world-church, and the fellowship within the local community. Particularly in the latter two relationships, ordained ministry with a representative dimension can also function as a focus of unity.

7.4.4 Authority

An important part of theology of ministry concerns the issue of ministerial authority. This emerged at several points in the study. The ecumenical reports speak about how ministerial authority should be exercised, namely in a servant-like manner in imitation of Christ. However, in terms of content, they offered little about exactly what authority means. The concept of authority also came up in the chapter on Moynagh. Moynagh challenges church leaders to work with an *adventus* view of the future. This does not require hierarchical authority but rather a bottom-up approach where the leader is not afraid to explore new possibilities. However, this also offers little about the content of ministerial authority.

Taken together the liturgical rooting of ministry, the image of the church as an interpretive community and the charismatic structure of the congregation can also shed light on the concept of ministerial authority.

7.4.4.1 Interpretive authority

In the church as an interpretive community both the minister and the members live under the authority of the gospel. This is the point Guder makes with his concept of ministerial authority. The minister's authority lies in invoking the authority of Scripture that is over and above him and the ordained minister's role is to direct his hearers to the gospel. Interpreting the Word is an activity of the entire community of believers who bow together under the Word. In doing so, however, the community makes use of ministers in whom it has recognized

the charismatic gifts of scriptural interpretation. The authority of the ordained minister is the authority of an interpreter who, through his knowledge of and feeling for the Bible and tradition, facilitates the interpretation process and gives the community and its members immediate and sufficient reasons to act. The authority of ordained ministry thus emerges from the charismatically structured congregation.

This concept of authority also has potential from an ecumenical point of view. CTCV made it clear that authority is closely associated with the proclamation of the Word, the ministry of the sacraments, and pastoral guidance of the congregation. In line with its liturgical rooting, the ecumenical concept of ordained ministry closely ties authority to the Word and the sacraments.

7.4.4.2 Political authority

The line of the church as an interpretive community can also be extended to the exercise of church discipline. The authority to excommunicate members of the church belongs to the entire community. For Bucer and Łaski this was clearly the case, for Calvin less so. Calvin's undervaluing of the charismatic community may be understood from the situation of a people's church in Geneva, but in doing so he did not give due weight to the fundamentally Reformed conviction that the keys of the kingdom lie in the proclamation of the gospel and therefore belong to the community of believers.

Unlike Guder, authority should not be understood in a merely pedagogical way. Guder is correct that the church has a pedagogical authority, at least if by that he means that it is directed towards understanding and insight into the truth of the gospel, but he seems to ignore that the church also has a political dimension in which insight and obedience do not always align. In the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, the church acts in a political way to protect the integrity of its witness to the kingdom of God. The political dimension of ordained ministry is also entirely intertwined with the charismatic structure of the church. When it comes to ecclesial discipline, ordained ministry is called to lead a common interpretive process of whether, how and by whom the integrity of the church as a witnessing community is violated. By emphasizing the integrity of the witnessing community, the missionary dimension of the church also comes back into the limelight here.

7.4.5 Ordination

It is appropriate for an ecumenically sensitive theology of ministry to also address the matter ordination of ministers. According to the ecumenical reports, ordination makes visible that the ministry owes its origin to Christ as the source of its commission. BEM/m explains the ordination by three words: *invocation*, *sign*, and *acknowledgement*. Invocation and acknowledgement are aspects that also feature in traditional Reformed ordination rites.

Invocation reminds those involved of the continual dependence of the ordinand on the work of the Spirit. Precisely this invocation should have a large place in a Reformed theology of ministry that is embedded in a charismatic conception of the community of the church. However, it is important that the laying on of hands is then not seen as a form of transmitting the gift of the Spirit or of a transmission of authority (*potestas*) that is not grounded in the Word.

Acknowledgement points to the indispensable role of the community of the church when it comes to ordained ministry. In particular, Guder pointed this out in his explanation of the legitimation and constitution of ecclesial ministry. Legitimation can be considered to be an expression of the church's examination of the gifting and calling of candidate ministers. Constitution refers to the fact that ecclesial ministry is also dependent on the confirmation and acceptance of the church at large and more specifically by a particular congregation of Christians who are willing to submit to the authority of the minister. Apart from that willing acceptance there can be no ministry because ministerial authority does not only require legitimisation but also constitution.

Only the sign character seems to contradict Reformed practice. However, since ordination as a sign is ecumenically clearly distinguished it from the universally recognized sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and since reformers like Bucer and Calvin were ambivalent when it comes to the question whether ordination should be regarded as a sacrament, this sign character need not be as problematic as it might appear at first glance.

Ordination as a ritual sign can have a place in Reformed theology or ministry because invocation points to the minister's continued dependence on the Spirit and acknowledgement to the need for the church's acceptance of his ministry. Moreover, opting for ordination as a ritual act also strengthens ties with the wider church.

7.4.6 Training of Future Ministers

A final aspect that needs attention is the training of ordained ministers. In light of the missionary calling of the church in a post Christendom culture, educational requirements for future ministers of the Word need to be reconsidered. It seems necessary that in the training of ministers of the word considerably more attention than usual is to be given to the public and missionary dimension of ordained ministry.

Given that the increasing entrepreneurial demands and the increased importance of the public and missionary dimension in the training of ministers of the Word are a relatively recent phenomenon, it is obvious that there is little to say about them from the Reformed tradition. Among the contemporary voices, however, there is plenty of useful material, particularly from Guder and Moynagh. The other two contemporary voices offer few useful starting points. With respect to the two ecumenical reports, this is understandable, given the nature of ecclesiastical documents. Van de Beek's position is different: that there are few leads for him in this area has to do with the fact that he has hardly any attention for the missionary and public dimension of ordained ministry.

7.4.6.1 Ecclesially Embedded Education

According to Moynagh, the church is in dire need of a radical turn-about and there is ever less need for traditional ministers who defend the status quo and more for entrepreneurs who are open to the innovative nature of God's coming kingdom and hold together the divine and human orientations of the church. Moreover, a radical reimagination of ecclesial life will cause church communities to become much less predictable, making the 'select, train and deploy' model less useful.

Moynagh argues for an alternative approach that consists of encouraging, recognizing, and supporting. A local church, denomination, or network might encourage people to consider whether they are called to founding new church communities, recognizing them at various stages of their journey and providing them with ongoing training and other support. The vocational journey of the founders would thus be nurtured as it unfolds. Throughout the process, they would be offered training, coaching and other support appropriate to the moment. Although Moynagh focuses on the founders of new ecclesial communities, his thoughts on education are also useful for 'traditional' ministry. One simply needs to exchange the word 'founder' for 'ordained minister'.

The strength of Moynagh's model lies in the strong connection he makes between the training of candidates and the concrete practice of church life. Whereas theological training runs the risk of training candidates in an ivory tower, in Moynagh's model there is a focus on concrete practice from the start. This means that at the end of their training, candidates in Moynagh's model are probably better equipped to deal with the specific challenges of daily church practice than their equals who are trained in seminary or at the academy.

In this, the role of the academy and the seminary is not entirely clear. It is precisely this aspect that deserves further elaboration because theological education involves more than training and coaching. What is the role of the theological academy here? Guder's thoughts on ecclesial ministry are helpful in this respect.

7.4.6.2 A Missional Reconsideration of the Theological Curriculum

In Guder's case, two main considerations became apparent. First, he draws attention to a missiological reconsideration of the theological curriculum. All theological sub-disciplines as taught in the academy are to be thought through from the *missio Dei*. That means that for each sub-discipline – biblical theology, systematic theology, church history and practical theology – the question needs to be asked how it contributes to the missionary calling of the church. The traditional curriculum does not need to be dismantled, but it does need missional renovation.

Next, the learning goals of theological education should be oriented to the intended communities served by the graduates as their equippers, rather than as their professional ministers. It is only logical to give these intended communities a significant role in theological instruction as well. Theological

education is not meant to be confined to an ivory tower of academic complacency but should be embedded far more in the concrete lives of actual churches.

The purpose of academic education of ordained ministers is to enable them to lead the church communities in which they are placed in a process of spiritual discernment and interpretation to shape Christian practices and communities. The theological academy should therefore provide future ministers with the necessary theological tools to make more profound and informed arguments on issues of Christian practice that currently concern them than their church members who have not received theological training.

7.4.6.3 Focal Points

In light of the above, there are several focal points for the training of future ministers of the Word.

First, it is important to rethink the entire theological curriculum from the perspective of the *missio Dei*. The question how the education and formation of future ministers contributes to the missionary calling of the church needs to be taken seriously. The words of Martin Kähler, who, more than a century ago(!), said that mission is the mother of all theology, still need to be heard. It is impermissible for future ministers to be primarily trained for the maintenance of a particular ecclesial institution or culture. Therefore, all individual theological disciplines should be thought through from the point of view of how they contribute to the church's missionary calling in the world. Consequently, the curricular objectives of theological education for ministry should focus on the intended missional communities served by future ministers.

Second, it is crucial that, more than is currently the case, the link between church practice an academic education is established from the outset. Both Moynagh and Guder point to the need to embed the training of future ministers in local congregations, i.e., in the concrete practice of the church. Indisputably, the theological academy remains indispensable for the training of future ministers of the Word, but churches cannot fully outsource the training of their ministers to institutions that focus mainly on imparting knowledge and less on spiritual and missional formation.[858] Particularly in the field of spiritual and missionary formation, churches will have to take their own responsibility and – preferably in consultation with (academic) educational institutions – search for ways in which future ministers within ecclesial communities can be best prepared for their future service in church and the world. This may include forms of mentoring, coaching, supervision and, above all, intentional communities of peers that integrate academic education with corporate practices that are aimed at (personal) spiritual formation and development.

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[858] Smith's criticism of Christian universities in general - namely that they are primarily concerned with *in*formation rather than with *for*mation - applies just as much or perhaps even more strongly to Christian academies focused on education of future ministers. See: Smith, *Desiring*, 215 ff.

Next, more than before, future ministers must be educated in cultural studies and psychology to acquire the necessary tools that will enable them to lead the community in a communal process of interpretive discernment. While immersion in the world of Scripture and familiarity with the theology of the church is of eminent importance for theological candidates, its relevance will be lost to many of their future members if this is not accompanied by the competence to relate it to the cultural context of the ecclesial community. Future ministers will thus need to be trained in spiritual discernment and receive the necessary tools to formulate reasoned and well-informed arguments when it comes to defining and interpreting Christian practices. Again, it is important that this cultural training for spiritual discernment takes place in intentional communities that, as training grounds, prepare candidates for the dialogical interpretive processes that take place in their future congregations.

Finally, it is important that in training ministers of the Word much more attention is given to the public and missionary dimension of their ministry. More than in the past, ministers of the Word are being asked to have an eye and a heart for the entrepreneurial aspect of being church. This does not necessarily mean that ministers of the Word are trained as entrepreneurs themselves, but it does mean that they are taught skills to encourage and lead the congregation in this. In this context, it is important that theological faculties and seminaries consider education in generative, enabling, and administrative ways of leading.

7.4.6.4 Academically trained?

In this context it is also good to comment briefly on the possibility of non-academically trained ordained ministers. In the first chapter it became clear that the discussion surrounding ecclesial ministry in the PKN was initially prompted by the question of whether non-academically trained theologians could also be admitted to the ordained ministry of the church. Eventually this question was answered in the affirmative and the PKN decided to allow non-academically trained theologians to be admitted to ordained ministry. A terminological distinction was advocated here, whereby the non-academically trained minister is called *pastor* (pastor), and the academically trained minister is called *predikant* (preacher). There is also a place for non-academically trained ministers of the Word within the CGKN in the form of the ministry of the evangelist.

These examples highlight that non-academically trained ordained ministers already exist in church practice. This development aligns with priority of the concrete need of contextually responsive Christian communities in a search for the most appropriate form of ecclesial ministry. In some cases, a community is better served by an entrepreneurial minister who is not necessarily academically trained, while in other cases there is a need for an academically educated pastor who can intellectually guide the congregation in complex missionary and moral challenges of postmodern secular society. The starting point for answering the question of whether an academically trained theologian is preferable should be the contextual need of the local Christian community. In practice, academically

trained and non-academically trained theologians will probably be complementary.

A closer link between the education of (future) ministers and the practice of the local church can be helpful for this in the long run. Precisely in the concrete context and practice of the ecclesial community within which the (future) minister works and is trained, it may become evident what gifts the candidate in question has received and what form of training is most appropriate for him in view of the needs of the concrete community.

7.5 In Conclusion

In summary, ordained ministry is about serving the church's contextual participation in the *missio Dei*. Based on a balanced eschatology and a desire for ecclesial unity, it is crucial that churches look for ways in which *episkopé* can be implemented in ecumenically responsible ways and how justice be done to the charismatic embedding and liturgical rooting of ordained ministry. The main tasks of ordained ministry include anchoring the church in the Christ event through proclamation and celebration of the sacraments, activating the charismatic potential of the community, and acting as an interpretive guide in a communal and individual pursuit of a credible embodiment of the gospel in the world. The ministerial structure chosen for this purpose should serve the church's missionary calling and not depend on a conjectural reading of history.

The heart of the matter is that ecclesial ministry is all about serving the Divine self-donation as it is expressed in the liturgy of the church every time the Eucharist is celebrated. In the end, ordained ministry is all about sharing the body of Christ in the world.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

This research concerns an attempt to explore how Reformed churches in the Netherlands can meet the twofold challenge of mission and ecumenism. The research question for this study is:

> *How can an ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ordained ministry serve the church's missionary calling in the Netherlands?*

In chapter 1, I began with the challenges as they present themselves. Based on a brief survey of ecclesiological discussions in Reformed denominations in the Netherlands, I demonstrated that there are two major challenges for the Reformed theology of ministry. The first challenge concerns the need to rethink ecclesiology from the *missio Dei*. The second challenge concerns the need to develop an ecumenically informed theology of ministry. A review of the most relevant literature illustrated that there is a gap in this area.

Route

In chapter 2 I turned to the origins of Reformed theology of ministry to gain more clarity about what is meant by the adjective 'Reformed'. Here I paid attention to Martin Bucer, John Calvin and John Łaski, because these three persons, each in their own way, stood at the bedrock of theology of ministry within the Dutch Reformed tradition. The result consisted of a cross section of Reformed theology of ministry in its initial stages, with a focus on the interaction between theoretical ecclesiology and ecclesial practice. A few things stood out:

It was apparent that Reformed theology of ministry is situated somewhere on the continuum between a clericalist approach on the one hand and an egalitarianist one on the other. Where exactly it is on this spectrum depends on the socio-political context and whether the congregation is organized around the voluntarist principle or, on the contrary, has the character of a people's church. Next, Reformed ecclesiology in this stage has a clear ecumenical slant, both fundamentally theological and in concrete practice. Also, it was also evident that the elder occupied a position less pronounced than is regularly suggested in Dutch Reformed circles. The liturgical role is the defining characteristic of ordained ministry. Finally, both Bucer and Łaski developed the idea of the church as an interpretive community that, under the leadership of ordained ministry, was searching for the meaning of Scripture in their context. The ministry of the Word, according to them, is not designed to make the interpretive activity of the community superfluous, but, on the contrary, to simulate and feed the communal process of discernment.

After listening to the past, I focused on the present. First, in chapter 3, I turned to ecumenical reports on ministry from the World Council of Churches. I took my starting point in the report *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* because its statements on ministry are embedded in a wider ecclesiological framework than in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. I started with a missiological assessment and concluded that its *koinonia* ecclesiology and its missionary focus is mainly self-referential. Nevertheless, the discussion of both reports provided valuable insights for a Reformed theology of ministry that strives to be ecumenically informed. I am thinking particularly of the concept of *episkopé* that refers to certain indispensable elements of ecclesial ministry.

Then in chapter 4 I turned my attention to Guder's missionary ecclesiology and theology of ministry. Guder, as a Reformed theologian, can be considered as a disciple of Newbigin and Barth. In their wake, he thinks through ecclesiology from the *missio Dei*. For Guder 'witness' is the mode of the church's participation in the *missio Dei*. The result is an ecclesiology that is strongly focused on the forming and equipping of witnessing communities in the world.

In chapter 5 I turned my attention to the Reformed theologian Van de Beek, whose idiosyncratic ecclesiology and theology of ministry was interesting for the purposes of this study precisely because of its catholizing tendency. Van de Beek's rejection of the concept *missio Dei* formed a counterweight that helped to highlight possible weaknesses of an overemphasis on the concept.

Finally, in chapter 6, I listened to Moynagh. He, too, wants to think through ecclesiology radically from the point of view of the missionary vocation of the church. Although Moynagh does not develop a theology of ministry in the strict sense of the word, his thoughts deserve attention because of their rootedness in ecclesial practice and their relevance for a church longing to be missionary in a post-Christian culture. Moynagh predominantly takes an anthropological approach to being church, emphasizing its conversational nature.

Presuppositions

Having travelled this path, it was possible to identify the presuppositions, principles, tasks, and themes of Reformed theology of ordained ministry in the final chapter. First, I identified four ecclesiological key presuppositions. An ecumenically informed Reformed theology of ministry from a missionary perspective needs to be firmly rooted in an ecclesiology that is *missional*, *contextual*, *eschatological*, and *ecumenical*.

The *missional* presupposition precludes the church from being self-centred. By nature, the church and its ministry participate in God's generous movement of love towards this world. The *contextual* presupposition implies that the diversity of ecclesial expressions is not the result of a pragmatic approach that is tolerated as a preliminary step towards institutional uniformity, but rather a principled premise of an ecclesiology that, following in the footsteps of the apostles, is serious about trans-cultural faith transmission. The *eschatological* presupposition refers to the need for a sound eschatological balance between the 'already' and the 'not yet' character of the kingdom of God. To avoid a one-

sided eschatological orientation, churches would do well to explicitly relate their practice to the Christ event as witnessed by the New Testament. Finally, the *ecumenical* presupposition is in large part driven by the belief that the missionary calling of the church is served by the unity of the church. Moreover, the cultural diversity of world-Christianity and its theological processing is hugely important for a church that does not want to retreat into isolation with its accompanying ecclesiological hubris.

Principles

In addition to the foundational theological and ecclesiological presuppositions, this study has also identified some theological guiding principles for ecclesial ministry.

A first important principle concerns the embedding of ecclesial ministry in the charismatic community of the church. In Reformed ecclesiology, theology of ministry is developed from pneumatology and is entirely at the service of the charismatic structure of the church.

The second principle concerns the liturgical rooting of ordained ministry. Ordained ministry is called into being by the Spirit working in the charismatic community of the church, but then takes root in the liturgy where the Christ event is celebrated.

A third important principle concerns the *episkopé* nature of ordained ministry. In essence, the term *episkopé* refers to the oversight necessary to ensure the externality of the church in Christ. The structure of this *episkopé* will have to be legitimized theologically, from the *missio Dei*.

A fourth principle concerns the idea that ecclesial ministry should function as a focus of unity. Ecclesial ministry understood as a focus of unity concerns the calling for ordained ministers to not only promote the internal unity of their own congregation, but also to explicitly seek unity with other church communities in their own setting.

Tasks

From the discussed presuppositions and principles, it is possible to look at the main tasks of ordained ministry and thus uncover its missionary intentions.

The first task of ordained ministry is to anchor the community of the church in the gospel as expressed by the apostles and written down in Scripture. This task is closely linked to the concept of apostolicity and its twofold meaning. First, apostolicity refers to the content of the apostles' teaching and its use presupposes that a church is only worthy of its name if it is faithful to these apostolic premises. In addition, however, the term also refers to the church's calling to follow the apostles and to engage in the process of cross-cultural appropriation of the gospel and the communities that embody it. This way, focusing communities on the Christ event in the wake of the apostles not only refers to the content of the gospel but also to the mode of its embodiment.

The second task of ordained ministers is to activate the charismatic potential of the community. The church living out of the Triune self-donation

should not ungratefully leave the gifts it receives from its Lord unopened or keep them eagerly to itself but should seek ways to energize the charismatic capacity of the congregation and its members in view of the church's calling in the world. Therefore, the task of ordained ministry is to activate and coordinate the charismatic potential of the community with a view to the credible embodiment of the gospel in its own context.

A third task flows directly from the previous one and concerns the understanding of the church as an interpretive community. The minister of the Word can be seen as an interpretive guide who helps the congregation to understand the Christ event in its context and find its place in it. This means that the minister, based on his knowledge of and feeling for the Bible and tradition, should stimulate and lead the interpretive dialogue within the community.

A fourth important task of ordained ministry concerns the equipping and training of church members to become faithful disciples of Jesus. In view of the still increasing secular and post-Christian status of Western Europe, Reformed churches and ministers in the Netherlands are no longer able to assume obvious cultural and ecclesial forms for the spiritual and missional formation of their members, but they should instead reflect on the crucial question of how they can creatively contribute to the cultivation of a Christian character for missionary witness in their own context.

For a large part, the tasks as I have presented them take place within the parameters of the church. Still, these tasks are eminently missionary because they are focused on the formation of a community and followers of Jesus who, in the concrete reality of the world, credibly embody the gospel. There is another principal aspect to this practical focus. If all the missionary weight is placed on the shoulders of ordained ministers, there is a significant danger that mission becomes clericalized. Of course, this does not mean that the ordained minister is imprisoned in the narrow but seemingly safe world of the church. First, it would be beneficial for the reflection on the content of the gospel if the ordained minister deliberately performs certain ministerial tasks beyond the confines of the church. Second, since the ordained minister's task is to guide the Christian community in the pursuit of a credible embodiment of the gospel in its locality it is important for the ordained minister to immerse himself in the cultural context of the local congregation to be sufficiently aware of modes of contextualizing the gospel.

In view of the current missionary situation, a distinction between an 'ordinary' ordained minister and an evangelist may bear fruit. However, it is important to emphasize that fundamentally this can only be a difference of emphasis. After all, by definition, ordained ministry is focused on the missionary calling of the church in the world.

Finally, the classic ministerial tasks remain necessary, but at the same time, the current post-Christian missionary situation also calls for an entrepreneurial approach to being church, where mere proclamation of the gospel from the

pulpit does not suffice. Church leaders who have fewer gifts in this area can play a clear role as *generative*, *enabling*, and *administrative* leaders.

Themes

After having identified the missionary dimensions and missionary intentions of ecclesial ministry, it was possible to address certain themes that play a role in the (ecumenical) discussion on ecclesial ministry.

The most prominent ecumenical challenges concerning ministry are probably apostolicity and apostolic succession. Both concepts are about preserving the externality of the church as well as the missionary character of the congregation. In the broad catholicity of world-Christianity, Reformed churches are to participate in a dialogical catholicity – on a local, supra-local and universal level – and pursue common structures of *episkopé* that are instrumental to both the externality of the church in the Christ event and the missionary character of ecclesial communities.

An issue related to the concept of apostolicity concerns the structure of ecclesial ministry. Indeed, churches that emphasize apostolic succession often link this emphasis to a specific threefold (i.e., episcopal) structure of ecclesial ministry that is normative in ecclesiological terms. Conversely, of course, the same is true of the threefold ministry structure of the Reformed tradition. However, in the pursuit of a contextual ecclesial structure, the starting point should not be a conjectural reading of history, but the missionary calling of the church in the world. A trend is discernible in which small communities are becoming more prominent. These are not sociological developments, but missionary considerations. This makes sense since the pursuit of a sound structure for the church and its ministries is not a matter of simple pragmatic considerations but concerns a thoroughly theological enterprise.

An important principle for the design of a church structure is that it should have *personal*, *collegial*, and *communal* dimensions. From a Reformed perspective the *personal* dimension of ecclesial ministry could help to underline the freedom of the proclamation of the gospel that originates in God's initiative. Unlike in the Reformed tradition, *collegiality* in ecumenical discussion refers not to the input of non-ordained members of the congregation, but to the collegiality of ministers of the Word among themselves. This way, the concept of collegiality could be made fruitful for specialty-based cooperation at the supra- local level, involving ordained ministers using each other's distinct qualities to serve the churches in a particular region. The *communal* dimension, finally, corresponds most closely to the presbyterial collegiality of the Reformed tradition. Even within Reformed churches there is sometimes an aristocratic tendency, which in practice places the leadership in the hands of only a small, privileged group. Therefore, Reformed churches, too, must seek ways in which the communal dimension of the church can be best served.

Furthermore, in a theology of ministry that strives to be ecumenical, it is important to pay attention to the concept of representation. Rooting ecclesial ministry in liturgy prevents the representational aspect of ordained ministry

from becoming disconnected from the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Ordained ministry is symbolic only insofar as it moves within the bandwidth of the Christ event as celebrated in liturgy.

Another important part of theology of ministry concerns the issue of ministerial authority. Taken together the liturgical rooting of ministry, the image of the church as an interpretive community and the charismatic structure of the congregation can also shed light on the concept of ministerial authority. The authority of the ordained minister is the authority of an interpreter who, through his knowledge of and feeling for the Bible and tradition, facilitates the interpretation process and gives the community and its members sufficient reasons to act. The political dimension of ordained ministry is also entirely intertwined with the charismatic structure of the church. For instance, when it comes to ecclesial discipline, ordained ministry is called to lead a common interpretive process of whether, how and by whom the integrity of the church as a witnessing community is violated.

It is also appropriate for an ecumenically sensitive theology of ministry to also address the ordination of ministers. Ordination as a ritual sign can have a place in Reformed theology or ministry because invocation points to the minister's continued dependence on the Spirit and acknowledgement to the need for the church's acceptance of his ministry. Moreover, opting for ordination as a ritual act also strengthens ties with the wider church.

A final aspect that needs attention is the training of ordained ministers. First, it is important to rethink the entire theological curriculum from the perspective of the *missio Dei*. The question how the education and formation of future ministers contributes to the missionary calling of the church needs to be taken seriously. Second, it is crucial that, more than is currently the case, the link between church practice an academic education is established from the outset. Third, more than before, future ministers must be educated in cultural studies and psychology to acquire the necessary tools that will enable them to lead the community in a communal process of interpretive discernment. Finally, it is important that in training ministers of the Word much more attention is given to the public and missionary dimension of their ministry.

The starting point for answering the question of whether an academically trained theologian is preferable should be the contextual need of the local Christian community. In practice, academically trained and non-academically trained theologians will probably be complementary.

In summary

Ordained ministry is about serving the church's contextual participation in the *missio Dei*. Based on a balanced eschatology and a desire for ecclesial unity, it is crucial that churches look for ways in which *episkopé* can be implemented in ecumenically responsible ways and how justice be done to the charismatic embedding and liturgical rooting of ordained ministry. The main tasks of ordained ministry include anchoring the church in the Christ event through proclamation and celebration of the sacraments, activating the charismatic

potential of the community, and acting as an interpretive guide in a communal and individual pursuit of a credible embodiment of the gospel in the world. The ministerial structure chosen for this purpose should serve the church's missionary calling and not depend on a conjectural reading of history.

The heart of the matter is that ecclesial ministry is all about serving the Divine self-donation as it is expressed in the liturgy of the church every time the Eucharist is celebrated. In the end, ordained ministry is all about sharing the body of Christ in the world.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Dit onderzoek betreft een poging om te verkennen hoe gereformeerde kerken in Nederland de missionaire en de oecumenische uitdagingen kunnen aangaan. De onderzoeksvraag luidt:

> Hoe kan een oecumenisch onderbouwde gereformeerde theologie van het geordineerde ambt de missionaire roeping van de kerk in Nederland dienen?

In hoofdstuk 1 begon ik met de uitdagingen zoals die zich aandienen. Op basis van een beknopt overzicht van ecclesiologische discussies in gereformeerde kerkgenootschappen in Nederland bleek dat er twee grote uitdagingen zijn voor gereformeerde ambtstheologie. De eerste uitdaging betreft de noodzaak om de ecclesiologie opnieuw te doordenken vanuit de *missio Dei*. De tweede uitdaging betreft de noodzaak om een oecumenisch onderbouwde theologie van het ambt te ontwikkelen. Een overzicht van de meest relevante literatuur liet zien dat er een leemte is op dit gebied.

Route

In hoofdstuk 2 richtte ik me op de oorsprong van de gereformeerde theologie van het ambt om meer duidelijkheid te krijgen over wat bedoeld wordt met het bijvoeglijk naamwoord 'gereformeerd'. Ik schonk aandacht aan Martin Bucer, Johannes Calvijn en Jan Łaski, omdat deze drie theologen, ieder op hun eigen manier, aan de basis stonden van de ambtstheologie binnen de gereformeerde traditie in Nederland. Het resultaat bestond uit een dwarsdoorsnede van de gereformeerde ambtstheologie in het beginstadium, met een focus op de interactie tussen theoretische ecclesiologie en kerkelijke praktijk. Een paar dingen vielen op.

Het werd duidelijk dat gereformeerde ambtstheologie zich ergens op het continuüm bevindt tussen een clericale benadering enerzijds en een egalitaire anderzijds. Waar precies hangt af van de sociaal-politieke context en van de vraag of de gemeenschap georganiseerd is rond het principe van vrijwilligheid of juist het karakter heeft van een volkskerk. Daarnaast etaleerde de gereformeerde ecclesiologie in dit stadium een duidelijk oecumenische inslag, zowel fundamenteel theologisch als in de concrete praktijk. Ook werd duidelijk dat de ouderling een minder uitgesproken positie innam dan regelmatig wordt gesuggereerd binnen de gereformeerde traditie in Nederland. De liturgische rol bleek het onderscheidende kenmerk van het geordineerde ambt te zijn. Tenslotte ontwikkelden zowel Bucer als Łaski het idee van de kerk als een interpretatieve gemeenschap die, onder leiding van het geordineerde ambt, op

zoek was naar de betekenis van de Schrift in hun context. De bediening van het Woord was volgens hen niet bedoeld om de interpreterende activiteit van de gemeenschap overbodig te maken, maar juist om het gemeenschappelijke proces van onderscheiding te simuleren en te voeden.

Na geluisterd te hebben naar het verleden, richtte ik me op het heden. In hoofdstuk 3 luisterde ik eerst naar de oecumenische rapporten van de Wereldraad van Kerken over de ambten. Als uitgangspunt nam ik het rapport *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, omdat hierin de uitspraken over de ambten zijn ingebed in een breder ecclesiologisch kader dan die van *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Ik begon met een missiologische evaluatie en concludeerde dat de *koinonia* ecclesiologie en de missionaire focus van het rapport vooral op gericht zijn op de cultuur van de kerk zelf. Niettemin leverde de bespreking van beide rapporten waardevolle inzichten op voor een gereformeerde ambtstheologie die ernaar streeft oecumenisch onderbouwd te zijn. Ik denk in het bijzonder aan het concept van *episkopé* dat verwijst naar bepaalde onmisbare elementen van het kerkelijk ambt.

In hoofdstuk 4 richtte ik vervolgens mijn aandacht op Darrell L. Guders missionaire ecclesiologie en zijn ambtstheologie. Als gereformeerd theoloog kan Guder beschouwd worden als een leerling van Newbigin en Barth. In hun kielzog reflecteert hij op de ecclesiologie vanuit de *missio Dei*. Voor Guder is 'getuigen' de manier waarop de kerk deelneemt aan de *missio Dei*. Het resultaat is een ecclesiologie die sterk gericht is op het vormen en toerusten van getuigende gemeenschappen in de wereld.

In hoofdstuk 5 besteedde ik aandacht aan de gereformeerde theoloog Bram van de Beek, wiens eigenzinnige ecclesiologie en ambtstheologie juist vanwege haar katholiserende tendens interessant is met het oog op dit onderzoek. Van de Beeks afwijzing van het begrip *missio Dei* vormde een tegenwicht dat hielp om mogelijke zwakheden van een te grote nadruk erop aan het licht te brengen.

Tot slot luisterde ik in hoofdstuk 6 naar Michael Moynagh. Ook hij wil de ecclesiologie radicaal doordenken vanuit de missionaire roeping van de kerk. Hoewel Moynagh geen theologie van het ambt in de strikte zin van het woord ontwikkelt, verdienen zijn gedachten aandacht vanwege hun verankering in de kerkelijke praktijk en hun relevantie voor een kerk die ernaar verlangt missionair te zijn in een postchristelijke cultuur. Moynagh hanteert voornamelijk een antropologische benadering van kerk-zijn, waarbij hij de nadruk legt op haar dialogische karakter.

Vooronderstellingen

Na deze weg te hebben afgelegd, was het mogelijk om in het laatste hoofdstuk de vooronderstellingen, principes, taken en thema's van de gereformeerde theologie van het geordineerde ambt te identificeren. Allereerst heb ik vier ecclesiologische vooronderstellingen benoemd. Een oecumenisch onderbouwde gereformeerde ambtstheologie vanuit missionair perspectief moet stevig geworteld zijn in een ecclesiologie die *missionair*, *contextueel*, *eschatologisch* en *oecumenisch* is.

De *missionaire* vooronderstelling voorkomt dat de kerk op zichzelf gericht is. Vanuit hun aard nemen de kerk en haar ambten deel aan Gods genereuze beweging van liefde naar deze wereld toe. De *contextuele* vooronderstelling impliceert dat de diversiteit van kerkelijke expressies niet het resultaat is van een pragmatische benadering die getolereerd wordt als een voorbereidende stap naar institutionele uniformiteit, maar eerder een principiële premisse van een ecclesiologie die, in het voetspoor van de apostelen, serieus werk maakt van transculturele geloofsoverdracht. De *eschatologische* vooronderstelling verwijst naar de noodzaak van een gezonde eschatologische balans tussen het 'reeds' en het 'nog niet' karakter van het koninkrijk van God. Om een eenzijdige eschatologische oriëntatie te vermijden, doen kerken er goed aan hun praktijk expliciet te relateren aan het Christusgebeuren waarvan het Nieuwe Testament getuigt. Ten slotte wordt de *oecumenische* vooronderstelling voor een groot deel gedreven door het geloof dat de missionaire roeping van de kerk gediend is met de eenheid van de kerk. Bovendien is de culturele diversiteit van de wereldchristenheid en de theologische verwerking ervan enorm belangrijk voor een kerk die zichzelf niet hoogmoedig wil isoleren.

Principes

Naast de fundamentele theologische en ecclesiologische vooronderstellingen, heeft deze studie ook enkele theologische leidende principes voor kerkelijke ambten opgeleverd.

Een eerste belangrijk principe betreft de inbedding van het geordineerde ambt in de charismatische gemeenschap van de kerk. In de gereformeerde ecclesiologie is de ambtstheologie ontwikkeld vanuit de pneumatologie en staat deze volledig ten dienste van de charismatische structuur van de kerk.

Het tweede principe betreft de liturgische worteling van het geordineerde ambt. Het geordineerde ambt wordt in het leven geroepen door de Geest die werkt in de charismatische gemeenschap van de kerk, maar wortelt vervolgens in de liturgie waar het Christusgebeuren wordt gevierd.

Een derde belangrijk principe betreft het *episkopé*-karakter van het geordineerde ambt. In essentie verwijst de term *episkopé* naar het opzicht dat nodig is om de exterioriteit van de kerk in Christus te verzekeren. De structuur van deze *episkopé* zal theologisch gelegitimeerd moeten worden, vanuit de *missio Dei*.

Een vierde principe betreft het idee dat het kerkelijk ambt moet functioneren als een brandpunt van eenheid. Het kerkelijk ambt opgevat als een focus van eenheid betreft een roeping voor geordineerde ambtsdragers om niet alleen de interne eenheid van hun eigen gemeente te bevorderen, maar ook om expliciet eenheid te zoeken met andere kerkgemeenschappen in hun eigen omgeving.

Taken
Vanuit de besproken vooronderstellingen en principes was het mogelijk om te kijken naar de belangrijkste taken van het geordineerde ambt en zo zijn missionaire bedoelingen bloot te leggen.

De eerste taak van het geordineerde ambt is om de gemeenschap van de kerk in het evangelie, zoals dat door de apostelen is verkondigd en in de Schrift is opgetekend, te verankeren. Deze taak is nauw verbonden aan het begrip apostoliciteit in zijn dubbele betekenis. Ten eerste verwijst apostoliciteit naar de inhoud van het onderwijs van de apostelen en het gebruik ervan veronderstelt dat een kerk haar naam alleen waardig is als ze trouw is aan deze apostolische grondbeginselen. Daarnaast verwijst de term echter ook naar de roeping van de kerk om de apostelen te volgen en zich toe te leggen op het proces van interculturele appropriatie van het evangelie en van de gemeenschappen die het belichamen. Op deze manier verwijst het verankeren van gemeenschappen in het Christusgebeuren in het spoor van de apostelen niet alleen naar de inhoud van het evangelie, maar ook naar de wijze waarop deze belichaamd wordt.

De tweede taak van de geordineerde ambtsdragers betreft het activeren van het charismatisch potentieel van de gemeenschap. De kerk die leeft vanuit de zelfgave van de Drie-ene God mag niet ondankbaar de gaven die zij van haar Heer ontvangt ongeopend laten of ze gretig voor zichzelf houden, maar dient manieren te zoeken om het charismatisch vermogen van de gemeente en haar leden te activeren met het oog op de roeping van de kerk in de wereld. Daarom is het de taak van het geordineerde ambt om het charismatisch potentieel van de gemeenschap te activeren en te coördineren met het oog op de geloofwaardige belichaming van het evangelie in haar eigen context.

Een derde taak vloeit direct voort uit de vorige en betreft het verstaan van de kerk als een interpretatieve gemeenschap. De dienaar van het Woord kan gezien worden als een interpretatieve gids die de christelijke gemeenschap helpt om het Christusgebeuren in haar context te begrijpen en haar plaats daarin te vinden. Dit betekent dat de geordineerde ambtsdrager, op basis van zijn kennis van en gevoel voor de Bijbel en de traditie, de interpretatieve dialoog binnen de gemeenschap moet stimuleren en leiden.

Een vierde belangrijke taak van het geordineerd ambt betreft de toerusting en training van gemeenteleden om trouwe discipelen van Jezus te worden. In het licht van de nog steeds toenemende seculiere en postchristelijke situatie van West-Europa kunnen gereformeerde kerken en predikanten in Nederland niet langer voor de hand liggende culturele en kerkelijke vormen gebruiken voor de geestelijke en missionaire vorming van hun leden, maar moeten zij in plaats daarvan nadenken over de cruciale vraag hoe zij creatief kunnen bijdragen aan christelijke karaktervorming met het oog het missionair getuigenis in hun eigen context.

Voor een groot deel vinden de bovenstaande taken plaats binnen de grenzen van de kerk. Toch zijn ze bij uitstek missionair omdat ze gericht zijn op de vorming van een gemeenschap van volgelingen van Jezus die, in de concrete werkelijkheid van de wereld, op geloofwaardige wijze het evangelie belichamen.

Er is nog een ander belangrijk principieel aspect aan deze praktische focus. Wanneer al het missionaire gewicht op de schouders van geordineerde ambtsdragers wordt gelegd, is er een aanzienlijk gevaar dat zending geclericaliseerd wordt.

Dit alles betekent natuurlijk niet dat de geordineerde predikant gevangen is binnen de muren van de kerk. Met het oog op haar eigen reflectie op de inhoud van het evangelie, zou het allereerst goed zijn als de geordineerde ambtsdrager bewust bepaalde ambtelijke taken uitvoert buiten de grenzen van de kerk. Ten tweede, aangezien het de taak van de geordineerde ambtsdrager is om de christelijke gemeenschap te leiden in het streven naar een geloofwaardige belichaming van het evangelie in haar omgeving, is het belangrijk dat zij zich verdiept in de culturele context van de lokale gemeente om zich voldoende bewust te zijn van de manieren waarop het evangelie gecontextualiseerd kan worden.

Met het oog op de huidige missionaire situatie kan een onderscheid tussen een 'gewone' geordineerde ambtsdrager en een evangelist vruchten afwerpen. Het is echter belangrijk om te benadrukken dat dit fundamenteel alleen een accentverschil kan zijn. Immers, het geordineerde ambt is per definitie gericht op de missionaire roeping van de kerk in de wereld.

Tenslotte blijven de klassieke ambtelijke taken noodzakelijk, maar tegelijkertijd vraagt de huidige postchristelijke missionaire situatie ook om een ondernemende benadering van kerk-zijn, waarbij enkel evangelieverkondiging vanaf de kansel niet volstaat. Kerkleiders die op dit gebied minder gaven hebben, kunnen een duidelijke rol spelen als *initiërende*, *faciliterende* en *administratieve* leiders.

Thema's

Nadat ik de missionaire dimensies en missionaire bedoelingen van het geordineerde ambt had benoemd, was het mogelijk om in te gaan op bepaalde thema's die een rol spelen in de (oecumenische) discussie over het kerkelijk ambt.

De voornaamste oecumenische uitdagingen met betrekking tot het ambt hebben te maken met de begrippen apostoliciteit en apostolische successie. Beide concepten gaan over het behoud van zowel de exterioriteit van de kerk als het missionaire karakter van de gemeente. In de brede katholiciteit van de wereldchristenheid dienen gereformeerde kerken deel te nemen aan een dialogische katholiciteit - op lokaal, supra-lokaal en universeel niveau - en gemeenschappelijke structuren van *episkopé* na te streven die instrumenteel zijn voor zowel de exterioriteit van de kerk in het Christusgebeuren als het missionaire karakter van kerkelijke gemeenschappen.

Een kwestie die gerelateerd is aan het concept van apostoliciteit betreft de structuur van de kerkelijk ambten. Kerken die de nadruk leggen op apostolische successie koppelen deze nadruk vaak aan een specifieke drievoudige (d.w.z. bisschoppelijke) structuur van kerkelijk ambt die normatief is in ecclesiologisch opzicht. Omgekeerd geldt natuurlijk hetzelfde voor de drievoudige

ambtsstructuur van de gereformeerde traditie. Echter, in het streven naar een contextuele kerkelijke structuur moet het uitgangspunt niet liggen in een veronderstelde historische ontwikkeling, maar in de missionaire roeping van de kerk in de wereld. Er is daarbij een trend waarneembaar waarin kleine gemeenschappen steeds meer op de voorgrond treden. Deze trend is niet allereerst een gevolg van sociologische ontwikkelingen, maar juist van missionaire overwegingen. Dit is begrijpelijk omdat het streven naar een gezonde structuur voor de kerk en haar ambten geen kwestie is van eenvoudige pragmatische overwegingen, maar een door en door theologische onderneming betreft.

Een belangrijk principe voor het ontwerp van een kerkstructuur is dat het *persoonlijke*, *collegiale* en *communale* dimensies dient te hebben. Vanuit gereformeerd perspectief zou de *persoonlijke* dimensie van kerkelijke bediening kunnen helpen om de vrijheid van de verkondiging van het evangelie te onderstrepen. Anders dan in de gereformeerde traditie verwijst *collegialiteit* in oecumenische discussies niet naar de inbreng van niet-geordineerde gemeenteleden, maar naar de collegialiteit van dienaren van het Woord onder elkaar. Op deze manier zou het concept van collegialiteit vruchtbaar gemaakt kunnen worden voor specialistische samenwerking op (boven)lokaal niveau, waarbij geordineerde ambtsdragers elkaars verschillende kwaliteiten gebruiken om de kerken in een bepaalde regio te dienen. De *communale* dimensie, tenslotte, komt het meest overeen met de presbyteriale collegialiteit van de gereformeerde traditie. Ook binnen gereformeerde kerken is er soms een aristocratische tendens, die in de praktijk het leiderschap in handen legt van slechts een kleine, bevoorrechte groep. Daarom moeten ook gereformeerde kerken zoeken naar manieren waarop de communale dimensie van de kerk het best gediend kan worden.

In een theologie van het ambt die oecumenisch probeert te zijn, is het bovendien belangrijk om aandacht te besteden aan het concept van representatie. Door het kerkelijk ambt te verankeren in de liturgie wordt voorkomen dat het representatieve aspect van het geordineerd ambt los komt te staan van de verkondiging van het evangelie en de bediening van de sacramenten. Het geordineerde ambt is alleen symbolisch voor zover het zich beweegt binnen de bandbreedte van het Christusgebeuren zoals dat in de liturgie gevierd wordt.

Een volgend belangrijk onderdeel van de theologie van het ambt betreft de kwestie van het ambtelijk gezag. De liturgische worteling van het ambt, in combinatie met het beeld van de kerk als een interpreterende gemeenschap en de charismatische structuur van de gemeente kunnen gezamenlijk ook licht werpen op het concept van ambtelijk gezag. Het gezag van de geordineerde ambtsdrager is het gezag van een interpretatieve gids die, door zijn kennis van en gevoel voor de Bijbel en de traditie, het interpretatieproces faciliteert en de gemeenschap en haar leden voldoende redenen geeft om te handelen. De politieke dimensie van het geordineerd ambt is ook volledig verweven met de charismatische structuur van de kerk. Als het bijvoorbeeld gaat om kerkelijke

tucht, is het geordineerd ambt geroepen om een gemeenschappelijk interpretatieproces te leiden over de vraag of, hoe en door wie de integriteit van de kerk als een getuigende gemeenschap wordt geschonden.

Het is ook wenselijk dat een oecumenisch onderbouwde theologie van het ambt de ordinatie van ambtsdragers thematiseert. Ordinatie als ritueel teken kan een plaats hebben in de gereformeerde theologie of bediening, omdat de invocatie wijst op de voortdurende afhankelijkheid van de ambtsdrager van de Geest en op de noodzaak van aanvaarding van zijn ambt door de kerk. Bovendien versterkt de keuze voor ordinatie als rituele handeling ook de banden met de bredere kerk.

Een laatste aspect dat aandacht verdient is de opleiding van geordineerde ambtsdragers. Ten eerste is het belangrijk om het hele theologische curriculum opnieuw te doordenken vanuit het perspectief van de *missio Dei*. De vraag hoe de opleiding en vorming van toekomstige predikanten bijdraagt aan de missionaire roeping van de kerk moet serieus genomen worden. Ten tweede is het cruciaal dat, meer dan nu het geval is, de link tussen kerkelijke praktijk en academische opleiding vanaf het begin wordt gelegd. Ten derde moeten toekomstige predikanten meer dan voorheen geschoold worden in culturele studies en psychologie om de noodzakelijke instrumenten te verwerven die hen in staat stellen de gemeenschap te leiden in een gemeenschappelijk proces van interpretatieve onderscheiding. Ten slotte is het belangrijk dat in de opleiding van dienaren van het Woord veel meer aandacht wordt besteed aan de publieke en missionaire dimensie van hun bediening.

Het uitgangspunt voor het beantwoorden van de vraag of een academisch geschoolde theoloog de voorkeur verdient, moet de contextuele behoefte van de lokale christelijke gemeenschap zijn. In de praktijk zullen academisch geschoolde en niet-academisch geschoolde theologen elkaar waarschijnlijk aanvullen.

Samengevat

Het geordineerd ambt is dienstbaar aan de contextuele participatie van de kerk aan de *missio Dei*. Vanuit een gebalanceerde eschatologie en een verlangen naar kerkelijke eenheid is het cruciaal dat kerken zoeken naar manieren waarop *episkopé* op een oecumenisch verantwoorde wijze kan worden geïmplementeerd en hoe recht kan worden gedaan aan de charismatische inbedding en liturgische worteling van het geordineerd ambt. De belangrijkste taken van het geordineerde ambt zijn onder andere het verankeren van de kerk in het Christusgebeuren door de verkondiging en de viering van de sacramenten, het activeren van het charismatisch potentieel van de gemeenschap en het optreden als een interpretatieve gids in een gemeenschappelijk en individueel streven naar een geloofwaardige belichaming van het evangelie in de wereld. De voor dit doel gekozen ambtelijke structuur moet de missionaire roeping van de kerk dienen en niet afhankelijk zijn van een veronderstelde historische ontwikkeling.

De kern van de zaak is dat kerkelijk ambt draait om het dienen van de Goddelijke zelfgave zoals die tot uitdrukking komt in de liturgie van de kerk

telkens wanneer de maaltijd van de Heer wordt gevierd. Ten diepste gaat het in het geordineerde ambt om het delen van het lichaam van Christus in de wereld.

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Curriculum Vitae

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