

Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice



Report of the Fourth Phase of Catholic-Reformed International Dialogue¹

¹ Following the request of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, in this report the title “Catholic Church” refers to that community that is also known as the Roman Catholic Church, while the word “catholic” in small case refers to the whole church as included in the creed.

Introduction

1. “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice” constituted the theme of the fourth phase of the international Catholic-Reformed dialogue, which was held under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) between 2011 and 2015. In these meetings, representatives of the Catholic Church and the Reformed churches came to explore various dimensions of this theme. At Rome, Italy, in 2011, “Justification: Reformed and Catholic (Historically and Currently)” introduced the discussions. “Justification and Sacramentality” with emphasis on the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper provided the agenda for the meeting at Decatur, Georgia (USA), in 2012. In 2013 at South Bend, Indiana (USA), the topic “Justification and Sanctification” in the context of the teaching authority of the church continued the conversations. At the fourth meeting at Coatbridge, Scotland, in 2014, the dialogue team explored the relationship between justification and justice, discussed preliminary drafts of the first chapter, and proposed the outline for the entire text. At Ghent, Belgium, in 2015, after several short papers on particular points that had been identified as needing further consideration, the initial drafts for the entire report were carefully revised, tasks were assigned and a plan was agreed for the final revision and completion of the report.

2. This most recent phase resumes a dialogue that originated in informal discussions between members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Catholic Church during the Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. Both communions were convinced that in the context of the new situation created by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the time was auspicious to move forward with official conversations at the international level. The theme chosen for their first meeting was “The Presence of Christ in Church and World” (1970-1977), which addressed the topics of Christology, ecclesiology, the Eucharist, and ministry. The second phase of the dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” (1984-1990), sought to extend the conversation on ecclesiology, focusing especially on the relation between the gospel and church in its ministerial and instrumental roles. These roles were seen to consist in the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. The former has assumed central importance for the Reformed churches and determined their understanding of the church as “creature of the Word” (*creatura verbi*). The category of sacrament has been decisive for the Catholic understanding of the church, defined here as “sacrament of grace” (*sacramentum gratiae*). The signal achievement of this phase was the mutual recognition that these two conceptions of the church are complementary: Word and sacrament are necessary for any adequate conception of the church. In the third phase, “The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God” (1998-2005), the two communions sought to shed further light on ecclesiology and Christian witness through an extended biblical investigation into the kingdom of God. At least two reasons – methodological and thematic – lay behind this choice. First, the ecumenical movement had already by this time begun to ask about the aims of dialogue: how does the struggle to overcome Christian divisions in faith and order relate to the struggle to overcome what divides societies, nations, cultures and

religions in today's world?² Since the kingdom of God, the universal reign of peace which is the destiny of the whole creation, embraces in a mysterious way all cultures, societies, nations, and religions, the theme was considered responsive to this concern. Second, the theme proved appealing in light of its biblical and patristic roots, its relative neglect by both sides of the Reformation divide, and its helpfulness in addressing the hopes of contemporary Christians for a greater measure of peace, justice and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17) in a turbulent world.³

3. How then does the theme "Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as Agent for Justice" continue and build on what has preceded? To answer this question, it is necessary to note developments in the first decade of this century, especially since the end of the third phase of our dialogue in 2005. These developments in large part influenced the choice of this theme.

4. On 31 October, 1999 the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Augsburg, Germany. As the outcome of thirty years of bilateral dialogue on a doctrine regarded as one of the most important disputes of the Reformation era, the consensus statement was then and is still regarded now as a significant milestone on the ecumenical journey which Catholics and Lutherans have traveled together. But this historic event has had ecumenical repercussions for other churches that did not participate in the process culminating in *JDDJ*. For this reason, its signatories invited the World Methodist Council (WMC) and WARC, together with observers from the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC, to a theological consultation in Columbus, Ohio (USA), in 2001. The purpose of the invitation was twofold: (1) to submit *JDDJ* to these churches for theological evaluation; and (2) to determine ways to involve them in ongoing discussion with the ultimate aim of inviting them to associate with *JDDJ*. For their part, the delegates of the WMC received the content of *JDDJ*; the WMC associated itself with *JDDJ* at its world conference in July 2006 at Seoul, Republic of Korea.

5. The WARC took a somewhat different approach in responding to *JDDJ*. Because of their historical commitment to the doctrine of justification and to its implications for individual and social life, the Reformed were invited to participate in a quadrilateral study commission, in which their perspective was expected to contribute to a wider ecumenical understanding of justification. This commission was not constituted at the time. Non-official responses to *JDDJ*, however, include three Reformed presentations given at Columbus.⁴ In addition, the European Area Committee of WARC appointed a Theological Subcommittee following the Columbus consultation to address the doctrine of justification from the Reformed perspective, with particular attention to the relation between justification and justice. These reports were later

² *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*, 7, http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_r-rc_2-menu.html (accessed 11 November 2015).

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ See Páraic Réamonn, "Introduction," *Reformed World*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2002), 1-4.

compiled in a volume published in 2009.⁵ No official action on *JDDJ*, however, was taken by WARC.

6. The following year witnessed a significant event in the history of the worldwide Reformed family of churches: in 2010 WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) organized a Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA), to merge the two bodies into the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This new fellowship of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches was the outcome of a process that began for WARC in Accra, Ghana in 2004 and for REC in Utrecht, the Netherlands in 2005.

7. This event provided an opportunity to the new WCRC to learn the mind of its member churches about a number of issues affecting them. To give concrete responses to these issues each of the delegates was appointed to a thematic section, including one on “Christian unity and ecumenical engagement.” Here the delegates urged that future ecumenical encounters should emphasize the implications of theological positions for action on behalf of justice in the world. Having the proposed theme of the upcoming phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue on justification before them, the delegates observed that there is a necessary relationship between justice and justification. In Jesus Christ the “setting right” which is accomplished in God’s work of justification calls and commits the justified to the work of justice in the wider world. For the Reformed churches today, “justification” and “justice” are integral to each other. Therefore, the latter cannot fall outside a doctrinal consensus on justification in any agreed statement. Even *JDDJ* itself speaks of the need to clarify further issues of doctrine, not least the relation between justification and social ethics.⁶ In this spirit there was some willingness on the part of the delegates to investigate what it may mean for the Reformed to associate with *JDDJ*. A new statement on justification could serve as a theological foundation of the Reformed churches’ commitment to justice. In addition, attaching such a statement to *JDDJ* in the act of associating with it would be symbolically significant in view of the 500th anniversary in 2017 of the beginning of the Reformation.

8. Since the signing of the *JDDJ* in 1999, several significant events have occurred also in the Catholic Church related to the theme of this phase of the dialogue. First of all, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 gave special attention to ecumenical relations and, in his post-Jubilee apostolic exhortation *Novo millennio ineunte* (2001), Pope John Paul II expressed hope for a renewed ecumenical commitment in the post-Jubilee pilgrimage. Second, the first decade of the new millennium provided many occasions for further reflection on the *JDDJ* both within the Catholic Church and with various other Christian communities, as mentioned above. Third, that decade

⁵ Michael Weinrich and John P. Burgess, eds., *What is Justification about? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009.

⁶ *JDDJ*, 43. For the complete text, see http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/l-rc/doc/i_l-rc_just.html (accessed 20 February 2016).

was also marked by synods of Catholic bishops devoted to the Eucharist (2005) and to the Word of God (2008), both of which resulted in important theological literature and official teaching on Word and sacrament. Fourth, the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013), included not only many ecumenical meetings and initiatives but also three encyclical letters (*Deus caritas est* (2005), *Spe salvi* (2007), and *Caritas in veritate* (2009), which provided substantial biblical and theological material relevant to the themes chosen for the present phase of our dialogue. For example, the attention given by the last of these to Catholic social teaching and to the theological foundation of a just society paralleled the concerns of the third phase of the dialogue and one of the more important emphases of Reformed churches in recent years. Moreover, the special Pauline Year (June 2008-June 2009) provided numerous opportunities for reflection on the writings of Saint Paul, particularly Pope Benedict's cycle of catecheses on Paul's doctrine of justification.⁷ Subsequently, the interventions of Pope Francis confirmed some of the themes mentioned here.

9. Thus, various developments in both communions opened the way for beginning a new, fourth phase of bilateral dialogue between us. The theme of justification by faith naturally presented itself as an obvious and preferred topic in light of the various unfinished conversations between us in relation to the *JDDJ* during the first decade of the new century, as reported above. Furthermore, the convergence claimed and deepened by our two preceding phases of dialogue concerning the complementarity of Word and sacrament offered the intriguing prospect of exploring how these two essential dimensions of ecclesial life might relate to justification by faith and sanctification. The fact that both Reformed and Catholic believers see an indissoluble link between justification and sanctification, both of which are intimately related to Word and sacrament, promised to open new levels of convergence between us. Finally, the keen interest by both of our communions in the role of the church as an agent for justice led to the tantalizing intuition that justification and Christian action on behalf of justice in the world must be intimately connected to each other. These considerations prompted the choice to explore the connections between justification and sanctification and the ministry of Word and sacrament with a view to clarifying the role of Christians and the church as a whole as agents for justice in the world.

⁷ During the "Year of Faith" called by Pope Benedict to mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Francis' first encyclical, *Lumen fidei* (2013), not only supplemented Pope Benedict's letters on charity and hope but also resonated well with the theme of justification by faith. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), Francis called for a renewed proclamation of the gospel in the context of the many social challenges facing today's world, devoting the entire fourth chapter of this document to "The Social Dimension of Evangelisation" (176-258). He writes that "All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world," a task in which the Catholic Church unites "its own commitment to that made in the social field by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, whether at the level of doctrinal reflection or at the practical level" (183). http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#The_Church%E2%80%99s_teaching_on_social_questions (accessed 20 February 2016). For full text of *Lumen fidei*, see http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html.

10. The foregoing reflections on these developments explain the decision to dedicate this fourth phase of dialogue to an exploration of the theme: “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice.” Accordingly, the structure of the following report consists of the following chapters: I. “Justification and Sanctification”; II. “Justification and Sanctification through the Church’s Ministry of Word and Sacrament”; and III. “Justification, Sanctification and Christian Action on Behalf of Justice in the World.”

Chapter One: Justification and Sanctification

11. Central to the disputes at the time of the Reformation was the understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. The centrality of this doctrine was reaffirmed in the *JDDJ*, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church on 31 October 1999. Several member churches of WARC offered varying and even critical reviews of the document. The newly formed WCRC later concurred with its insistence on the importance of the doctrine of justification by faith. An earlier phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue registered agreement between us about the Trinitarian and Christological foundations of justification and sanctification, which we determined to be a helpful starting point for our own reflections:

Before all humankind, sisters and brothers, we announce the death of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26) and proclaim his resurrection from the dead (cf. Rom. 10:9; Acts 2:32; 3:15). In the mystery of his death and resurrection we confess the event which saves humanity, that is, it liberates it from the distress in which it is imprisoned by sin and establishes it in communion with God. . . . In his life and in his death Jesus is revealed as the Son par excellence of God, the one alone who knows the Father and whom the Father alone knows (cf. Matt. 11:27), who can address himself to God saying “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). . . . Finally, the work of Jesus, the Son, reveals to us the role of the Spirit who is common to him and to the Father: it reveals to us that God is triune. By the life, death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit becomes the common gift of the Father and the Son to humanity.⁸

12. Subsequent paragraphs of the same report⁹ present material pertinent to justification and sanctification. From Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind, comes the grace by which we are justified through faith and thereby brought into communion with God in the one Holy Spirit. That dialogue team further confessed that the acceptance in faith of justification is itself a gift of grace. “To rely for this salvation on anything other than faith would be to [detract] from the fullness of salvation accomplished and offered in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

13. This faith through which we receive our justification, our “pardon, our liberation, our life with God,”¹¹ is a “living and life-giving faith,”¹² that is, it is a faith that “receives grace freely” and

⁸ *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 60, 73-75, http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_rc_2-menu.html (accessed 20 February 2016).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹² *Ibid.*, 77.

“bears testimony actively” as it works itself out in love (cf. Gal. 5:6). Justification can thus be seen to issue in good works. “Justified by the free gift of faith, [we] can henceforth live according to righteousness”¹³ and “committed to gratitude and service, we bear fruits worthy of the grace” we have received. In this connection, this previous phase of the dialogue stated that “justification by faith brings with it the gift of sanctification, which can grow continually as it creates life, justice and liberty.”¹⁴ Thus, Jesus Christ is not only the one Mediator but also the “unique way” by which we may lead lives pleasing to God.

A) Justification and Sanctification: Reformed Perspective

14. The Reformed tradition developed its understanding of justification initially in the 16th century, in agreement with Martin Luther’s emphasis that Christ alone is our righteousness, which we receive by faith alone and not through any works of our own. John Calvin even called justification “the main hinge on which religion turns.”¹⁵ In addition, in the work of Calvin and such confessional documents as the *Belgic Confession* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), and the *Westminster Confession* (1647) there is evident a deep concern for sanctification, that process of growth in holiness which Reformed see as a vital, but distinct aspect of Christian life. From the 16th century to the present, this “double grace” of justification and sanctification has characterized the Reformed understanding of salvation, and the two should be considered as distinct but never as separate from one another. Recent confessional documents have continued this dual emphasis, but have tended not to use those specific terms, preferring instead language such as “deliverance” and “service.”¹⁶

15. Jesus Christ is the basis and content of our justification. The starting point for the Reformed understanding of justification is that Christ himself is our righteousness (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30). For the Reformed tradition, the righteousness of Christ that we receive is grounded in his perfect obedience, which is defined as both active and passive. By his active obedience he perfectly fulfilled the law through his life of love toward God and human beings, especially those in dire need. This is precisely the life for which God created us, yet because we fail to live it in greater or lesser degrees we stand condemned as sinners before God’s just judgment. But for this very reason, Christ’s obedience is also passive. By his passive obedience Christ consented to bear, in his passion and death on the cross, the just penalty of the law against sin in order that we might be pardoned.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 79,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79,

¹⁵ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, 3.11.1, 726.

¹⁶ *The Theological Declaration of Barmen*, 2 and *The Confession of 1967* (Presbyterian Church (USA), Section C, resp. For these and all subsequent references to the Reformed confessional documents that appear in this report, cf. *Book of Confessions*, Louisville, KY, Geneva Press, 1996.

16. Christ was delivered over to death for our sins, but raised to life for our justification (Rom. 4:25). In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are at once judged and condemned for our sins and accepted in grace, placed in a new life before God and with God. On the basis of what Christ has done and undergone for us and in our place, God is merciful with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but rather imputes to us the righteousness of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19).¹⁷ In this event consists the mystery of the “wonderful exchange” (*commercium admirabile*). On the cross Christ has taken our sin and death to himself (cf. Rom. 8:3, 4), and in rising again from the dead he gives us his righteousness and life.

17. Christ’s righteousness and life are given to us whole and entire by faith, which unites us with Christ and makes us members of his body the church. They are given to the believer once and for all, in and with baptism, and then ever anew day by day. To believe in Jesus Christ is to receive him as he has given himself to us. According to John Calvin, Christ has given himself not only to deliver us from sin and death and restore us to favor with God, but also to regenerate us by his Spirit, so that we may live a new life of love and righteousness.¹⁸ In virtue of our union with Christ through faith we therefore have received a twofold benefit (*duplex gratia*), namely, justification and sanctification.

18. Like justification, sanctification is entirely a gift of grace received by faith. The sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is reflected in a faith that is living, because it “apprehends Christ who is alive and makes alive and shows that it is alive by living works.”¹⁹ It is impossible for true faith to be unfruitful, because it is a faith that works itself out in love (cf. Gal. 5:6) and engenders a desire to do those works that God has commanded in his word.²⁰ Thus the new life of faith is characterized by a “complete joy in God through Christ and a strong desire to live according to the will of God in all good works.”²¹

19. This is not to suggest that our walk in obedience is anything more than a small beginning in this new life of faith.²² Though sanctification is given to us whole and entire, we never succeed completely in overcoming all sin here and now. There remains a continual struggle between the flesh, which desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit, which desires what is contrary to the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:17). Therefore, the new life of faith consists not only in works of love and justice, but also in lifelong repentance. Though the power of sin is broken, we have still to pray

¹⁷ *Second Helvetic Confession*, 15.

¹⁸ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.1., 592-93.

¹⁹ *Second Helvetic Confession*, 15.

²⁰ *Belgic Confession*, 24.

²¹ *Heidelberg Catechism*, 90.

²² *Ibid.*, 114.

for forgiveness for the sins that we daily commit as those who are both righteous and sinful (*simul iustus et peccator*). We have constantly to die (*mortificatio*) to sin in order that we may live (*vivificatio*) to God in the power of the risen Christ (cf. Rom 6:11). “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

20. God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified, and they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification.²³ Since the gifts and call of God are irrevocable (cf. Rom. 11:29), the gift of faith includes the assurance of salvation; faith without assurance is deficient. Nevertheless, our assurance does not come from anything in ourselves, much less from our good works; rather, it is based on Christ and the promises of God. Our perseverance is based on the promise of God to be faithful to us in Christ to the end. “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). For this reason we are confident as we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

B) Justification and Sanctification: Catholic Perspective

21. A presentation of the Catholic doctrine of justification and sanctification requires a consideration of the teachings of the Council of Trent (1547), the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the *JDDJ* (1999). Catholics believe that doctrine undergoes development and deepening in the course of history in a way that is both faithful to Scripture and tradition, on the one hand, and responsive to the needs of new contexts and questions, on the other. While the teaching of the Council of Trent is the first official, normative Catholic presentation of the doctrine of justification, Vatican II provided a solid Christological, anthropological and ecclesiological basis for this teaching and the *JDDJ*, as its official explanation within the context of the ecumenical dialogue, is an authoritative interpretation of it.

22. Critically responding to the Reformers, the Council of Trent assumed the Pauline category of “justification,” but previously that same salvific event was also described in terms of new life, re-creation in Christ, sanctification. The essential content of the decree affirms that justification depends entirely on the grace of God that we receive through Jesus Christ, in continuity with the teaching of the first millennium against the errors of Pelagius. Self-justification is excluded from the outset, and salvation is said to be offered to the whole world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: “But even though ‘Christ died for all’ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:15), still not all receive the benefit of his death, but only those to whom the merit of his Passion is imparted.”²⁴

²³ Cf. *Westminster Confession* 11, 5.

²⁴ *Decree on Justification*, 3 (1523). For this and all subsequent references to sources of Catholic doctrine, see Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum, editio XLIII. ET* Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, eds., Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash, 43rd edition, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2012.

The merit of Christ effects “the transition from the state in which one is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and adoption as [children] of God (cf. Rom. 8:15) through the second Adam Jesus Christ our Saviour.”²⁵ In adults, the beginning of justification is attributed to God’s prevenient grace through Jesus Christ. By turning away from sins, adults assent to and cooperate with God’s grace and so prepare for the sacrament of baptism, which bestows the gift of justification.²⁶

23. Trent uses the language of causality to describe justification in a way that gives emphasis to the priority of the divine action.²⁷ The aim of justification (its “final cause”) is the “glory of God and of Christ, and life everlasting.” The agent (“efficient cause”) “is the merciful God who gratuitously washes and sanctifies (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11), sealing and anointing with the promised Holy Spirit. . . .” The meritorious cause “is the most beloved only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ who, ‘while we were enemies’ (Rom 5:10), ‘out of great love with which he loved us’ (Eph. 4:2) merited for us justification by his most holy Passion on the wood of the Cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father.” Baptism plays an instrumental role; for this reason it is considered the “sacrament of faith,” since without faith “no one has ever been justified.” Finally, the formal cause of justification is “the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which he makes us just.”

24. Justification remains a free gift of grace, since “nothing that precedes justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification.”²⁸ During the course of life, one can “increase in the very justice . . . received through the grace of Christ,”²⁹ seeking to live a godly life (cf. Tit. 2:12), obeying the commandments (cf. 1 Jn. 5:3) and performing good works (2 Pet. 1:10). Nevertheless, one must not be presumptuous about salvation but rather ask for the grace of perseverance.³⁰ Finally, God rewards those who “abound in good works” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58; Heb. 6:10; 10:22; 2 Tim. 4:7), which are never independent of Christ. As the life of the vine flows into the branches (cf. John 15:5), so the power of Christ “always precedes, accompanies, and follows [our] good works, which, without it, could in no way be pleasing to God and meritorious.”³¹

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 (1524).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, chapters 5 and 6. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* interprets the meaning of this “cooperation” in the following way: “Justification establishes cooperation between God’s grace and man’s freedom. On man’s part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.” Liguori, MO, Liguori Publications, 1994, 1993.

²⁷ All quotations in this paragraph are taken from *Decree on Justification*, 7 (1528-31).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 (1532).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 (1535).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-13 (1540-41).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16 (1545).

Sanctifying grace is lost by mortal sin, even though faith might not be lost. This grace can be restored to the repentant sinner through the sacrament of penance instituted by Christ for this very purpose.

25. The affirmations of the Second Vatican Council that Christ is the “focal point and goal” of human life and that in him alone is revealed the mystery of human dignity, community, and action address to some extent the Christological concerns expressed in the Reformation slogan *solus Christus*. The Church likewise believes that the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in its Lord and Master. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations.³² In addition, faith is understood as a commitment of one’s entire self to God in response to God’s self-revelation. God reveals himself, not just some truth or knowledge about himself. Faith is then the willing response to this self-revelation.

“The obedience of faith’ (Rom. 16:26; cf. 1:5; 2 Cor. 10:5-6) is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,”³³ and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving “joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it.”³⁴ To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation, the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts.³⁵

The church is the people of God, the community of believers who have responded to God’s self-revelation in faith under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ These teachings of Vatican II represent a deepening of Trent’s vision of faith, relating it to the Christological, anthropological, and ecclesiological doctrines of the Catholic Church. Faith is no longer considered merely as the first step in the process of justification that leads to the reception of baptism.

³² Cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 10 and 45 (4310, 4345); see also 22, 32 and 38 (4322, 4332, and 4338).

³³ Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, 3 (3008).

³⁴ Synod of Orange II, can. 7 (377); Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, 3 (3010).

³⁵ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation *Dei verbum*, 5 (4205). See also the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum domini* (September 30, 2010) of Pope Benedict XVI, especially on the God who speaks (6-16), our response in faith to the God who speaks (22-25) and all of Part Two on the Word of God in the church, *Verbum in ecclesia* (50-89). http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html (accessed 20 February, 2016).

³⁶ Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 9 (4122-24).

26. The principal elements of an authentic interpretation of justification, as officially embraced by the Catholic Church in the *JDDJ*, include the following affirmations: “sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ” and “whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.”³⁷ Renewal of life “necessarily follows from justification”; without such renewal “faith does not exist.”³⁸ Therefore, when claiming that the renewal of the person takes place through the reception of grace, Catholics do not thereby deny that God’s gift of grace in justification remains independent of human cooperation.”³⁹ Human participation in preparing for the reception of justification is itself “an effect of grace” and “not an action arising from innate human abilities.”⁴⁰ While not using the language of “assurance of salvation” (perhaps because of Trent’s caution against rash presumption), still Catholics affirm that, in spite of human weakness, a believer cannot “at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy.”⁴¹

C) Consensus and Convergence

27. Regardless of the differences which appear in the previous two sections, our exploration of this theme, together with the common confession from the second phase of our dialogue, allows us to claim full agreement with the consensus formulated in *JDDJ*:

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to do good works.”⁴²

28. We also affirm together that the doctrines of justification and sanctification must be seen within the whole scope of Christian revelation. Scripture and its faithful interpretation in the course of the life of the church confess the saving activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in bringing about the redemption of human beings from sin and death and their sanctification by means of this same divine economy. We firmly agree that there are a plurality of images and metaphors used both in Scripture and our respective traditions to describe this saving activity

³⁷ *JDDJ*, 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

and that justification cannot be separated from many other ways of speaking about salvation, including redemption, reconciliation, regeneration, forgiveness, new creation, and kingdom of God, among others. Nevertheless, we agree that the doctrine of justification is of particular significance in expressing the very heart of the gospel.

29. We also affirm together that justification and sanctification are free gifts received by faith, not earned by us.

30. We also affirm together that justification is inseparable from sanctification, which involves the transformation of the sinner and the commitment to live a life of righteousness and love, a life characterized by obedience to the commandments and to the teachings of Jesus. The council fathers at Trent taught that Christians must strive to live in charity. They emphasized this calling to counter what they perceived to be a teaching that rendered unnecessary the pursuit of a life of holiness because of the assurance that salvation is based on faith alone. Calvin's teaching of the double grace of justification and sanctification that we receive in virtue of our union with Christ shows that the position rejected by Trent is not applicable to him. Since justification and sanctification are so intimately united for the Reformed, they cannot be said to have denied the need for the pursuit of holiness that Trent was so concerned to defend.

D) Points Needing Further Clarification

31. Our dialogue has acknowledged that there are different conceptions at work in our thinking about justification which, however, appear to be compatible with our agreement with the fundamental statement of the *JDDJ*. We are agreed that we are justified only in virtue of the passion and resurrection of Christ for the glory of God, the honor of Christ, and eternal life. The major remaining divergence seems to be that for the Catholic justification refers to a process while for the Reformed it indicates a status. Trent and classical Catholic teaching speak of an "increase" or "growth" in justification.⁴³ For the Reformed, justification refers to the new standing we have before and with God, in union with Christ by grace through faith, as pardoned and reconciled sinners. This standing is whole and complete and so cannot admit of a "more" or a "less." Reformed, however, do speak of increase and growth in sanctification.

32. Trent maintains that one can lose the grace of justification after serious sin. Nevertheless, Catholics affirm that one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God's mercy and Christ's merit.⁴⁴ The Reformed insist that one cannot lose the gift of justification. The assurance of salvation is rooted in the calling and gifts of

⁴³ *Decree on the Sacraments, Foreword* (1600). While Trent speaks of an "increase" in justification, the more common Catholic way of expressing progress in discipleship is in terms of growth in grace. All followers of Christ "must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through love. . . . But if charity is to grow and fructify in the soul like a good seed, each of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and carry out his will with deeds, with the help of his grace. . ." *Lumen gentium*, 41, 42 (4166).

⁴⁴ *JDDJ* 36.

God, which are irrevocable. The Reformed affirm that assurance of salvation rests not in themselves but in the promises of God who is faithful. Still, in the Reformed tradition there have been some who have raised the question of this absolute assurance of salvation over against serious sin committed by the justified believer.⁴⁵

33. Trent finds the concept of “merit” helpful for understanding what the New Testament affirms about God’s promise to reward good works, even using the concept with respect to eternal life. The Reformed tradition, concerned to safeguard a proper understanding of salvation by grace alone, has preferred to apply the concept to Jesus Christ. Thus, we are justified not on the basis of our works and merits (*propter opera et merita nostra*) but on the basis of Christ’s merit (*propter meritum Christi*). The Reformed do not deny that God rewards good works (cf. Matt. 5:12; 10:42 *et passim*), but they do not ascribe the reward to the person who receives it; it is ascribed rather to the “goodness, generosity and truthfulness of God who promises and gives it.”⁴⁶ As St. Augustine wrote: “God crowns in us the gifts of His own mercy.”⁴⁷ Above all, for the Reformed eternal life is not seen as a reward dependent on good works, but as a free gift given in justification by grace through faith alone.

⁴⁵ See G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Sin*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971; James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. John Wain, New York, Penguin Books, 1983.

⁴⁶ *Second Helvetic Confession*, 16.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Tractatus 3, 10: “*coronat autem in nobis Deus dona misericordiae suae*” cited in “Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana 24,” Roma 1968, 56; cf. *Second Helvetic Confession*, 16.

Chapter Two: Justification and Sanctification Through the Church's Ministry of Word and Sacrament

34. The previous chapter pointed out agreement between the Reformed and Catholics that justification and sanctification cannot be separated. The present chapter seeks to integrate that agreement with an important achievement claimed by two earlier phases of dialogue between our communities. They had stated that a typical way of contrasting our respective visions of the Church as "creation of the Word" (*creatura verbi*) for the Reformed and as "sacrament of grace" (*sacramentum gratiae*) for Catholics was insufficient, because this does justice neither to the Christian understanding of the Word of God nor to that of sacrament, which always comprises both performative gesture and accompanying word. In 1990, the final report of our second phase of dialogue noted:

The two conceptions, "the creation of the Word" and "sacrament of grace," can in fact be seen as expressing the same instrumental reality under different aspects, as complementary to each other or as two sides of the same coin. They can also become the poles of a creative tension between our churches.⁴⁸

Subsequently, the final report of the third phase, issued in 2007, stated:

We can now affirm, in light of our investigation both of the kingdom and of the patristic literature, not only that these visions are mutually informative and complementary but also that neither is fully adequate without the other. A "sacramental" church that does not give proper place to the Word of God would be essentially incomplete; a church that is truly a creation of the Word will celebrate that Word liturgically and sacramentally. If our churches differ according to these two visions, perhaps it is less because either church is convinced that the church is only *creatura verbi* or only *sacramentum gratiae* and more because each tradition has emphasized one aspect to the point of de-emphasizing or neglecting the other. In such a case, arriving at full communion will amount to a process in which each community recovers the full scope of God's provision for the life of the church.⁴⁹

How do justification and sanctification relate to the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments within the ongoing life of the Christian community? Because the specific theme of this fourth phase of dialogue between our communities concerns the relation of justification to the "sacramentality" of the church and to the church's action on behalf of justice, the present chapter will concentrate on the relation of justification and sanctification to Word and sacrament, while the final chapter will consider the relation of justification and sanctification to action on behalf of justice.

⁴⁸ *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 113.

⁴⁹ *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*, 193.

35. Our experience has confirmed what a recent ecumenical report pointed out about one result of the long division of Christian communities from one another:

Dialogue demonstrates that the partners speak different languages and understand the meanings of words differently; they make different distinctions and think in different thought forms. However, what appears to be an opposition in expression is not always an opposition in substance. In order to determine the exact relationship between respective articles of doctrine, texts must be interpreted in the light of the historical context in which they arose. That allows one to see where a difference or opposition truly exists and where it does not.⁵⁰

Perhaps this is especially important to remember when discussing the relation of justification to Word and sacrament or when asking whether the church as a whole may be considered in some sense to be “sacramental.” John Calvin and many other leaders of the 16th century Reformation had no hesitation in speaking about the necessity of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper within the life of the church. Yet they placed more emphasis upon Christ as the ground and content of justification and sanctification and upon the Holy Spirit’s use of the proclamation of the Word to impart saving faith than upon the role of the sacraments or that of the church as a whole. For the Reformed, however, the church is the ordinary setting where the proclamation of Christ’s gospel of salvation takes place. For their part, Catholics have tended to emphasize the close union between Christ and the church in such a way as to see Christ’s saving activity through the Church’s proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments; nevertheless, for them Christ remains the unique foundation and author of justification and sanctification. Both views can call upon Scripture for support – that there is salvation in no one else but Christ (cf. Acts 4:12 and 1 Cor. 3:11) and that Christ is intimately united through the Spirit with his body, the Church (cf. Eph. 1: 22-23; 4:15-16). But the customary language, thought and exegetical patterns of both churches emphasize these truths in different ways. As a result, the language of “sacraments” and of “sacramentality” sounds different to Reformed believers than it does to Catholic believers.

36. Can one delve underneath such language to ask whether there is a real difference in substance between our communities? Both profess that the actions of the church in proclaiming the Word and in celebrating the sacraments are not on the same level as the saving activity of Christ but are dependent on his gift of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. The heart of the question seems to concern whether – and, if so, how – one may speak of a certain “instrumentality” or “cooperation” on the part of the church. An important consensus on this point has already been reached in Catholic-Protestant dialogue in France: “The divergence . . . does not pertain to the fact of the instrumentality of the Church in the transmission of salvation, but to the nature of this instrumentality: is the Church sanctified in such a manner so that she

⁵⁰ Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, *From Conflict to Communion*, 33. For full text see <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf>.

can herself become a sanctifying subject?”⁵¹ A further question is whether priority in such a role should be given to the proclamation of the Word, to the celebration of sacraments, or to neither, both being equally necessary. The Appendix to the *JDDJ*, a document which has served as one of our sources in the present dialogue, includes the words: “The working of God’s grace does not exclude human action: God effects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore, we are called to strive (cf. Phil 2:12 ff.). As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵² As long as the recognition of the Holy Spirit’s agency is assured, many Reformed Christians are able to agree with Lutherans and Catholics in that statement.

A) Justification and Sanctification in the Church of Word and Sacrament

37. We note that the second phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue registered agreement about how justification – and, in light of our first chapter, we would add sanctification – relates to Word and sacrament.

Justification by grace through faith is given us in the Church. This is not to say that the Church exercises a mediation complementary to that of Christ, or that it is clothed with a power independent of the gift of grace. The Church is at once the place, the instrument, and the minister chosen by God to make heard Christ’s word and to celebrate the sacraments in God’s name throughout the centuries. When the Church faithfully preaches the word of salvation and celebrates the sacraments, obeying the command of the Lord and invoking the power of the Spirit, it is sure of being heard, for it carries out in its ministry the action of Christ himself.⁵³

38. The New Testament suggests that justification and sanctification, on the one hand, and the proclamation and celebration of Word and sacrament, on the other, are intimately related within that profound mystery of salvation in Christ. Some passages highlight the importance of the Word as a means by which Christ bestows the gift of saving faith. Such faith, according to Paul, comes from hearing the Word: “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Rom. 10:14). This leads Paul to conclude: “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). This faith is the

⁵¹ Comité mixte catholique-protestant en France, *Consensus œcuménique et différence fondamentale*, Paris, 1987, § 11 [our translation]: “La divergence . . . ne concerne pas le fait de l’instrumentalité de l’Église dans la transmission du salut, mais la nature de cette instrumentalité: l’Église est-elle sanctifiée de manière à devenir elle-même sujet sanctifiant?”

⁵² *Joint Declaration*, Annex 2C, quoting “The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration,” II. 64f. in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000, 566.

⁵³ *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 86.

means of our justification: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Other passages speak of rites such as baptism and the Eucharist as means of the saving action of Christ in the Spirit. “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit. 3:4-7). John’s Gospel includes passages which seem to point to the saving effect both of baptism – “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit’” (Jn. 3:5) – and of the Eucharist – ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day’ (Jn. 6:53-54). In the account of the day of Pentecost and in the summary of ecclesial life which immediately follows, we read: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:37-38, 41-42). The importance of the audible word and the visible rite for the life of the church reflects the essentially incarnational nature of the mystery of salvation in Christ.

39. A contemporary ecumenical presentation of salvation history, which seeks to clarify the notion of sacrament, can at the same time illustrate the importance of the Word. One such attempt was offered in a summary of the responses to the convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC.

In the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has communicated effectively the mystery of his saving love to the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ continues his saving action of God by being present and active in our midst. For this purpose God continues to act through human persons, through their words, signs and actions, together with elements of creation. Thus God communicates to the faithful, and through their witness to the world, his saving promise and grace. Those who hear and receive in faith and trust this gracious action of God are thereby liberated from their captivity to sin and transformed in their lives. Those who receive this gift, respond to it in thanksgiving and praise, and are brought into a *koinonia* with the Holy Trinity and with each other and are sent to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Through this sacramental action, communicated through words, signs and actions, this community, the church, is called, equipped and sent, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit to witness to God’s reconciling and recreating love in a sinful and broken world. And

so all who in faith long for fullness of life in Christ may experience the first-fruits of God's kingdom – present and yet to be fully accomplished in new-heaven and earth.⁵⁴

This description expresses how God makes use of words, signs and actions in the economy of salvation. Since our current phase of dialogue focused in a special way upon sacramentality, the following section will consider one of the sacraments that we both celebrate: Baptism. The subsequent section will address sacraments in general. Because the dialogue considered Eucharist mainly in connection with justice, this report will treat it in chapter three. Nevertheless, there are some general aspects that pertain to both sacraments.

a. Justification, Baptism and Incorporation into the Church

40. Both Catholics and Reformed acknowledge “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” and so recognize the importance of the celebration of baptism.⁵⁵ Indeed, on the acknowledgment that the appropriate formula and practice are being used, there is now a long established practice of mutual recognition of baptism between the Catholic and Reformed churches.⁵⁶ This expression of the faith of the ancient church is in harmony with Paul's interpretation of baptism as a “participation in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ”.⁵⁷ Even though they explain differently the relation between the unique justifying act of Christ and the ecclesial sacramental action by which this new life is signified, Catholics and Reformed alike can confess together, with the words of the *JDDJ*, “that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life”⁵⁸; and that “in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies,

⁵⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990, 143-144. Henceforth the convergence statement *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* will be referred to as *BEM*.

⁵⁵ A fine multi-lateral exposition of the meaning and importance of Baptism can be found in: *Confessing the One Faith. An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, A Faith and Order Study Document no. 153, New Revised Edition, Geneva, WCC Publications 1991, 90-96.

⁵⁶ Recent Catholic-Reformed national dialogues in the United States and Scotland have brought to light similar concerns for both traditions in terms of the pastoral demands for those requesting baptism for their children, while not even in the widest sense being active members of the church, as well as the urgent need for contextually appropriate baptismal education. For the United States dialogue report, entitled *These Living Waters*, see <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/reformed/upload/These-Living-Waters.pdf> (accessed September 11, 2015). The Scottish text is entitled *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed*, which can be obtained at http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/3115/Baptism_document.pdf (accessed September 11, 2015).

⁵⁷ Cf. Rom. 6: 3-11; Col. 2:12; *BEM 2*. *BEM* also recalls other biblical expressions for baptism: a washing away of sin (1 Cor. 6: 11); a new birth (Jn. 3: 5); an enlightenment by Christ (Eph. 5: 14); a re-clothing in Christ (Gal. 3: 27); a renewal by the Spirit (Tit. 3:5); the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Pet. 3:20–21); an exodus from bondage (1 Cor. 10: 1-2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex, race or social status are transcended (Gal. 3: 27-28; 1 Cor. 12: 13).

⁵⁸ *JDDJ*, 25.

and truly renews the person.”⁵⁹ This is the reason why it is so important to explore the relations between justification, sanctification, the celebration of baptism and its significance for the justified person. It is worthy of note that the baptismal liturgies as practiced both in the Catholic Church and the Reformed churches do not reflect the language of justification. Here it might be of interest to pursue further some of the theological reflection expressed in the national Catholic-Reformed dialogue that took place in the United States, which focused its attention on the relationship between baptism and grace rather than that of baptism and justification.⁶⁰

41. Given the emphasis in the Reformed tradition not only upon *sola scriptura* but also *tota scriptura*,⁶¹ it is not surprising that its theology of baptism has sought to interpret the meaning of this sacrament in the context of the covenant witnessed to in the Old and New Testaments. Baptism is the sign of the covenant (*signum foederis Dei*), grounded in God’s promise to Abraham, which is confirmed to him and his descendants in the rite of circumcision. Baptism stands in analogy to circumcision, signifying inclusion in this one covenant and a share in its blessings.⁶² Baptism is the sacrament that makes salvation personal: “holy baptism reminds and assures us that Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross benefits us personally.”⁶³ The administration of baptism symbolizes that our sins are washed away. But it is not the water of baptism that effects this reality: “Only Jesus Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.”⁶⁴ Baptism means not only the washing away of sins but also a rebirth: “God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). On the relation between sign and the reality signified in the administration of baptism, there is a difference of opinion within the Reformed tradition; generally, however, it is held that grace is given by the Holy Spirit who acts in the Spirit’s own time. Only those who believe in Christ will benefit from baptism. That is why children are baptized after the parents have professed their faith and adults are baptized only after a similar personal profession. Nevertheless, baptism is not reducible to the personal, but includes also a strong communal dimension, since those who are baptized are incorporated into the body of Christ,

⁵⁹ *JDDJ*, 28. Here it is important to note that the Reformed would not say that it is in the strict sense the Holy Spirit who justifies. For the Reformed God the Father justifies the sinner in virtue of the redemption accomplished by the Son (see, e.g., Rom. 8:31-32), a redemption that includes justification and sanctification. But since these gifts do not benefit us unless the Spirit unites us with Christ so that he and these gifts become ours, it is not inaccurate to say that the Holy Spirit plays a role in our justification.

⁶⁰ See Section 5, 70-73 of *These Living Waters*, available at the website indicated in note 48 above.

⁶¹ Paragraphs 24-25 of the report of the first phase of the Catholic-Reformed international dialogue *The Presence of Christ in Church and World* registers some important convergences between us on the relation between Scripture and Tradition. Such a convergence is one of the fruits of many bilateral dialogues; see W. Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits*, London/New York, Continuum, 2009, 102, 197-198.

⁶² *Heidelberg Catechism*, 74.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 69

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

made visible through their assembling together as his church.⁶⁵ “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). Finally, baptism has moral consequences: “To be washed with Christ’s Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed and sanctified us to be members of Christ so that more and more we become dead to sin and live holy and blameless lives.”⁶⁶

42. According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, baptism is the sacrament of faith that plunges us into the paschal mystery⁶⁷; without faith no one is ever justified. The celebration of baptism, as a profession of faith, is not only a personal confession of the faith of the believer but also a confession of the faith of the church as the community of believers.⁶⁸ This is especially evident in the baptism of an infant, which also expresses the Catholic understanding that the celebration itself of the sacrament, and not the subjective state of the recipient or the celebrant, is determinative of validity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that “our Lord tied the forgiveness of sins to faith and Baptism” (citing Mk. 16: 15-16), adding that “Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification.”⁶⁹ Catholics believe that baptism is “necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament” and “the means that assures entry into eternal beatitude”.⁷⁰ The effects of baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. In baptism one becomes a new creature, an adopted child of God, a “participant of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), a member of Christ, co-heir with him and temple of the Holy Spirit.

43. Thus, the whole of Christian life has its roots in baptism. Finally, baptism makes one a member of the body of Christ, incorporating one into the church. From the baptismal font is born the one people of God of the new covenant, which transcends all natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes. By means of baptism, Christians become living stones to be “built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:5), participating in the priesthood of Christ and in his prophetic and royal mission. Baptism precedes the apostolic and missionary activity of the people of God. “Incorporated in the Church through Baptism, the faithful are destined by the baptismal character for the worship of the Christian religion; reborn as children of God they must

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁷ Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* 6 (4006).

⁶⁸ *Lumen gentium* 7 (4112).

⁶⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 977.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1257. The catechism goes on to speak of “baptism of blood” regarding those who are martyred for the faith (1258) and “baptism of desire” regarding catechumens who die before having the opportunity to receive the sacrament (1259). The sacrament of baptism is treated in paragraphs 1213-1284 of the catechism. Much of what is written here about baptism is taken, often quite literally, from paragraphs 1265-1271.

confess before men and women the faith which they have received from God through the Church.”⁷¹ As Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism states, baptism “establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it.”⁷²

b. The Relation between Justification and Sanctification and the Understanding of Sacraments in General

44. There has been considerable agreement among Christian churches about baptism, even though practices such as re-baptism are evidence that some communities have not recognized this rite of initiation as practiced in other communities. The specific sacrament of baptism was chosen for consideration in the foregoing section because it most clearly offers an opportunity for exploring the particular relation between justification and sacraments, which is the central theme of the present chapter. In the following paragraphs, the Reformed and Catholic reflections concerning the relation between justification, sanctification and baptism will now be considered in relation to sacraments in general. A first section will present material suggestive of possible convergences between us regarding the relation of justification and sanctification to the sacraments. A second section will identify several differences, which call for further exploration and dialogue.

c. Areas of Converging Understanding Concerning the Sacraments

45. The Reformed tradition, insisting on God’s sovereign grace and the freedom of the Spirit, is careful about language or thought patterns that would deny or compromise them. God is not bound by the sacraments. Nevertheless, God instituted the sacraments to seal and confirm the promise of the gospel proclaimed in the Word, “making it more evident to us and in a sense ratifying it.”⁷³ The *Geneva Catechism* affirms that the sacrament is the “outward attestation of the grace of God, which, by a visible sign, represents spiritual things to imprint the promises of God more firmly in our hearts, to make us surer of them.”⁷⁴ By giving us signs tangible to the senses God condescends to us in order to accommodate our human weakness, that is, our corporeality. Sacraments, just as the proclamation of the Word, are indeed means of grace, but the Reformed reject the view that grace is somehow “contained” in the elements used in their celebration. The *Westminster Confession* insists that “the grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them.”⁷⁵ On the other hand, the connection between the sacramental sign and the thing signified is so close that the Reformed

⁷¹ *Lumen gentium* 11 (4127).

⁷² *Unitatis redintegratio* 22; cf. also 3 (4188).

⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.14.3., 1278.

⁷⁴ Calvin, *Geneva Catechism*, 310.

⁷⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 27.3.

do not hesitate to refer to a “sacramental union” (*unio sacramentalis*). According to the *Westminster Confession*, “there is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.”⁷⁶ In this perspective, it is not inappropriate to say that the waters of baptism wash away sins and grant a participation in Christ; or that the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper nourishes Christians with the body and blood of Christ, uniting them more and more with his glorified body as well as with members of his body the church. It has always to be borne in mind, however, that it is the Holy Spirit that communicates Christ and his benefits to those who receive them by faith. The Holy Spirit is the sole cause of the efficacy of the sacraments. This is not to deny the fact that they remain sacraments even if they are received by the unbelieving. Together with the Word, the sacraments are objective means of grace appointed by God and used by the Holy Spirit to grant us a participation in Christ and to confirm our faith in his promises. Because these are the principal activities of the worship of God’s people, the Reformed emphasize the indispensability of the church. Following the famous phrase of St. Cyprian that one cannot have God as one’s father if one does not have the church as one’s mother, Calvin prized the image of the church as a mother, who conceives and nourishes each of her children.⁷⁷

46. Catholics would concur in substance with many of these Reformed perspectives on Word and sacrament. They too affirm the uniqueness of the salvific activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the sovereignty of God, the centrality of union with Christ and the importance of the proclamation of the Word. However, their emphasis upon the close unity between Christ and the church leads them naturally to stress the notion of efficacy in their sacramental language and practice in a way that is quite different from that of the Reformed. After offering its teaching on justification and prior to treating each sacrament individually, the Council of Trent promulgated a decree on the sacraments in general (*sacramenta in generale*), explaining how they relate to justification: “For all true justification either begins through the sacraments, or, once begun, increases through them, or when lost is regained through them.”⁷⁸ The teaching that justification begins, increases, and can be regained reflects the Catholic understanding of the close relation between justification and sanctifying grace, which connotes as well the inseparability, in Catholic thinking, of justification and sanctification.

47. The sacraments are prepared for by the Word of God and by the faith which assents to this Word. Therefore, they are called sacraments of faith. According to Vatican II, “Sacraments not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called ‘sacraments of faith’.”⁷⁹ This presupposes a close relatedness of Word

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.2.

⁷⁷ See *Institutes* IV.1.1.4.

⁷⁸ Council of Trent, *Decree on the Sacraments*, Foreword (1600).

⁷⁹ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 59.

and sacrament: “The people of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God. . . . The preaching of the Word is required for the sacramental ministry itself, since the sacraments are sacraments of faith, drawing their origin and nourishment from the Word.”⁸⁰

48. In addition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has outlined the Christological foundation of the sacraments.⁸¹ They are founded in the mysteries of Christ’s life, and are effective, not on the basis of their own “power” but thanks to that power that comes forth from the body of Christ, through the action of the Holy Spirit at work in the church. The Spirit manifests and communicates to human beings, especially in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the God who is love. Their purpose is to sanctify human beings, to build up the body of Christ, and to glorify God. In this context the language of sacramental efficacy needs to be carefully understood; in fact, the sacraments “are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work. It is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit.”⁸² Sacramental grace is that grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament, by which the Spirit heals and transforms the recipients, making them “become participants of the divine nature” (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). Clearly the celebration of the sacraments entails the reception of the Word in faith and of that sanctifying grace which is the very heart of justification and sanctification.

d. Areas Calling for Further Dialogue

49. Many Reformed believers concur with much of the above. What differences then remain between our churches regarding the individual rites known as sacraments? One area concerns the question of the efficacy of the sacraments. The fact that it is Christ himself who baptizes and celebrates the Lord’s Supper/Eucharist (and Catholics would add – who presides at the other sacraments as well) has led Catholics to emphasize forcefully the efficacy of the sacraments, as suggested by the expression that they are effective *ex opere operato*, that is, “by the very fact of the action’s being performed,” not depending upon the subjective state of those conferring or receiving them.⁸³ While Catholics would also affirm that a sacrament does not bear fruit in the life of a person who does not receive it in faith, nevertheless, the meaning of the expression *ex*

⁸⁰ Vatican Council II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis* 4.

⁸¹ Much of the material in this paragraph is taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1115-1123.

⁸² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1127.

⁸³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1128: “This is the meaning of the Church’s affirmation that the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: ‘by the very fact of the action’s being performed’), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that ‘the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God’ (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, 68, 8). From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.”

opere operato has been misinterpreted as suggesting an efficacy that is mechanical or automatic and insufficiently respectful of the agency of the Holy Spirit through the celebration of the sacraments. Calvin noted that “We must not suppose that there is some latent virtue inherent in the sacraments by which they, in themselves, confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon us . . . since the only office divinely assigned to them is to attest and ratify the benevolence of the Lord towards us; and they avail no farther than accompanied by the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts, and make us capable of receiving this testimony in which various distinguished graces are clearly manifested. . . . God, therefore, truly performs whatever he promises by figures and by signs; nor are the signs without effect, for they prove that he is their true and faithful author.”⁸⁴ From what has been said above, what is being criticized here is not the view that the Catholic Church actually holds. It would seem that both positions seek to affirm both the primacy of divine agency in the sacraments and that they are effective signs. Still they seem to differ in nuance, emphasis and the language used to express these convictions.

50. Another area of disagreement concerns the identification of those rites which are properly designated as “sacraments.”⁸⁵ Our differences here depend in part on different notions of what a sacrament is and upon different understandings of their “institution.” Calvin identifies baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the two sacraments instituted by Christ, adding that he would have no objection to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament but for the fact that it is not meant for the use of the whole church.⁸⁶ Later, however, he devotes an entire chapter to argue against the “five sacraments falsely so called.”⁸⁷ While the Council of Trent, for its part, teaches that Christ instituted seven sacraments, it immediately rejects the notion that they are all of equal importance.⁸⁸ Such qualitative differentiation makes it possible for Catholics to maintain the traditional view which has always recognized the prominent significance of baptism and Eucharist as *sacramenta maiora* or *principalia*, in contrast to the other five sacraments.⁸⁹ At the same time, it is true that the Reformed celebrate a number of those rites which Catholics call “sacraments,” such as confirmation, reconciliation, marriage and ordination, without designating them with that term. In some contexts, these rites are known as “ordinances of God.”⁹⁰ In some

⁸⁴ *Institutes* IV, 14, 17.

⁸⁵ Cf. *The Presence of Christ in the Church and in the World* (1977), 98; *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1990), 140.

⁸⁶ *Institutes* IV, 14, 20, see also IV, 14,22; 18,20.

⁸⁷ *Institutes* IV, 19.

⁸⁸ Council of Trent, *Decree on Sacraments*, (1601 and 1603).

⁸⁹ Cf. Related with this idea is Thomas Aquinas’ expression “*potissima sacramenta*” (*Summa theologiae* III, q. 62, a. 5; cf. also *Summa contra gentiles*, IV, 72). See also Y. Congar, “The idea of ‘major’ or ‘principal sacraments’,” *Concilium* 4 (1968), no. 1, 1, 12-17.

⁹⁰ The *Second Helvetic Confession* for instance reads under chapter 19 entitled ‘Of the Sacraments of the Church of Christ: “There are some who count seven Sacraments of the new people. Of these we acknowledge that

ecumenical dialogues, criteria have been proposed in order to overcome the historical divergences.⁹¹

B) The “Sacramentality” of the Church in Relation to Christ’s Salvific Activity in Justification and Sanctification

51. The following section will explore the possibility of applying what has been said so far concerning the sacraments to the wider topic of the nature and mission of the church as a whole. This will build upon the agreements of our earlier phases of dialogue concerning the church as a community of Word and sacrament and will hopefully serve as a good transition to our third and final chapter on the church as an agent for justice in the world.

52. During the twentieth century, some Catholic theologians began to develop the theological notion of “sacrament” as a way of interpreting the salvific activity of Christ and the Spirit in and through the Church as sign and instrument.⁹² The divine economy of salvation takes place within the conditions in which human beings live, through audible words and visible signs. Already creation reflects and speaks of its divine author. With the incarnation and paschal mystery of the Son of God, redemption brings to fulfillment God’s saving design for creation. This echoes a principle dear to medieval scholastic theologians, that is, that grace perfects nature, now reinterpreted more broadly. If a sacrament may be considered to be a visible encounter with grace in history, then, always depending upon Christ and recognizing that he continues to work in history through the Holy Spirit, it becomes possible to speak analogously of the sacramentality of the church as a whole, not only in celebrating particular sacramental rites, but also in proclaiming the Word of God and in the witness of Christian life. This is what was meant when Vatican II opened its Constitution on the Church by claiming that the church “is in Christ like (*veluti*) a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”⁹³ Our dialogue has seen such a designation of the church as a welcome change from the largely institutional self-understanding which dominated Catholic ecclesiology in the centuries following the Reformation. The conviction that the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to bring healing to a world wounded by sin resonates to some

repentance, the ordination of ministers (not indeed the papal but the apostolic ordination), and matrimony are profitable ordinances of God, but not Sacraments.”

⁹¹ Some ecumenical dialogues involving the Reformed and Catholics have suggested that a promising approach to addressing disagreement about the number of sacraments may be found in distinguishing between a broader and a narrower usage of the term “sacrament” (cf. Lehmann, K. and Pannenberg, W., Hrsg., *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*, Band I: *Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt in Zeitalter der Reformation und heute*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985, 77-88, I. 1.2) or between two “sacraments” and five “sacramental (ecclesial) acts” (cf. Groupe des Dombes, *The Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments* (1979), 32.

⁹² This development was anticipated in the 19th century by Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) and Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888). Yves Congar and Karl Rahner, both of whom played influential roles at the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, acknowledged an intellectual debt especially to the former.

⁹³ *Lumen gentium* 1 (4101).

degree with a Reformed emphasis on the witness which the Christian community, as the prophetic people of God, is called to give in history.⁹⁴

53. Through justification and through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, the church, as the body of Christ, is emboldened to continue Christ's offices of prophet, priest, and king in keeping with its unique calling to be a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God. According to the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Jesus is called the Christ because he was ordained by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher, our only high priest and our eternal king.⁹⁵ Moreover, every Christian by faith shares in this anointing and in this threefold office.⁹⁶ The value of this triple office was acknowledged by Vatican II when it described not only individual members of the ordained clergy⁹⁷ and the laity,⁹⁸ but the entire people of God as a prophetic, priestly and kingly people.⁹⁹ This suggests the possibility of an important convergence between us regarding the nature of the church. Those who are justified by grace through faith and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament are invested with the prophetic office of proclaiming the gospel message of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God in speech and action. They offer their lives as a living sacrifice of praise (cf. Rom. 12:1) and dedicate themselves to action for justice and peace in accordance with the demands of the kingdom. Justification grounds the lifelong process of sanctification in which the prophetic, priestly and kingly people of God commit themselves to share in the offices of Christ by acting as he did. During our dialogue, we on occasion referred to sanctification as the "middle term" between justification and justice, which finds expression in social action and the promotion of human dignity. This was a brief, useful way for the dialogue to express the interconnectedness of justification, sanctification and social action.

54. Seeing the Church as a prophetic, priestly, and kingly people on the basis of Word and sacrament also provides a framework for understanding the relation between prophetic voices and authority within the life of the community. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires believers to deepen their understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ and to discern ways of applying the gospel to the needs of time and place according to the signs of the times.¹⁰⁰ It is the same Holy

⁹⁴ See e.g. K. Barth, *The Humanity of God*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996: "The Church is the special race of men, the congregation, or to use Calvin's expression, the *compagnie*, which has been constituted, appointed and called to be His witness in the world by a knowledge of the gracious God manifest in Jesus Christ, as knowledge which is rather miserable, but which is invincible because the Holy Spirit has the making of it."

⁹⁵ *Heidelberg Catechism*, 31.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁷ *Lumen gentium*, 25-28 (4149-53).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-36 (4160-62).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-13 (4125-32).

¹⁰⁰ *Lumen gentium* teaches that "discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the

Spirit who is invoked to assist those charged with roles of authority and leadership within the community. Our dialogue did not touch on the significantly different ecclesial structures and understandings of authority, accountability, and discernment in our two traditions. It would be mutually enriching to take up such themes in future phases. Only some very general comments can be offered here. In the Catholic Church there has been a tendency to locate the role of authority, leadership, and discernment within individual offices, although since Vatican II conciliar structures have been fostered at various levels of the life of the Church inviting the participation of all according to their specific vocation within the people of God.¹⁰¹ The Reformed tradition invests authority in conciliar processes, which are found at local, regional, and national levels and which interact with each other. Within these conciliar processes the decision making authority on all matters of the church is vested not only in ordained members of the clergy but, on a level of parity, also in elders, deacons, and their equivalents. In particular situations such decision-making authority can be vested in all members of a congregation.

people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life” 12 (4125).

¹⁰¹ Such participation includes all of all of the baptized, including those who, in Catholic parlance, are called the laity. As *Lumen gentium* states: “But by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others. It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer” 31 (4157).

Chapter Three: Justification and Christian Action on Behalf of Justice in the World

55. Our first chapter explored our agreement that justification and sanctification are indissolubly linked in Reformed and Catholic thought. The second chapter related justification and sanctification to the ministry of Word and sacrament, giving an opportunity, first, to explore points of convergence and difference between us regarding these essential dimensions of the life of the Christian community and, second, to consider the service of the church as a whole in God's saving action in history. This final chapter will explore how the acceptance of God's pardon in justification and the ongoing sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, impel Christians to commit themselves to participate in the kingdom of God already inaugurated by Christ Jesus.

56. The very similarity between the words "justification" and "justice" in almost all languages invites Christians to reflect upon whether and how the realities they express are related. The New Testament makes use of the very same word – *dikaïosynē* – to express both the quality of upright behavior and the state of being freed from sin through the mercy of God.¹⁰² That both of these meanings are conveyed with the same word reflects the fact that they are profoundly related. The one who is justified by faith is called to act in a righteous way. As a consequence, the doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression, and violence in today's world. The report of phase three of the dialogue between WARC and the Catholic Church noted that "Jesus, the Word made flesh, proclaimed that the kingdom is at hand and the community of disciples is that group of human beings which, under the influence of grace, has responded in faith. . . . This response of saving faith impels them, for their part, to proclaim the Word of salvation and commissions them to witness to the kingdom values that Jesus taught."¹⁰³ The tragic abundance of economic injustice, oppression, racism, sexism and abuse of the environment is all too evident in our world today; these evils are present even within the Christian community. In the face of this, there have been repeated calls in both of our communities for commitment to work for change. The church is nourished to work on

¹⁰² The noun *dikaïosynē* can be translated either as "justice" or as "righteousness." In the New Testament it can express simply the quality of upright behavior, as in the verse "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). A central theme of Pauline theology, however, is to employ this word in his reflection about the relation between faith and the works of the law: "But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (Rom. 3:21-22). For its part, the noun justification, in today's vernacular languages, refers either to God's activity of reconciling sinners to himself or to the experience of being reconciled to God. Paul uses this verb (*dikaiûn*) to express God's gracious saving action in Christ: "Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

¹⁰³ *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*, 190.

behalf of justice, peace and the protection of creation through the ongoing encounter with Christ in the Spirit through Word and sacrament. As the previous phase of our bilateral conversations noted:

The transformation of the world occurs in part through efforts to create a more just and peaceful society. But Christians also believe that this transformation is realized now, in an anticipatory way, in that communion between God and human beings which takes place in the church, especially through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and other sacraments or rites. As sacrament of the kingdom, the church is and must be both creation of the Word and sacrament of grace.¹⁰⁴

Justice is a complex reality, having various meanings depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed. But we found the greatest convergence about it by starting with the revelation of the loving and graceful God, who expresses justice-seeking action in all facets of the lives of human beings and of creation.

57. God makes and declares human beings just not only to be saved individually within the community of the church, but also so that they can participate in God's work of healing and transforming their unjust world. In this sense, one can talk of the ethics of justification. This is beautifully expressed in the parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats, where Jesus states that at the last judgment he will say "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." (cf. Matt. 25:31-46). The God of the Bible is a God of righteous mercy¹⁰⁵ who takes human misery to heart, entering into it and overcoming it from within. God establishes justice for the innocent who are threatened, the poor, the alienated and the oppressed. God stands unconditionally and passionately on their side: "he has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52). God's concern for us in our distress cannot be taken seriously without assuming responsibility for all those who are poor and wretched.¹⁰⁶ The believer is summoned to accompany and defend those who suffer wrong. Conformity to Christ means attending to the needs of those excluded by society. The poor, the marginalized and the victimized, together with the whole groaning creation, require the special attention of the Christian¹⁰⁷

A) Justification, Sanctification and Action on behalf of Justice

58. For the Reformed, justification is always accompanied by sanctification; they are two inseparable aspects of the saving activity of Christ granted to believers in virtue of their union

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. the Hebrew word *tzedakah*, the primary meaning of which is "righteousness."

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 386-387.

¹⁰⁷ See Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 197-201; *Laudato si*, 17-19.

with Christ that as a result they may live in holiness. The Second Vatican Council entitled an entire chapter of its Constitution on the Church the “universal call to holiness,” proposing that the church is holy “because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as ‘alone holy,’ loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her (cf. Eph. 5:25-26); he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. Therefore all in the Church . . . are called to holiness, according to the apostle’s saying: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 Th. 4:3; cf. Eph. 1:4).”¹⁰⁸ True sanctification always manifests itself in the fruits of the Spirit, outstanding among which is love. Thus the Council affirms that “the first and most necessary gift is charity, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor because of him.”¹⁰⁹ Such love for God and for neighbor will impel the Christian to seek to rectify situations in which human beings suffer under conditions of oppression, injustice or the destruction of the environment on which we all depend. In this perspective, justification and sanctification of necessity call for and lead naturally to action on behalf of justice. One national dialogue between our two communions affirms:

The people of God are called in every age to proclaim righteousness, to struggle against injustice, and to care for one another, for the structures of civilization, and for creation. In our age, “human rights” is a particular way of speaking of the ethical demands of righteousness and justice under God's rule. At their deepest point, all human rights are grounded in nothing else than God's righteousness, which we know through Jesus Christ. It is under the grace of God's righteousness that humans speak of a universal and reliable moral law that is known by revelation and reason. It is engraved on the human heart in such a way that no one and no group is excused from recognizing the claim that other humans must be treated with justice, and that societies must be arranged on the basis of freedom and equity. . . .¹¹⁰

The statement reinforces the Christian mandate to do justice by pointing out that it is engraved on every human heart, a claim that accords with the Catholic understanding of natural law. Though the Reformed have varying perspectives on the concept of natural law, they do affirm that God’s law given at creation is consistent with God’s law revealed to Moses and embodied in Jesus Christ. As those renewed by the Holy Spirit and thereby empowered to obey this law more completely, Christians have a special interest in pursuing justice.

B) The Word of God and Commitment to Justice

¹⁰⁸ *Lumen gentium*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹⁰ “The Statement on Human Rights” from Reformed-Roman Catholic USA consultation on “Ethics and the Search for Christian Unity,” (1980), available at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/reformed/upload/Ethics-and-the-Search-for-Christian-Unity.pdf> (accessed 18 February, 2015).

59. The Word of God – incarnate, written, and proclaimed – founds the Christian pursuit of justice. The incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, embodies God’s justice most fully, as we see in his proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth: “‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Lk. 4:18-21, quoting Is. 61:1-2).

60. The righteousness proclaimed and embodied by Jesus presupposes the Old Testament tradition that testifies to God’s justice. God is the just judge (Ps. 7:10; 11:7; Jer. 11:20) who rules and orders all things with righteousness (Dt. 32:4; Ps. 119:137; Is. 5:16). God’s righteousness lasts forever (Ps. 119:142) and brings about the deliverance of the people Israel, in fulfillment of the promise (Ps. 103:6; Is. 42:6-7; 45, 13:24-25 and, in general, Is. 40-66). Justice is also a human moral virtue which designates the observance of God’s commandments so that one does justice or acts with righteousness (Gen. 18:19; Ps. 106: 3; 119:40,106; Prov. 21:3; Is. 56:1; 58:2). In the Old Testament, God’s good gifts of heaven and earth, seas and dry land, vegetation and animals, and God’s promise of land to Israel, beckon us to seek not only just human relations, but also the care and protection of God’s whole creation.

61. While one dimension of biblical justice is captured in the “golden rule” (“Do to others as you would have them do to you,” (Luke 6:31), the New Testament encourages an even more radical form of righteousness, following the very example of Jesus: “Live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph. 5:2). In this way, scripture asks not simply that people act fairly and consistently, treating others as they hope that they might themselves be treated, but to treat others as they themselves have already been treated. Christ delivered us at great cost from the peril of eternal death. We have been spared from a condemnation that would otherwise have been ours. From now on there is nothing for us but to live a life of gratitude. The standard of behavior is set not by our wishes to be treated fairly but by Jesus’ saving act of radical, self-sacrificing love.

62. We hear and respond to God’s Word most frequently in and through the church’s proclamation of the good news of God’s righteous action in Christ, which is: “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed” (Rom. 3:23-25). Christ’s death for us on the cross is for the sake of our salvation as well as an indication of the depth of his suffering love on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized.

63. Proclamation of this gospel has obvious implications for the social commitment of Jesus’ followers. Faith engendered by hearing the Word heals the person wounded by sin and moves

him or her toward justice both within and beyond the bounds of the church. As Pope Francis noted in his exhortation on the joy of the gospel:

Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of “charity à la carte” or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world.¹¹¹

And as the *Belhar Confession*, of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa, states:

We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.¹¹²

Both these statements underline our shared conviction that the church is directed beyond itself toward the world, to which it is called to bear witness about the good news of God’s reign of love and justice.

C) Sacraments and Commitment to Justice

64. Sacraments, as expressions of faith, both clarify the meaning of justice and call believers to commit themselves to pursuing its realization in the world. An essential aspect of the believer’s response of gratitude for what God has done in his or her life is to live a life worthy of the call to sanctification and holiness. The sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit impels them to promote that justice which scripture relates with the kingdom of God. “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Baptismal liturgies in our churches tend to emphasize biblical themes related to salvation in Christ, especially those of participation in the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection and birth in Christ to become a new creation. Dying and rising with Christ, sharing his life through life-giving grace, becoming an adopted child of God – these fundamental dimensions of baptism impel Christians to be conformed to Christ, whose mission and identity are so devoted to the relief of human misery. An essential characteristic of baptismal life in the pattern of the Trinity is that it is oriented to mission. The Father sent the Son to give the Spirit. Jesus’ baptism

¹¹¹ *Evangelii gaudium*, 180.

¹¹² *The Confession of Belhar* (September 1986), 3. The confession was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA). For full text see http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf.

inaugurated his mission. Anointed with the Spirit at his baptism, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and then returned to Galilee proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God (cf. Mark 1:9-15; Luke 3:21-4:14). Similarly, the Christian, conformed to Christ in baptism and anointed by the Spirit, is sent to serve the coming of the kingdom of God, to participate in Christ's mission while manifesting the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit and thus to transform the world. In the end, the establishment of the kingdom is the work of God:

Certainly we cannot "build" the Kingdom of God by our own efforts—what we build will always be the kingdom of man [sic] with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope. And we cannot – to use the classical expression – "merit" Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something "merited," but always a gift.¹¹³

D) The Eucharist and Justice in the World

65. It is with regret that we must acknowledge that, even though we agree on the implications of the Eucharist for justice, our two communions still cannot celebrate the Eucharist together. The reasons for this situation have not yet been addressed by dialogue between our churches at the international level, though we hope that this will be taken up in the future.¹¹⁴ With this in mind we are nevertheless able to say together the following.

66. The Eucharist by its very nature leads to sharing and caring for the poor and disadvantaged. One of the earliest accounts of the Eucharist – 1 Cor. 11:17-34 – is a good point of departure for considering its social significance. Paul writes to admonish the Corinthians to correct certain abuses, such as disparities in food and drink, with some persons having more than enough while others had very little. The community was torn apart by conspicuous consumption at the expense of the poor and needy. Its celebration of the Lord's Supper stood in contradiction to that communion which is the very meaning of the Eucharist. In John's Gospel, Jesus' miracle of multiplying the loaves and his discourse on the bread of life make explicit reference to the feeding of the Israelites with manna – bread from heaven – during their journey through the desert to the promised land (cf. Jn. 6, 31-33 and Ex. 16). This feeding of the people during their exodus from Egypt was a miraculous experience of solidarity and sharing, in which those who gathered much had nothing left over and those who gathered little had no shortage (Ex. 16, 18). The Eucharist, like the manna in the desert, is food for people on the march toward the true promised land, revealed by Jesus to be the kingdom of God. The Eucharist is essentially a shared meal which

¹¹³ *Spe salvi*, 35.

¹¹⁴ The 7th round of Reformed-Catholic dialogue in the United States (2003-2010) did spend significant time exploring convergences and divergences in Eucharistic theology and practice. This work helps to illuminate the continuing limits of our Eucharistic sharing, as well as suggesting areas for future dialogue. See the dialogue's final report *This Bread of Life*, esp. section 3c "Presence of Christ" and section 3d "Offering and Sacrifice", as well as section 4 "Pastoral Implications." http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/worship/pdfs/this-bread-of-life.pdf

scholarship has shown to be deeply associated with the paschal celebration; it is one of the culminating moments of the ministry of Jesus, who often shared meals with his followers and with publicans and sinners and who encouraged his disciples to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind who were unable to repay one's generosity (Lk. 14:13-14). Furthermore, the Eucharist is the expression of the self-giving, sacrificial love of Christ, who says "this is my body given for you" (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24), "this is my blood poured out for you" (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:19), verses which reflect the suffering servant hymn of Is. 53:4-6. The celebration of the self-sacrificing love of Christ in the Eucharist invites those who participate to do as he has done, offering their own action on behalf of those in need. In this way, one can see that a deep meaning of the Eucharist is charity. Charity is at the very heart of the social commitment of the Church:

Charity is love received and given. It is "grace" (*cháris*). Its source is the wellspring of the Father's love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (cf. Jn. 13: 1) and "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5: 5). As the objects of God's love, men and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God's charity and to weave networks of charity. This dynamic of charity received and given is what gives rise to the Church's social teaching, which is *caritas in veritate in re sociali*: the proclamation of the truth of Christ's love in society.¹¹⁵

67. The connection between the Eucharist and love was also nicely underlined by some of the earliest Christian writers. According to the *Didache*, the Eucharist was expected to express the overcoming of every cultural division, especially those rooted in enmity, while at the same time committing all who partook of it to sharing with the poor.¹¹⁶ Concerning Christian worship in the second century, Justin Martyr wrote:

And on the day named after the sun, all, whether they live in the city or countryside, are gathered together in unity. . . . Those who are prosperous and who desire to do so, give what they wish, according to each one's own choice, and the collection is deposited with the presider. He aids orphans and widows, those who are in want through disease or through another cause, those who are in prison, and foreigners who are sojourning here. In short, the presider is a guardian to all who are in need.¹¹⁷

Several decades later, Tertullian speaks of the Eucharist in contexts where it appears associated with the practice of the works of love that the Christian community practiced, especially for the

¹¹⁵ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 5.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Eucharist and Offering*, Pueblo: New York 1986, 15.

¹¹⁷ *First Apology*, 67, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers I: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. 9 vols., 1885; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1996, 186. Hereafter referred to as *ANF*.

weak and persecuted.¹¹⁸ Perhaps even more important is the actual practice of some of the various churches about which we have some information.

68. From this one can see that the church, in various contexts, drawing much good from cultures as well as challenging what is contrary to the gospel, is called to be a transforming community that cares for the poor, the needy, and the humiliated. It needs to reflect Jesus' words at the last supper: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). The Eucharist points to and embodies real reconciliation. The third phase of dialogue between our communities pondered the role of the Church during the situation of apartheid in South Africa, where a provoking stimulus to reflection on the system of separation of the races began precisely because of the refusal on the part of some to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that included all believers.¹¹⁹ The Eucharist impels the Christian community to overcome such division. The Eucharist points out, in a most eminent way, what it means to be a Christian. Its celebration necessarily implies a certain way of life. Regarding justice, the Eucharist recalls and manifests that, in Christ, the righteousness of God has been revealed, as a gift and human response. In the offering of his body and the shedding of his blood, a new order has been definitively established. Each celebration of the Eucharist introduces us into the dynamic of justification, reconciliation and re-creation of humankind. But the witness character of the sacramental symbols does not end with human re-creation. Immersed in the waters of baptism and transformed by sharing the manna of Christ, fruit of the earth, and work of human hands, we are also thereby called to be responsible stewards of the environment. Our sharing of a meal must also be extended to the responsibility to safeguard that the earth be habitable for all. In the face of so many structures and mechanisms of injustice and exclusion, the Eucharist should be a true sign of the coming kingdom of God.

E) Authority and Action on Behalf of Justice

69. It is the church as the whole people of God that is called to advance and promote those things that lead towards the establishing of a more just world. In order to avoid that such advancement and promotion be conditioned by any cultural, social or political context alone, this requires continuous processes of discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the same time it involves the openness to be challenged to live the Christian witness as appropriate to different contexts.

70. In the church there are different ministries and areas of service, both those that hold formal authority and those that manifest themselves prophetically/charismatically from time to time. Care must be taken not to create any false dichotomies between institutional and prophetic/charismatic authority nor between clerical and non-clerical voices. The collaboration between prophetic voices within the Church and the voices of those in roles of formal

¹¹⁸ Cf. especially *Ad uxorem*, II,4: CSEL 70, 117 and II,8: CSEL 70, 124. ET in *ANF 4*, 46-48.

¹¹⁹ See *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* (2007), 82-101.

institutional authority needs to find expression within the formal structures of the church as well as beyond those structures.

71. Experience shows that such collaboration produced by the Spirit can be preceded by tension and conflict. Dialogue and discernment through humble, prayerful listening to one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit provides the church with good cause for hope that the level of agreement needed for carrying out its mission as the prophetic, priestly and kingly people, can be reached, without prejudice to the legitimate variety of insights and proposals that emerge within the community.

72. Formal authority and leadership within the church are ordered very differently in our respective traditions. The dialogue team did reflect on some matters relating to this difference but not sufficiently so to report on it. It would therefore be useful to take up an exploration of the structures and ordering of our churches together with their respective decision-making processes at a future point. In particular, the better understanding of the location of formal authority and leadership within the respective ecclesial structures might prove itself to be ecumenically fruitful.¹²⁰

F) Building on our Previous Phase: Church as “Sacrament” of the Kingdom

73. The kingdom of God was at the heart of the ministry and activity of Jesus. In The Lord's Prayer, Reformed and Catholic Christians pray together, "Thy kingdom come." We acknowledge that Jesus and the kingdom are one. There is no kingdom without Jesus, and no Jesus without the kingdom. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we are praying for the coming of Jesus at the same time. As this divine kingdom comes to us in the person and work of Jesus, we would note that it has three tenses. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God's kingdom has come once and for all. In the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments, this kingdom enters into our midst here and now. At the end of history, when Jesus will be revealed in glory, this kingdom will reach its fulfillment in universal thanks and praise for the mercy and justice of God.

74. Phase three of our dialogue explored in depth the meaning of this kingdom as revealed both in scripture and in subsequent tradition. Here we affirm together that reception of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist calls Christians to a firm commitment to serve the cause of the justice of the kingdom of God in today's world. Baptism anoints the Christian community to become the priestly, prophetic and kingly people of God. The Lord's Supper forms us into a just, reconciled, and loving communion and strengthens the bonds of communion between and among the members of the body of Christ, thereby impelling them to become agents of justice, reconciliation, and love within the church and the world. Our earlier phase has spoken of the

¹²⁰ See paragraphs 142-144 of the report of the second phase of our dialogue *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* and especially chapters 2 and 3 of the report of the third phase of our dialogue, *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* on case studies of common action on behalf of justice and on structures and processes of discernment.

church as a kind of sacrament of the kingdom of God.¹²¹ In its focus on the implications of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist for the justice of this kingdom, our current phase has sought to deepen and extend reflection on this image of the church. Together we affirm the hope, expressed in our earlier dialogue, that our

articulation of the church's ministerial and instrumental role, in total dependence on the Spirit of Christ and directed toward God's kingdom, can make a contribution to Christian unity that reaches beyond our own communities. The ecumenical movement as a whole may be understood as participation in the movement of the Holy Spirit, who calls and inspires us to seek the kingdom of God together, and to commit ourselves to one another. If churches find new ways to give shape to this mutual support and accountability, then we pray that the result will be greater visibility for the church as sign and instrument of God's kingdom.¹²²

In this light, we recognize that the relation of eschatology and justice could serve as an important topic for the future of ecumenical exploration.

G) Inseparability of Doctrinal and Practical Ecumenism

75. There has been a classic conflict among ecumenically minded Christians between those who insist that the path toward unity requires a focus upon doctrinal questions which have been at the root of historic divisions, such as justification by faith, sanctification, and sacraments, and those who insist that such issues are less important today and that the focus of work for unity should be directed toward collaboration between the churches for the betterment of society. This is the tension, which can be expressed as that between doctrinal ecumenism and social ecumenism and was represented by the distinct efforts of the ecumenical movements of "Faith and Order" and "Life and Work." Our work in this dialogue has hopefully shown that theological agreement about the Holy Spirit's saving activity of justification and sanctification by grace through faith. Sanctification by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament is precisely what impels believers and the Christian community as a whole to action on behalf of justice in the world. These classic doctrinal themes provide a broad theological basis for the action of the Christian community on behalf of justice, peace, and the protection of creation. The specific issues addressed in the Church's social action also need to be grounded in a solid theological reflection. Commitment to and work for social justice in our world finds an important and irreplaceable foundation in agreement about the theological doctrines of justification and sanctification, which are generated in believers by the Holy Spirit through the Church's ministry of Word and sacrament.

¹²¹ Cf. *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*, 190-193.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 197.

General Conclusion

76. Approaching the Reformation anniversary year of 2017, we have taken up the theme of justification by faith, which was so important in the debates and eventual divisions between Christians five hundred years ago. Our aim was to consider this topic within several fresh perspectives that have perhaps not been sufficiently explored by us or by other ecumenical participants up until now. The three chapters of our report consider the relation of justification, respectively, to sanctification, to Word and sacrament and to action on behalf of justice in the world.

77. We discovered a very substantial agreement that justification and sanctification cannot be separated. This means that justification will make possible and lead to the fruits of virtuous action. The justified believer enters into a journey toward that holiness to which he or she is called by the Lord and enabled by the grace of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the teaching that human beings are saved by grace through faith and not through works, which St. Paul proposed within the precise conditions he faced when gentiles entered into the Christian community, does not serve as a reason for division between us regarding the meaning of salvation by faith and the importance of good works. There seem to remain some differences between us in that the Reformed, for their part, see justification as complete and irrevocable, based on their confidence of the faithfulness of God to his covenant, while Catholics, for their part, closely associate justification with sanctifying grace, which they understand as lost when a believer falls into grave sin. Future dialogue toward greater doctrinal agreement and full communion between us should take up the themes of divine election and the possibility of falling into and of overcoming serious sin.

78. We discovered a very substantial agreement that justification and sanctification are brought about by the Holy Spirit by means of Word and sacrament. This allowed us to bring our theme of justification and sanctification into contact with an important advance registered by two earlier phases of dialogue, that is, our agreement that the Church is constituted by both the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. Through Word and sacrament the Holy Spirit confers the grace of faith, which is at the heart of both justification and sanctification. A contribution that our convergence here can make to the overall ecumenical movement is to nuance the conviction that human beings are saved “by faith alone.”¹²³ This expression should not obscure the fact that the Spirit makes use of means, such as audible spoken words and visible enacted rites, to impart the righteousness that comes by grace through faith. Significant differences remain between us regarding how we understand the salvific efficacy of Word and sacrament and regarding the number of the sacraments. Furthermore, the charismatic interplay between the prophetic voice of the whole community of the Church and the formally

¹²³ It would seem that the words “faith alone” appear in the New Testament only in James 2:4, which claims that one is not saved by faith alone, without works. The emphasis on saving faith by the Pauline tradition finds a good expression in Ephesians 2:8 (“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”).

located voice of authority within the Church needs to reflect the nature of the community as a prophetic, priestly and kingly people, anointed as such by the Spirit received in baptism and nourished in the Eucharist. We have not taken up the question of what precise ministerial offices and structures are called for by Word and sacrament. These could serve as themes for future dialogue.

79. Finally, we discovered full agreement that the theological doctrine and reality of justification by faith and sanctification impels the Christian community to act on behalf of justice. The imperative for justice flows necessarily from justification and from the call of the whole Church to holiness. We especially considered how the celebration of the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper points to the need for the community to reach out to those in need. Here we noted that justice is closely allied to charity and mercy, both in the Scriptures and in the voices of the tradition. Differences remain on where each community locates formal authority. The process and structures of decision-making remain to be more fully explored, though this theme has already received some important initial treatment in the report of phase three of dialogue between our communities, *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom*. Fortunately our present report has shown that there need be no tension between dialogue about traditionally divisive theological issues, such as the nature of justification, and collaboration in the work of justice. To our delight, we discovered that it is precisely theological agreement that can provide a basis for collaboration in promoting justice, peace and the protection of creation.

80. As we conclude this fourth phase of dialogue between the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Catholic Church, we members of the bilateral international commission unanimously encourage our two communities to continue on the path of dialogue. Each of the three previous paragraphs spotlights some issues which this phase of dialogue has shown to be in need of further discussion. Other issues to which this report invites us to give greater attention are the Eucharist, ordained ministry, and the exercise of authority. We believe that a most promising theme for dialogue which could lead to the uncovering of greater ecclesiological convergence between us could be a focus upon the nature of the Church as a prophetic, priestly and royal/shepherd people of God, a theme which is explicitly proposed both by Calvin and by the Reformed tradition as well as by the Second Vatican Council. Should a new bilateral commission be nominated, perhaps its first consideration might be to discern, in light of the foregoing paragraphs, what particular concern seems to call most urgently for discussion within our respective churches.

81. We also would suggest several concrete steps that can enhance the reception of the present report.

- The report ought to be made available to the various ecumenical offices throughout our communities at regional, national, and local levels; the internet could be used for inexpensive and expedited communication to promote growth toward greater unity between our churches.
- Some collaboration in preparing catechesis on justification and sanctification, about which we share a significant consensus, could be developed.

- Efforts can be made at regional and local levels to agree to develop and make use of common certificates of baptism, noting that our churches fully recognize baptism when administered according to the mandate of Jesus in Matthew 28:19.
- Discussions about Reformed association with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* can be continued and, if possible, lead to such an association, which would be important not only for our two churches but for the wider ecumenical community as a whole.
- Especially in light of Chapter Three of the present report, new initiatives for promoting justice, peace, and the protection of the environment can be fostered between our communities at various geographic levels.