

C le Bruyns
University of Stellenbosch

The promise of the Petrine ministry: an old stumbling block, a new stepping-stone¹

ABSTRACT

One of the most significant developments in Protestant-Roman Catholic ecumenism is the changing perspective on the Petrine ministry, especially as it relates to Protestant Christianity, in which the longstanding ecumenical “thorn in the flesh” has become more of an “open” question. In this article these new Protestant viewpoints and the underlying factors facilitating these changes are addressed, and most notably the vast benefits that arise from a new perspective on the papacy. It will be argued that Protestants may potentially embrace the Petrine office as an authentic ministry of the Christian churches, which provide actual benefits for the wider community of Christians. It will also be argued that the papacy can only be fully embraced to the extent that certain modifications are realised in its manner of exercise. Protestant traditions in their diversity have much to offer Roman Catholicism in their critique of the Petrine ministry as it presently exists.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF THE PAPACY

New Protestant perspectives on the Petrine office are presently emerging in modern ecumenism.² It is an ecumenical *donnée* that the Roman Catholic papacy has existed as the greatest “thorn in the flesh” in Protestant-Catholic relations. For Roman Catholics it may certainly have featured as the “Rock of the Ages”, but for Protestants it has undoubtedly continued as an unnecessary and regrettable “stumbling block” for their churches. These emerging perspectives reflect a different outlook on the nature and outworking of the Petrine office when considering the vast array of negative sentiment it has received throughout theological and ecclesiastical history in the post-Reformation era, an outlook that views it as a more promising structure of ministry.

The pontiffs themselves acknowledged the dilemma of their office on several occasions. “The Pope, as we well know, is undoubtedly the gravest obstacle in the path of ecumenism,” observed Paul VI in a 1967 address to members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.³ John Paul II echoed these sentiments in a 1984 discourse at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, when he pointed out that the ministry of the Bishop of Rome

1 An earlier version of this paper was given at a postgraduate seminar at the University of Stellenbosch, 27 March 2002. This paper also forms part of a current research project on “The papacy as ecumenical challenge: Contemporary Protestant perspectives on the Petrine ministry”, which is presently being conducted through the Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology, University of Stellenbosch, in my capacity as a Research Fellow.

2 Of special relevance, see Braaten & Jenson (2001); Frieling (1997); MacEoin (1998); Puglisi (1999).

3 Cf Address to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) in AAS 59 (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*), (Apr 28, 1967), 498.

presented a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections. These words were reiterated in his 1995 papal encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* (cf §88).

Longstanding Protestant resistance to the authenticity of the Petrine ministry is fuelled particularly by papal claims of divine institution (*iure divino*), infallibility, universal jurisdiction and authority, and generally the manner of its exercise in history, *a fortiori* its outworking during the medieval era. As such it has in vehement and pejorative fundamentalist fashion been labelled the “throne of Satan”, “the harlot of Babylon”, and even “the Antichrist”. This was precisely Luther’s critique of the papacy,⁴ as well as Calvin’s disparagement.⁵ Subsequent Protestant traditions, leaders and theologians, and church dialogues continued to wrestle with these problematic facets of the Bishop of Rome, indeed aspects that demand further treatment and response in order to move beyond the current impasse between Catholics and Protestants.

The travesties of the Petrine office in church relations notwithstanding, the ecumenical churches are virtually agreed on the seriousness of addressing the papal question for any meaningful progression in future relations between Catholics and Protestants. Avery Dulles candidly recognises the pressing nature of this subject, “It is hard to see how Catholics could consider themselves to be fully reconciled with churches that did not acknowledge the papacy as bearer of a divinely instituted ‘Petrine ministry’ within the universal Church” (1995:122-123). One of the most dynamic signs of development in Protestant-Catholic relations, therefore, is the increasing tendency for Protestants to regard the papacy as a legitimate and propitious form of ministry in the context of the broader community of Christians.

2. NEW DIRECTIONS: THE OPENING OF A CLOSED ISSUE

To account for these changing perspectives there are several general factors that may appropriately be recalled. In the first place, Protestants are coming to terms more and more with the sovereign work of God in human history, which is assisting them in possibly accommodating the papal office as a genuine structure of the Christian Church. The papacy is usually treated as a theological oddity in the Protestant worldview, with various accusations levelled against the papal office that seemingly disqualify it as an authentic ministry of God. These allegations are, for the most part, justifiable in the different historical contexts of the history of the papacy, but cannot be appealed to as *de facto* reasons against the office as a truly divine channel of God. Harvey Cox (1998:147) contends,

Somehow, as I plunged deeper into history, then theology and the history of religion, it was the sheer persistence and virtual omnipresence (for blessing or for bane) of the papacy, which impressed me. I began to see at least a glimmer of plausibility in the hoary Catholic argument that any institution which has survived that long, despite the fornicators and four-flushers who had actually occupied the office, must be taken with some degree of

4 His “Antichrist” verdict was not based on a hatred against the pope as many have mistakenly assumed, but more accurately on the actual operation of the papal office at that time (cf Meyer 1999:16). While Luther certainly took issue with the soteriological necessity of the papacy, the question of its ecclesial necessity was still a valid reality.

5 Calvin, however, was less accommodating of the authentic nature of the papacy. While similarly disapproving the questionable exercise of the office at that time, his scope of repudiation included the papal claims of divine institution, biblical development, and legitimate authority. See Vischer 1999:137-138.

seriousness. If the God of the Bible, as I believe, acts in and through human history, then it has to be conceded that the papacy, and not just in the West, occupies a not inconsiderable chunk of that history.

In the second place, the revolutionary programme of renewal inaugurated at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) significantly paved the way for more constructive conversation between Catholics and Protestants, especially on the subject of the Petrine office. Pope John XXIII and his *aggiornamento* (i.e. updating, modernisation, adaptation, renewal) campaign set the Roman Catholic Church on an unprecedented path that gave way to shifts in the attitude, theology and practices of Catholicism.⁶ It particularly affected the ecumenical tone and outlook of Catholics toward Protestant faith communities, which eventually brought to reality the establishment and maintenance of a vast array of formal dialogues, with the previously closed issue of the papacy inevitably becoming a prominent subject of ecumenical discourse in recent years.⁷

In the third place, both Catholic and Protestant churches are becoming more aware of the vast benefits available through one another as they journey together toward Christian *koinonia*. Margaret O’Gara (1998:vii) aptly labels the ecumenical enterprise a “gift exchange” from which tangible outcomes are possible in a meaningful dialogue and encounter,

In ecumenical dialogue, each Christian communion brings one or many gifts to the dialogue table, and each receives riches from their dialogue partners as well. But in the ecumenical gift exchange, the gift giving enriches all of the partners, since we do not lose our gifts by sharing them with others. In fact, the gift exchange of ecumenism means a reception of gifts for which we have been prepared by repentance and hope.

Applying this to the Petrine ministry, emerging Protestant voices are becoming ever more cognisant of the actual benefits to be gained from communion with the Petrine service (*Petrusdienst*) – whether what is conceived here is a communion “under” the pope or, rather more realistically, a communion “with, not under” the pope (cf Frieling 1997). As Catholics revisit the nature of the Petrine ministry since its inception, Protestants are being confronted with the ideals of the Petrine office (*Petrusamt*) as a promising ministry for the wider community of churches, while equally giving direction and feedback vis-à-vis the future outworking of the papacy if it is to become a truly universal office of the Christian churches.⁸

This article addresses more specific foundations for the changing Protestant perspectives on the Petrine office, which are discernible in two critically momentous documents of profound ecumenical value. The first text is the section on “Ministry” in the Faith and Order document of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), while the second is the renowned papal encyclical letter of John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995). Both documents serve as an ongoing challenge to the

6 For a fairly recent publication on the impact of Vatican II on the contemporary Roman Catholic Church, see Rausch 1996. The presentation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) in “a new way” is another case in point.

7 See Rusch & Gros 1998 for their compilation of international ecumenical documents between Catholics and various Protestant churches. While these dialogues represent discussions on a kaleidoscope of ecclesial and theological concerns, the problem and promise of the Petrine ministry is particularly conspicuous in the Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran dialogues.

8 It is important and necessary that a two-way ecumenical impact takes place, in reference to the ecumenical “gift exchange”, where Protestants are challenged by the gift of the Petrine ministry and Catholics are enriched by the Protestant critique and feedback vis-à-vis the papacy in its present form.

churches today to review their understanding of ministry in general and the Petrine ministry in particular.

3. THEOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE ON MINISTRY: "THE LIMA TEXT" (1982)

In January 1982 in Lima, Peru, the WCC's Faith and Order Commission released *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), or what is often referred to as "the Lima text". It is widely regarded as the most significant theological achievement of the ecumenical movement, and presently prevails as the most widely distributed, translated, and discussed ecumenical text in modern times.⁹ But what does this Lima document have to do with a discussion on the Petrine ministry, especially in light of the fact that no conversation on the papacy is specifically included in the text? A number of points that arise from the Ministry section of BEM may be highlighted for its relevance to the papal question.

In the first place, the Lima text is a statement on the topic of *ministry*. Its relevance is noted in the increasing tendency in recent decades to talk about the papacy as "the Petrine ministry". The essence of the papal office – as a ministry – is thus indirectly accommodated in BEM, which rightly talked about ministry as a major church-dividing reality in the history of church relations vis-à-vis divergent understandings of its nature and form. The Petrine ministry is thus indirectly placed in proper ecclesiological and ecumenical perspective as a distinctive form of ministry in the Church. It represents, therefore, a new point of departure in Protestant-Catholic ecumenism on this grave obstacle.

In the second place, the Lima text is a *convergence statement* on ministry. As a truly ecumenical document its participants included those from virtually all major Christian traditions – Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, United, Disciples, Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal. BEM points to various convergences in convictions and perspectives on the issue of ministry in the midst of such great diversity among the churches and, in so doing, indirectly permits a possible agreement of general aspects of the Petrine ministry.

In leaving behind the hostilities of the past, the churches have begun to discover many promising convergences in their shared convictions and perspectives. These convergences give assurance that despite much diversity in theological expression the churches have much in common in their understanding of the faith (BEM ix).

The potential acceptance of the Petrine ministry as a legitimate, albeit different, form of ministry is more possible if the convergence statements about ministry in BEM find congruence with the nature of the Petrine ministry. Theological convergence on fundamental aspects of ministry in general provide a constructive basis for plausibly affirming the legitimacy of the Petrine ministry specifically. It certainly moves us away from regarding the papal institution as a totally alien phenomenon, but instead underlines its close relation to fundamentals of Christian ministry. These shared convictions between various Protestant forms of ministry and the Roman Catholic Petrine ministry, for instance, contribute profoundly to a common understanding of faith and ministry, thus providing an important setting for closer communion between the churches.

9 For a helpful description of the BEM process, see *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990* (1990), especially 6-16. Notwithstanding the broad scope of involvement in the dialogues and process, the report highlights statistical information attesting to its significance, which "makes BEM the most widely distributed text in the history of the ecumenical movement!" (1990:10).

In the third place, the Lima text is an *objective* convergence statement on ministry. BEM talks about the need for different churches and their accompanying distinctive forms of ministry to be learning institutions. It challenges all churches to a real sense of openness and learning as they review their specific forms of ministry and compare themselves with other churches and their specific forms of ministry, when it urges, “All churches need to examine the forms of ... ministry and the degree to which the churches are faithful to its original intentions. Churches must be prepared to renew their understanding and their practice of ... ministry” (M51).

In this way all churches with their accompanying forms of ministry distinctives are placed on level ground, as opposed to directly imposing a judgement on any church’s ministry, not the least of which is that of the Catholic Church. Here BEM is indirectly opening non-papal churches to the reality of possibly learning and gaining from the papal churches. For it insightfully states, “Openness to each other holds the possibility that the Spirit may well speak to one church through the insights of another” (M54).

The Lima text calls churches to critically review distinctive forms of ministry for its effectiveness vis-à-vis the preservation of truth, maintenance of unity, and faithfulness in witness, and, to this end, indirectly challenges them to appraise the Petrine ministry as a potentially propitious ministry that could substantially benefit the churches at large, as well as enrich and enhance their own understanding and carrying out of ministry, assuming that the Petrine ministry reflects a significant potential for effectiveness (cf M6, M25).

In the fourth place, the Lima text is an objective convergence statement on ministry, with a special regard for the *ideals of the ordained ministry*. BEM, in discussing common statements about the ideals of the ordained ministry, facilitates an integrative comparison between ordained ministry in general and the Petrine ministry as a specific expression of the ordained ministry. It talks about ordained ministry in the context of “persons who have received a charism and whom the church appoints for service by ordination through the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands” (M7). Such persons, moreover, would assist the Church in the fulfilment of its mission, as well as being “publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus of its unity” (M8).

The Petrine ministry, as an arguably legitimate form of ordained ministry, is indirectly placed in an even greater viable regard when BEM enquires, “How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?” (M6). To the extent that the Petrine ministry finds congruency with these ideals – such as the spread of the Gospel or the edification of the community – it may plausibly be embraced by Protestants as a *bona fide* form of the ordained ministry, as well as providing a reliable model of accountability for its outworking in a protected and reforming capacity.

As heralds and ambassadors, ordained ministers are representatives of Jesus Christ to the community, and proclaim his message of reconciliation. As leaders and teachers they call the community to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, the teacher and prophet, in whom law and prophets were fulfilled. As pastors, under Jesus Christ the chief shepherd, they assemble and guide the dispersed people of God, in anticipation of the coming Kingdom (M11).

In the fifth place, the Lima text is an objective convergence statement on ministry, with a special regard for the ideals and *threefold pattern* of the ordained ministry. BEM recommends a return to the threefold pattern of ministry as a potent case in point for greater effectiveness in the practice of ministry, unity and witness. It is not a flawless pattern of ministry, but did find universal

acceptance at early stages in theological and ecclesiastical history (M19, M22). In the light of BEM's assertion that this pattern is conceivably present in all churches in one way or another (cf M24), it represents a promising development for structurally locating a space for the papal office in a viable ministry setting. In recent years Protestants have become increasingly convinced of the importance of and need for universal structures of church unity and ministry in the light of an often disjointed and splintered outworking of ministry. This emerging consensus implicitly accommodates the role the Bishop of Rome can serve to this end.

In the sixth place, the Lima text is an objective convergence statement on ministry, with a special regard for the ideals and threefold pattern of the ordained ministry, *exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way*. BEM takes special note of how ministry is exercised in the churches, recognising the need for these three expressions in the churches.

It should be *personal* because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be *collegial*, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a *communal* dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit (M26).

These convergence statements apply indirectly to the Petrine ministry where the personal, collegial and communal dimensions of the papacy are currently under review. The papal office, if exercised properly, provides an important expression of these three dimensions of ministry and, as such, may potentially be embraced by all Christians as a viable form of ministry.

In the seventh place, the Lima text is an objective convergence statement on ministry, with a special regard for the ideals and threefold pattern of the ordained ministry, exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way, providing *a service of episkopè*. BEM highlights the role of episcopacy as a necessary gift to the Church as it fulfils the need in the churches for a ministry of leadership and pastoral supervision that stands above local congregations, "... a ministry of episkopè is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every church needs this ministry of unity in some form in order to be the Church of God, the one body of Christ, a sign of the unity of all in the Kingdom" (M23).

This need was singled out in one of the section reports of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (1993), "... there is a growing convergence amongst the churches regarding the need for a ministry of oversight (episkopè) at all levels in the life of the Church".¹⁰ With Protestant fragmentation and the unchecked splintering of denominations at its peak, such a role would indeed be a necessary gift for the churches.¹¹

10 See Report of Section III §25 in Best & Gassmann 1994:250. See also Report of Section II §§28-30, 243.

11 In their "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2002", David Barrett and Todd Johnson draw attention to this glaring fragmentation and disconnectedness, highlighting the rampant increase in denominationalism during the last century. In 1900 there are 1 880 denominational bodies, compared

This ministry of episkopè happens to be the most explicit role the Petrine ministry has assumed throughout the centuries, that of oversight and presidency. It is a gift BEM affirmed as essential for the life and witness of the Church concerning the “pastoral guidance of the community” (M17), as well as the “focus of unity within the whole community” (M20).

In the eighth place, the Lima text is an objective convergence statement on ministry, with a special regard for the ideals and threefold pattern of the ordained ministry, exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way, providing an *authoritative* service of episkopè. Authority is affirmed in BEM for its necessity in the ordained ministry. It should not be frowned upon as if there is no place for it in the ministry, although it is invalidated whenever its purpose and goal is distorted or misconstrued. BEM rightly noted,

... the authority of the ordained ministry is not to be understood as the possession of the ordained person but as a gift for the continuing edification of the body in and for which the minister has been ordained. Authority has the character of responsibility before God and is exercised with the cooperation of the whole community (M15).

The nature of the papal office is related to BEM at this point, since the Petrine office features as an authoritative structure of ministerial oversight and supervision in the Catholic Church. However, in the light of its continuing function in Catholicism, but especially in regard to a wider role in the Christian churches, its authority while a necessary gift, can only legitimately be embraced as long as the papal office does not lose sight of the goal and purpose of this authority, and also that it does not lose sight of the common calling of the whole people of God. A cautious view of authority and ministry is reflected in the Lima document,

... ordained ministers must not be autocrats or impersonal functionaries. Although called to exercise wise and loving leadership on the basis of the Word of God, they are bound to the faithful in interdependence and reciprocity. Only when they seek the response and acknowledgement of the community can their authority be protected from the distortions of isolation and domination. They manifest and exercise the authority of Christ in the way Christ himself revealed God’s authority to the world, by committing their life to the community ... Authority in the Church can only be authentic as it seeks to conform to this model (M16).

Some Protestants are wondering whether the benefits of a legitimate kind of authority through the pope may be accessed through some kind of communion with the Petrine office – whether it is a communion “under” the pope, or “with” the pope. It is not disputed that the pontiffs occupy an authoritative role in the churches, as well as in society at large, with Protestants considering anew how such a role of authority may serve as a meaningful and welcome gift to the churches in general.

4. A NEW DIALOGUE ON THE PETRINE MINISTRY: *UT UNUM SINT* (1995)

Ecumenical dialogue on the Petrine ministry reached a critical point in the encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint*. What was begun at Lima came to the forefront of ecumenical thinking, concerns and

to 2000 where there are 33 800 distinct and organisationally separate denominations recognisable. More disturbingly telling is that the 2002 statistic of 35 500 denominations are set to almost double to 63 000 by the year 2025.

efforts in this encyclical. Penned by the current pope, it was released to the churches as an internal document bearing the approval and authority of the Vatican on May 25, 1995. In recent years it has featured prominently in Protestant-Catholic discourse, and is unhesitatingly employed to account for changing Protestant perspectives on the papacy in contemporary ecumenism. A few remarks on this encyclical are helpful in this regard.

Firstly, in the encyclical the Catholic Church's commitment to renewal and internal reform is reaffirmed, as well as its commitment to ecclesial reconciliation and unity. Incidentally this was the first one ever written on the subject of ecumenism. In this way what was inaugurated at Vatican II is reinforced and continued, in a process that is labelled "irrevocable".

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself irrevocably to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the Spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the "signs of the times". The experiences of these years have made the church even more profoundly aware of her identity and her mission in history (§3).

Secondly, the papal letter builds on the accomplishments of Lima and its subsequent dialogues regarding the subject of ministry, but proceeds in a deeper and more focused fashion to identify the Petrine ministry as a contemporary ecumenical dilemma worthy of urgent attention on the part of the Catholic Church (cf §4, §§94-96).

Points of convergence at BEM are reflected in the encyclical as follows: the notion of the bishop as a focus and servant of unity; the bishop in the threefold form of ministry seeking to preserve the apostolic tradition and the integrity of the faith; the model of authority as rooted in servanthood and service. Moreover, the Petrine ministry as pictured in the encyclical is one that concurs with the emerging convergence in many Protestant churches regarding the need for structures serving the universal unity of the churches. On this Petrine function, John Paul II notes,

The function of Peter must continue in the Church so that under her sole Head, who is Jesus Christ, she may be visibly present in the world as the communion of all his disciples. Do not many of those involved in ecumenism today feel a need for such a ministry? A ministry, which presides in truth and love so that the ship – that beautiful symbol which the World Council of Churches has chosen as its emblem – will not be buffeted by the storms and will one day reach its haven (§97).

The pope's attention to the valuable role of the bishop of Rome is discernible throughout the letter, even at its very outset,

In our ecumenical age, marked by the Second Vatican Council, the mission of the bishop of Rome is particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ's disciples. The bishop of Rome himself must fervently make his own Christ's prayer for that conversion which is indispensable for "Peter" to be able to serve his brethren. I earnestly invite the faithful of the Catholic Church and all Christians to share in this prayer. May all join me in praying for this conversion (§4).

In a section near the end of his letter, devoted to the "Ministry of Unity of the Bishop of Rome" (§§88-96), he openly acknowledges the profound difficulty the papal office poses for most Christians outside the Catholic Church, "whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections" (§88) regarding the institution, history and claims of the office itself. "To the extent that we are responsible

for these,” he humbly notes, “I join my predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness” (§88). In unprecedented fashion, John Paul II then invites church leaders and their theologians to

... engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea “that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21) (§96).

This was an extremely significant gesture in Protestant-Catholic ecumenism on the difficult issue of the Petrine office, a gesture that has resulted in a new kind of dialogue with Catholics by Protestants on this grave obstacle in contemporary relations, resulting in a number of responses in recent years.¹²

Thirdly, the encyclical letter clearly reflects the Lima spirit of seeing benefits and gains from the ministry forms of other churches, in this case presenting the Petrine ministry as a ministry of service to the wider community of Christians worthy of potential acceptance by the non-Catholic faith communities. It displays and develops a much more functional explanation of the Petrine office, which underlines it essentially as a ministry, rather than an office or institution *per se*. As a different kind of ministry, but nevertheless a form of ministry that may benefit others, the pope comments again on the Bishop of Rome,

In the beautiful expression of Pope St Gregory the Great, my ministry is that of *servus servorum Dei* ... I have a particular responsibility ... in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation (§88, §95).

The mission of the bishop of Rome within the college of all the pastors consists precisely in “keeping watch” (episkopein), like a sentinel, so that through the efforts of the pastors the true voice of Christ the shepherd may be heard in all the particular churches. In this way, in each of the particular churches entrusted to those pastors, the *una, sancta, catholica et apostolica ecclesia* is made present. All the churches are in full and visible communion, because all the pastors are in communion with Peter and therefore united in Christ (§94).

The advice of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, in *De consideratione* to Pope Eugene III in the thirteenth century, is also laudable in its illumination of the papal mission at present,

Authority has been given to you in order that you may share, and not that you may give orders. Yes; act as a servant. Yourself a man, do not try to make other men your servants – you would make yourself the servant of a thousand villainies. Yes, you occupy the first rank, the first rank by excellence; but for what purpose do you occupy it? ... Even we, therefore, no matter how high an opinion we may have of our prerogatives, let us not

12 For a resourceful discussion, critique and documentation of these ongoing dialogues and responses, see Braaten & Jenson 2001; MacEoin 1998; Puglisi 1999; Rusch and Gros 1998.

hesitate to recognise that a service has been placed on us, not that we have been granted power ... And so that you may not think that this has been said solely for humility, and not for truth, here is what the Lord says in the gospel, "Among pagans it is the kings that lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are given the name of Benefactor." And he adds, "This must not happen with you."¹³ Nothing could be clearer: dominion is forbidden to the apostles.

The pope stresses the nature and ideals of this role of the Bishop of Rome, relating it continually to the broader mission and plan of God through the Church (cf §§5-6, §92). The reference to the Lima text's three-tiered dimension concerning the exercise of the ordained ministry is also reflected here (cf §§94-95). What is particularly noteworthy for Protestants is the reality of greater accountability and envisioned reform that is in mind, since a critical tension has understandably always been the precise manner in which this office has been exercised. John Wilkins (1998:128) cautions,

The blunt fact is, however, that unless the Catholic church is governed through a collegiality, which is structurally safeguarded, no Orthodox, Anglican or Protestant church will take a single practical step towards unity with it. The right speeches will be made – and it is important that they should be. There will be meetings and assemblies and above all there will be joint prayer. All this is indispensable. But action will not follow.

5. QUO VADIS? THE POSSIBILITY OF A PROTESTANT PETRINE RECEPTION

Roman Catholic theologian Bernard Häring (1998:16) refers to the anticipatory mode present at John Paul II's inauguration,

A sudden hope filled me, as I watched in 1978, while John Paul II was being installed as pope. After the oft quoted, "you are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church", I heard the warning, "get behind me, Satan, you are a scandal". Will this papacy, I asked myself, initiate a truly biblical and ecumenical renewal of the Petrine ministry?

Can Protestants leave behind past hostilities regarding the papacy in past times that experienced this office as nothing short of a stumbling block, and proceed anew in embracing it as a legitimate and propitious ministry for all churches, in this way a stepping stone for the churches to pursue greater effectiveness in mission, truth and unity? In the light of recent developments in Catholicism and ecumenism,¹⁴ it is more possible today but not with the papacy in its present form. Protestants must review the Petrine ministry more carefully in order to realise change and renewal in the nature and functioning of the Petrine office, so that it will truly serve the whole community of Christians in their faith, life and ministry.

The current Protestant-Catholic discourse on the promise of the Petrine ministry is in its early stages. Notwithstanding a number of dialogues that have taken place with some measure of interaction on the propitious nature of this structure of ministry, these represent only a fraction of

13 Cited by Zizola 1998:55.

14 For a recent overview of Catholics and Evangelical Protestants in renewed ecumenical conversation, see Rausch 2000.

Protestant churches. The wider community of Protestant churches have only been confronted with its potential benefits in recent years.

A critical dimension of the potential reception of the Petrine function by the Protestant community inevitably involves a study of how the Petrine ministry best serves churches in terms of their distinctive agendas. For example, I would argue that the Petrine ministry is essentially a ministry of the Gospel and, as such, would be linking the nature of the papal office directly with the theological agenda and aspirations of evangelical Christianity, for whom the Gospel is paramount. Or, I would claim that the Petrine ministry can justifiably be understood as a ministry of the Spirit – a charismatic ministry, perhaps – which would provide a meaningful theological bridge between Catholics and the Pentecostal and charismatic communities. The Petrine ministry may also be linked to various other Protestant traditions such as the Reformed, Methodist, Lutheran, and Anglican churches.

In a general sense, the broader Christian community can benefit significantly from what the papal ministry has to offer. Part and parcel of this venture is a critique these Protestant traditions can offer the Bishop of Rome. This is precisely what the current pope requested in his 1995 encyclical. It is this communion that will transform Catholic-Protestant relations that, in turn, will provide an able basis for transforming the world (cf Jn 17:21-23). Harvey Cox's interpretation (1998:147) of this recognition of the pope as a legitimate agent of ministry is rightly linked to the larger Church's ministry in society, which must inspire the ecumenical community to engage this old problem in a fresh and creative way,

But when we recognise that the unity of Christians, which the pope says he embraces as the main goal of the Petrine ministry, is a means toward achieving human unity, this casts the timeworn agenda in a new light. It enables us to approach seemingly obsolete questions from a new angle. The stubborn dilemma about valid and invalid orders, for example, might seem less intractable if we kept in mind that the whole church, in all its many twigs and branches and including the laity, is called by God to be a minister/servant to the world, and that the various orders of ministry are principally various forms of servanthood.

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