

## WHY NOT JOIN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH?

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**ABSTRACT:** The title of this contribution is purposefully ambivalent. It can be read as a rhetorical question: when there are so many good reasons to join the church of Rome, why should Protestants refrain from taking this step? The most important historical reason for the Reformation was the state of the church: the authority of the office, and the episcopacy were spoiled by abuse of that power. The access to Christ and his grace were blocked. To what degree is this reproach still viable? In recent years, from a Reformed and evangelical perspective, there have been many changes in that Church that have caused a rapprochement, and that have prompted many Protestants to become Roman Catholic. However, the title can also be read differently: as an argumentation against joining the Roman Catholic Church. Accordingly, this article will elaborate upon both possibilities and offer a number of remarks on the choice itself.

**KEYWORDS:** *Reformation; Evangelical; Roman Catholic; Church.*

**ABSTRAK:** Judul dari kontribusi ini sengaja bersifat ambivalen. Hal ini dapat dibaca sebagai pertanyaan retorik: ketika ada begitu banyak alasan baik untuk bergabung dengan gereja Roma, mengapa kaum Protestant menahan diri mengambil langkah tersebut? Alasan historis yang terpenting bagi reformasi adalah status dari gereja: otoritas jabatan dan kepenilikan yang dirusak karena penyalahgunaan kekuasaan. Akibatnya akses kepada Kristus dan anugerahnya menjadi terhalangi. Seberapa jauh kekurangan ini merupakan kondisi sekarang? Di tahun-tahun belakangan, dari perspektif Reformed dan injili, telah banyak perubahan di gereja tersebut ke arah yang lebih baik, dan mengakibatkan banyak kaum Protestant menjadi Roma Katolik. Akan tetapi, judul yang sama dapat dibaca secara berbeda: sebagai sebuah argumentasi untuk tidak bergabung dengan gereja Roma

Katolik. Karenanya, tulisan ini akan menguraikan baik kedua pilihan dan memberikan beberapa catatan akan masing-masing pilihan.

**KATA KUNCI:** *Reformasi; Injili; Roma Katolik; Gereja.*

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This contribution is written under a title that is purposefully ambivalent. It can be read as a rhetorical question: when there are so many good reasons to join the church of Rome, why should Protestants refrain from taking this step? In recent years, from a Reformed and evangelical perspective, there have been many changes in that Church that have caused a rapprochement, and that have prompted many Protestants to become Roman Catholic. However, the title can also be read differently: as an argumentation *against* joining the Roman Catholic Church. Accordingly, this chapter will elaborate upon both possibilities and offer a number of remarks on the choice itself.

### **Emergency Measure**

Historically, Protestantism never had the intention of starting a new church. Rather, it started as movement to *reform* the church, to bring it back to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Both the Reformers and their Roman Catholic counterparts agreed that the Church had to be one and should not be divided over different confessions. Such is crystal clear from their early religious disputations. When Luther disputed with Eck in Heidelberg in 1518, and when John Calvin stood up in the disputation of Lausanne in 1536, it was clear to all the parties that the disputes at hand concerned central issues pertaining to the one church, the unity of which was a common supposition. Not without reason, Calvin dedicated the introductions to his works to rulers of his days: the unity of the church, and the defense and restoration of true worship were at stake, for which reason rulers and kings should be addressed. To Calvin, the state of true religion was important for the whole society, and therefore became an important concern for ruler and king alike.<sup>1</sup> Stated briefly, in the eyes of the advocates of a reformation, the reform of the church was an emergency measure. Protestantism is historically accidental and was never meant to found a confession that essentially has a different foundation to that which came before.<sup>2</sup> This historical judgment implies a serious statement for the status of the Reformed churches of our own day: the Reformed churches must also regard themselves as an emergency measure.

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<sup>1</sup> See for the historical background e.g. E. Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 56-61.

<sup>2</sup> A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 266-287.

One characteristic of such an emergency measure is that it is not meant for eternity, but rather, is timely. Its very impermanence creates hope that there will be a time in which the necessity for an emergency measure has passed.

### Transitions and Conversions

There have been times in history in which returns to the Roman Catholic Church were frequent. A number of those in John Calvin's immediate circle returned to the old Church, including his friend Louis du Tillet and later Pierre Caroli, who criticized Calvin and Farel for their views on the Trinity. Theirs was a time in which borders were not yet firmly set. The line between Roman Catholic and Reformed was not static. It was sometimes thin and depended on political decisions, power issues and personal disappointment. Those borders did not become firm until the 1648 Peace of Westphalia or Münster, which finally brought an end to the Eighty Years War in a divided Europe.

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century formed a similarly interesting period in the history of transitions or conversions to Catholicism. Napoleon had decreased the pope's power, and the Vatican was in a miserable state. Nevertheless, that century saw a surge in the Roman Catholic Church's power and moral impact. The story of John Henry Newman (1801-1890) must be mentioned in this context. It was only gradually that the Anglican clergyman Newman became impressed by the Roman Catholic Church. In particular, the idea of the continuity of the development of doctrine convinced him that he had to join this tradition.<sup>3</sup> In the Netherlands, a new wave of conversions, or better stated, transitions to the Roman Catholic Church occurred after World War II. The historian H. van der Linde (1915-2008) is one well-known example of this. Another example is that of Ronald Bär (1928), who had previously undertaken theological studies in Utrecht as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. Bär converted to Roman Catholicism and became a priest in 1959, because, as he once told me, he 'needed a bishop'. Philip Bär himself later became one such bishop. Another famous example is Cornelia de Vogel (1905-1986), an expert in Platonic philosophy, who was born in a fairly liberal Protestant milieu, but later became convinced, via Platonism, of the Roman Catholic Church as her own ecclesiastical home. My own tutor and friend Johannes Cornelis (Hans) Schouten (1929-2016), might also be mentioned in this context. For many years, he was a father in the faith to me. He conducted my wedding, ordained me to the ministry, and baptized one of our children. A few years ago, at 80

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<sup>3</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London: Longman, Green, 1864).

years old, after many long considerations, he became a Catholic and began a second life as priest.

Famous examples of converts can be found in North America: the politician Newt Gingrich (b. 1943), the author Graham Greene (1904-1991) and of course, a group of those who might be called evangelical Catholics like Richard John Neuhaus (1936-2009), and Eduardo Echeverria, himself a living example and defender of unity with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup>

### Historical Developments

There are many reasons for why we should join the Roman Catholic Church.

The present state of the Roman Catholic Church is by no means comparable with the state under the Renaissance Popes. At that time, the pope wielded a great deal of worldly power, and was able to build a huge and impressive building like Saint Peter's Basilica. However, the costs incurred by this project were high indeed. Every marble pillar was paid for by indulgences. The Church claimed to have power over the salvation of sinners. The result of this, of course, was the Reformation, which shook the church and effected a division that was then dramatically multiplied in Protestantism. The Reformers' accusation was that the church should not place itself between Christ and man: the church can only help the believer to trust Christ, and to embrace the person of Christ as the mirror in whom all the treasures of heaven are stored. The Church of Rome soon understood that it should go through a cleansing of many abuses and unholy practices. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) was a first and important answer to the Reformation. More recently, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a further major step forward in that it can be evaluated as an acknowledgment of some of objections historically mounted from the Protestant side. By contrast, in Protestant eyes, Vatican I (1869-1870) was a reaction to the Catholic Church's loss of political power, which was balanced by declaring that the pope is infallible when speaking 'ex cathedra' — a move that aroused suspicion amongst Reformed theologians in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Herman Bavinck being a prime example. In their view, this was another attempt by Rome to exercise control on the whole of life. Nature in itself is not enough, but it should ultimately be ruled and dominated by ecclesial power. Again, it was that power claim that triggered distrust. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Protestants saw stakes once

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<sup>4</sup> E. Echeverria, *Dialogue of Love. Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic Ecumenist*, Eugene (Or): Wipf & Stock, 2010).

again set aflame. Vatican II, however, was different. It was not meant as a Council that would declare new dogmas, but rather was intended as an *aggiornamento*. The Dutch Reformed theologian Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903-1996) was invited as an observer, together with the then young historian Heiko Augustinus Oberman (1930-2001). The steps made towards the practices of the Reformation were in fact considerable. From now on, the celebration of the mass in the vernacular was allowed. The Church was no longer regarded as a state, with more accent being given to the community of the church as the people of God. That was a new element and caused a shift in emphasis. It created new space for the laity, and served as an opening for renewal movements like the Charismatic Movement, Focolare, and San Egidio. Attentiveness to Scripture, and to reading the Bible became more important. With regard to the issue of revelation, the step was made that tradition and Bible as Word of God were taken together, and a clear opposition between tradition and Scripture was rejected.

Despite all this, the idea of continuity idea in a *successio apostolorum* was maintained as an essential element of orthodox doctrine. Both church and grace still remained centered on the priestly office, with the most central place being reserved for the infallibility of the pope, who has the plenitude of power, and his position as head of the church.

### **Pope and Image**

What are reasons that might compel one to join this church today? For many years we have heard reports of abuse by priests, leading to and the Catholic Church's public image diminishing more and more. This has had a terrible effect, with many people in Germany, for example, quitting the Church. However, the beginning of the reign of Pope Francis, change has been apparent. He is a pope of the people, of beggars and the disabled. When one sees him addressing public audiences, and notes his way of dealing with questions of justice, it is clear that he communicates a total engagement in, and choice for, those who are poor, live on the margins and suffer from the ills of modern society. Unlike his predecessor, he does not convey the image of a scholar. Pope Benedict's image was that of a pious scholar, committed to Christ and Mary, but nevertheless one of the elite. Apart from what can be said with regard to image, it should be noted that all the recent popes were clear in their Christocentric theology and practice.

### **Unity of the Church**

A more principal reason to join the Roman Catholic Church is that in the episcopal system, the bishop's role includes publicly presenting the

unity of the church. There is one person, locally and perhaps even universally, who can speak on behalf of that church. The issue of ministry, and in particular the possibility of a bishop, is an issue that was also seriously discussed within Protestant theology in the wake of the Lima Report on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry from 1982.<sup>5</sup> As to the question of unity, the churches stemming from the Reformation do indeed have an obvious disadvantage. They are divided, if not separated, in denominations, and these denominations are often nationally organized. The continuation of splits is nothing less than a disease. It should be asked: is the church of Christ in its essence organized along borders of nation, ethnic background, or even language? There is only one church that is truly transnational: the Roman Catholic Church. This becomes clear every Sunday and Wednesday in Rome, in front of St. Peter's, as people from all the nations gather here, sing their songs, and worship in their own language, but are nevertheless one in that they belong to the visible Roman Catholic Church. What a difference with the Protestant denominations, to say nothing of the divisions in the evangelical and Pentecostal world! The caricature of this evangelical division is captured well in the saying: "...then I started my own church." Many evangelicals who have converted to Roman Catholicism have done so precisely because of this disease. And let us be honest: it is a *disease* that often leads to the effect that faith and church membership *decease*. For the aforementioned Hans Schouten, these divisions and the perverse subjectivism in the evangelical world were an important reason, the drop that made the bucket overflow, that finally made him join the Roman Catholic Church.

### Authority

As we know, the unity of the church is particularly located in the pope as the successor of Peter. Notwithstanding the shift that was brought by Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* (1964) in its frequent talk of the church as the people of God (and of the pilgrimage of this people), and notwithstanding the fact that the order of bishops is mentioned as the subject of the highest and complete power over the church,<sup>6</sup> it remains clear that the final ecclesial

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<sup>5</sup> A few examples from the Dutch context may suffice to show the interest: M. Gosker, *Het ambt in de oecumenische discussie. De betekenis van de Lima-Ambtstekst voor de voortgang van de oecumene en de doorwerking in de Nederlandse SOW-kerken*, Budapest-Amstelveen 2000, E. van der Borgh, *Het ambt her-dacht. De gereformeerde ambts-theologie in het licht van het rapport Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Lima 1982) van de theologische commissie Faith and Order van de Wereldraad van Kerken*, (Zoetermeer: Meinema 2000), 487-489; B.J. Aalbers and P. Nissen (red.), *De bisschop, kerkscheidend of kerkverenigend?* (Delft: Eburon 2002); J. Kronenburg, *Episcopus Oecumenicus: bouwsteen voor een theologie van het bisschopsambt in een verenigde reformatorische kerk*, (Zoetermeer: Meinema 2003). A. van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus. De theologie van de kerk en de Heilige Geest* (Zoetermeer: Meinema 2012), 246-254.

<sup>6</sup> 'subiectum supremæ ac plenæ potestatis in universam Ecclesiam existit.' *Lumen Gentium* 22.

power has its apex and cornerstone in the papacy.<sup>7</sup> In this, the dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus* (1870) was confirmed. This location of the Roman Catholic Church's authority in the papacy is one of the best examples of a church that has its pillar in the concept of office. It has a wonderful clarity and is distinctly attractive in this way. It is quite different from the practice in most of the Reformed churches, let alone the evangelical churches, where the concept of office is much less clear. Where is the authority in the Reformed churches located? Officially the authority is located in the consistory, with the elders and deacons. But is that true? Perhaps this was the case in some former era when we had elders who knew the confession of the church, and who were immersed in the Bible. In the Netherlands, however, that is now only so for some churches. Might authority in fact be located in one charismatic pastor, as in many free churches and neo-pentecostal churches, or is it found in the committee that takes care of the church's financial affairs?

Some Reformed theologians have become more sympathetic to an episcopal model. In his book on the church, Abraham van de Beek, rightly states that biblically, the idea of an office already existed before there was a credo or creed.<sup>8</sup> This was even so before there was the Bible as canon. There was a church, and there were bishops long before there were canon and creed. In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the people are summoned to listen to their bishop. It should also be the cause that for the Reformed churches, the office is given by God as a *gegenüber* (opposite) of the congregation.

One of the central issues at hand is the representation of Christ. Does the minister represent Christ when he delivers a sermon, or when he ministers Holy Supper? Barthian theologians mostly deeply disagree. Van de Beek agrees with the position that the representation of Christ stands at the very core of the office. In his view, however, it is not only the person of the office bearer, which is important, but the ministry of the Word and the Sacrament, that belong indissolubly together.<sup>9</sup> In the Heidelberg Catechism this authority is connected to discipline and access to the eucharist.<sup>10</sup> In light of this, van de Beek argues for a retrieval and reassessment of the office of the bishop. This works to the disadvantage of the other elders and deacons. In his view, in the Reformed tradition, the elder and the deacon are an attempt to maintain the *corpus Christianum* in a changing early modern culture. Nowadays, he argues, the office of elder has been hollowed out.<sup>11</sup> He

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<sup>7</sup> 'Romanus pontifex, ut successor Petri, est unitatis, tum Episcoporum tum fidelium multitudinis, perpetuum ac visibile principium et fundamentum', *Lumen Gentium* 23.

<sup>8</sup> Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 197.

<sup>9</sup> Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 206-208.

<sup>10</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q/A 83.

<sup>11</sup> Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 244.

argues for a conciliar-presbyterial-episcopal model: people with a personal responsibility, who work with others to keep the church close to Christ.<sup>12</sup>

### **Objectivity of Grace**

It may be, of course, that the aforementioned reasons for joining the Roman Catholic Church are nonetheless non-essential, and that we must proceed to more serious reasons that might convince us that the Reformation was an emergency measure that had its time, and is no longer needed. In this context, there is a serious theological reason that should be reconsidered: the Church's confession that God has revealed himself in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. As the fulfillment of the promises given to Israel, he is the last and final word, by whom God realized the covenant. He is the second Adam, around whom a new community is gathered. Jesus Christ, the Son, is the gift of God to his world. Him we confess. Jesus Christ is not an idea or a concept. In his humanity, he is rather the objective Gift in which all the treasures of God's grace are stored. It is this gift that He promised to give us when the Christian church celebrates Holy Communion, the Holy Supper or Eucharist or however else it might be named. He is truly present by the power of the Holy Spirit. Crucial is here a real presence of the Living Lord (*praesentia realis*). As is well known, the question of whether Reformed theologians do indeed hold to the *praesentia realis* or in fact embrace a kind of symbolism has been a longstanding debate between Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians. Alongside John W. Nevin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the USA, and with other scholars in our age, we must say that Calvin expressed his own views on this in different ways, depending on his particular interlocutors. However, there is also good reason to say that in a happy way, he was unsure on this point. Sometimes, he seems to lean towards Zurich, and sometimes to Wittenberg.<sup>13</sup> In my own opinion he was more catholic in his experience in that he believed himself to be in the presence of the power (*virtus*) of the eternal life that springs from Jesus Christ as the fountain of God's grace. It was not clear to him how the distance between us and Christ in heaven is bridged, but the least that must be said is that the Holy Spirit is the one who bridges this gap. Here, grace is exposed to the senses. There is still an objectivity, of course, which is mediated by the Holy Spirit and therefore *spiritualiter*, but nevertheless, it is exposed to the objectivity of the Holy Spirit. Recently Frank Ewerszumrode concluded in a

<sup>12</sup> Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 246.

<sup>13</sup> W. Janse, "Calvin's Eucharistic Theology. Three Dogma-Historical Observations" in: H.J. Selderhuis (ed.) *Calvinus sacramentorum literarum interpres. Paper of the International Congress on Calvin Research* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2008), 37-69.

careful evaluation that in his own way, Calvin defended what the doctrine of transubstantiation wanted to say in a different conceptuality.<sup>14</sup>

Or do we find here, exactly as to the question of objectivity, that this objectivity is flawed? In Calvin's thought grace is received by faith. If there is no faith, no hands stretched out to receive in humbleness, then nothing is received. Bread and wine left over from the Holy Supper mean nothing. There is no *reservatio* of the body of Christ, no tabernacle in which the holy bread and wine are held. Is the Reformed position ultimately flawed and spoiled by a kind of subjective twist, by subjectivism, that makes the reception of grace dependent on the human subject? That accusation is the concern of many Catholic theologians.

What is the objectivity of the grace given to us? The Roman Catholic Church's strong emphasis on the visibility of God's grace is certainly one of the attractive characteristics of its religious practices. This is reflected and conceptualized in the teaching of the Church. And yet, we must ask whether this is the very reason that one should *not* join the Catholic Church. The fullness of God's divinity was living in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In the encyclical *Divinum illud munus* by Leo XIII (1897), we find this formulated in words that are crystal clear: 'In that way the final promise of Christ to his apostles to send his Spirit came through, who by his breath the completed received doctrine and, so to say, sealed the deposit,'<sup>15</sup> and this outpouring of the Spirit will have as its result that the Church 'will never be obnoxious to any mistake'.<sup>16</sup> Thus the church is a divine work, an "opus plane divinum". Christ is the Head of the Church and the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church.

This strong connection to the institution of the church was given a slight twist in Vatican II, when some words in the original text of *Lumen Gentium* were changed. Originally it stated that the Church of Christ on earth is identical with the catholic church (*est*). In the final version, however, this was changed to the famous formula: "haec ecclesia ... subsistit in Ecclesia catholica".<sup>17</sup> That means at least that there is differentiation, although definitely not a separation of the two. The comparison with body and soul is

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<sup>14</sup> Frank Ewerszumrode OP, *Mysterium Christi spiritualis praesentiae. Die Abendmahllehre des Genfer Reformators Johannes Calvin aus römisch-katholischer Perspektive*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2012), 273. See also the introduction of H.A. Speelman in his translation of Calvin's *Petite Traité de la Sainte Cène Een met Christus. Een klein traktaat over het heilig avondmaal*, Kampen: Brevier 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "Divinum illud munus" in: H. Denzinger, *Compendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, (Freiburg im Breisgau/Basel/Rom/Wien: Herder 1991<sup>37</sup>), 907, par. 3328: "Ita plane eveniebat illud extremum Christi ad Apostolos suos promissum de Spiritu Sancto mittendo, qui doctrinae, ipso afflante, traditae completurus ipse esset et quodammodo obsignaturus depositum".

<sup>16</sup> Denzinger, 908 (3328): "ut ipsa ne ulli unquam errori obnoxia sit".

<sup>17</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 8, see Denzinger, 1964.

made. Berkouwer remarks that in this way there is at least some openness for the acknowledgment of the gifts of the Spirit in other Christian faith communities. Nevertheless, it remains true that according to *Lumen Gentium*, the Church of Rome is the most perfect realization of the Church of Christ on earth, and the Protestant churches will never be more than imperfect realizations of it.<sup>18</sup>

Once more, the visibility of the pope's position as the Head of the Church of Christ on earth is emphasized and made concrete in *Lumen Gentium*, which clearly states that the order of bishops has authority, but only together with the bishop of Rome, as *vicarius Christi*, and that the pope has the supreme and universal authority, which he can always freely exercise. The decisions of the first Vatican Council, in which the primacy of the pope was articulated in terms of infallibility, were confirmed.

Why not join the Roman Catholic Church? As has been noted, van de Beek in particular has argued that the Reformed Churches should reconsider their views on ecclesiastical office, arguing that the church needs an office that holds the responsibility for maintaining the community with Christ. This would indeed include a hierarchical structure, which, notably, was also John Calvin's opinion. Ultimately, the minister is the *episcopus*. However, it must be said that by removing both the bishop and the worldly power of the duke of Savoy in Geneva, the monarchical model was replaced by a system in which in principle, the community of elders and pastors assumed responsibility and together replaced the bishop. Van de Beek observes that at no point in Scripture or the early church did Peter have the decisive position that has grown across history in the primacy of the See of Rome. He concludes that the institution that is the papacy should not be a hindrance for the unity of the church. The official structure is not a case for the *status confessionis*. The worldwide church, he argues, could be able to include the unity of that church and the leading of Rome.<sup>19</sup> He pleads for the reinstallation of an episcopal structure, arguing that it would then be possible for the Church of Rome to adopt a coordinating function. However, such a step makes only sense when it is done by a church as a whole.

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<sup>18</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Vaticaanse concilie en nieuwe theologie*, (Kampen: Kok 1965), 92. See *Lumen Gentium* 8, where it is said that Christ his holy church "ut compaginem visibilem constituit". As to the churches of the Reformation no more can be said than "extra eius compaginem elementa plura sanctificationis et veritatis inveniantur, quae ut dona Ecclesiae Christi propria, ad unitatem catholicam impellunt".

<sup>19</sup> Van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*, 259. Much could and should be said when we would engage in the exegesis of petrinic texts like Mat. 16: 18-19, John 21:15-19, Mat. 28:16-20. But this is a task that is beyond the scope of this tentative article.

### **Why not Join the Roman Catholic Church?**

The most important historical reason for the Reformation was the state of the church: the authority of the office, and the episcopacy were spoiled by abuse of that power. The access to Christ and his grace were blocked. To what degree, if any, is this reproach still viable? Particularly in the orbit of Barthian theology, frequent warnings are heard regarding a theology in which the Holy Spirit is claimed by the office bearer or by the church. Such a theology leads to an abuse of authority and power that does not bring to Christ, but rather serves as a barrier. A high view of the office always runs the risk that the name of Christ might be spoiled and become a source of derision due to the behavior of the servants of the church. And yet, the servants of the church remain human beings. The Holy Spirit is never the possession of office bearers or the church. We must pray for the Holy Spirit, time and again.

At this point I come to my question: at their ordination, ministers receive a blessing which means that they live and work under the promise of the Holy Spirit. The objectivity pertaining to this is the objectivity of the promise and work of the Holy Spirit. But this Spirit will never become a possession of the priest or minister; the promise remains just that, and its fulfillment continues to stand under the command to obey Christ, who is the one and real Head of the church. His servants on earth are human beings. They have their own biases, and are vulnerable to disobedience and sin.

We have a promise, we receive blessings, and even have people with a special command and task (and therefore, a distinct authority), but they are not the only ones who live under the Holy Spirit's promise. This could and should be taken far more seriously than it is nowadays in most Protestant churches. When the consistory has to function as a kind of episcopacy, then the *censura morum* and the mutual visitation between congregations should be installed as real counseling. It is even advisable to take the episcopal model more seriously, in view of how local churches sometimes suffer from situations in which problems were concealed and surface too late.

Can we locate and objectify the Holy Spirit in the way the Roman Catholic Church has done in its view on office? As a final remark I offer a question posed by Karl Barth when he was invited to Vatican II. In a meeting with other prelates, Joseph Ratzinger, the later pope, spoke on the church. He spoke for a considerable time and in wondrous ways about the church. After a while, however, Barth responded: 'We Protestants are utterly poor when standing alongside this wealth. But why did you not speak until now, at least not explicitly, on the Holy Spirit? And for what reason does the tradition assume such a dominating role for the Roman Catholic Church? Does

this somehow stem from fear of the Holy Spirit? My dear Herr Ratzinger, might it be that your church is in fact is on the run from the Holy Spirit?<sup>20</sup> Eberhard Busch recounts that this question was simultaneously embarrassing and consequential enough not to be ignored.

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<sup>20</sup> E. Busch, *Meine Zeit mit Karl Barth* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 230.