This introductory chapter is not about ministry itself, but gives the theological context within which the ordained ministry is discussed.

Preceding History

Since the origins of Faith and Order, the search has been on for a common basis to discuss ministry. Over the years much has changed in this field, but there has been no change in the preference to discuss ministry in conjunction with the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. The text about ministry from the First World Conference in Lausanne in 1927 was not presented with an introduction. The document has a comparative approach to ecclesiology that is aimed at the realization of an institutional and organizational unity; it immediately presents the reader with the points on which the participating churches agree and those on which they differ.¹ The Second World Conference in Edinburgh, held in 1937, follows the same methodology, but does mention the royal priesthood of all believers as a common presupposition for ministry (Ed 92).² At the Third World Conference in Lund in 1952, ministry was not discussed separately, but was given a place in the chapter about continuity. As a consequence of changes in methodology, there is a growing awareness that ecclesiological disagreements are caused by differences in Christological approach. For this reason, the method of comparative ecclesiology and of approaching ministry as a problem in isolation


² Vischer, A Documentary History, 58–61 for Final Report, V. The church of Christ: Ministry and Sacraments, (vii) Ministry. From now on the paragraphs from the Edinburgh conference in 1937 will be indicated by Ed and the number of the paragraph.
are abandoned in favor of studying ministry in the light of a deepened Christology and eschatological understanding of the church. This leads to an approach that is based on salvation history and Christology, which was prepared by the theology of K. Barth as well as by central themes from the Anglican and Orthodox traditions.

The results of this new working method became apparent at the Fourth World Conference in Montreal in 1963; again, ministry is the subject of its own section report, “The redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of his Church.” This is the first time that ministry has its own separate introduction (Mo 77–82) with two theological points of departure. The first one, “the biblical teaching about the royal priesthood of the whole people of God” (Mo 77–78), is based on the trailblazing study, Christ’s Ministry and the Ministry of the church, from the World Council of Churches’ Laity Department. This report reflects on the significance of the laity’s own responsibility for the church in detail; it led to new emphases in the approach to ordained ministry. The second one opts for an approach to ministry from the perspective of Christology (Mo 79–82) and consists of the following sections: “The work of Christ and the mission of the church” (Mo 83–87) and “Christ, the church and the ministry” (Mo 88–91) that provide a description of the Christological foundation of church and ministry.

The 1974 Accra text contains a more detailed introduction to the problems regarding ministry. In the preamble (Ac 1), the character of ministry as service is emphasized, and then the first chapter discusses ministry in the framework of the Christian community. The first two sections of this chapter will later be incorporated in the introductory chapter to the Lima text. The first section gives a twofold description of the church as the community that has its origin in the work of the triune God (Ac 3–6), and as historical-contingent social community (Ac 7–10). Thus the Christological foundation is widened to encompass the


5 One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry. References to paragraphs from this text that was laid down in Accra in 1974 will be indicated with Ac and the number of the paragraph.