

# Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism

## A JWG Study

### Introduction

1. In baptism one is brought into the saving mysteries of the reconciliation of humanity with God through Jesus Christ. Baptism creates a unique relationship to Christ because it is a participation in his life, death and resurrection. (cf. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM), 1982, B3).

2. “Through Baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the church of every time and place” (B6), the community which is formed by the healing grace of Christ. Many persons experience the sorrows and anguish of broken social relations and broken family life, with all the devastating impact that brokenness can have on those concerned. The world itself shows signs of fractured human relationships: structures of alienation and division contradict that unity which God intends for all peoples and creation (Col. 1:15). But baptism is the joyful act of welcome into a new and caring community of the faithful bound together in Jesus Christ – a community which transcends the very divisions evident in society. Life in Christ brought about by baptism is a healing balm for individuals and community alike, in a broken and sinful world.

3. While divided churches themselves contradict God’s reconciliation in Christ, one of the great achievements of the modern ecumenical movement has been to show that, as Pope John Paul II has stated, “the universal brotherhood of Christians has become a firm ecumenical conviction... [and this]... is rooted in recognition of the oneness of baptism...” (Ut Unum Sint 42). It is because of baptism and our allegiance to Christ that we can call one another Christians. Indeed on the basis of a common recognition of baptism into Christ, some churches have been enabled to enter new relationships of communion. Such recognition is not simply a statement of how an individual’s baptism is regarded, “it constitutes an ecclesiological statement” (ibid.). Individual members of churches should not be considered apart from the whole community of faith that gave them birth and in which they are nourished and exercise Christian discipleship. This study therefore seeks to explore the ecclesiological and ecumenical implications of a common recognition of baptism.

4. In undertaking the study the Joint Working Group has drawn on the insights of international bilateral and multilateral discussions on baptism and on official responses to BEM. It has also taken into account a survey of agreements on the recognition of baptism undertaken by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and continuing work on baptism being conducted by the Faith and Order commission of the WCC.

#### BAPTISM IN THE MODERN ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

5. In the modern ecumenical movement, the gradual acknowledgment of a common understanding of baptism has been one of the most basic reasons enabling long separated Christians to speak now of sharing a real though incomplete communion. According to the Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which has gained wide acceptance among Christians of various traditions, “Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other, and with the church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. The union with Christ which we share through baptism has important implications for Christian unity” (B6). According to the Second Vatican Council, by the sacrament of baptism one “becomes truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ... Baptism, therefore, constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it” (*Unitatis Redintegratio* [UR] 22 1964).

6. On the other hand, Faith and Order’s evaluation of the official responses to BEM 1990 noted areas where further study should be undertaken on baptism. A comparison of some of the specific responses to BEM indicate that there are still important issues that need to be resolved in dialogue among the churches before we can speak of a genuinely common understanding of baptism. Furthermore, some new problems are emerging which need to be addressed lest the convergence/consensus achieved be somehow diminished (see §108 below).

#### A MORE RECENT ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE:

7. In addition, another significant ecumenical challenge arises from among the fastest growing and largest Christian communities today, Pentecostals and Evangelicals, many of whom have not been directly involved in the modern ecumenical movement. A particular challenge that they bring is that many of these Christians do not see baptism itself as the point of entry into the body of Christ, but rather as an intimately related consequence of that entry.<sup>1</sup> The growth of communities with this viewpoint presents a new ecumenical challenge for today and the future.

#### THE PRESENT STUDY

8. Despite these various challenges, the creation of a new relationship among separated Christians has been an ecumenical achievement. The purpose of this study is to help the churches to build on this accomplishment and, in particular, on the contribution made to the unity of Christians by the growing acknowledgment of a common baptism. This text reviews some fundamental aspects of the degree of the current ecumenical convergences and consensus on baptism while also pointing to differences still remaining. Thus, one can speak of a “common” baptism in a legitimate, though quali-

fied, sense. On the one hand, the degree of common understanding of baptism which has been achieved ecumenically has already been a building block for unity and has already helped to create new relationships and foster reconciliation between separated Christians. On the other hand, further ecumenical work on baptism is still needed to resolve continuing difficulties if further progress is to be made.

9. This study points also to some of the implications, ecclesiological and ecumenical, of a common baptism for the goal of unity which we seek.<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiological implications refer to issues relating to the doctrine of the church and thus inter-related with baptism. They concern those remaining theological divergences among Christians which now more urgently need to be resolved, or to which more ecumenical attention must now be given in order to take further steps towards a common understanding of the church and the healing of divisions among Christians. These will be noted in each specific section. Ecumenical implications refer to those practical, pastoral steps that might be taken now to implement the growing common understanding of baptism. They are steps based on the degree of communion Christians already share, and therefore may also have an ecclesial character – steps that can help separated Christians to grow together. These are listed in the section 6 at the end.

10. This is a study document meant to enable discussion. It is the hope of the Joint Working Group that this study will be used in educational contexts in which ecumenical matters are explored. It is hoped that this study can assist and encourage the Catholic Church and the member churches of the WCC to open a discussion on ecclesial and ecumenical implications of the recognition of a common baptism and to take appropriate steps to manifest a greater degree of communion.

## 1. Growing ecumenical convergence on baptism

11. From the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement baptism has been claimed as a common bond for Christians and has been the subject of intensive conversation among the churches. In this section and in the pages that follow some of the basic convergences on baptism achieved in dialogue are recalled. The differences that still remain are presented as well in order to indicate the further work that needs to be done.

### COMMON PERSPECTIVES ON BAPTISM

12. Through shared study churches have discovered common perspectives on baptism relating to (a) its foundational place in the church, (b) the primary aspects of its meaning, and (c) the pattern or *ordo* of elements in the process of baptismal initiation. They have also made notable steps in bringing closer the views of baptism as sacrament and baptism as ordinance.

13. The ecumenical convergence and agreements on baptism found in BEM mark an important step forward in the ecumenical movement. Many of the official responses from member churches of the World Council of Churches found much to praise in the baptism section of BEM. The response of the Catholic Church to that baptism section (*Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. 6, WCC, 1988, pp. 9-16) was largely affirmative, finding “much we can agree with”, while, as many other responses, raising issues in need of further study. Important clarifications on baptism have been made in bilateral dialogues as well.

14. Ecumenical study has enabled separated Christians to appreciate together the priority of the liturgical act of baptism. In faithful obedience to the great commission from the risen Christ (Matt. 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything I have commanded you”), the church’s practice of baptism responds to the apostolic calling to preach the gospel and make disciples. From the beginning, baptism was part of the mission of the apostolic church and its practice was part of the constitution of the church. Before there was an established canon of the New Testament scriptures and while the ecclesial structure was still developing, baptism was a constitutive element of Christian life. As an act of repentance, forgiveness, profession, incorporation and eschatological hope, the observance of baptism recapitulates and embodies the reality of the church, which continually lives out these same relations with God through Christ in its worship, sacraments, teaching, *koinonia* and service. As a specific rite, baptism anchors a wider complex of steps in the initiation, growth and identity of individual believers within the body of Christ. But baptism is not only an event for individuals and a bond of unity among Christians. As such, it is also one expression and icon of the church’s very nature.

15. Despite variations in baptismal practice that existed within an undivided church (as for instance variations in the local baptismal creeds that were used), ecumenical dialogue has enabled separated Christians to identify the shared pattern of the early church as a common heritage for the divided churches today, being the foundation of the understanding and practice of baptism in each Christian communion. In that common heritage “baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (B17). “In baptism a profession of faith is given according to the Trinitarian content of the faith of the community (*regula fidei*).” This “baptismal confession joins the faith of the baptized to the common faith of the church through the ages” (*Confessing the One Faith*, introduction, 15).

16. “The New Testament scriptures and the liturgy of the church unfold the meaning of baptism in various images which express the riches of Christ and the gifts of his salvation” (BEM 2). Reflecting this heritage, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (B3-7) identifies five major sets of images: (a) participation in Christ’s death and resurrection; (b) conversion, pardoning and cleansing; (c) gift of the Spirit; (d) incorporation into the body of Christ; and (e) sign of the kingdom. While ecumenical convergence can be claimed on these points, the need for further work can be illustrated by looking at point (d). While BEM states that “our common baptism... is a basic bond of unity” (B6) and that baptism is “incorporation into the body of Christ” (B comm. 14b), there are different views relating to that incorporation which reflect unresolved differences in ecclesiology. Thus, many would agree that incorporation in the church is through baptism, but some responses to BEM indicate that full incorporation into the church, the body of Christ, implies not just baptism, but rather a larger process of Christian initiation of which baptism is a part. The reality of new life in Jesus Christ and rebirth in the Holy Spirit is described in BEM with a wide variety of spiritual images. Christian traditions have differed in the weight they give to these images in understanding baptism. The churches can all be enriched by learning from each other in order to grasp the breadth of the meaning of baptism.

17. Many of the convergences in these areas are reflected in results of bilateral dialogues which also point to areas where further discussion is needed. To give two examples, the Anglican-Reformed International Commission report “God’s Reign and Our Unity” (1984 §§47-61) reflects BEM’s convergences. But differences appear when the text discusses the related question of membership. Reformed churches have tended to define it “primarily as membership in a local congregation”, while Anglicans, “by practice of episcopal confirmation, have emphasized membership in the wider church”. The report states that these emphases “are complementary rather than contradictory”, but “require further exploration by our churches” (§57). The international Catholic-Orthodox dialogue reflects BEM’s convergences in its list of seven points of agreement (“Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church”, 1987, §49). However, the latter also includes important areas of agreement between Orthodox and Catholics which are not as explicitly stated in BEM, e.g., the “necessity of baptism for salvation”, and as an effect of baptism, the “liberation from original sin” (ibid.).

18. In current ecumenical discussion three dimensions of the common pattern of baptism are noted – three distinct ways to understand the scope of this pattern. First of all, in the most basic sense, baptism refers to the liturgical water rite and the pattern for its celebration. Second, baptism may also refer to a wider pattern of Christian initiation, one that includes several components in addition to the specific liturgical rite of baptism. In a third sense, we may see that baptism points towards ongoing formation and responsible discipleship, where the pattern of our baptismal calling is worked out over a whole life. With the first perspective in view, we could say that baptism is one of the elements that make up the life of the church. With the third perspective in view, we could say that the baptismal pattern marks the entire life of believers in the church.

19. “Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth into Christ” (BEM 9). In the early church this was expressed in the emergence of complex patterns of Christian nurture which included instruction in the faith before and after baptism, as well as an extended series of liturgical celebrations marking the journey in a growing faith. These aspects were focused in the water rite of baptism and admission to the eucharistic table. In its broadest sense the *ordo* (or pattern) of baptism includes formation in faith, baptism in water, and participation in the life of the community. In different Christian traditions the order and expression of these aspects varies.

20. The ecumenical and ecclesial consequences of agreement about baptism vary greatly, depending upon which dimension of this common pattern is in view. The churches have a high degree of agreement about the fundamental components of the liturgical water rite and its necessity. As the pattern is expanded, the specific agreement among the churches diminishes. For example, there are fewer disputes about recognition of baptism centred on whether the rite has been performed with water in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, than relate to the place of the rite in this larger pattern of initiation or formation.

#### SACRAMENT AND ORDINANCE

21. Many churches use the term sacrament to express their understanding of what the common pattern or *ordo* of baptism is. Some churches are uncomfortable with the notion of sacrament and they prefer to speak of baptism as an ordinance. A brief look at

the history of these two terms may help to identify the issue and suggest that it may not be as divisive as is sometimes thought.

22. When the Greek fathers used the word *mysterion* to describe baptism, and when the Latins translated this by *mysterium* or *sacramentum* they wanted to say that, in the celebration of baptism, the saving work of God in Christ is realized by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Latin church *sacramentum* (from which comes our modern word *sacrament*) came to be a generic term applied to baptism and eucharist, as well as to some other rites of the church. A sacrament was understood to be a symbolic action, made up of words and actions which held within it and manifested the divine reality (res) realized once for all in the death and resurrection of Christ for our salvation. This notion of sacrament was very carefully analyzed in Scholastic theology. Some elements of the analysis, however, lent themselves to misunderstanding, especially when they were associated with forms of liturgical practice that seemed to encourage belief in a quasi-mechanical view of sacramental efficacy, as if sacraments dispensed grace in an automatic way.

23. The word “ordinance” stresses that certain acts within the worship and liturgy of the church are performed in obedience to the specific command and example of Christ in scripture. Those who use the term “sacraments” usually also regard them as ordinances in this sense. Historically, some Christian groups adopted “ordinance” language in the Reformation era because of arguments over whether certain liturgical acts were actually instituted by Christ in scripture and because of their rejection of certain theological views about the working of God’s grace which they believed were involved in the definition of “sacraments”. Some churches which use only the word “ordinance” regard acts such as baptism and the Lord’s supper as signs of a reality that has already been actualized and which is even now effective by faith in the life of the believer and the congregation. Some who use only the word “ordinance” would in fact give this a “sacramental” meaning, consistent with the explanation of sacraments in churches that use the term. Those who characterize baptism as an ordinance wish to safeguard an understanding of its root in scripture, its confessional character as witness to Christ, and the initiative of God, active to stir faith and conversion in the believer prior to baptism. This view has often wrongly been construed as denying that God is active in the event of baptism or that God’s grace is received in baptism; in fact, it is an attempt to affirm the faithful act of discipleship through participation in baptism, the centrality of Christ to the act of baptism and the breadth of God’s grace already active in our lives prior to, as well as in, baptism.

24. This divergent language is in some cases based on misunderstanding, but in other instances on disagreement which remains, even after clarification. Nevertheless, most traditions can agree that the realities in the church’s life called sacraments or ordinances bring Christians to the central mysteries of life in Christ. Most would affirm of ordinances/sacraments both that they are expressive of divine realities, representing that which is already true, and also that they are instrumental in that God uses them to bring about a new reality. The two approaches represent different starting points in considering the interdependence of faith as an ongoing process and faith as a decisive event. At other points in this document further areas of convergence are explored, for instance in the discussion of the relation of baptism and faith in section 3.

## THE ECUMENICAL IMPACT OF THE GROWING CONVERGENCE ON BAPTISM

25. While there is not yet a complete agreement on baptism among separated Christians, the growing convergence that has been achieved thus far can be counted among the important achievements of the modern ecumenical movement. As the following examples illustrate, this growing convergence has already been able to serve the cause of reconciliation, fostering unity between different churches in different ways. This is one sense in which the growing consensus on baptism even now has ecclesiological implications.

26. Ecumenical agreements bringing some churches into new relationships, in some cases even into full communion, include mutual understanding of baptism as part of their theological basis. The Leuenberg agreement (1973) between Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe includes, as part of “The Common Understanding of the Gospel” needed for church fellowship among them, a basic consensus regarding baptism (§14), even though the agreement indicates that the question of “baptismal practice” needs further study (§39). The nine member churches of the Churches Uniting in Christ (2001) in the United States have included in their theological consensus the convergences and agreements on baptism found in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

27. In several ecumenical advances which have taken place involving the Catholic Church with Christian world communions which include member churches of the WCC, a common understanding of baptism has been crucial. In their common declaration at Canterbury in 1982, Pope John Paul II and Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Robert Runcie stated that “the bond of our common baptism into Christ” led their predecessors to inaugurate the international dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church. The same two leaders in their common declaration in Rome in 1989 stated that the “certain yet incomplete communion we already share” is grounded in sharing together important areas of faith including “our common baptism into Christ”.

28. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD), officially signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (1999), expresses an agreement on basic truths of the doctrine of justification. It is historic in stating that the teaching of the Lutheran churches and the Catholic Church presented in the declaration are not subject to the condemnations of the other’s teaching found respectively in the council of Trent and in the Lutheran confessions in the 16th century. The JD’s explication of justification comes in seven core areas, in two of which baptism is central. In §25 we read, “We confess together 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.” And in §28, “We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies and truly renews the person.”

29. In several joint declarations between the pope and patriarchs of Oriental Orthodox churches, reflecting resolution of long-standing problems, agreement on baptism has also been an important factor. For example, the joint declaration between Pope John Paul II and Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (1984) expresses agreement on Christology in a way which virtually resolves for them the Christological conflicts arising from the doctrinal formulations of the council of Chalcedon (451). The agreement also describes common perspectives today on baptism, eucharist and other sacraments, and a common understanding of sacraments which they hold together “in

one and the same succession of apostolic ministry” (§7). This allows them to authorize collaboration in pastoral care in situations where their faithful find access to a priest of their own church “materially or morally impossible”. Nonetheless, at the same time, they say that their churches cannot celebrate the holy eucharist together since that supposes a complete identity of faith, including a common understanding of God’s will for the church, which does not yet exist between them.

#### ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

30. Many other examples could be cited that illustrate the impact of the growing convergence on baptism. But what has been said thus far in this first section suggests several ecclesiological implications of a common baptism. First, a common baptism is among those factors which have enabled, even inspired, some long separated churches to enter into new relationships with one another. Some of these are significant new relationships, but not of full communion. Others are relationships of full communion, or, as in the case of those participating in the Leuenberg Agreement, of pulpit and altar fellowship.

31. Second, those Christian communities which agree that baptism means incorporation into the body of Christ, the church, and who agree that the church is one, should belong to one and the same community. If there is one church of Jesus Christ and if baptism is entrance into it, then all those who are baptized are bound to one another in Christ and should be in full communion with one another. There should not be a division among ecclesial communities; baptism should impel Christians to work for the elimination of divisions.

32. It also follows that even if there is agreement on a common understanding of baptism, churches nonetheless differ concerning what they require for achieving full communion with those from whom they are separated. This is because they have divergent understandings of the nature of the church. Thus, a third ecclesiological implication of a common understanding of baptism, from what has been described above, is the urgency within the ecumenical movement of working towards a common understanding of the nature of the church. This is important so that, as new relationships take shape among some churches, the agreements that bind them together will include perspectives on the nature of the church which would be open to reconciliation with other churches in the future as the ecumenical movement progresses.

33. Fourth, since baptism is foundational for the nature of the church, then it is one of the prerequisites for full communion. If a particular Christian community does not celebrate baptism, then its members are without one of the important elements which make for communion with all other baptized Christians. The level of communion between such a community and the communities who celebrate baptism is significantly impaired.

## 2. Baptism and initiation into the life of faith

34. When the gospel is preached and the call to conversion is heard, a process of incorporation into life in Christ is set in motion in the one who is called to salvation (Acts 2:37-42). While the process continues throughout life until the Christian is definitively incorporated into Christ at the parousia, its earthly course is marked by certain



decisive moments, in which significant stages of life in Christ are first realized and manifested. These moments taken together can be called Christian initiation. They are moments of faith and conversion, of ritual celebration and of entry into the life of the church. Baptism is at the heart of the process, both as decisive moment and as model of the entire process.

35. The churches are united in confessing that “there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5). United in the one Lord, they affirm that faith and baptism belong together. They can agree that faith calls for baptism, and that the rite of baptism expresses the faith of the church of Christ and of the person baptized. Baptism expresses faith in the gracious gift of God that justifies sinners; it celebrates the realization of that gift in a new member of the church. This faith is handed on in the church, in its life and teaching, and is appropriated as the faith of the church by the person baptized.

#### THE RITES OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

36. Christian initiation is effected in a complex interplay of faith and conversion, of ritual celebration, of teaching and spiritual formation, of practice and of mission. While there are differences between churches in the way the relationship between these elements is understood, there is widespread agreement that the water-rite of baptism is at the heart of initiation.

37. “Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (B17). The baptismal rite has taken different forms in the history of the church’s life. While churches have their individual normative practices, they often recognize other forms as constituting a true baptism. On the one hand, total or partial immersion of the candidate in water seems to be the form best grounded in the Tradition, and to be acceptable to most churches. Many recognize as true a baptism that is done by the pouring of water on the person, particularly on the head. On the other hand various churches doubt whether a sprinkling with water is a sufficient sacramental sign. More ecumenically problematic is the practice of some churches, noted by BEM, that have a rite of initiation that does not use water but is nevertheless called baptism (comm. 21c). Most difficult to reconcile with the understanding of most Christians concerning baptism and the church are the procedures for initiation into Christian faith and life of some Christian communities that lack any specific rite resembling baptism and even deliberately exclude baptism.

38. In many churches chrismation/confirmation and first reception of the eucharist are associated with baptism as rites of initiation. While there are differences in the way the relationship between these three rites is understood and practised in the churches, and their bearing on Christian life is not always experienced in the same way, it is generally accepted that they give expression and reality to different aspects of a single process of initiation. Baptism is intrinsically related to the other two rites, in so far as it calls forth the gift of the eschatological Spirit and brings one into communion in the body of Christ; they, for their part, are grounded in baptism and draw meaning from it.

39. Some churches do not practise chrismation/confirmation, and others who do so allow reception of the eucharist before chrismation/confirmation. While these practices are problematical for other churches they do not call into question the fundamental orientation of baptism to eucharist and its role as precondition for receiving the eucharist to which the whole Christian Tradition bears witness.

40. The sacrament of baptism is, in the first meaning of the term, a distinctive water-rite that occurs once in a life-time and cannot be repeated. The ongoing gift of growth in faith and the continual dying and rising in Christ that this entails is truly a living out of the once-for-all encounter of faith with Christ that is given and modelled in the rite of baptism. In this sense Christian life can be understood as a “life-long baptism”, lasting until final oneness with Christ is attained.

#### BAPTISM AND FAITH

41. Baptism as rite, and as a daily dying and rising with Christ, is inseparable from faith. God, who calls persons by name (Isa. 43:1; cf. Acts 9:4), is the source of faith. Even the freedom to respond in faith is God’s gracious gift. Faith begins in persons when God sows in them the seed of simple trust. By the witness of the Holy Spirit they grow up into Christ, in whom the fullness of God dwells (Col. 1:19). It is not on the basis of their own understanding or ability that human beings can receive God’s gift, but only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:26ff.). Nothing can be claimed for baptism that would interfere with the utter gratuitousness of the gift of God received in faith.

42. Faith is the response of the believer to the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, preached in and by the community of those who already believe in him and praise the glory of his name. Drawn into that faith, the new believer gradually makes his/her own the words in which the gospel of salvation is expressed. These are primarily the words of the scriptures, and particularly the confessions of faith that they contain. They are also those symbols of faith, those distillations of the gospel, that the churches have recognized as expressions of the faith and authorized for use in worship and teaching. It is these words of faith, crystallized in the Trinitarian formula “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, that give form and meaning to the water rite of baptism and that in the early church led to it being called sacrament of faith.

43. Thus baptism situates the faith of the Christian within the living faith of the church and so contributes to the growth of his or her faith. “As Christians mature, they grow up into the fullness of the faith confessed, celebrated and witnessed to by the Christian community, both locally and worldwide... in the faith professed by the whole church throughout the ages... The ‘we believe’ of the Christian community and the ‘I believe’ of personal commitment become one” (second Faith and Order consultation on baptism at Faverge, 2001, 48).

44. The Trinitarian faith confessed in the baptismal creed and the baptismal washing performed by the church in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are indissolubly united in the liturgy of holy baptism. In the creed the church testifies to its faith in the Triune God, and incorporates those baptized into God’s holy people. This connection between the baptismal formula and the believing church is at the core of the process of Christian initiation. In this sense baptism is always understood to be believer’s baptism.

45. The faith confessed in baptism is the faith that binds believers and their churches together. In early centuries Christian communities shared their baptismal creeds as a basis of unity. Later, councils expressed the same faith in more extensive formulations. The heart of the faith expressed in the most universally acknowledged creeds used today – the Nicene-Constantinopolitan and the Apostles Creeds – is the faith in the

Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And “the profession of faith occurs also in those churches which do not formally use the words of the Nicene Creed, when baptismal confession uses other formulas authorized by the church” (Confessing the One Faith, introduction, §15).

46. Churches that share faith in the Trinity and fully recognize one another’s baptism may, nevertheless, break communion with each other due to differences about other matters of faith or questions of order. In this case the communion which is the fruit of faith and baptism is impeded. There are churches which consider that a disagreement in faith that is sufficiently serious to be communion-breaking between them and another church makes them unable to admit baptized members of that church to full participation in the eucharist, the normal fulfillment of baptism. Many other churches, however, consider that, even in the absence of full ecclesial communion, churches should admit members of other churches, whose baptism they recognize and Trinitarian faith they share, to full participation in the eucharist.

#### ADULT BAPTISM AND THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS

47. Most churches can share the broad understanding of the relation between faith and baptism that has been described above. But differences remain which lead to problems for the mutual recognition of baptism. The differences are not very apparent when the baptism being considered is that of an adult. Two facts provide a unifying point of reference for churches regarding the manner and meaning of the baptism of adults. First, biblical descriptions of the pattern of initiation normally refer to adults. Second, major classical liturgies of baptism were initially intended for adults. Such baptisms, celebrated according to the present-day rituals and disciplines of almost all churches, are normally the baptism of actual believers, and can be recognized as such. But when baptism is administered to a child who is not yet capable of making a personal profession of faith, the interpretation of the scriptural and traditional material on baptism can differ. For some churches the scriptures only authorize the baptizing of those who make a personal act of conversion and a personal confession of faith. For others the scriptures provide no compelling reason for refusing baptism to children not yet capable of such personal decisions, when they are presented by those who are responsible for them and are entrusted by them to the church for their formation and instruction. Furthermore, descriptions in Acts of the baptism of whole households must be taken carefully into account. And, even though classical baptismal liturgies were designed for adults, a very early and extensive description of such a liturgy, the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (c.215), explicitly includes the initiation of children who cannot answer for themselves (XX, 4).

48. It must be recognized with BEM that “the necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism is acknowledged by the churches. Personal commitment is necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ” (B8). “While the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents” (B11). The churches recognize the paradigmatic and normative quality of the baptism of adult believers, illustrated in the New Testament and practised by all churches, as the most explicit sign of the character of baptism. However, as BEM goes on to note, “In the course of history, the practice of

baptism has developed in a variety of forms. Some churches baptize infants brought by parents or guardians who are ready, in and with the church, to bring up the children in the Christian faith. Other churches practise exclusively the baptism of believers who are able to make a personal confession of faith. Some of these churches encourage infants or children to be presented and blessed in a service which usually involves thanksgiving for the gift of the child and also the commitment of the mother and father to Christian parenthood” (B11).

49. It has to be noted here that the development of infant baptism is rooted in the history of the early church and was never intended to be a departure from the pattern of initiation that we have identified and that is ordained in the New Testament texts on baptism. Children were baptized because God’s call to salvation seemed to bear on them no less than on adults. Age could be no barrier to the gift of God in Christ and the Spirit. In the celebration of baptism the rite was always associated with faith and with life in the community of believers. In infants, faith took the form of the living faith of the church that gathered the child to itself in baptism. The faith of the church was understood to be now present in this new member in the form of the faith-nurture that was henceforth enfolding it. Faith was understood to be an already-present grace that would enable the child to grow up to the point of being able to make a personal confession of faith and personally ratify the grace of conversion that had been given in baptism. The ground of this conviction was the understanding that the grace of Christ has taken hold of all the children of Adam and can free them from sin once they are brought into contact with him through the preaching and sacraments of the church. It is only and always this grace that generates the human response that is inherent to faith. It can be already at work in the nurture through which children are being brought to the point of being able to make personal choices.

50. Churches that practise only the baptism of adult believers are no less caring for children than the churches that baptize them. They also welcome children for instruction, care and blessing within the community. They mark the commitment of Christian parents and their ecclesial community (and in some cases of specific sponsors as well) to nurture a newborn child in the faith, within the life of the church. Even though the welcome is not enacted through baptism it looks towards baptism as its horizon. For people so welcomed into the church in childhood, baptism in adult age can be the personal expression of the climax of a journey of conversion and faith, which is one of the principle ways in which the scriptures speak of it. Furthermore, the ecumenical convergence being reached about the sacramental status of baptism can now enable churches that baptize only those who can make a personal act of faith to see the baptism they administer as also embodying the grace of Christ and the gift of the Spirit that brings about the personal faith and conversion that is expressed in the celebration.

51. In the Latin tradition infant baptism received strong support in the theology of Augustine and his reaction against Pelagian views. This view gave expression to the fear of exposing infants to the danger of dying without being rescued from [original] sin by the saving work of Christ, as well as to the positive advantages of initiation into life in Christ and his church that baptism brings. A restored theology of baptism and a critical re-evaluation of certain explanations of the consequences of original sin for children would give increased weight to the Christological and ecclesiological reality of baptism. These churches also recognize that there are risks of mishandling the gifts of God in

baptizing children. The promises of Christian nurture given by parents and sponsors may not be kept and the sacrament may be profaned. In fact, these churches have, theoretically if not always in practice, required that baptism be delayed until the child is old enough to speak for him/herself when there is not a reasonable guarantee that the child will be nurtured in the faith. While these concerns, which must surely be intensified in our post-Christian world, do not amount to identifying with the position of churches that practise only believer's baptism, they certainly indicate a belief that the full pattern of Christian initiation must be respected. In this they affirm something that can serve as an important ground for recognition of baptism between them and churches that practise only believer's baptism.

52. We have proposed that the pattern of baptismal initiation has three elements: formation in faith, baptism in water, and participation in the life of the community. These three elements are present in the rite of water baptism itself for every church, though not in the same way. Likewise all three elements are present in the life-long process of Christian discipleship, with its continual formation in faith, recollection of baptismal grace and promise, and deepening participation in the life of the church. If we ask about the relation of faith to baptism in reference to the water rite alone, the differences among the churches remain substantial. When we compare instead the wider pattern of baptismal initiation and formation in Christ, more extensive convergence emerges. It is a convergence that is compatible with and even enriched by the fact that different traditions emphasize one or other element of the pattern and put them together in different ways.

53. The convergence is grounded on the fact that churches recognize a paradigmatic and normative quality of baptism performed upon personal profession of faith, illustrated in the New Testament and practised by all churches, as the most explicit sign of the character of baptism. Those traditions that practise only this form of baptism in their pattern of initiation maintain a living witness to the reality of baptism the churches affirm together, and express powerfully the shared conviction that baptism is inherently oriented to personal conversion. Those traditions that practise infant baptism as part of their pattern of initiation maintain a living witness to the initiating call and grace from God that the churches agree enable human response, and express powerfully the shared convictions that infants and children are nurtured and received within the community of Christ's church prior to any explicit confession.

54. It is being suggested that each church, even as it retains its own baptismal tradition, recognize in others the one baptism into Jesus Christ by affirming the similarity of wider patterns of initiation and formation in Christ present in every community. This is the convergence foreseen in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*: "Churches are increasingly recognizing one another's baptism as the one baptism into Christ, when Jesus Christ has been confessed as Lord by the candidate or, in the case of infant baptism, when confession has been made by the church (parents, guardians, godparents and congregation) and affirmed later by personal faith and commitment" (B15). Those churches that practise only believer's baptism could recognize the one baptism in other traditions within their full patterns of Christian initiation, which include personal affirmation of faith. Those churches that normally practise infant baptism could recognize the one baptism within the full pattern of Christian initiation in "believer's churches", even where identical forms of chrismation or confirmation were lacking.

55. Recognition that the one baptism of Christ is present within another tradition's full pattern of Christian initiation can also reinforce another key affirmation in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: "Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as 're-baptism' must be avoided" (B13).

#### ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

56. There is an intimate relationship between baptism and faith. This, and the fact that the various churches in their baptismal practice have the intent to baptize into the universal body of Christ (cf. §42), but in fact baptize into communities separated from one another, often because of serious differences in their understanding of aspects of Christian faith, suggests the following. An ecclesiological implication of the emerging convergence on baptism is that this development makes more urgent the achievement, by separated Christians, of a common understanding of the apostolic faith which the church proclaims and in light of which a person is baptized.

57. Concerning the disagreement about baptizing infants, those on both sides agree that baptism is related to personal faith. One position holds that personal faith is a condition for being baptized, and the other that personal faith is required of the person baptized as soon as it becomes possible. But a significant difference between the two positions concerns the role taken by the church, as suggested in statements above explaining infant baptism: "In infants, faith took the form of the living faith of the church that gathered the child to itself in baptism" (§49); faith was understood as "an already-present grace that would enable the child to grow up... able to make its personal confession of faith and personally ratify the grace of conversion... given in baptism..." a conviction based on the understanding "... that the grace of Christ has taken hold of all the children of Adam and can free them from sin once they are brought into contact with him through the preaching and sacraments of the church" (§49). The ecclesiological implication which follows is that among the basic issues which need to be resolved in order to overcome the divergence on infant baptism are the questions of the nature and purpose of the church and its role in the economy of salvation.

### 3. Baptism and incorporation into the church

58. Both the rite of baptism, as well as the life-long process of growing into Christ which it initiates, take place within a particular (local) church community. Its members and ministers preach the gospel, invite, instruct and ritually prepare its catechumens, celebrate the sacramental rites of initiation, register the act and take responsibility for the ongoing Christian formation and sacramental completion of those baptized in it. Such a baptizing community believes that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Christ is realized in itself. Thus the baptism it celebrates is the gift of the Spirit that incorporates the baptized, at one and the same time, into its own community life and into the body of Christ that is his church. The communion which this local church has with other churches expresses and embodies the oneness of Christians that is given in the body of Christ. The eucharist, as the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ given for the salvation of all, brings the communion given in baptism to its sacramental fullness.

59. All churches agree that the incorporation into Christ that is inaugurated in baptism is intended to be, as gift of Christ in the Spirit to the glory of God the Father, complete and full incorporation. Correspondingly, baptism expresses the intention to admit the baptized person into the universal communion of the church of Christ. Christian communities do not baptize into themselves as isolated units but as churches that believe the body of Christ is present and available in their own ecclesial reality. The desire for communion in the body of Christ inherent in baptism compels the baptized to reach out to other ecclesial communities that practise the same pattern of baptism and confess the same apostolic faith.

60. When the communities that baptize are in full communion with each other – as when they already belong to the same ecclesial family – communion between their members is sacramentally and institutionally completed and its spiritual fruitfulness is correspondingly enhanced. The baptized together share the same eucharist, in which communion is fully expressed and nourished. They live together with the same faith, and the same institutional bonds of mission, ministry and service.

61. When there are obstacles to full communion among different communities, baptism still provides a degree of communion that is real, if imperfect. The baptized can recognize in the baptismal faith and practice of those others a belief in and desire for the oneness of Christians in the body of Christ that corresponds to their own. They can recognize in one another's baptism a visible and institutional expression of the unity in Christ into which the members of each church believe they have been baptized and find in that an expression and nourishment of their desire for the ecclesial fullness of that unity.

62. Nor do the difficulties that some churches have about recognizing the full sacramental reality of baptism celebrated in churches not in full communion with themselves – difficulties that have to be recognized and respected – deprive baptism of all significance for communion. The position of the Orthodox is a case in point. There is a complication when a non-Orthodox wishes to join the Orthodox church, as baptism, chrismation/confirmation and the eucharist are considered to be one sacrament of initiation. As a result, practices vary. Baptism is used if the postulant is deemed not to be baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity (e.g. Unitarians). Chrismation is performed in the case of absence of confirmation, or in the case of a different conception of confirmation. But in the case, for instance, of a Roman Catholic, the reception should be performed through confession and communion, recognizing and respecting the holy orders and the full sacramentality of the Roman Catholic Church. This, for example, is the official attitude of the church of Russia among others. However, among the Orthodox, a difficulty arises from the fact that there exists a difference between Orthodox theology which recognizes baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, and the practice of some Orthodox communities – not churches – e.g. Mount Athos, that rebaptize non-Orthodox Christians (Mount Athos is part of the church of Constantinople which follows Orthodox theology as described above).

63. Some churches do not admit to eucharistic communion all those whose baptism they recognize. But according to Roman Catholic theology, the desire (votum) for the eucharist is given in every true baptism, and the reality (res) of grace – union with Christ – is acknowledged to exist because of baptism even when access to eucharistic communion is denied or restricted (see also §§92-95 below).

## CONFIRMATION AND OTHER SACRAMENTS

64. The relation of baptism and other sacraments, especially confirmation, needs further discussion. The convergence text BEM (B14) states, “In God’s work of salvation, the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, participation in Christ’s death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the receiving of the Spirit. Baptism in its full meaning signifies and effects both.”

65. But the differences might be outlined in this way. In some churches confirmation has its origins in a post-baptismal episcopal anointing or imposition of hands in early Christianity – an event which, in the course of history in the West, became separated in time from the baptismal ritual [in the East, chrismation/confirmation, being delegated to the priest by the bishop, is part of the baptismal ceremony]. In other churches, particularly Reformation churches, confirmation means a more mature profession of faith by adolescents. Thus for certain traditions confirmation is a sacramental part of the baptismal action (even if performed years later). For most traditions confirmation is understood as “completing” baptism. For some traditions, however, confirmation is a distinctive sacramental rite understood not as “completing” a person’s earlier baptism – that is viewed as complete in and of itself – but as an act by a person, now “mature”, that publicly witnesses to and affirms it (cf. Faith and Order consultation, Faverges, October 2001, no. 26).

66. Christians differ, then, in their understanding as to where the sign of the gift of the Spirit is to be found. Different actions have become associated with the giving of the Spirit. For some it is the water rite itself. For others, it is the anointing with chrism and/or the imposition of hands, which many churches call confirmation. For still others it is all three, as they see the Spirit operative throughout the rite. All agree that Christian baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit. But the place and role of confirmation within the practice of Christian initiation needs further clarification among the churches.

## ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

67. This discussion on “baptism and incorporation into the church” suggests several ecclesiological implications. First, the implication of the common belief that baptism is incorporation into the body of Christ, the church, is that the rite of baptism is an effective sign which really accomplishes something in the life of the person who receives it.

68. But, despite this common belief just mentioned, there are also different convictions among Christians governing the way they understand various theological aspects of baptism, or the sacramental aspect of incorporation, or indeed the sacraments themselves. For some, incorporation into the church comes through the sacraments of initiation which include baptism, confirmation and eucharist. For others, the celebration of the sacrament of baptism alone suffices for incorporation into the body of Christ. For still others, it is a profession of faith in Jesus Christ which brings one into the church, and baptism is a sign of acknowledgment that this has taken place. In light of these differences, a second ecclesiological implication from the discussion of this aspect of the emerging convergence on baptism is the need to develop common ecumenical perspectives on the sacraments, and especially on the relationship of sacraments to the church.



69. Also, there are different evaluations of the nature of confirmation and its status as a sacrament. A third implication follows, namely that it would be valuable for disagreeing communities to dialogue about the precise question of whether this difference concerning confirmation reflects any ecclesiological disagreement.

#### 4. Baptism and continual growth in Christ

70. As previously pointed out, one of the dimensions of the common pattern of baptism is the “ongoing formation and responsible discipleship where the pattern of our baptismal calling is worked out over a whole life” (see above 18). Whatever the age of the person, in fact, baptism marks the beginning of a new life in Christ and in the church, and this life is characterized by growth. The Christian life, based on and nourished by faith, involves becoming more and more what God promises and creates in baptism. Life in Christ is life in the Holy Spirit who guides and empowers us to fulfil our baptismal vocation which is to participate in the *missio Dei*, being realized in the ongoing history of salvation.

##### GROWTH IN CHRIST

71. Christian life is not characterized only by growth. Rather, the baptismal participation in Christ’s death and resurrection includes, also, the need for daily repentance and forgiveness. Life in Christ therefore involves a readiness to forgive just as we have been forgiven, thus opening the baptized to attitudes and behaviours that shape a new ethical orientation. According to BEM: “... those baptized are pardoned, cleansed and sanctified by Christ, and are given as part of their baptismal experience a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (B4).

72. This perspective emphasizes the awareness that baptism is an ever-present reality to be continually lived out. The baptized are drawn to become more and more “living stones... a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people... [to] proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:5,9). These are aspects of life in Christ that Christians share and can witness to together.

73. In their ecumenical efforts to respond to God’s call to unity, churches are rediscovering together the ecclesial aspect to this new ethical orientation: baptism is administered by a community of faith that itself lives by God’s forgiveness, which is a gift and a calling. Therefore, fundamental to ecumenical effort is the awareness of the relationship between forgiveness and a spirit of conversion, which implies a readiness to confess the sins of one against the other and to be open to the Spirit’s gift of metanoia. This opens the churches also to the awareness of the need for a healing of memories between them, and to reconciliation. This commitment to *koinonia* flows from the new life in Christ received in baptism and it has Christ himself as pattern. The fifth world conference on Faith and Order reminded us of what *koinonia* means at both the individual and the collective level and of the relationship of *koinonia* to the very core of the baptismal process of Christian formation (Santiago report, 1993, section I, 20).

74. Recognizing baptism as a bond of unity strengthens the Christian sense of mission and witness and the call to engage together in the common work of the baptized

and believing people of God. Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, then president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, wrote about the relation of this bond of unity to mission in 1980:

“By the very fact of baptism each and every Christian is consecrated to the Trinity and called to bear witness to Christ in this baptismal profession of faith in the central Christian truths. There is one baptism and all Christians share, to a greater or lesser extent, a common baptismal profession of faith. This communion based on baptism and the profession of baptismal faith, renders a common witness theologically possible. But since this communion in faith is not complete, such common witness is inevitably limited in its scope. One of the main motives that leads us to seek for unity is the need for all Christians to be able to give a truly and completely common witness to the whole Christian faith” (Cardinal Willebrands, Letter to Episcopal Conference, 22 May 1980, Information Service, 43, 1980, II, p.64).

75. Conversion, forgiveness and repentance, such fundamental parts of the biblical heritage, are ethical claims as well. The daily calling to a change of heart and mind (*metanoia*) deepens our faithfulness as Christians. It is a calling to become who we are in Christ. Forgiveness, a gift and a calling, and repentance are signified by the water rite that links the aspect of cleansing and the aspect of life.

76. The last statement opens the perspective that the liturgical life of the church expresses the patterns linking the various aspects of Christian relationship established in baptism: praising God, hearing God’s life-giving and prophetic word, participating together with brothers and sisters in the eucharistic meal, interceding for all people in their need, and being sent out to proclaim and to make Christ present in and for the world. The incorporation in Christ, which takes place through baptism, gives rise to a *koinonia* in the church’s *kerygma*, *leiturgia*, *diakonia* and *martyria*. These aspects of the church call both for individual and community efforts and witness.

#### THE CALL TO HOLINESS

77. For all the baptized, growth in Christ implies a call and an empowering to holiness realized by the Spirit: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16; cf. also Lev. 11:44, 20:7). BEM reminds us of this universal call to holiness when it says that baptism initiates the reality of a new life given in the midst of the present world, gives participation in the community of the Holy Spirit, and is a sign of the kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come. “Through the gifts of faith, hope and love, baptism has a dynamic which embraces the whole of life, extends to all nations, and anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (B7).

78. The call to holiness is for all the faithful, and for all it has an eschatological dimension, since all are called to God’s kingdom. A distinctive way of living out the vocation to holiness is, in some traditions, constituted by the consecrated life (in monastic or other forms), which is an eschatological sign and also a way of working out the baptismal life, through a particular concern for others and for the whole creation.

## ETHICAL FORMATION AS PART OF CONTINUAL GROWTH IN CHRIST

79. From what has already been said, it is clear that ethical formation is part of continual growth in the saving mysteries of Christ. “By baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ where their sins are buried, where the ‘old Adam’ is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is broken” (B3). No longer slaves to sin, but free, the baptized are “fully identified with the death of Christ, they are buried with him and are raised here and now to a new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (ibid.).

80. This ethical orientation springing from baptism should become “intentional” for every baptized person, as a sign of growth in Christ and as a sign of ongoing formation that shapes and models our life-style to Christ’s. Such an ethical commitment is an imperative that, along with the missionary imperative, needs to be cultivated and put into practical terms. Thus the churches are required to take responsibility for the formation/education of the faithful. The Joint Working Group itself, in a previous study report concerning “Guidelines for Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues”, reminds the churches of the important task of “seeking to be faithful to God in Christ, to be led by the Holy Spirit, and to be a moral environment which helps all members in the formation of Christian conscience and practice”. It affirms “the responsibility of every church to provide moral guidance for its members and for society at large” (JWG Seventh Report, p.41).

81. There is, therefore, a deep responsibility for baptized Christians to make their life together, in the words of Pope John Paul II, the building of “the home and the school of communion”, a framework in which ethical and moral aspects are part of the building up the *koinonia*:

“A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens’ (Gal. 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanism without a soul, ‘masks’ of communion rather than its means of expression and growth” (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 2001, 43).

## ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

82. What has been said in this section suggests several ecclesiological implications. There is general ecumenical agreement that the unity to which Christians are called includes “a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God’s grace to all people and serving the whole of creation” (WCC Canberra statement on unity, 1991, 2.1). On the basis of a common baptism separated Christians can, even now, engage in some common witness to the gospel, but still limited in scope because their communion in faith is not yet complete (cf. §68). An ecclesiological implication of a common baptism is the need for separated Christians to work towards a common understanding of the mission of the church, and to continually resolve divergences in the understanding of faith and morals which prevent them from giving full, common witness to the gospel.

83. There is also general agreement that the unity to which separated Christians are called is not uniformity, but a *koinonia* characterized by a unity in diversity rooted in a

deep spirituality (cf. Canberra statement, 2.2). Agreement, therefore, that baptism involves a continual, life-long growth in Christ, and a call to holiness (cf. §§77ff.) suggests the following ecclesiological implication: that in their search for full communion, Christians assess together and find ways of sharing for the benefit of all, those various authentic gifts found in each tradition which foster holiness and life in Christ, and contribute to the church's mission of witnessing to the truth and light of the gospel before the world. In contrast to the mutual isolation that separated Christians have experienced, a sharing of gifts with one another is a way of building up *koinonia* and, thus, of fostering common witness.

84. Growth in Christ means growth in holiness, which involves turning away from sin and living the new life of the Spirit. The fact that baptism, as entrance into the church, introduces an individual along this path, or reinforces one who may have begun such a change of life before baptism, draws attention to the following ecclesiological implication. The Christian community is a moral community of disciples, made up of members who are striving, under the power of God's grace, to live as saints after the pattern of Jesus himself, who called them to be holy as their Father in heaven is holy, and who sent the Holy Spirit to bring this journey to completion. Every Christian community should be a school of prayer and of moral training and personal growth.

##### 5. Mutual recognition of baptism

85. It is in this perspective that we turn now to the importance of continuing to seek the mutual recognition of baptism as a primary aspect of fostering bonds of unity between separated Christians. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

86. Confessing what is in the scriptures, Christians in dialogue have reaffirmed that "we are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world. The union with Christ which we share through baptism has important implications for Christian unity.... Therefore, our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship" (B6).

87. Furthermore, Christians in the ecumenical movement have committed themselves to a long and demanding process of common reflection and action in order to manifest the communion they have rediscovered and recognized through decades of ecumenical dialogue. At the fifth world conference on Faith and Order delegates, in worship, "affirmed and celebrated together the increasing mutual recognition of one another's baptism as the one baptism into Christ". "Indeed such an affirmation has become fundamental for the churches' participation in the ecumenical movement" (cited in *Becoming a Christian*, Faith and Order Paper 184, 1999, §68, p.95).

88. Mutual recognition of baptism is in itself an act of recognition of *koinonia*. It becomes a way in which separated communities manifest the degree of real communion already reached, even if incomplete. There are levels or degrees of mutual recognition reflecting the extent to which separated Christians share the apostolic faith and life. Furthermore, there are different views concerning how much of the apostolic faith needs to be shared prior to mutual recognition and, indeed, in regard to baptism, what constitutes the fullness of the apostolic faith related to it. For example, there would be gen-

eral agreement that the apostolic faith is represented when baptism is performed with adequate water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But some would add that to express the apostolic faith completely and faithfully the minister of baptism must be an ordained priest. Others would say that while the minister of baptism must normally be an ordained priest or deacon, in the case of an emergency an “extraordinary” minister can perform a valid baptism. Views held on such issues reflect ecclesiological convictions and might determine for some whether or not mutual recognition of baptism is possible.

#### THE NEED TO DEFINE TERMS

89. While the conditions allowing mutual recognition increase, there are also problems raised and issues that need further reflection and clarification. Among these is the question of terminology. What is the relationship between recognition and acknowledgment, and the relationship between recognition and reception? Continuing theological reflection and the application of such reflection is urgently needed. Therefore, the JWG is called to survey and seek clarity on these issues. Such an investigation has been already initiated by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity through the survey/questionnaire to the episcopal conferences, as well as by Faith and Order through the survey on liturgical rites.

#### RECOGNITION AND APOSTOLICITY

90. As indicated above, among the issues raised with regard to recognition/reception is the fundamental question of apostolicity. In fact, recognition implies not only a synchronic aspect concerning the relationship among confessions today, but also a diachronic aspect, regarding the relationship with the apostolic heritage handed on over the centuries (cf. Faith and Order consultation on baptism, Faverges, 9).

91. The recognition of the apostolicity of the rite and ordo of baptism is a step towards the full recognition of the apostolicity of the churches in a wider and more profound sense: the full recognition of the same apostolic faith, sacramental order and mission. Full recognition of apostolicity, therefore, involves more than the recognition of baptism. As the world conference on Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela stated, “The church seeks to be a community, being faithful as disciples of Christ, living in continuity with the apostolic community established by a baptism inseparable from faith and metanoia, called to a common life in Christ, manifested and sustained by the Lord’s supper under the care of a ministry at the same time personal and communal and having as its mission the proclamation in word and witness of the gospel” (Santiago report, p.231).

And as the Decree on Ecumenism stated:

“Baptism therefore constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it. But baptism, of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. Baptism is thus oriented towards a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself willed it to be, and finally, towards a complete participation in eucharistic communion” (UR, n.22).

Those initiated through baptism continue in an ongoing process of conformity to Christ, both in the dynamics of their individual lives and in those of ecclesial life.

92. In the present stage of the ecumenical movement, separated churches, reflecting unresolved theological issues among them, approach various issues from different ecclesiological perspectives even when there is a common recognition of baptism. An example concerns the relationship of baptism to the eucharist. With regard to the question of what is required for participation in the eucharist, different positions are taken.

93. The churches of the Reformation affirm that the eucharist is a moment of full communion, expressing and enhancing *koinonia*. It is the spiritual basis on which churches live out their baptismal *koinonia* and express more fully their common confession, worship, witness and service. Furthermore, the churches of the Reformation place primary emphasis on the fact that it is Jesus Christ who invites his disciples to share in the meal. They therefore extend the Lord's hospitality, welcoming to his table all those who love Jesus Christ, have received baptism as a sign of belonging to his body, and have a sufficient understanding of the meaning of the eucharist and its implications. Among many churches of the Reformation the full communion expressed in the eucharist is already experienced in all areas of their faith and life, as reflected in numerous "full communion" or "full mutual recognition" agreements (e.g. Leuenberg and Porvoo). In other cases the full communion expressed in the eucharist is not yet, or incompletely, experienced in all areas of their faith and life. Many such churches have entered into agreements which affirm and celebrate the right of their members, when worshipping in one another's churches, to receive the Lord's hospitality at his table (e.g. the Consultation on Church Union [now Churches Uniting in Christ] in the United States). Such formal, theologically grounded agreements enable these churches to express the baptismal and eucharistic communion which is already theirs in Christ, even as they work to extend this to all areas of their faith and life.

94. The position of the Catholic Church concerning participation in the eucharist takes into account the close relationship of Christ to the church, and of the foundational role of the eucharist in the church. The Second Vatican Council is speaking especially of the eucharist when it describes the liturgy as "the summit towards which the activity of the church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all her power flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). According to the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (1993, no. 129), a sacrament is "an act of Christ and of the church through the Spirit" and its celebration in a concrete community is a sign of the reality of its unity in faith, worship and community life. Since sacraments are sources of the unity of the Christian community, of spiritual life, and are the means of building them up, eucharistic communion therefore "is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression" (*ibid.*).

At the same time the Catholic Church teaches that by baptism members of other churches and ecclesial communities are brought into a real, even if imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Baptism constitutes a sacramental bond of unity among all who through it are reborn, and "is wholly directed towards the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ". The eucharist is for the baptized a spiritual food which enables them to live the life of Christ and to be incorporated more profoundly in him and share more intensely in the mystery of Christ (*cf. ibid.*).

In light of these two basic principles, which must always be taken into account together, the Directory states, “that in general the Catholic Church permits access to its eucharistic communion... only those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life” (ibid.). For the same reasons, “it also recognizes that in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions”, access to the eucharist “may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other churches and ecclesial communities” (ibid.). According to the Directory, this involves a “grave and pressing need” as usually determined by general norms established by the bishop (no. 130). Among the conditions referred to above is that the person who requests the sacrament “manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed” (no. 131).

Thus, in this view, mutual recognition of baptism, in itself, is not sufficient for eucharistic communion because the latter is linked to full ecclesial communion in faith and life, and its visible expression.

95. The Orthodox church also places a very strong emphasis on eucharistic sharing as the final visible sign of full communion. Such sharing particularly implies confession of one apostolic faith which, though it may be expressed in different terms, must necessarily be the same. One of the impediments resides precisely in the necessary verification of this identity in the confession of the same faith. As eucharistic sharing is the expression of full communion, the Orthodox do not practise “eucharistic hospitality” (except in very special cases in which the minister responsible for the eucharist, bishop or priest, pastorally deems it necessary to make an exception; this is an example of *oikonomia*). As far as recognition/reception of baptism is concerned, it must be remembered that in the Orthodox perspective, baptism-chrismation/confirmation-eucharist are one sacrament of initiation.

96. Taking into account these different views of the relationship of baptism to eucharistic sharing, it is important nonetheless that separated Christians give appropriate concrete expression to the common bonds that they share in baptism, so that this relationship is more than one of mere politeness. An important development in recent decades is found in the growing number of invitations to one another to participate in specific, even if limited, ways in major events in each other’s churches. For example, the Catholic Church has invited ecumenical partners to participate as fraternal delegates in the assemblies of the synod of bishops in Rome. They are invited to address the assembly and to take part in small group discussions, even though they do not have a vote. It has become normal, too, for other Christian world communions to invite ecumenical partners to their assemblies. On the basis of the common bonds that we share in baptism we have thus begun, though still divided, to enter again into one another’s ecclesial life. In order to deepen our relationships, could we not find more such opportunities? Above all, there are many opportunities that can be found for praying for one another, and praying with one another. The annual week of prayer for Christian unity has become an occasion of ecumenical prayer virtually structured into the schedules of all Christian communities, and the opportunities that it offers should not be lost. The week reminds us that prayer for unity is the most important ecumenical activity. It reminds us that our ecumenical journey must be continually supported by prayer throughout the year, and that our ecumenical efforts to pray together are an important way of praising God and begging God’s forgiveness for our divisions.

97. From what has just been said, it is clear that even when there is a mutual recognition of baptism, separated churches have different convictions concerning how this relates to other aspects of Christian life. While there are different ecclesiologies at work, there is also the awareness, at the heart of ecumenical dialogue, that each Christian community, in its life, teaching and practice, has gifts to be discovered and shared. Within the ecumenical movement therefore, churches are constantly called to a “fresh interpretation” of their life, teaching and practice, taking guidance – from this exchange of gifts – for their “worship, educational, ethical and spiritual life and witness” (BEM introduction).

#### ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

98. According to the Canberra statement on unity, “the goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness” (2.1). As seen above, the mutual recognition of baptism implies an acknowledgment of the apostolicity of each other’s baptism, but in itself is only a step towards full recognition of the apostolicity of the church involved. Therefore an ecclesiological implication of the efforts of separated churches to formulate and express mutual recognition of baptism is that when this is accomplished it provides a (or another) substantial basis from which to seek further recognition of apostolicity in one another, and impels those churches towards seeking to express together a shared understanding of the apostolic heritage, of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness.

#### 6. Ecumenical implications

99. The growing convergence on baptism, and the acknowledgment that through a valid baptism Christians are brought into a real though imperfect communion, has a number of ecumenical implications, suggesting steps that might be taken now to deepen ecumenical relationships. Some of these are the following.

100. (1) Years of dialogue have brought us to the present acknowledgment of a significant convergence on baptism. The churches have the continuing responsibility to foster knowledge of this achievement among their constituencies, and of the fact that this convergence is a major reason why, today, Christians can acknowledge that, though still separated, they share a real though imperfect communion.

101. (2) As stated above (ch. 2, §55) a key affirmation in BEM is that “Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as ‘re-baptism’ must be avoided.” It is therefore desirable for the churches to seek a common affirmation that it is illegitimate as well as unnecessary to perform baptism to mark rededication to Christ, return to the church after a break in communion, or the reception of special charisms or spiritual gifts. At the same time, reaffirmation and remembrance of one’s baptism, in acts that may include elements or “echoes” from the baptismal rite itself, is a proper aspect of Christian worship and spirituality (as when in a baptismal liturgy those present are asked to remember and explicitly affirm their own baptismal confession).

102. (3) Baptism has been a part of the mission and the constitution of the church from earliest times, even before the canon of scripture was established. Recalling this helps us recognize anew the fundamental importance of baptism in the life of the church.



The growing ecumenical convergence on baptism has been one of the important achievements of the modern ecumenical movement, and a major factor in fostering new relationships between separated Christians. For these reasons, the importance of baptism in fostering ecumenical reconciliation should be given more visibility in the continuing ecumenical movement, as an important common factor on which to build. It is recommended therefore that, in the formation of ecumenical instruments or structures which are intended to foster unity among participating churches, such as councils of churches, or similar instruments, reference to baptism should be included in the theological basis of such instruments. In the case of those ecumenical instruments already existing and which do not have baptism as part of their theological basis, on occasions when their constitutions or by-laws are being reviewed, consideration might be given to including baptism as part of the theological basis (cf. ch. 1).

103. (4) In order that the growing convergence on baptism be reflected in local church life, it is recommended that dialogue concerning the significance and valid celebration of baptism take place between authorities of the Catholic Church at the diocesan or episcopal conference level, with the corresponding authorities of WCC member churches in those areas. Thus it should be possible to arrive at common statements through which they express mutual recognition of baptism as well as procedures for considering cases in which doubt may arise as to the validity of a particular baptism (cf. Directory, §94). Consideration might be given to developing common baptismal certificates for use by churches in the same region (cf. ch. 1).

104. (5) All Christians who have received the one baptism into Christ's one body have also received a radical calling from God to communion with all the baptized. The growing ecumenical convergence on baptism, with its insights into our shared pattern of baptismal initiation, despite the real variations in practice, offers us new opportunities to act on that calling, and in some ways to undertake common witness together. Out of the conviction that the Holy Spirit draws us towards visible *koinonia*, the churches should seek occasions to express and deepen the existing level of oneness in a common baptism through concrete signs of unity, such as: sending and receiving representatives to be present or take part in each other's baptismal celebrations, praying regularly in our worship for the candidates for baptism and the newly baptized in all the churches, sharing together in aspects of the catechumenate (preparation for baptism) or catechesis (instruction of the newly baptized), reclaiming major Christian festivals such as Easter, Pentecost, Epiphany as common times for the celebration of baptism in our churches.

105. (6) Christians of one communion often still live with bitter memories concerning other Christians, stemming from conflicts of centuries ago which led to divisions which have still not been overcome. These memories are among the primary reasons which make full reconciliation among separated Christians difficult. Since their links to one another in baptism should bring "a wider awareness of the need for healing and reconciliation of memories" (see ch. 4, §73), this should be an impetus to separated Christian communions to take steps towards the healing of memories, as one aspect towards their further reconciliation.

106. (7) One key to ecumenical progress is renewal within each church (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 6). Ecumenical dialogue on baptism implies that consideration be given to internal renewal as well (cf. BEM preface, question 3). The growing ecumenical convergence on baptism should be another reason that proper pastoral practices con-

cerning baptism within each church focus continually on central matters of faith. For example, in those communities in which godparents play a role in baptism, the criteria for choosing godparents for the one to be baptized should relate primarily to the strong faith of the prospective godparent, and not simply to social or family reasons. Not only would this benefit the one to be baptized, but it would also be an acknowledgment of the close relation between baptism and faith which is one of the basic areas of the emerging ecumenical convergence (cf. ch. 2).

107. (8) All Christians need to give attention to the ongoing communications revolution of today, unprecedented in scope. The mass media can have a forceful and lasting impact on shaping culture, including influencing the way that religious matters are presented to the public. An ecumenical opportunity is offered for Christians to cooperate to the extent possible, and for the sake of the gospel, to see that Christian life and values are presented correctly in the media. The growing convergence on baptism is a reason for Christians to cooperate in presenting to the media information concerning baptism which focuses on the religious dimensions of this sacrament/ordinance. These efforts can help to avoid the creation of a gap between the profound spiritual meaning and significance of baptism as understood by Christians, on the one hand, and impressions of baptism which have appeared in the media, showing baptism as merely a social event, or simply stressing some cultural matters relating to baptism, on the other. Such cooperation would be a way of giving common witness to the gospel.

108. (9) The growing ecumenical convergence on baptism also calls for reflection on other contemporary cultural challenges which, if not faced together by the churches, could have a negative impact on ecumenical relationships. One such challenge is that of inculturation. Some cultures may have a more poetic or doxological way of expressing realities; others use predominately rational forms of expression. In either case, aspects of a particular culture must be brought into the baptismal rite in a way which enhances, rather than diminishes, the normative meaning and symbolism of baptism as rebirth into Christ.

109. (10) Through the ecumenical movement, separated Christians have come to acknowledge a significant degree of *koinonia*. In light of this we ask churches not to allow practices to develop which threaten the unity they now share in respect of the *ordo*, theology and administration of baptism (cf. implication 4, §103 above). One example is the replacement of the traditional Trinitarian baptismal formula (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) with alternative wording. Another example is the admission of persons to the eucharist before baptism (cf. ch. 1 and 2).

110. (11) Churches which share in this growing ecumenical convergence are called to dialogue with churches which are ecumenically engaged, but understand and practise baptism differently, or do not practise it at all. These include (a) churches which baptize “in the name of Jesus” rather than with the traditional Trinitarian formula, but with water; (b) churches which baptize with the traditional Trinitarian formula, but without water; and (c) churches in which entry into the Christian community is effected without baptismal rites. Such dialogue might well focus on the understanding of the Holy Spirit and its role in bringing persons to faith and into the church, and in the believer’s life-long growth into Christ.

## Conclusion

111. Baptism is incorporation into the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and therefore is fundamental for Christian life. That it is central for Christian mission is evident from the fact that Our Lord instructed his disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matt. 28:19). As we have explored baptism in this study we have realized more deeply the great gift that baptism is.

112. It is therefore with gratitude to God that we count the growing ecumenical convergence on baptism as one of the important achievements of the modern ecumenical movement. The degree of common understanding of baptism realized thus far has already helped to foster significant new relationships between Christian churches. The ecumenical implications listed just above, in part six of this study document, are intended to suggest ways in which the convergences achieved on baptism can be consolidated and received into the life of the churches so that further steps forward towards unity can be built on solid foundations. The ecclesiological implications mentioned in each of the other sections indicate that the convergences on baptism relate to other issues to which attention must be given in continuing dialogue if further steps towards visible unity are to be taken.

113. It is hoped that this study document, by illustrating the extent of mutual agreement on baptism discovered thus far, will enable Christians to respond together, to the extent possible now, to the Lord’s commission to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations...,” and to invite those who have not heard the gospel before to life in Christ through baptism.

### A NOTE ON PROCESS:

Initial material presented for reflection to the JWG executive in January 2000 included a summary of implications of baptism derived from many responses to BEM (John Radano) and an overview of current Faith and Order work on baptism (Alan Falconer). The two were asked to coordinate the project. After the JWG plenary in May 2000 developed five main areas which became the focus of discussion for the study, drafting meetings took place in 2001 and 2002 (Geneva), February 2003 (Rome), and September 2003 (Geneva). Work in progress on the study was presented each year for discussion at annual JWG meetings. Participating in drafting sessions were Eugene Brand (2001, 2002), Thomas Best (2001, 2002, September 2003), Gosbert Byamungu (2001), Alan Falconer (2001, 2002, September 2003), Mark Heim (2001, 2002, February 2003), Nicholas Lossky (February 2003), Thomas Pott, osb (2002, February 2003), John Radano (2001, 2002, February and September 2003), Teresa Francesca Rossi (2002, February 2003), Liam Walsh op (2002, February 2003). Drafting was also done through correspondence between February and September 2003 by Heim, Lossky, Radano, Rossi, Walsh. Teresa Rossi did additional research on media presentations on baptism for the project, and William Henn contributed suggestions for improving certain aspects of an advanced draft of the text. David Hamid reviewed the advanced text for editorial clarity and consistency. The study document was approved at the JWG plenary meeting in Crete, in May 2004.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In one dialogue report, Pentecostals said that they “do not see the unity between Christians as being based in a common water baptism, mainly because they believe that the New Testament does not base it on baptism. Instead the foundation of unity is a common faith and experience of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour through the Holy Spirit” (Perspectives on Koinonia, report of the third phase of the international Pentecostal-Catholic dialogue, 1990 §55). Concerning Evangelicals see for example “The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, 1977-1984”, in Growth in Agreement II, p. 422.

<sup>2</sup> The most recent ecumenical description of the unity that is being sought is the Canberra statement, “The Unity of the Church As Koinonia: Gift and Calling”, approved by the World Council of Churches assembly at Canberra, Australia, 1991. This will be referred to at several points.