

## DOCUMENTATION SUPPLEMENT

### BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY, FAITH AND ORDER PAPER no. 111: A CATHOLIC RESPONSE

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

The process for arriving at this response was coordinated by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. The process included, first, consultation starting in 1982 with Catholic episcopal conferences throughout the world, many of which sent reports on BEM to the Secretariat. Secondly, reports on BEM received from episcopal confe-

rences and those received from Catholic theological faculties and societies, and other sources, were analyzed and taken into account by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity with the help of a team of theological consultants who worked to develop a draft response to BEM. Thirdly, the draft response was brought to its present and final form as a result of collaboration between the Secretariat and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The Catholic response was sent by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to the Faith & Order Secretariat in Geneva, in August 1987.

### BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY: AN APPRAISAL

#### I. INTRODUCTION

##### *Appreciation*

The Faith & Order document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) has emerged as a culmination of more than fifty years of work that began with the first World Conference on Faith & Order held at Lausanne in 1927. The Faith & Order movement is a founding component of the modern ecumenical movement, the search for the restoration of unity among all Christians which the Second Vatican Council described as a movement "fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1) and was one of the paths leading to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The Faith & Order Commission within the World Council guides the direction of the Faith & Order movement. BEM is perhaps the most significant result of the movement so far.

BEM is significant for several reasons. The first is the nature of the Commission that produced it at Lima in 1982. It consisted of Anglicans, Orthodox, Protestants and Roman Catholics. (Although the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches, it officially designates twelve Catholic members to the Commission on Faith & Order who participate, by personal title, as full voting members in the Commission. They constitute one-tenth of the Commission, which has one hundred and twenty members). The Commission represents a broad range of churches and communities, "a rich diversity of cultural backgrounds and traditions" who "worship in dozens of languages and live

under every kind of political system" (Preface to BEM). This Commission claimed to have achieved in BEM "a remarkable degree of agreement", if not yet full consensus, "major areas of theological convergence", while identifying "disputed issues in need of further research and reconciliation" (Preface). Theologians coming from groups that were historically often in direct theological confrontation and disagreement with each other, now together claimed agreement and/or convergence on key areas of faith. This itself is a remarkable achievement.

Secondly, BEM is a primary result of the ecumenical process which has been working, in light of the historical background of divisions among Christians, toward the goal of unity in faith. It claims a degree of agreement, or at least areas of theological convergence, which would be an important contribution to this goal. Pope John Paul II told a working group of Faith & Order dealing with BEM in Rome, in 1980, before the final formulation of the document, "Your... persevering effort has already obtained results for which we thank him who is given to us to guide us in the whole truth (cf. *Jn* 16: 13). It is necessary to continue. It is necessary to reach the goal" (Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *Information Service*, no. 45, 1981/1).

Thirdly, BEM is significant because with it Faith & Order is challenging churches and communities to respond. Having gone through a notable evolution over decades, the Lima text of 1982 was considered mature enough within the limits defined to be sent to the churches and communities for "official response... at the highest appropriate

priate level of authority” with suggestions given in support of a process of reception. The Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches endorsed this proposal and recommended to the churches a timetable within which they might respond. Thus began a phase in the ecumenical movement which signals deeper involvement on the part of Christians in all communities in the task of working for unity.

### *The Catholic Church and BEM*

The Catholic Church sees BEM in relation to important issues that *Unitatis Redintegratio* pointed to in its own elaboration of ecumenical priorities. For one thing the urgent need for unity among divided Christians is expressed by the Vatican Council and also in BEM. A principal concern of the Second Vatican Council was the “restoration of unity among all Christians”. The division among Christians, the Council said, “openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature” (UR 1). The Council noted God's initiative who “in recent times... has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and longing for unity”. *Unitatis Redintegratio* was formulated by the Second Vatican Council to encourage Catholics to “respond to the grace of this divine call” (UR 1). The Preface of BEM, for its part, states that “the goal of visible church unity” is what the churches and communities in the World Council of Churches are striving for. Catholics and other Christians may well differ on the conception of what the unity of the Church entails, and this must therefore be a matter for ecumenical dialogue. But the common ground here is that, in both cases, there is focus on the urgency of Christian unity. Though not involved in the initial stages of the process within the Faith & Order movement leading to BEM (yet becoming directly involved in the process after the Second Vatican Council), the Catholic Church sees in BEM a significant result of the ecumenical movement. For this reason, it must give the document serious attention.

*Unitatis Redintegratio* called for ecumenical dialogue (4), pointed to the ecumenical significance of baptism and urged that “the doctrine about the Lord's Supper, about the other sacraments, worship and ministry in the Church, should form subjects of dialogue (22). BEM ”deals directly with these concerns. *Unitatis redintegratio* furthermore urged that “Before the whole world let all Christians confess their faith in God, one and three, in the incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord” (12). A number of Catholic reactions to BEM have praised the Trinitarian and Christological emphasis given in the text.

### *Status of the Text*

Even though we think that the text falls short at certain points, we believe that if it were accepted by the various churches and ecclesial communities, it would bring the churches to an important step forward in the ecumenical movement, although still only one stage along the way in the ecumenical process of working toward visible unity of divided Christians. If through this process of response and reception for BEM, now being undertaken, many of the convergences, even agreements reported by BEM were affirmed by the churches and ecclesial communities, we believe that this would be an advance in the ecumenical movement.

BEM is also *a stage along the way*, one of the “various stages” the churches will have to pass through on “their way towards their goal of visible unity” (Preface). Its claims therefore are limited: “we have not yet fully reached ‘consensus’... Full consensus can only be proclaimed after the churches reach the point of living and acting together in unity”. The text does not offer a full systematic treatment of baptism, eucharist, or ministry, but focuses rather on those aspects which have been related to the problems of mutual recognition leading to unity. It is also formulated with the help of a new theological vocabulary which necessarily includes a new horizon of thought. At important junctions of the document, contrasting statements and language open the way to a variety of interpretations. The commentaries related to the text identify disputed issues still in need of further research and reconciliation. And there are occasional passages which suggest options in theology and practice not consistent, for example, with the Catholic faith.

### *Contributing to a Continuing Process*

Thus, in responding to BEM, we seek both to identify and acknowledge the achievement, the forward steps that have been taken thus far, and at the same time to see ourselves participating in a process which must continue toward the goal of the visible unity of Christians. The limitations of the document also limit the scope of our response. But we wish to affirm the process and to see it continue to flourish.

In this response we deal with a number of questions which we consider especially important in the text. There is much that we can affirm, and we must build on these positive achievements. There are points that we criticize and these will be clearly noted. There are also some basic issues that we consider critical and in need of further treatment in order to foster continuing progress in the ecumenical movement. But we do not comment on every point in BEM.

## *Catholic Ecclesiological Self-Understanding*

Furthermore in this response we do not speak at length or elaborate on the full Catholic ecclesiological self-understanding (cf. e.g. *Lumen Gentium*). This is because our scope here is more limited, indeed related to the limited scope and content of BEM itself. It is important that this be understood in order to prevent misunderstandings. This response is made in full awareness of the Catholic Church's own unity and truth and without denying what is essential to its self-understanding. We believe, as *Unitatis Redintegratio* states (4) that the "unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning... subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time".

It is our conviction that the study of ecclesiology must come more and more into the center of the ecumenical dialogue. Perhaps the best reflection on BEM will only come after ecclesiology is given more serious attention in the ecumenical dialogue. At the same time, the study of BEM is already a way of dealing with essential realities of the Church. But the fact that one does not find a commentary or reflection here relating to every important aspect of Catholic ecclesiological self-understanding should not be interpreted to mean that whatever is not commented on is not important or less significant. It simply means that the focus of this study is not ecclesiology as such. Rather we believe that better attention and clearer understanding would be given to some crucial issues of Catholic ecclesiological self-understanding if they are elaborated within the study of ecclesiology itself. For example, the fundamental Catholic doctrine that the Church of Christ "subsists in the Catholic Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8) can be truly understood only in the framework of a Roman Catholic ecclesiology of communion.

It is clear to us then that Faith & Order must focus more directly on ecclesiology. We believe that, without serious attention to the broader questions of ecclesiology, there are disadvantages not only for the study and understanding of the content of BEM, but for our ecumenical progress as well.

## *A Broader Ecumenical Context*

Finally, we appreciate the fact that BEM must be seen within a broader ecumenical perspective. The Nairobi General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975 described the unity we seek as a "conciliar community of local churches truly united". Within this context, baptism, eucharist and ministry are some of the fundamental elements of a local church truly united.

Ministry, for example, must be seen as an important factor linking local churches as well as an essential means of unity for the local church.

## II. THE ONGOING WORK OF FAITH AND ORDER

In order to contribute to building on the solid work already done by Faith & Order, as reflected in much of the BEM text, which we will point to in this response, we wish to state at the outset some critical issues which we see in need of ongoing work by Faith & Order. As we reflect on the text, we think that many of the criticisms that can be raised about it relate to the notions of sacrament (and sacramentality), the precise nature of the Apostolic Tradition, and the issue of decisive authority in the Church. All of these are part of the question of ecclesiology which must be an ongoing concern within the ecumenical movement. We present them to Faith & Order as items that need further treatment. We expect that other insights on the value of the presentation of the three sacraments considered in BEM will emerge when further work is done, in an ecumenical setting, on ecclesiology.

### *Sacrament and Sacramentality*

We can speak in positive terms of many things said in the treatment of the sacramental aspect of baptism, eucharist and ministry in BEM. There are many areas of convergence.

Still, we believe that there is an absence of a clear concept of sacrament (and sacramentality) in BEM. Further work is needed on this.

In the text on baptism, for example, the commentaries to number 12 and 14 suggest this difficulty. Despite many important points made about the meaning of baptism, there seems to be lack of clarity as well on the full effect of baptism. The text does not give reasons to show clearly why baptism is an unrepeatable act. Is baptism necessary for salvation?

Questions about baptism and initiation into the church are raised here. What are the full dimensions of Christian initiation? Does baptism itself adequately sacramentalize the full reality of Christian initiation? We believe that further study is needed on confirmation as a sacrament. The relationship between baptism and the eucharist needs further exploration as well (cf. Comm. 14).

Concerning the text on the eucharist, while there is again a great deal that we affirm positively, we also point to areas that we think need clarification and development. For example, concerning the real presence, the description of the change that takes place in the eucharist (cf. 15) is ambiguous and open to several interpretations. The terminology used in the text in regard to the

eucharist as sacrifice raises questions about the adequacy of the treatment of this aspect.

Concerning ministry, we think that an important convergence has been achieved because we believe that the description of ordination is such as to point in the direction of a sacramental understanding. But the description is not able fully to reflect the faith of those Christians (including Catholics) for whom ordination is clearly a sacrament. Therefore we believe that further exploration is necessary here.

On the notion of sacrament, BEM shows that there are many aspects that Christians can affirm together. But, because of the importance of seeking agreement on baptism, eucharist and ministry as a step toward Christian unity (cf. Vancouver Report, *Gathered for life*, pp. 45 fl.) we believe that the ongoing work of Faith & Order must include a further and deeper ecumenical exploration of the notion of sacrament and sacramentality.

### *Apostolic Tradition*

The precise nature of Apostolic Tradition and its implications need further attention as well. Surely, within the ecumenical movement the World Conference on Faith & Order at Montreal in 1963 was a landmark in providing a way to get beyond the controversies over Scripture and Tradition that had marked Catholic/Protestant relationships since the Reformation. In many ways BEM is the beneficiary of the Montreal Conference. Still certain points that are made, particularly in the commentaries in BEM, raise questions about the notion of the Apostolic Tradition currently understood by the different churches and ecclesial communities, suggesting that more work has to be done ecumenically on this question.

According to Catholic teaching (Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 7-10) sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God which is entrusted to the Church. They are bound closely together. Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ, in whom the entire Revelation of God is summed up, and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching. By adhering to it, the Church remains always faithful to the teaching of the apostles, and to the gospel of Christ.

Thus, in our view there must be a clear distinction made between the Apostolic Tradition, which obliges us because it is rooted in Revelation, and the various traditions which may develop in local churches.

To illustrate the problem, BEM calls to our attention the practice of certain African churches which confer baptism without water (cf. B Comm. 21). It notes that in certain parts of the world, where bread and wine are not customary or obtainable, it is now sometimes held that local food or drink serve better to anchor the eucharist in everyday life (E Comm. 28). Perhaps most clearly the difference is seen in relationship to different views on the ordination of women. Commentary 18 of the Ministry document notes that those communities which practice ordination of women do so because of their understanding of the gospel, a theological conviction which is said to be reinforced by their experience during the years in which they have included women in their ordained ministries. On the other hand, those which do not ordain women consider that "the force of nineteen centuries of tradition must not be set aside". Is it not obvious that there are different conceptions here of the Apostolic Tradition and what it implies for an issue such as the ordination of women? We believe therefore that further study and clarification must be done on the precise nature of Apostolic Tradition, as Faith & Order continues its important task.

### *Authority in the Church*

Further study is also needed on the nature of authority in the Church. Within an ecumenical context, this concern was raised again at the sixth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Vancouver in 1983. Besides proposing BEM for response and reception, another of the steps toward unity recommended by Vancouver was that of furthering "the Church's common quest for agreement on common ways of decision-making and teaching authoritatively" (Vancouver Report, *Gathered for Life*, p. 50).

A number of questions on authority are raised for us by the BEM text. What are the constitutive elements of authority and order in the Church? What is the nature and role of decisive authority in the discernment of God's will as to the development of ministry in the Church in the past and with regard to the present needs of the Church? Related to this is the precise understanding of the threefold ministry and its functions, as presented in BEM. For example, according to the BEM text, does the threefold ministry belong to the constitutive being of the Church as rooted in God's will for the Church, or only to the ecumenical well-being (*bene esse*) of the Church? How is this decided? With what authority?

Concerning episcopal succession, when it is said that it is a "sign" of continuity and unity in the Church (M 38), what does "sign" mean here? What is the ecclesiological meaning of the episcopal succession for ordination? What is the precise difference and relationship between the



priesthood of all, and the priesthood of the ordained? What are the ecclesiological dimensions of the authority of the ordained minister? Further study must be done on the fundamental ecclesiological aspects of the question of the recognition of ministry. The recognition of ordained ministry and the ecclesial character of a church community are indissolubly and mutually related. And should not the question of a universal ministry in the Church be explored? By what authority are such questions decided?

We would encourage Faith & Order to undertake the suggestion of the Vancouver Assembly mentioned above, and to study the question of authority in the Church. The nature of authority in the Church is a key issue for the progress of ecumenism.

### III. BEM AND THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH

We turn to a more particular reflection on the text in relationship to the "Faith of the Church through the ages" (Preface). There is a great deal that we affirm in the text, while noting difficulties as well.

#### A) BAPTISM

##### 1. GENERAL APPRECIATION

We find the text on baptism to be grounded in the apostolic faith received and professed by the Catholic Church. It draws in a balanced way from the major New Testament areas of teaching about baptism; it gives an important place to the witness of the early Church. While it does not discuss all major doctrinal issues that have arisen about baptism, it is sensitive to the effect they have had on the development of the understanding of this sacrament and to the positive values of differing solutions that emerged; it appreciates the normative force that some forms of liturgical celebration may have and the significance of pastoral practice; within the ecumenical scope it sets for itself, it articulates the development of the Christian understanding of baptism with a coherent theological method. It has many affinities, both of style and of content, with the way the faith of the Church about baptism is stated in the Second Vatican Council and in the *Liturgy of Christian Initiation*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 6, *LG* 4 and 10, *UR* 22; *Christian Initiation, General Introduction* 1-6, *Initiation of Adults* 8, *Initiation of Children* 2-3).

The faith of the Church is well stated on the following matters:

a) Baptism is confessed to be the gift and work of the Trinitarian God (1, 7, 17). Faith in the Trinity allows the text to deal profoundly with the Christ-centredness of baptism and with

the role correspondingly played in it by the Holy Spirit (4, 5, 7, 14).

b) The practice of baptism is an integral part of God's plan to gather all into his Kingdom through the Church, in which the mission of Christ is continued through the Spirit (1, 7, 10).

c) Baptism is a sacramental reality. The text calls baptism a sacrament (23 and Comm. 13). But it deals with the question, not so much by using the word (which because of its complex history, needs a great deal of explanation in inter-church conversations) as by affirming the principal features of baptism that the word sacrament has served to express. It says:

— Baptism is a sign (2, 18), with definite ritual requirements (17, 20), celebrated in and by the Church (12, 22, 23); it is a sign of the faith of the Church (12), of its faith in Christ and in the new life that he inaugurated in his Paschal Mystery (2, 3, 4), of its faith in the gift of the Holy Spirit in whom this life is shared (5).

— Participation in Christ's death and the gift of the Holy Spirit are both signified and effected by Baptism (14).

— The effective sign that is Baptism was inaugurated by Jesus (1).

— Baptism is both God's gift to us and our human response to that gift (8). The gift that it signifies and effects is the washing away and overcoming of sin (2, 3), conversion, pardon and justification (3, 4), incorporation into Christ (6), moral sanctity (4) of which the Holy Spirit is the source and seal (5), the making of men and women to be sons and daughters of God in Christ the Son (5), who will finally enter their full inheritance to the praise of the glory of God (5). Our response is faith (8), confession of sin and conversion (4), life-long moral effort, under the transforming power of grace, to grow in the likeness of Christ (9), and work for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth as in heaven (7, 10).

— Baptism, in making us one with Christ, makes us one with each other and "with the Church of every time and place" (6); it signs and seals us in this common fellowship (6) and is an unrepeatable act (13).

##### 2. PARTICULAR COMMENTS

###### *The Institution of Baptism*

The text is a careful statement of the fundamental truth that is affirmed when baptism is said to have been instituted by Christ. The reality that is symbolized in the rite of baptism is the reality of Christ himself, giving himself in death and resurrection, and being accepted in the way he commanded by those who are called to enter the New Covenant. That baptism is the way he

commanded is made known through the apostolic witness found in the Scripture and in the Tradition of the Church.

### *The Meaning of Baptism*

Baptism incorporates people into the Body of Christ, bringing them into union “with each other and with the Church of every time and place” (6). This is well explained by the text. The document does not here give adequate attention, however, to the implications of the fact that a person is baptized within a particular ecclesial fellowship in a divided Christianity. Because the text is addressed to churches and communities that are not in full communion with one another, it rightly emphasizes that, in uniting people to Christ, baptism establishes a bond between them that is deeper than anything that divides them. It draws attention to the contradiction between one baptism and divided Christian communities, and calls for an overcoming of divisions and a visible manifestation of baptismal fellowship (6).

When the text speaks of the “dynamic of baptism 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” (7), it touches the question of the relationship between baptism and salvation of all humankind - a question which is also connected with the necessity of the Church for salvation. Since the text is dealing with the meaning of baptism, and not with the whole plan of salvation, it is perhaps understandable that it does not say anything about the salvation of those who are not baptized. But neither does the text deal explicitly with the question of the necessity of baptism for salvation, which clearly requires further common study.

The question of the necessity of baptism for salvation is connected with, although not totally dependent on, the development of the doctrine of original sin. The text seems to refer to the reality which the doctrine of original sin expresses in 3 (“By baptism Christians... but free”). Here, as in other passages, the text says clearly that baptism takes away sin, but it does not go into the question of whether or why all are sinners in the way the doctrine of original sin has done.

It is understandable that in a convergence text like this, Faith & Order might prefer to avoid using the term original sin. However, underlying the doctrine of original sin is an understanding in faith about universal human sinfulness, about the universal need for salvation, about Christ as the universal Saviour, and about the necessity of baptism for salvation. It is a doctrine that can claim solid roots in the Scriptures (e.g., *Rom* 5) and that took shape in the patristic age. It has a profound influence on baptismal doctrine and practice. The faith of the Church that it ex-

presses remains obscure in the text. Therefore we think it would be appropriate that the doctrine of original sin, both in name and content, be explicitly incorporated into the discussion on the meaning and effects of baptism.

In dealing with “Incorporation into the Body of Christ” (6), the text says: “Baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship”. In n. 5 too, it speaks of the seal with which the baptized are marked. We think that there should be clarification of what is meant here by the “seal”. What is the full meaning of the seal? Towards that clarification, we make the following observations.

The image of “seal”, especially when taken in conjunction with the liturgical practice of signing and anointing those being baptized with the form of a cross, was much developed in the patristic period. It is not clear if the text is alluding in the passages quoted to these patristic developments. They did have an important place in the reflection of the Church, especially in the Latin tradition, about the sacramentality of baptism. They entered into the explanations of why baptism is not repeated, of how there can be a real sacrament even when, because of lack of due disposition, a baptized person does not seem to live as if he or she were sanctified, of how baptism incorporates people into the Church, and of how the baptism in a community that is judged to be out of full communion with the Church can still be recognized as a true baptism.

These remain real issues related to baptism. They are not addressed in the text. A theology of the baptismal character, growing out of Augustine's reflection on the seal, does raise and deal with them. An ecumenical rediscovery of the extent to which such a theology represents an important part of the patristic tradition would, we believe, enrich the Lima text on baptism.

### *Baptism and Faith*

There is a deep doctrine of grace inherent in the explanation given in nn. 8-10 of how human response meets the gift of God in baptism. The text is an invitation to a deep baptismal spirituality.

On the one hand, it is affirmed that it is God's gift of salvation that is embodied (contained) and set forth (signified) in baptism. On the other hand, it is affirmed that this grace given in baptism calls forth and is received in faith, in commitment to growth in holiness, and in care for the world. This grace is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is given, and creates among those who are baptized a fellowship in faith, in love and “in hope for the manifestation of God's new creation and for the time when God will be all in all” (10). The references to the Church in these paragraphs, and particularly the use of the word

"context" to describe its role (10), seems, however, less than adequate to express the ecclesiological dimension of baptismal grace.

### *Baptismal Practice*

In regard to the section on the "baptism of believers and infants", we appreciate the difficulty of formulating a text which would encompass the beliefs of those who are convinced of the importance of baptism for infants and those who believe that baptism is only justified when the one to be baptized is an adult believer. Keeping in mind what has been said previously concerning original sin, grace, etc., we commend the efforts of Faith & Order for seeking in BEM to clarify the common ground between these positions. But we think that further study is still needed on this issue.

The issue is dealt with on the level of practice. In the sacramental life of the Church, practice expresses faith, and the faith is also deepened from reflection on practice. The constant practice of the Church is a basic factor that justifies the baptism of infants. At the same time the faith of the Church has been ready from the earliest times to answer difficulties that have been raised against the practice, and to provide reasons for continuing it.

The doctrine that a profession of faith is required in baptism is also grounded on liturgical and pastoral practice, primarily in the baptism of adults but also in the baptism of infants. All this is well presented in the text. Particularly good is the explanation of how the reality of baptism is assured, on the one hand, by "Christ's faithfulness unto death" (12) and by "the faithfulness of God, the ground of all life in faith" (12); and on the other hand by the response of faith, which is always the faith of the community (12). The text shows how this pattern is fulfilled both in the baptism of those who make a personal profession of faith at the moment of baptism and in those who will be brought to that profession of faith subsequently by Christian nurture. The faith of these latter is seen as a response to "the promise and claim of the Gospel" that has been laid upon them (Commentary 12).

But the terminology used in the text "Baptism of Believers and Infants" requires comment. Baptized infants are incorporated into Christ and are members of the believing community. It follows that the distinction the text seems to make between "infants" and "believers" is misleading. It might have been better if the text spoke of baptism of adults and infants.

The Catholic practice and belief about the importance of the baptism of infants stems from some fundamental convictions of faith about baptism already mentioned in the text. Baptism is first of all a gift of God (cf. 1). It is a gift through which one can participate in the saving

mysteries of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, where the power of sin is broken, and new life with Christ begins (cf. 3). Infants are affected by original sin. But through baptism they share in the new life in Christ. But they must then be brought, through Christian nurture, to that profession of faith. This too is very important. It may be that the concern about apparent "indiscriminate baptism" in 16 stems from a perception on the part of some of those who do not practise it, that infant baptism has been practised in a way that seems "magical" or "automatic", as if there were no concern beyond the act of baptism itself. In fact, there is a serious pastoral responsibility within the Church not only for preparation of the baptism of an infant, but also of the Christian nurture which follows. Parents or guardians have the serious responsibility to see to the nurture of baptized children leading to a mature commitment to Christ. Being faithful to this responsibility can also be a contribution toward overcoming differences between the churches and communities which incorporate infants into the community of believers through baptism and those practising only the baptism of adult believers.

Concerning the discussion of "baptism-chris-mationconfirmation", number 14 is a fair statement of the faith of the Church about the gift of the Holy Spirit in Christian initiation, as it has developed through the ages. It is a complex theological development, as the steps taken by our own Church since Vatican II to renew the liturgy, theology and pastoral practice of confirmation testify.

We do, however, believe that the emergence of a distinctive sacramental rite called chris-mation or confirmation is a normative development in the faith of the Church. While the gift of the Holy Spirit is given in baptism, certain aspects of that Pentecostal gift have come to be effectively symbolized in the liturgy of Christian initiation by anointing with perfumed oil and a prayer with laying on of hands. Among such aspects are its empowerment for witness and for standing firm in trials, and its public manifestation of membership in the Church. Some of these have already been mentioned in no. 5 of the text. An evocation of them here would have opened the way to a better theological understanding of why the Catholic Church believes that chris-mation/confirmation is a sacrament distinct from baptism, in which there is given a special and unique gift of the Holy Spirit. This is part of the liturgical process of Christian initiation that can stand on its own as a sacramental celebration of the Church.

We agree with the statement that "baptism, as incorporation into the body of Christ, points by its very nature to the eucharistic sharing of Christ's body and blood..." (Comm. 14 b; cf. *VR* 22). More might have been made of this truth in the

main text. It would have helped to clarify certain aspects of baptism, particularly its ecclesiological dimension. Christian initiation begun in baptism is completed by participation in the eucharist, which is the sacrament that engages and manifests the full reality of the Church.

We agree with Commentary 14 c, that baptism needs to be reaffirmed constantly. We do so in our liturgy in the ways suggested. In reaffirming baptism, the eucharist, of course, also completes it, because it is the fullness of that life towards which baptism is directed. We see confirmation as another step after baptism in the process of initiation, and therefore something that has its own place in developing the life that finds its fullness in the eucharist.

### *The Celebration of Baptism*

What is said in this section of the text about the celebration of baptism is liturgically rich and includes all of the classical elements related to that celebration. An acceptance of it by ecclesial communities would certainly contribute greatly towards the process of mutual recognition of baptism.

We agree with the concern expressed in Commentary 21 a, about integrating the celebration of baptism as much as possible in the culture of those who are being evangelized. Regarding the practice mentioned in Comm. 21 c, we note simply that we consider the use of water to be essential for baptism. On a question of fact, we would wonder what kind of evidence there is to support the judgement made in Comm. 21 b that "in many large European and North American majority churches infant baptism is often practised in an apparently indiscriminate way".

Thus in the text on baptism we find much we can agree with, as well as points to be studied further in the Faith & Order process.

## B) THE EUCHARIST

### 1. GENERAL APPRECIATION

Catholics can recognize in the statement on the Eucharist much that corresponds to the understanding and practice of the apostolic faith, or, as it is said in the document, the faith of the Church through the ages.

We especially appreciate the following:

a) The sources employed for the interpretation of the meaning of the eucharist and the form of celebration are Scripture and Tradition. The classical liturgies of the first millennium and patristic theology are important points of reference in this text.

b) The eucharist is described as pertaining to the content of faith. It presents a strong Cristo-

logical dimension, identifying the mystery of the eucharist in various ways with the real presence of the risen Lord and his sacrifice on the cross.

c) The structure and ordering of the basic aspects of the document, as well as their relation to one another, conform with Catholic teaching, specifically:

— The presentation of the mystery of the eucharist follows the flow<sup>7</sup> of classical eucharistic liturgies, with the eucharistic theology drawing heavily on the content of the traditional prayer and symbolic actions of these liturgies. The text draws on patristic sources for additional explanation of the mystery of the eucharist.

— There is strong emphasis on the Trinitarian dimension. The source and goal of the eucharist is identified as the Trinity.

— The explanation of the content of the act of the Church in the eucharistic prayer includes basic elements required by Catholic teaching as well: thanksgiving to the Father; memorial of the institution of the eucharist and the sacrifice of the cross; intercession made in union with Christ for the world; petition for the Spirit's coming on the bread and wine and on the community, in order that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, and that the community be sanctified; the meal of the New Covenant.

d) There is a strong eschatological dimension. The eucharist is viewed as a foretaste of Christ's parousia and of the final Kingdom (6), given through the Spirit (18). It opens up the vision of the Kingdom (22) and the renewal of the world (23).

e) The eucharist is presented as the central act of the Church's worship (1). Because of this, the text recommends frequent celebration (30).

f) The text has important ecclesiological dimensions (8) and implications for mission.

### 2. PARTICULAR COMMENTS

#### *The Institution of the Eucharist*

The explanation of the institution of the eucharist accounts for its historical grounding in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth and also relates it to the risen Lord. In this way it is made clear that the eucharist is not merely a subjective memorial of what Christ did in the past, but relates to the saving mystery of Christ in the life of the Church today: the risen Lord, on the basis of his presence (if properly understood), institutional word and the power of the Holy Spirit, is the host and meal of the Church.

The text highlights the link between the Last Supper and the eucharist. The description of the eucharist as "a gift from the Lord", "a sacramen-

tal meal ", given to the Church as a means "to remember and encounter him", and "a sacramental meal which by visible signs communicates to us God's love in Jesus Christ ": all this is taught as well by the Catholic Church.

### *The Meaning of the Eucharist*

The definition of eucharist as "sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Spirit", combines the two aspects of the mystery of the eucharist: the real presence of Christ effected by the Spirit and the gift signified by this. The gift is identified as "salvation" received through communion "in the body and blood" of Christ. Stating that "...in eating and drinking the bread and wine, Christ grants communion with himself", the text shows that Christ is the true host of the meal, the giver of the gift. But, since the gift is himself, the unambiguous biblical language, which speaks of participation of the body and blood of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 10:16; *John* 6:52-56) should be used here.

The link between eucharist and forgiveness of sins is grounded on *Mt* 26: 28. But the "assurance of the forgiveness of sins" through the eucharist is preconditioned by the state of reconciliation with God in the Church. This points to the need for previous reconciliation of sinners (cf. *1 Cor* 11:28). In our understanding the previous reconciliation would take place through the sacrament of penance.

In the section on "the eucharist as thanksgiving to the Father", we find that the description of the breadth and depth of the thanksgiving, given in the eucharistic prayer, reflects faithfully the riches of the classical liturgical tradition. But whatever be the historical links between the form of Jewish prayer (berakah) that is mentioned\* and the eucharistic prayer, the latter has a unique trait, which is well expressed in *Eucharist*, a thanksgiving for what God has done in the economy of salvation, marked by memorial of and founded on the Christ-event.

The thanksgiving of the Church is grounded on the one High Priest: "This sacrifice of praise is possible only through Christ, with him and in him" (4). This statement recalls the conclusion of the Roman Canon, which affirms that the eucharistic prayer is first and foremost the thanksgiving of Jesus Christ to the Father. The relation between the act of the Church and the act of Christ could be more clearly expressed by stating that the Church receives the thanksgiving of Jesus Christ in the eucharist and associates herself with it as bride of Christ in order to express the acceptable thanksgiving for all God's benefits. In the Catholic understanding, the eucharist as thanksgiving signifies above all the thanksgiving of Jesus Christ to the Father, with the offering of his body and blood for the remission of sins and the salvation of the world.

The text in 4 speaks of the bread and wine as a locus for the presence of the world at the eucharist, and as "fruits of the earth", "presented to the Father in faith and thanksgiving". But the identity between the gift which Jesus Christ makes of his life and the sacramental gesture of the Church require that it be made clear that the gifts of bread and wine, the visible expression of what is being celebrated here and now, are the sacramental signs of Christ's presence.

The presentation of the "*eucharist as anamnesis or memorial of Christ*" is well done. The biblical concept of memorial is employed in a precise way. The eucharist is not a mere recalling of a past event. Rather, anamnesis is used to express the idea of the effective, operative presence of the sacrifice of the Cross in and through the eucharistic celebration, for the benefit "of all humankind". The implied analogy between the eucharist and Old Covenant liturgies is based on "the present efficacy of God's work when it is celebrated by God's people in a liturgy". We find the presentation which stresses the analogy between memorial celebration of Israel and the eucharist acceptable. The difference between the two is expressed in 5-8.

The connection established between the sacrifice of the cross and the eucharist corresponds to Catholic understanding. The sacrifice of the eucharist is one in which the sacrifice of the cross is represented to the end that its saving power be applied here and now for the salvation of the world.

The present efficacy of the sacrifice of the cross in the eucharist is grounded on the presence of the risen Lord who cannot be separated from his saving work (6). He is present "in the anamnesis" (commemorative personal presence) as coming from the future to grant communion with himself as "a foretaste of the parousia and of the final kingdom". The traditional belief that Christ is host of the meal from the outset, as well as gift of the meal, comes to the foreground, while, at the same time, important ecclesiological aspects of the eucharist are mentioned. The connection between eucharist and the economy of salvation, already realized fully in the ascension of Christ and the blessed in him, is established.

The intimate relation between the mystery content of the eucharist and the activity of the Church is succinctly formulated (7). It recalls Catholic theology's presentation of the threefold dimension of sacramental celebrations. Since "Christ acts through the joyful celebration of the Church", the eucharist is "not only a calling to mind of what is past", but "the Church's effective

\* Is it appropriate to classify the eucharist as berakah or even to explain, as is done in III, 27, that it is derived "from the Jewish tradition of the berakah"? At the present stage of investigation of the history of berakah and its relation to eucharistic prayers, many questions remain open.

proclamation of God's mighty acts" (a real participation now) and "promises" (a real foretaste of the future glory).

The ecclesiological dimension of the eucharistic doctrine is expressed in the text's theology of intercession: "The eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, who lives to make intercession for us... the Church offers its intercession in communion with Christ, our High Priest" (8). Here the Church is seen to be united spiritually and sacramentally to the commemorative active presence of the sacrifice of Christ. In her intercession, the Church makes her own the very intercession of Christ himself (cf. Commentary 8). Elsewhere it is said: "It is in the eucharist that the community of God's people is fully manifested. Eucharistic celebrations always have to do with the whole Church and the whole Church is involved in each local eucharistic celebration" (19). This statement implies an understanding of the mystery of Church and eucharist which corresponds to the traditional eucharistic ecclesiology of the Catholic Church.

The eucharist embodies the movement of the Church in Christ to the Father. The value of the thanksgiving and intercession of the Church is affirmed on the basis of its inclusion in the intercession of Christ (8). This relates to Catholic teaching which expresses the belief that the eucharist is an offering made to the Father by the whole Christ, head and body, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But at several points (8, Comm. 8, 9) the notion of intercession is used in a way that could seem insufficient to explain the sacrificial nature of the eucharist in the Catholic sense. The statement that the eucharist is the "sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ" (8) refers to the relationship between the historical sacrifice of the cross and the eucharistic celebration. The link between the historical event of the cross and the present efficacy of that event is the crucified and risen Lord, established as High Priest and "Intercessor". In this perspective it is correct to say that the "events" of Christ's life, as historical events, were caught up in the flow of time and cannot be repeated "or prolonged". But since the High Priest is the crucified and risen Lord, his offering of self on the cross can be said to be "made eternal". His glorified body is the body of the Lord offered once-for-all. Consequently, it does not seem to do justice to the reality of Christ's sacrifice to describe the continuity of Christ's saving work only in terms of simple "intercession".

Correspondingly, the description of the Church's activity in the eucharist as thanksgiving and intercession needs to be filled out by some reference to the self-offering of the participants of the eucharist, made in union with the eternal "self-offering" of Christ. Section II, 9-10-11 can be read in such a way that this notion is included.

The suggestion is made (Comm. 8) that Catholic doctrine's references to the eucharist as propitiatory sacrifice be understood in terms of intercession. But Catholics would ask: Is it sufficient to describe the role of Christ, in the "application of the propitiatory effects of the cross", as "Intercessor"?

The traditional anamnesis-offering prayer expresses the idea that there is an offering of the one acceptable sacrifice made by the Church in union with Christ. For Catholics this prayer would express the belief that through the eucharist we are enabled to associate ourselves with the passover of Christ to his Father. A veiled reference to this aspect seems to be found in 9: "In the eucharist, Christ empowers us to live with him, to suffer with him... as justified sinners". But Catholic theology prefers to state more clearly and directly, with reference to the eucharist, what is said (in 10) about the spiritual worship offered to God in daily life. But again, the empowerment by Christ is explained only in terms of "intercession" (9). From the Catholic perspective, it might have been good to take more account of Christ's role as sanctifier (cf. previous remarks on 8).

The formulation of the relation of the preaching of the word to the celebration of the eucharist (12) is correct; it does not confound the preaching of the word with the eucharist; at the same time, it affirms the intimate relation between the two.

We appreciate the presentation in the text of the real presence of Christ. The passages which deal with the relation of the risen Lord to the elements of the eucharist include an appeal not only to the witness of Scripture (cf. 13: "the words and acts of Christ at the institution of the eucharist stand at the heart of the celebration"), but also to the epiklesis of the liturgy which asks for the coming of the Spirit on the elements (14-15). If it could be interpreted in the light of the implications of the theology of the epiklesis of the Spirit, as found in patristic teaching, the presentation satisfies the requirements of Catholic belief. Catholic tradition and practice, we should add here, put emphasis on the importance of the words of institution within the eucharistic celebration.

The significance of the Church's recall on "the words and acts (13) of Christ at the institution of the eucharist" conforms to the authentic doctrine. "At the heart of the celebration" the Church proclaims what Christ did once for all. The risen Lord relates himself to this activity. He places the elements of bread and wine in the relation between himself and the community. These elements are made signs which realize his saving presence, namely, "sacrament of his body and blood". In this way Christ fulfils one of the ways he promised to be "with his own".

The statement about the fact and the mode

of Christ's "unique" presence, which "does not depend on the faith of the individual", is adequate. But Catholic faith links the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist to the sacrament of the body and blood more closely than is done in the text. Jesus did not say simply: "This is my body... This is my blood...". According to the New Testament he added: "...body, given for you; ...blood, shed for the many". Christ first offered himself sacramentally to the Father in the eucharist, in a sacrifice that actualizes the redemption of humanity. If he now offers himself as a means of sacramental communion to the faithful, it is to allow them to associate themselves with his self-offering to the Father. Only insofar as Christ offers himself to the Father in the sacrificial action of the Church's liturgy, do the elements become sacrament of his self-offering to the communicants. But, from our view, although the text speaks of the "present efficacy" (5) "of the sacrifice of Christ" (5), and "the living and effective sign of his sacrifice" (5) and the eucharist as the "sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ" (8), it does not say unambiguously that the eucharist is in itself a real sacrifice, the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

A distinction is made in Comm. 13 between Churches that "believe" in the *change* of the elements and those which do not link Christ's presence "so definitely to the signs of bread and wine". But the final sentence seems to relativize the word "believe". It asks whether the "difference can be accommodated with the convergence formulated in the text itself". On the one hand, we welcome the convergence that is taking place. On the other hand, we must note that for Catholic doctrine, the *conversion* of the elements is a matter of faith and is only open to possible new theological explanations as to the "how" of the intrinsic change. The content of the word "transubstantiation" ought to be expressed without ambiguity. For Catholics this is a central mystery of , faith, and they cannot accept expressions that are ambiguous. Thus it would seem that the differences as explained here cannot be accommodated within the convergence formulated in the text itself. Further work must be done on this.

While focusing more on the pneumatological element, this section on "the eucharist as invocation of the Spirit" (14-18) emphasizes the intimate relation between the mystery of the eucharist and the mystery of the Triune God. It sets forth the role of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the eucharist in a way that is in conformity with Catholic teaching. The statement that the whole action of the eucharist has an "epicletic" character because it depends on the work of the Holy Spirit (16) is appropriate and emphasizes the fact that the eucharist is a holy work from the outset.

According to the text, the bread and wine are

said to "become the sacramental signs of Christ's body and blood" (15) in virtue of the words of Christ and the power of the Spirit. This corresponds to Catholic teaching which also refers to the bread and wine as sacramental signs ("sacramentum tantum", i.e., insofar as they signify). But the thought that they become sacramental signs is linked to the intrinsic change which takes place, whereby unity of being is realized between the signifying reality and the reality signified. The reference to the sanctifying action of the Spirit weighs the statement of the text in the direction of intrinsic change. But the text is also open to the idea that the gifts undergo a change of meaning, which does not go beyond the establishment of an extrinsic relation between the thing signifying and the thing signified. This would be inadequate. Since this matter relates to the important question of the real presence further explanation is needed from the perspective of Catholic faith\*.

The presentation of "the eucharist as communion of the faithful" gives expression to an important ecclesiological point: "The eucharistic communion with Christ who nourishes the life of the Church is at the same time communion with the body of Christ which is the Church" (19). And in this context it draws out ethical implications of participation in the eucharist, centering on the need to face and overcome divisiveness within the Church and in the world.

At the same time, Commentary 19 raises a concern that "the catholicity of the eucharist is less manifest" when "the right of the baptized believers and their ministers to participate in and preside over the eucharistic celebration in one church is called into question by those who preside over and are members of other eucharistic congregations". But the catholicity of the eucharist is not something different from the catholicity of the Church. Catholicity includes openness, but an openness conditioned by acceptance of the whole saving mystery of Christ and its consequences. But the issues raised (in Comm. 19) in relationship to it must ultimately be situated within an ecclesiology to be adequately answered.

The explanation of "the eucharist as a meal of the kingdom" suggests a valuable commentary on the link between baptism and eucharist. Through baptism one is justified, incorporated into Christ

\* Somewhat related to this, the various attempts to understand the mystery of the eucharistic presence of Christ are placed (Comm. 15) at three levels: 1) some affirm only the fact; 2) others "consider it necessary to assert" a change of bread and wine; 3) others develop theological explanations. Catholic theology, which includes all three levels, requires a reformulation of the description of its understanding of the second level. Our faith in the real presence implies that we believe that the bread and wine become really the body and blood of Christ. The phrase "consider it necessary to assert" is not adequate to express this. *Consider it necessary to confess* would be more appropriate.



and ordered to the eucharist (cf. *UR* 22), which is the representation of the saving mystery of Christ under the aspect of the sharing in the eschatological meal of joy with Christ and the blessed in the Kingdom, unto the glory of the Father.

The text recalls how the eschatological dimension of the eucharist grounds the mission of the Church. The link between eucharist and mission is integral to the Catholic explication of the connection between eucharist and life. Christian ethic has a sacramental basis. Through the eucharist the Church not only receives its name (body of Christ, 24), but also its mission to extend Christ's salvation to the world.

### *The Celebration of the Eucharist*

In general, the description of the elements of the classical liturgical celebration of the eucharist is adequate. The list of elements includes a "lex orandi" which is able to converge toward a "lex credendi" of the Church. But there are some reservations or questions from the standpoint of Catholic doctrine. First, instead of "declaration of pardon", we would prefer to have a phrase that indicates more precisely the element of true forgiveness of sin in the life of the Christian. Secondly, the expression of the Church's intention to offer the sacrifice of Christ is important. Is it implied in the listing under "the anamnesis or memorial..., etc."? This should be clearer. Thirdly, the expression "eating and drinking in communion with Christ and with each member of the Church" is weak. It does not sufficiently express the distinction between sacramental participation of the body and blood of Christ and communion with Christ through communion with those who are in Christ.

The problem of changeable and unchangeable elements of the eucharistic celebration (Comm. 28) is correctly referred to the responsibility of the Church. It is the Church and not the individual as such that has the assurance of the guidance of the Spirit in this matter. The description of Christ at work in the eucharist is well stated (29). But the question of the president of the eucharist could perhaps be dealt with better in the text on ministry. The Catholic position is that the one who presides must be a priest sacramentally ordained within the apostolic succession.

A distinction is made (32) between churches, which stress "that Christ's presense in the consecrated elements continues after the celebration", and others, which place "the main emphasis on the act of celebration itself and on the consumption of the elements in the act of communion". The Catholic Church agrees with the first position and also agrees with what is said positively about the second position. She only disagrees with those

who deny the duration of the real presence after the celebration. And we would ask, if one denies the duration of the real presence after the celebration, what does this signify for one's understanding of real presence and the reality of the conversion? Therefore, it would have been useful to indicate the deeper ecclesiological sacramental and eschatological grounds for the ancient practice of reservation of the consecrated species. While the text states that "the best way of showing respect for the elements... is by the consumption, without excluding the use for communion of the sick", we would add to this that the various forms of eucharistic worship, properly done, are also legitimate and praiseworthy ways of acknowledging the continuing presence of Christ in the eucharist.

Finally, the policies of the churches and ecclesial communities differ in regard to eucharistic sharing. In our view, the problem of eucharistic sharing (33) has an ecclesial dimension and cannot be resolved in isolation from an understanding of the mystery of the Church as well as the ministry. In this regard, for Catholics, it is unity in the profession of faith that constitutes the core of ecclesial communion. Because the eucharistic celebration is by its very nature a profession of the faith of the Church, it is impossible for the Catholic Church presently to engage in general eucharistic sharing. For in our view we cannot share in the eucharist unless we share fully in that faith.

In the text on the eucharist we find much we can agree with, and have pointed to areas where we believe further study is needed as the Faith & Order process continues.

## C) MINISTRY

### 1. GENERAL APPRECIATION

The statement on ministry deals with one of the central and most complex themes in ecumenical conversations. We are well aware that perhaps none of the churches or ecclesial communities represented in the Faith & Order Commission can find its faith and practice in regard to ministry fully reflected and stated in this document in precisely the way that it has understood and experienced it. It is necessarily influenced by the variety of views and practices present in the Faith & Order Commission. Furthermore, the ministerial structures of the churches and communities divided from one another are not only marked by differing theologies, but have also been affected by various historical and sociological developments within the churches which contribute heavily to shaping their identity. Well aware of the complexity of the ecumenical dialogue on ministry, we are grateful for the work achieved on

it by the Commission and we appreciate especially the fact that its presentation goes in the direction of the major lines of what we recognize "as the faith of the Church through the ages".

In that light we would especially single out:

a) The use within a wider ecumenical horizon of a terminology that reflects traditional Christian theology;

b) the significant Trinitarian, Christological and ecclesiological aspects of the text;

c) the embodiment of the ordained ministry within the wider theological and ecclesiological horizon of God's salvific work through Christ and his Church, in which diverse and complementary gifts are bestowed upon the community and the individual members of the whole people (Section I);

d) the continuous connection of the ordained ministry with the mission of the Twelve and the fundamental apostolicity of the Church;

e) the well-balanced description of the ordained ministry as the result of God's gratuitous initiative and of a commissioning by the Church for a responsibility in the Church in Christ's name;

f) the positive description of ordination which, although open to various interpretations, remains open as well to a sacramental understanding;

g) the significant presentation of the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons even if they are considered rather as functional tasks that can exist concretely in different patterns (22);

h) the responsibility of the ministry is adequately described as proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry" (13);

i) the statement is more than a theological exposition. It also has a pastoral perspective that can both inspire ministers in the exercise of their ministry, and help the community to accept them as "heralds and ambassadors of Jesus Christ" (11).

We appreciate the fact that ordained ministry is not treated in isolation but rather in its wider ecclesiological context, in its relationship to the Church as God's people, to its unity, apostolicity and catholicity and its existence as a local community. But, further reflection on ecclesiology will be needed in the Commission on Faith & Order, in order to put the ordained ministry in clear perspective. As an illustration, one essential dimension of the Church that remains obscure, although it is of the greatest importance for understanding and valuing the authority of ordained ministry, is the sacramental aspect of the whole Church, at work in a particular way in the ministry, in its teaching office, in the administration of the sacraments and in its governing. In a real and effective sense the Church is an icon of the presence of God and his Kingdom in

the world. This is always because of God's actual and constant faithfulness to his promise in Jesus Christ. The basic ministerial structures participate in that sacramental dimension. Further ecumenical dialogue will have to deal more fully with that spiritual and sacramental dimension of the Church and its ministry.

### *Authority of Tradition*

The text uses the sacred Scriptures and especially the New Testament as a basis for its argumentation, showing the uniqueness of Christ's authority, the particular role of the apostles and the spirit in which the ministry must be exercised.

In stating that the Church has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility (9), the text could not ignore the difficulties that arise in trying to retrace the origin of the actual pattern in the Bible (cf. Comm. 17, 19, 22, Comm. 40) and had to try to avoid historic fundamentalism.

The text necessarily had to deal with historic evolution of ministry in the early Church, for example, the evolution of the forms of the ordained ministry (19-21), the succession of the apostolic ministry (35-36, and Comm. 36) and the understanding of priesthood. Frequently it gives special weight to an argument from antiquity\*. One aim of this approach is to contribute to helping communities which have not retained the episcopate, to appreciate the episcopate as a sign of the continuity and unity of the Church (38) and maybe to recover the sign (53b). Later developments regarding structures, taking place at some points of crisis in history, do not seem to have the same weight in the document as those of the first centuries (19, 22). These references to the apostolic times and the first centuries of Christianity are due not only to historic and critical honesty, but have a clear theological weight. That evolution is related to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (19).

The attention given to origins and "antiquity" certainly meets a concern of many churches. But this approach in the document still remains incomplete because too often it involves only a statement of fact and is insufficiently supported by theological reflection on the normativity of such

\* "The ministry of... persons (responsible for showing the Church's dependence on Jesus Christ) who *since very early times* have been ordained..." (8); "the Church has *never been without* persons holding specific authority and responsibility" (9); "...*from the beginning*, there were differentiated roles in the community" (9); "The basic reality of an ordained ministry *was present from the beginning*" (Commentary 11); "*Historically...* the threefold ministry *became* the generally accepted pattern in the Church of the *early centuries*"; "Under the particular *historical* circumstances of the *growing* church in the *early centuries*, the succession of bishops became one of the ways... in which the apostolic tradition... was expressed" (36).

antiquity. In other words, it must be completed by considering also the role of decisive authority in the discernment of such developments in the past, as well as in regard to the present needs of the Church and the ecumenical situation today.

## 2. PARTICULAR COMMENTS

### *The calling of the Whole People of God*

In the line of many texts that have emerged from bilateral dialogues, but also of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* of the Second Vatican Council, it is good to see that the text looks at the problem of the ordained ministry from a broader angle. It starts with a brief theological and ecclesiological reflection upon the calling of the whole people of God. It shows how this calling must be envisioned in the perspective of God's Trinitarian concern for humanity as a whole: the calling of God, the mediation of Jesus Christ and the liberating and renewing power of the Holy Spirit. It is in this light that the document describes some features of the calling of the Church, expressing especially its mission to witness and service. As part of this calling, the Holy Spirit bestows on the community diverse and complementary gifts (5) and charisms that form the background for all ministries in the Church. We agree with the general understanding of the calling of the people of God, as it is stated in the first section.

The question, "how, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love" (6), is a fair question. The reference to the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit rightly indicates the awareness that church order, at least in its fundamental constitution, is not the result of historical developments and human-made organization. But the question cannot be answered conclusively as long as the questions of who will decide, who will discern God's will in various developments and with what authority, are left open. We believe in fact that certain people are commissioned in the Church with a God-given authority to exercise such ministry of decision. Therefore, the question of authority in the Church must be studied in relationship to ministry.

### *The Church and the Ordained Ministry*

One of the means by which the Church is ordered according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is through the existence of an ordained ministry. In the description of the chief responsibility of the ordained ministry, given in n. 13, we recognize the framework of a Catholic understanding of the mission of the

ordained ministry. We approve of the way this ministry is already related to the mission of the Twelve. We would suggest that this mission should be related further with Christ's own mission by the Father: "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you" (*John* 20:21).

We are glad to see that the document mentions the two complementary forms of "representation" of ordained ministers: the representation of the people of God and the representation of Jesus Christ, as heralds, ambassadors, leaders, teachers, pastors (11). In the commentary to 13, when the specificity of the ordained ministry with regard to the participation of the community in fulfilling these functions is mentioned, it declares that "the ordained ministry fulfils these functions in a representative way, providing the focus for the unity of the life and witness of the community" (Commentary 13). The concept of "representation" is a valuable concept which roots in the theological understanding of the churches. But it needs further qualification in the context of the agreed statement, so that through its relation to the Archetypus Christ, the ordained ministry is in and for the Church an effective and sacramental reality, by which a minister acts "in persona Christi". This view should also help to explain more fully why, according to the Catholic faith, the eucharist must be presided over by an ordained minister, who represents Christ in a personal and sacramental way (14). In this way, too, the image of the ordained ministry as "focus of its unity" (8, Comm. 13 & 14, in relation to the eucharist) could be deepened. By stressing this sacramental aspect that marks a person before God and the community, we do not want to separate the minister from the community or exalt him above it, because we fully agree with the strong connection the document makes between the ordained ministry and the community (cf. 12). Still, there is a special role for the ordained ministry. We should not hesitate to see, in light of tradition, something of Christ's real and sacramental presence in the ordained minister: a particular sign among others.

The section on "ordained ministry and authority" contains two fine paragraphs on the manner and the spirit in which ordained ministers must exercise their authority with the cooperation of the whole community, focusing on the model of Christ himself and the way he revealed God's authority to the world (16). We agree with these paragraphs. But at the same time the task remains of reflecting upon the ecclesiological dimension and the peculiar nature of this authority. It is rooted, as the document aptly states, in agreement with the Tradition of the Church, on the relation between ordination and function, in Jesus Christ "who has received it from the Father and who confers it by the Holy Spirit through the act of ordination" (15).

In considering "ordained ministry and priesthood", the commentary to 17 rightly points to the different applications of the word "priest" and "priesthood" in the New Testament and the Church, thus avoiding a confusion of Christ's unique priesthood, the royal and prophetic priesthood of all baptized and the priesthood of certain ordained ministers: they belong to different evolutions in the use of the word "priesthood/priest". In this way it points at the same time to the analogy and the essential difference between them.

This is important, but perhaps needs to be further clarified. In the teaching of the Catholic Church, although the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are interrelated, each being in its own way a participation in the one priesthood of Christ, they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 10). We believe that further study must be done by Faith & Order on this point. We note for example in 17 that in the appropriate reasons for "calling the minister 'priest'", the reality of "sacrifice", mentioned explicitly for Christ and the priesthood of the baptized, is absent, although it belongs inherently to the concept of ordained priesthood. Certain ministers are called priests because of their specific part in presiding at the celebration of the eucharist, as "heralds and ambassadors" of Christ, who gives himself as sacrifice for all. The reference to the eucharist that is made in the commentary to 17, could have been made correctly in the paragraph itself.

We approve of the nuanced way in which the "ministry of men and women in the Church" is treated (II D). We recognize fully that the experience of the churches which practise the ordination of women constitutes inevitably a challenge to our own position. At the same time we believe that there are theological issues rooted not only in the understanding of Tradition, but also of the Scriptures, concerning Christology, which lie at the heart of our convictions and understanding with regard to the admission of women to the ordained ministry (Comm. 18). On this latter point, the text states (18) that "many churches hold that the tradition of the Church in this regard must not be changed". In our view, it would be more accurate to say that we have no authority to change it, since we believe it belongs to the Apostolic Tradition of the Church. Perhaps this nuance also points to a different conception of Apostolic Tradition in the BEM text than Catholics would find acceptable. Even if differences on these issues can raise obstacles to recognition of certain ministries, they should never become prejudicial to further reflection upon the ordained ministry within the ecumenical context. "Openness to each other holds the possibility that the Spirit may well speak to one church through the insights of another" (54).

### *The Forms of the Ordained Ministry*

It is important for the future of the ecumenical movement that the text, after having fully recognized the historic evolution of the ministerial pattern in the Church, could so explicitly agree on the singular significance of the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, as "the generally accepted pattern in the Church of the early centuries" and as being "still retained today by many churches" (22).

This evolution in the Church is seen as more than merely a result of fortuitous events. It is seen in connection with the guidance of the Spirit (19 & 22). And we surely agree with the hope expressed that "the threefold ministry ... may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it" (22). This statement fits within the framework of the Church's faith and order through the ages. But it should be ecclesialogically deepened by examining whether the text means that such ministry belongs only to the ecumenical well-being (*bene esse*) of the Church, or rather to its constitutive being, rooted in God's will for the Church as it has been discerned by the authority in the Church. Therefore one has to distinguish between the fundamental and constitutive core of the threefold ministry, as the institutional expression of what was involved in the message of the New Testament, and the historic form, style and organization it has inevitably assumed and will also assume in the future. An ecumenical discernment is needed to see what belongs to the constitutive structure of the Church and what to the contingent social organization. The invitation to reform many formal aspects of the threefold pattern (24) in openness to each other and to contextual needs should be taken up.

The description of guiding principles for the exercise of the ordained ministry (26-27), of the functions of the bishops, presbyters and deacons (28-31) and of the variety of charisms (32-33) bring together various elements that are retraceable in various developments and in the historical evolution of the Church, in which one recognizes the practice of the Church through the ages.

Episcopacy is rightly described as "a focus of unity" (20), as necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body (23) and as a service of unity at a regional level (27) as "representative pastoral ministers of oversight, continuity and unity in the Church". Even if the text acknowledges the fact that "they relate the Christian community in their area to the wider Church and the universal Church to their community", the description hardly mentions the very traditional and essential collegial aspect of episcopacy. In a unique way, in comparison to other ordained ministers, bishops represent and symbolize in their person their local church and relate it, in communion with the other churches, to the universal Church. The

ecumenical council becomes thus a representative image of the universal Church, because it is a meeting of the college of bishops around the bishop of Rome who, according to the Catholic Church, is the head of this college. While all of this is important, we miss here the clear expression of the teaching function of the bishops, the magisterium, which is a significant aspect that must also be taken into account here, and in the future work of Faith & Order.

We understand that it may not be the purpose, at present, of the Faith & Order Commission to reflect upon the personal expression of a “focus of unity” in the universal Church, but one can ask whether that would not be a logical result of the reflections started upon a representative service of oversight, continuity and unity in the Church.

### *Succession in the Apostolic Tradition*

In the context of the divergent practices among the churches, the document deals with the relation between the apostolicity of the Church and the Apostolic Tradition on one side, and the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry (35) and, more especially, the episcopal succession as one of its forms (36), on the other. By doing so it gives the problem a wider ecclesiological relevancy and brings a mutual comprehension for practices, which may seem unacceptable when isolated.

The connection of the apostolic succession with the Apostolic Tradition, understood as “the continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles”, in their witness, proclamation, celebration, service etc. (34), is legitimate. One may even say as in 36: “... the succession of bishops became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed”. But is there not the tendency here to be content with a listing and a juxtaposition of items which all have to do with the Apostolic Tradition without showing sufficiently how they have their own function within the totality and how they are related among themselves?

According to the statement, the episcopal succession was understood in the early centuries “as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion” (36, with reference to Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch in the commentary). And today, even churches which have not retained the episcopate are able to appreciate the episcopal succession as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church” (38). It is said that there is willingness expressed among them “to accept episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole Church” (38). The text speaks further on of “a need to recover the sign of the episcopal succession” that will strengthen

and deepen that continuity with the Church of the apostles (53 b).

We agree that the “episcopal succession” is of the order of the sign that can signify, through the image of historic transmission, the fact that the Church is rooted in the apostolic Church around Christ and therefore shows its fundamental apostolicity. However, the meaning of “sign/expression” needs to be clear. In the previous version, *One Baptism, One Eucharist and A Mutually Recognized Ministry* (34), the text spoke of an “effective sign”. This indicates better the unique importance of the episcopal succession for the edification of the Church through the ages. This is immediately related to the meaning which the ministry of the bishop has in a Catholic ecclesiology: it is more than a function of oversight next to other functions and ministries. In his very personal ministry, the bishop represents the local church entrusted to him. He is its qualified spokesperson in the communion of the churches. At the same time he is the first representative of Jesus Christ in the community. By his ordination to the episcopacy he is commissioned to exercise leadership in the community, to teach with authority and to judge. All other ministries are linked to his and function in relationship to it. Thus his ministry is a sacramental sign of integration and a focus of communion. Through the episcopal succession, the bishop embodies and actualizes both catholicity in time, i.e., the continuity of the Church across the generations, as well as the communion lived in each generation. The actual community is thus linked up through a personal sign with the apostolic origins, its teaching and way of living.

In that perspective, episcopal succession can rightly be called a *guarantee* (cf. 38) of the continuity and unity of the Church, if one recognizes in it the expression of Christ's faithfulness to the Church to the end of time. At the same time it lays upon each individual office-bearer the responsibility to be a faithful and diligent guarantor.

### *Ordination*

When stating that “the Church ordains certain of its members for the ministry in the name of Christ by the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands” (39; also 7c, 41, 52), the text describes the act of ordination in a way consonant with the faith and the practice of the Catholic Church. The document specifies three essential dimensions of the ordination: 1. it is “an invocation to God that the new minister be given the power of the Holy Spirit...” (42). 2. It is “a sign of the granting of this prayer by the Lord who gives the gift of the ordained ministry” (43), and 3. it is “an acknowledgement by the Church of the Spirit in the one ordained, and a commitment by both the Church and the ordinand to the new relationship” (44).

This positive evaluation meets in many ways the Catholic concept of ordination as a sacrament: the reality granted is the power of the Holy Spirit (42); the ordained ministry as a gift given by the Lord; a sign signifying a spiritual relationship (43) for "a new relation which is established between this minister and the local Christian community" (42, 44). And this is acknowledged and given in a sign, the act of ordination (42). "Ordination is a sign performed in faith that the spiritual relationship signified is present in, with and through the words spoken, the gestures made and the forms employed (43). In a quite comprehensive sense, in which historical and spiritual references are made, the institution of the act of ordination is related "with Jesus Christ and the apostolic witness" (39); "The laying on of hands is the sign of the gift of the Spirit, rendering visible the fact that the ministry was instituted in the revelation accomplished in Christ, and reminding the Church to look to him as the source of its commission" (39). While this seems to be implied in the passages just cited, Catholics would like it to be stated clearly that ordination is not only a sign, but an effective sign.

In the description of ordination essential elements for the sacrament are enumerated, without however calling it a sacrament. Using the word twice in a wider, but significant way, once as an adjective (41) and once as an adverb (43), it points in the direction of a sacramental understanding. Among the churches and communities represented in *Faith & Order*, ordination is described as a sacrament by some, but not by others. This perhaps explains why the word is not used. At the same time, in the line of the faith, the essentials of a sacramental understanding can be recognized in the broad treatment given to it in this text.

Furthermore, we mention in passing three elements that take up Catholic concerns: 1) the specifying intention in ordination (39), 2) the eucharistic context of ordination (41), and 3) the statement that ordination is never repeated in recognition of the God-given charism of ministry. All of this points to an important convergence on ordination achieved in BEM. But one that still does not express clearly the Catholic conviction that ordination is indeed a sacrament.

One point is not treated in a way that is sufficient according to the Catholic faith, namely the problem of the competent minister of ordination. This is important because, in fact, it is through the epiclesis prayed for by the competent minister that the gift of the Spirit is conferred on the person ordained (cf. 43). We understand the difficulty arising in a statement expressing the views of churches and ecclesial communities which differ on the qualified minister. We appreciate the statement that even churches which have not retained the episcopate want to express the continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission in

the fact that "ordination is always done... by persons in whom the Church recognizes the authority to transmit the ministerial commission" (37).

Our view, however, is that ordination is a sacrament. The competent minister of this sacrament is a bishop who stands in the authentic apostolic succession and who acts in the person of Christ. We therefore ask the Commission on Faith & Order to reflect on the ecclesiological meaning of the episcopal succession for ordination. We believe that its necessity is due to the fact that the episcopal succession signifies and actualizes the sacramental link of the ministry—first of all of the episcopal ministry itself—with the apostolic origin. It is rooted in the sacramental nature of the Church. It is only when the question of the minister of the ordination is settled adequately that a serious step toward recognition of ministry will become possible.

### *Towards the Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries*

The unsatisfactory way in which *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* deals with the problem of the mutual recognition of the ordained ministry shows that we touch here upon a crux in the endeavours towards Christian unity. At the heart of it stands the very concrete issue of sacramental ordination related to this issue of the historic episcopal succession. Many particular questions however cannot be solved before entering in concrete union-negotiations. One way forward seems to lie in increasing mutual respect by the churches and ecclesial communities for each other.

We can acknowledge the many ways in which continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved in communities which have not retained the form of historic episcopate. As the Second Vatican Council says, "The Christian way of life of these brethren is nourished by faith in Christ. It is strengthened by the grace of baptism and the hearing of the word of God. This way of life expresses itself in private prayer, in meditation on the scriptures, in the life of a Christian family, and in the worship of the community gathered together to praise God" (*UR* 23; cf. *LG* 15). But we believe that ordained ministry requires sacramental ordination by a bishop standing in the apostolic succession. We hope that a growing fraternal solidarity of collaboration, common reflection, prayer and service between churches and ecclesial communities, and particularly their ministers, can reach a point of seeing whether, or in what terms, an ordained ministry recognized by all might become possible.

Meanwhile we suggest again that the theological reflection upon the meaning of the episcopal succession for the understanding of the Church and its ministry should be deepened. It will not be an opportunistic "recovering of the sign of

episcopal succession” that will solve the problem, but newly gained convictions about God’s will and the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding the constitutive features of church order, the episcopal succession and its exercise in ordination.

It must be clear that the recognition of ordained ministry cannot be isolated from its ecclesiological context. The recognition of the ordained ministry and of the ecclesial character of a Christian community are indissolubly and mutually related. To the extent that it can be recognized that communion now exists between churches and ecclesial communities, however imperfect that communion may be, there is implied some recognition of the ecclesial reality of the other. The question that follows is what does this communion imply for the way we perceive the ministry of the other? This perhaps is one question that should be taken up when attention is given to the fundamental ecclesiological dimension of the problem of recognition of the ordained ministry.

Since, in our view, ordained ministry requires sacramental ordination in the apostolic succession, it is premature to make pronouncements upon the form a public act of mutual recognition of churches and their ministries would have (55). Rather it is necessary now to work toward unity in faith on this central ecclesiological issue.

#### IV. CONSEQUENCES OF BEM FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS AND DIALOGUE

##### 1. CONSEQUENCES CONCERNING ECUMENISM IN GENERAL

The BEM text makes some valuable suggestions on ecumenical relations in general.

##### *A Wholistic Approach to Ecumenism*

One suggestion it makes is that our approach to ecumenism must be wholistic. BEM suggests this in several ways. First, the four areas of inquiry asked of the churches by Faith & Order in relationship to BEM encourage the churches to reflect on the interrelationship of the different aspects of the ecumenical movement. Theological dialogue must not be isolated from other ecumenical efforts to break down barriers between Christians. Rather, each aspect of ecumenism must nourish and be nourished by others. Therefore, just as the theological dialogue must continue, so too must the dialogue of charity that fosters increasing personal contacts on all levels of the Church, including the highest levels. These contacts bring understanding. There must also be efforts of common witness between our churches and communities through joint service in matters of evangelization, charity and justice. In this way, we can reach out from beyond the barriers that

separate us to forge links that bind us to one another in Christ, in our service to the world.

Secondly, BEM reminds us of the importance of multilateral ecumenical engagement. Both bilateral and multilateral conversations are valuable instruments in the ecumenical movement. In the evolution of the ecumenical documents on baptism, eucharist and ministry, there has been a mutual influence in the treatment of these issues in BEM and in the bilaterals, and a theological and methodological convergence (see *Report of the Fourth Forum on Bilateral Conversations*, Faith & Order paper no. 125). Furthermore, the multilateral context provides a framework that enables a wide variety of churches and communities to encounter one another on a continuous basis. Some encounter others only within a multilateral framework. When they encounter each other in both, the multilateral framework helps also to ensure that a growing understanding with one partner in a bilateral dialogue will not lead to alienation from others.

##### *The Goal of Visible Unity*

Another lesson from or consequence of BEM is that it keeps before Christians this goal of visible unity toward which they must move. It speaks of this goal in the preface. The text of each of the three areas concentrates on those aspects of the theme that relate in some way to problems of mutual recognition leading to unity. Thus the development of the text leads to the need to work for “mutual recognition of baptism” (B 15), and toward “unity in eucharistic celebration and communion” (E 28), and for “mutual recognition of the ordained ministries” (M 51 ff.). Though the notion of visible unity still needs to be clarified from an ecumenical point of view, BEM is a reminder to us that the ecumenical movement aims not only at a renewal of attitudes of Christians, but also at a rethinking of relationships between divided Christian communities.

##### *Toward the Next Step*

We believe that BEM is indicative of an important level of convergence on these issues. There are issues needing further development, and some issues that have not yet been addressed. But what has been achieved, as reflected in BEM, makes us realize the convergence, and the similarities growing even with those who have been furthest from us doctrinally. This in itself is a stimulant for further dialogue toward another step forward on the way to unity in faith, and the visible unity of Christians.

##### 2. PARTICULAR CONSEQUENCES STEMMING FROM EACH TEXT

In regard to *Baptism*, BEM can help us to reflect again on baptism as a basis for Christian unity. The Catholic Church and every Christian community should deepen its recognition of the



real bonds of faith and life in Christ that exist between communities which celebrate baptism authentically and ought to find ways of expressing this recognition. BEM presents important ways of seeing common ground between those communities which practise baptism of infants and those practising baptism of adults only. Although, as we have already noted, the text is not completely satisfactory from our point of view on some issues concerning baptism, it is a major contribution to the ecumenical movement. It is on the basis of baptism that we can say that, despite our continuing divisions, a real, though imperfect communion already exists between divided Christians. The BEM text explains the baptismal basis of this communion that already exists.

In regard to *Eucharist*, the reception of the Lima text on eucharist by a church would not have the immediate result of allowing reciprocal eucharistic sharing. This is because the notion of eucharistic sharing for the Catholic Church is intimately related to other basic factors such as unity in the whole faith of the Church, and particularly in regard to the Church and the ministry.

As already noted, we are not totally satisfied with every aspect of the BEM text on the eucharist. On some serious points it does not say enough to represent the fullness of Christian faith. Still we recognize the significance of the convergence and even areas of agreement on many points of eucharistic thinking that the text represents. Thus we would say that if all the churches and ecclesial communities are able to accept at least the theological understanding and description of the celebration of the eucharist as described in BEM and implement it as part of their normal life, we believe that this would be an important development, and that these divided Christians now stood on a new level in regard to achieving common faith on the eucharist.

Concerning *Ministry*, what BEM says is important, although we have pointed to areas where further study is necessary. In regard to recognition of ministry, for us it is not only agreement on the question of apostolic succession, but also being situated within it, that is necessary for recognition of ordination.

But if some of the proposals on ministry in BEM were generally accepted, that would constitute a major step toward Christian unity. For example, if the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, explained in BEM, were adopted generally by Christian communities, that would put the churches and ecclesial communities on a new level of relationship, even if the precise meaning of the threefold ministry would still need further refinement.

BEM notes grounds on which mutual respect for ministries can grow. It states that "in churches which practise the succession through the episcopate, it is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission

has been preserved in churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate" (37). It notes however that "these considerations do not diminish the importance of the episcopal ministry" (38) and many of the former "express willingness to accept episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole Church". These considerations remind us of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council which say that "the brethren divided from us also carry out many liturgical actions of the Christian religion. In ways that vary according to the condition of each church or community, these liturgical actions most certainly can truly engender a life of grace and, one must say, can aptly give access to the communion of salvation". It follows that the separated churches and communities as such "have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation» (UR 3).

There are already grounds on which mutual respect can begin to grow and dimensions of fellowship between our communities can be built, reflecting the levels of communion that now exist. But this is still inadequate. We need to continue the dialogue for unity of faith in regard to ministry as well as other matters, as we move toward full communion.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study of BEM has been for many Catholics an enriching experience. Catholics can find in BEM much that they can agree with. At the same time there are important areas related to baptism, eucharist and ministry clearly in need of further study within the ecumenical context that the Commission on Faith & Order provides. We rejoice in the convergence that has taken place and look to further growth toward unity.

For the Catholic Church, the truths of faith are not divided from one another. They constitute a unique organic whole. Therefore full agreement on the sacraments is related to agreement on the nature of the Church. The sacraments, including baptism, receive their full significance and efficacy from the comprehensive ecclesial reality on which they depend and which they manifest. Nor can the goal of the unity of divided Christians be reached without agreement on the nature of the Church.

BEM is a significant result and contribution to the ecumenical movement. It demonstrates clearly that serious progress is being made in the quest for visible Christian unity.

With this response, the Catholic Church wants to encourage Faith & Order to continue its valuable work of seeking unity in faith as the basis for visible unity. We recommit ourselves to this process with other churches and ecclesial communities in that serious task to which Christ calls all of us.