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## One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:4-6).<sup>1</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. The mutual recognition of baptism: a gift and inspiration to the churches

1. Following the biblical witness churches understand baptism as the event, unique and unrepeatable, by which Christ claims his followers and makes them his own. In accord with this *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* says: "Therefore, our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship".<sup>2</sup>

2. This "call to the churches" has become even more insistent since BEM was published in 1982. In particular, the question of the mutual recognition of baptism has grown in importance as the churches have progressed on their ecumenical pilgrimage, and needs to be put sharply today: what does the "mutual recognition of baptism" actually mean, theologically and ecclesologically? What are the full *implications* of that recognition, and how can each church live out those implications both in its own life, and ecumenically?

3. The present document stands within, and is best understood in light of, Faith and Order's recent process of reflection on the role of worship generally, and now baptism in particular, in the search for Christian unity. This process is traced in detail in Appendix II.<sup>3</sup>

4. This text is offered in the hope that it will help the churches (a) to clarify the meaning of the mutual recognition of baptism and to put its implications fully into practice, and (b) to clarify issues which prevent such recognition.

5. The text begins by discussing the notion of recognition, principally but not only with respect to baptism, and then (in Section II, "Baptism: Symbol and Pattern of the New Life in Christ") explores the symbolic dimensions of baptism, the terminology of "sacrament" and "ordinance", and the relation of the event of

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982, "Baptism", §6, p. 3. Also: "Mutual recognition of baptism is acknowledged as an important sign of expressing the baptismal unity given in Christ. Wherever possible, mutual recognition should be expressed explicitly by the churches", *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, §15, p. 6; and "Baptism, therefore, constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it": *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §22, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., New York, Guild Press, America Press, Association Press, 1966, p. 364.

<sup>3</sup> This document reflects work in progress. It is essentially the text presented to the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in July/August 2004. (The term "Christian initiation" has been removed from the title pending further discussion, and a number of formatting changes have been made).

baptism itself to the continuing, life-long process of growth into Christ. Section III ("Baptism and the Church) reviews a wealth of biblical imagery in relation to baptism, notes the function of baptism as the point of entry into the church, stressing the common dimensions of most churches' baptismal liturgies, and explores the relation between baptism and the eucharist, and raises issues about the relation of baptism to church membership. Section IV ("Baptism and Faith") addresses the questions - which come classically to focus in baptism - of the believer's faith in relation to God's initiative and to the faith of the community, and offers some comments on the context and content of Christian formation. The final Section (V, "Towards Mutual Recognition: Steps for the Journey") reviews these themes in close relation to the challenge now facing the churches, to deepen their mutual recognition of baptism and to put that recognition into more effective practice.

6. In the reflections in this text on the recognition of baptism, the event of baptism will be set within the larger pattern of Christian initiation: for baptism is preceded by formation in faith and followed by an ongoing process of nurture within the Christian community, fostering a life-long process of growth into Christ. This larger pattern involving formation, the event of baptism, and continuing formation into Christ, may be termed *baptismal life*.

7. Central to the present text is the attempt to place the event of baptism within that larger context, in the hope that this will offer new possibilities for churches to understand the baptismal theology and practice of others and thus foster greater mutual recognition. The event of baptism is central to the process of Christian initiation, and can be fully understood only in light of it. At the same time, the fact that Christian initiation is a process which is not completed this side of the Kingdom allows for different orderings of the elements of that process, and may help churches with different orderings to find convergence in their baptismal intentions, if not always in their practice.

8. In many cases churches do mutually recognize (as it was put at the fifth world conference on Faith and Order) "one another's baptism as the one baptism into Christ",<sup>4</sup> and this has important consequences for the self-understanding and practice of *all* the churches. But it is also true that "not all churches are able to recognize other churches' baptisms, and not all agree entirely on the insights of *BEM* concerning baptism".<sup>5</sup> The situation is indeed complex, as the following instances make clear.

9. In some cases, this mutual recognition reflects a condition of full sharing in faith and life among the churches, including eucharistic communion and provisions for communion in discernment and decision-making, and in service and mission. In some cases, mutual recognition exists together with significant limitations in sharing, particularly at the eucharistic table - raising questions for some about the meaning of recognition, if not of baptism itself (see §§10-16). In some cases, mutual recognition exists but has not led to further shared life and mission. In some cases, the mutual recognition of baptism is lacking, so that some churches (or congregations within them) require the baptism of all persons seeking membership, even if they have already undergone baptism in another church. In some cases, a church's readiness to recognize baptisms performed in another church varies from place to place depending on local circumstances, including the degree of local awareness, and acceptance, of the ecumenical dimension of the church's life. A related difficulty is how churches respond to *requests* for baptism from persons previously baptized, and on what grounds this might be refused.

## B. Discernment and the recognition of baptism

10. Mutual recognition is one of the central aims of the ecumenical endeavour. There are at least three dimensions to mutual recognition: recognizing one another individually as Christians; churches recognizing the baptism of a person from one faith community who seeks entrance into another; and churches recognizing one another as churches, that is, as authentic expressions of the One Church of Jesus Christ.

11. In all of these contexts, recognition indicates that one party *acknowledges* an already-existing quality, identity or status which it has discerned in another. It does not mean that one party *grants* to another a status which is within its power to give.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Worship Book, Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, 1993*, Geneva, Commission on Faith and Order, World Council of Churches, English, pp. 10-12; Spanish, pp. 30-33; German, pp. 51-54; French, pp. 72-75.

<sup>5</sup> "Faith and Order Work on Worship (with special reference to Baptism) in Relation to the Unity of the Church, Planning Meeting, Communauté de Grandchamp, July, 1998", Appendix III, "Report of Planning Group on Worship", in Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Board, 15-24 June 1999, Toronto, Canada, Faith and Order Paper No. 185, World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, 1999, p. 101 (Report, pp. 100-110).

12. Recognition in this sense of “acknowledging” corresponds to the churches’ realization that they already share an existing degree of *koinonia*. This grows with their experience in the ecumenical movement, as they are challenged to receive God’s gift together more intensely and to make their communion ever more visible (cf. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*). Recognition as acknowledgement intensifies the commitment of the churches to one another, on the basis of their shared convictions and values, as equal partners within the search for visible unity. This by no means excludes their calling one another to a fuller expression of, as the preface to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* puts it, “the faith of the Church through the ages”.<sup>6</sup> Such respectful mutual encouragement and correction is natural, as each church seeks to discern in the other - as in itself - an authentic expression of the One Church of Jesus Christ. Acknowledgement also corresponds to the nature of the thanksgiving of the church, that *eucharistia* that always recognizes and proclaims the action of God.

13. What are the implications of the understanding of recognition as acknowledgement for the mutual recognition of baptism? Mutual recognition of baptism is a process of the churches’ discerning apostolicity in one another’s lives or, put more fully: of discerning, in one another, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

14. This process of discernment takes place within at least three contexts. These may be visualized as concentric circles with the baptismal rite at the centre, encircled by the larger pattern of Christian initiation, encircled in turn by the whole life and witness of the particular ecclesial community.

a) Recognition of baptism concerns discernment of the apostolicity of the rite itself. The baptismal ritual typically includes the proclamation of God’s word, the confession of Christian faith, thanksgiving, the use of water to immerse or lave connection with the proclamation of the triune name, and some signs or symbols (as in chrismation, laying on of hands, and admission to the eucharist) of reception into the Christian community. The importance of these for the mutual recognition of baptism is that these “signs of initiation”, which initiate the baptized into the realities signified, function as signs of the *common faith* which Christians through the ages share. The trinitarian formula realizes faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and the water rite signals initiation into the *complexus* of meanings of the biblical teaching on baptism (cf. §18-20, 43-47, 48-49).

b) Recognition of baptism also implies discerning apostolicity in the larger pattern of Christian initiation. In Christian churches there is typically a rich pattern of initiation which includes formation in the faith, baptism in water, and eucharistic communion leading to responsible participation in the life of the community.

c) Recognition of baptism also entails discerning apostolicity in the ongoing life and witness of the ecclesial community that baptizes and forms the new Christian.

15. Creative thinking is needed about how the churches can better celebrate the fact that they *do* recognize each other’s baptisms. To begin this, one might ask: as a member of a local congregation how do I know, and actually experience in the life of my own church, the fact that it recognizes the baptism of others? Actions to make recognition a lived reality in the lives of churches could include common baptismal services, notices about such events on church bulletin boards, and joint confirmations.

16. It is important to remember that the churches speak of recognition not only with regard to baptism but also of other dimensions of the life of the church, in particular ministry. For recognition of ministry to occur, churches need to discern apostolicity in the patterns, and source of authority, of the ministry exercised in other churches. It often happens that baptism is recognized among churches, but the members of those churches are not able to partake together of the eucharistic meal. This situation - so puzzling to the uninitiated - arises through lack of mutual recognition not of baptism, but of ministries.

## II. BAPTISM: SYMBOL AND PATTERN OF THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

17. The churches, drawing on historic texts and traditions, have formed various interpretations of the significance of baptism. This section examines biblical material related to baptism; addresses such questions as, in what sense can baptism be said to be a “symbol”? and, “what pattern (*ordo*) of baptism is

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<sup>6</sup> Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, “Preface”, p. x.

to be respected?"; and explores the relation between the event of baptism and the larger pattern of initiation, referred to here as "baptismal life".

## A. Symbol

### 1. Biblical baptismal imagery

18. For most churches, baptism actualizes the whole history of salvation. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* presents the churches with a rich tableau of images from scripture which express the reality of new life through Jesus Christ.

Baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12); a washing away of sin (1 Cor.6:11); a new birth (Jn, 3:5); an enlightenment by Christ (Eph. 5:14); a re-clothing in Christ (Gal. 3:27); a renewal by the Spirit (Titus 3:5); the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Peter 3:20-21); an exodus from bondage (1 Cor. 10:1-2); and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended (Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 12:13).<sup>7</sup>

19. In the celebration of baptism these images often point to stories in the Old Testament, which are understood as "types" of the salvation to be brought in Christ. Thus baptism joins the candidate not only to Christ but to the entire history of salvation, to the entire biblical account of God's acting to give light and life, forgiveness and new meaning. Christians have understood that the waters of creation in Genesis (Gen. 1) prefigure the waters of the new creation in baptism; the extirpation of sin through the flood (Gen.7) anticipates the washing from sin in baptism; the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14) foreshadows the exodus from bondage and the liberation into a new creation; the water from the rock in the wilderness (Ex. 17) prefigures Christ who gives the water of life. Similarly the act of covenant in circumcision (Gen. 17) has its parallel in the new act of covenant – baptism; and as God was able to bring new life to dry bones (Ez. 37) so God, through the waters of baptism, brings new life to those who seek baptism.

20. The churches throughout the ages have drawn on these images with differing emphases, ignoring some and using others heavily. Some of these differences arise from the particular cultural contexts within which Christians and churches live, which have helped to form their theological outlook, but which have also resulted in certain limitations. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has helped many churches to discover anew the variety of scriptural images which have been used to interpret the meaning of baptism. When seen separately, each image risks presenting an unbalanced or monochromatic view of baptism; together, they portray a colourful mosaic of the reality of new life in Christ. Here the churches are challenged to listen to one another, and to benefit from the experiences of others, as they seek to understand the wealth of meaning in baptism.

### 2. The Liturgy of baptism

#### (a) Sign and symbol

21. Over the centuries, the churches have incorporated into the celebration of baptism a wide range of symbols and symbolic actions based on scriptural images (involving not only water but – for instance – laying on of hands, oil, new garments, light) in an attempt to express and interpret the meaning of the baptismal act. These actions have varied with time, place and cultural context and have done so from Christian beginnings.

22. Integral to the practice of baptism in all churches are both natural elements used as signs or symbols, and symbolic actions. The words "symbol" and "sign" are understood in different ways in different contexts. In this text, the word "symbol" will be used to designate something that actually participates in the reality which it represents, while "sign" simply points to a reality beyond itself. Symbols incorporate a wide variety of meanings, both positive and negative. Signs can be more restrictive in their significance, pointing to but one thing. However, we should observe that the phrase "effective sign" often used in ecumenical literature bears the same dynamic meaning as the term "symbol" used here. The terms "image" and "type" are also sometimes used in reflections on the sacraments. As we have already seen, these refer to the history of salvation; the former to the variety of its representations, and the latter to how these are interpreted as prefiguring Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, "Baptism", §2, p. 2.

23. In baptism, water is an *effective sign* in the sense that it points to certain realities. For example, its application carries the meaning of washing and so points towards the forgiveness of sins made possible in Christ. Immersion in water suggests burial in the death of Christ. Rising from the water suggests both participation in the resurrection of Christ, as also the breaking of the waters from the womb at the time of birth. This action thus demonstrates the way in which a new Christian enters into a new life made possible by the gospel of divine grace, as well as pointing towards the final kingdom in which the Christian shall be raised from death. But for many the water of baptism is also a *symbol*, in the sense that it participates in the reality which it represents, making possible something which would not be possible otherwise.

(b) The Liturgical expression of the symbolic meaning of baptism

24. Material signs employed as symbols elucidate the many theological realities associated with baptism. For example water, particularly when used abundantly, bears both negative and positive qualities since it can be seen as the means of participation in Christ's death, as if through drowning, and as the means of new birth, as if from the waters of a womb. The use of water as a natural agent for washing is seen in some traditions as affirming God's cleansing of the candidate from his or her sin. Similarly, oil may be used as a symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit and of incorporation into the royal priesthood, a baptismal garment as symbolizing the "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ", and the light of the baptismal candle as symbolizing our sharing in Christ as "the light of the world."

25. Where candidates offer a personal testimony at the time of their baptism, this is seen as a powerful sign of the working of the Holy Spirit embodied in the lives of particular individuals, thus revealing God's power to convert and to save. At the same time, the assembly which gathers to celebrate the act of baptism signifies the whole Church into which the baptized are incorporated. The individual and communal confession of faith at the edge of the water is a symbol of the faith of the church, inspired by the Spirit, into which this candidate is now baptized.

26. Baptismal practices in various churches show different approaches to the blending of signs and symbols. Through all the differences, however, there appears an appreciation of the importance of created elements in expressing the saving power of God. In many traditions, the thanksgiving over the waters of the font echoes and reflects the thanksgiving over the bread and wine of the eucharist, calling upon the Spirit also to make use of water in the reign of Christ.

27. Today, as churches engage more closely with the cultures in which they live, there is a new process of exploration as to how other elements, held to be of symbolic importance in local cultures, can also be used to express the richness of the various dimensions of baptism. This has been explored at length in the Faith and Order consultation in Faverges in France in 1997 and its accompanying illustrations.<sup>8</sup> These reflections open the way to further creative developments in this area but, as was noted at Faverges,<sup>9</sup> this process must be done critically and with caution.

B. Sacrament and ordinance

28. Describing baptism as a sacrament requires some further explication, since the word "sacrament" is used with a variety of meanings among the churches. All churches can agree that "the sacraments" have meaning only within the context of an ecclesial community; indeed, the Church itself can be understood as the sacramental presence of Christ in the world. Sacraments are often described as "a visible form of an invisible grace", so that through Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, God's saving work is actualized in the very event from which the person and the ecclesial community, as well as the whole universe, benefit. Through the sacraments, human life is drawn ever more deeply into the communion of the triune God. The Greek word "mystery" (*mysterion*), of which sacrament is a translation, also draws attention to the unfolding of God's purpose of salvation in Christ, and so to an anticipation in the sacraments of the future new creation. Churches which hold to this understanding of sacrament may, however, still differ about the way that God's gracious presence is related to the material elements, and about the way that salvation in the present is related to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism*, see esp. 'III. The inculturation of baptism', p.83-88.

<sup>9</sup> See *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism*, 'Report of the Consultation,' 'Criteria for the Inculturation of Baptism', §36-42, pp. 85-88.

29. The word “ordinance”, on the other hand, indicates that certain acts within the worship and liturgy of the church are performed in obedience to the command and example of Christ. Those who affirm the reality of “sacraments” usually regard these also as ordinances, while some who prefer the term “ordinance” may in fact be giving this a sacramental meaning. Some churches which use only the word “ordinance” may, however, regard acts such as baptism and the Lord’s supper as being signs of a reality which has already been actualized and which is even now effective by faith in the life of the believer and the congregation. For all these differences, most traditions can agree that the realities pointed to by the sacraments/ordinances bring Christians to the central mysteries of the life in Christ.

30. Another way of thinking about sacraments is to affirm both that they are *expressive* of divine realities, representing that which is already true, and also that they are *instrumental* in that God uses them to bring about a new reality. Some traditions emphasize the instrumental meaning of baptism, recognizing it as an action in which God transforms the life of the candidate as he or she is brought into the Christian community. Other traditions emphasize expressive aspects, seeing in baptism a God-given and eloquent demonstration, within the Christian community, of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its saving significance for the person who – being already a Christian through his or her personal encounter and continuing relationship with Christ – is then baptized. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, and both may be regarded as essential for understanding the full meaning of baptism. They may, however, represent different starting points in considering the interdependence of faith as an ongoing process and a sacramental event.

31. Differences of interpretation, as well as differences in practice about sacraments, remain a reality in the life of the churches. One may distinguish between areas of misunderstanding and issues on which, even after clarification, there continues to be disagreement. One misunderstanding, for example, is over the attempt to formulate a doctrine intended to safeguard the efficacy of the sacraments, irrespective of the worthiness of the celebrant or of the recipient. This has often wrongly been construed as offering a “mechanical” view of the sacrament, in which grace is dispensed in an automatic way; in fact, it is an attempt to safeguard the truth that God is graciously at work in a way which transcends human shortcomings.

32. Many of the above reflections on baptism in relation to sacrament and ordinance may also be applied to the eucharist.

### C. Baptism and life-long growing into Christ

33. “Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to lifelong growth into Christ”.<sup>10</sup> Most churches regard the baptismal event as a one-time, unrepeatable liturgical rite in which God acts and the Christian faith is confirmed. But as a one-time ritual, this single event reflects and recapitulates the catechumenate, and the life-long processes of nurture and growth, that lead to and follow it. Three elements therefore constitute the pattern of baptismal life: formation in faith, baptism in water, and participation in the life of the community, fostering a life-long process of growth into Christ.<sup>11</sup>

34. In the early church this was expressed in the emergence of complex patterns of Christian nurture which included instruction in faith before and after baptism, as well as an extended series of liturgical celebrations marking the journey in a growing faith. These aspects were focused in the water rite of baptism and admission to the eucharistic table. Baptism may be likened to birth and the eucharist to the nutrition which sustains life. Reflection on these early patterns was part of the work done by the Faverge Consultation in 1997, and formed a basis of its proposals on the *ordo* (structure) of baptism. In the document from this consultation the word “pattern” was used instead of *ordo*, to make clear that in different Christian traditions the three aspects of instruction, baptism and continuing nurture in the faith may appear in a different order and be expressed in different ways.

35. These aspects – formation in faith, water rite and participation in community – may be discerned in some form in the baptismal practices of the churches, whatever the age of the person being baptized. The water rite itself includes profession of faith, and it takes place in the midst of the worshipping community. These three aspects are also reflected in the wider context of events which surround the act of baptism, and which mark the beginnings or early stages of the Christian life. That is, the water rite is central to a

<sup>10</sup> Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, ‘Baptism’, §9, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, Report of the Consultation, ‘The common baptismal ordo’, §§17-24, pp. 78-81.

process which includes extended formation in faith and deepening participation in the life of the body of Christ. Initiation into the life of Christ and his church is thus a larger process than the moment of baptism. The three aspects of the pattern are further reflected in life-long growth in Christ into which the baptized enters ever more deeply. The way of discipleship is marked daily by the baptismal experience of dying to self and sin and rising with Christ to forgiveness and new life, experiences which are focussed sacramentally in the eucharist. The following account spells out these aspects in more detail.

36. The threefold pattern of *baptismal life* thus embraces:

a) *Formation in faith*. This aspect includes preaching and teaching about the faith of the church before and after the act of baptism, which in some traditions takes formal shape in *catechesis*. Such catechesis is intended to lead to conversion, appropriation of the faith in heart and mind, and trust in the triune God. But all the faithful preaching of the church is also to be seen as the “word coming to the element” of water, constituting the sacrament. Within the whole process of formation in faith, the faith which is expressed by the community of the church, parents and sponsors in the case of an infant who is baptized must be professed later on by that person himself or herself. In some traditions this profession may include the form of a formal rite, while in others it may consist simply in intentional participation in the life of the local worshipping community. It should be stressed that formation in faith is a life-long process and does not come to an end by an act of profession, except for the final profession which is the witness of a Christian death.

b) *The rite of baptism*. “Baptism is a gift of God and is administered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.<sup>12</sup> It is thus the central symbolic act within the whole process of Christian initiation. Immersion or submersion in water is the fullest imaging of death and rebirth to new life, although other uses of water (pouring or sprinkling) are attested in ancient Christian traditions, reflect other biblical images for the giving of life and the Spirit, and are authentic means of baptism. Nevertheless we are aware that different modes of baptism may raise obstacles to mutual recognition in some cases. Further difficulties are caused by those churches which affirm baptism without water (identifying only a baptism with the Spirit), or which understand baptism as an event without material signs, or which use formulas which do not explicitly use the triune name of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. Most churches affirm the giving of the Holy Spirit in baptism – sometimes called “sealing” by the Spirit – while they also recognize the role of the Spirit at other moments in the wider process of initiation. At the edge of this water (or water and anointing) rite, other events of widespread importance also take place, in diverse order: thanksgiving over the water, confession of faith, a variety of interpretive signs and symbols (clothing, illuminating, and others).

c) *Participation in the life of the community*. The act of baptism is normally fulfilled in a sharing in the eucharist (or Lord’s supper), and in this way the newly baptized are further integrated into the life of the local Christian community. Some churches mark this stage of participation with additional signs of welcome and mutual commitment. Those newly baptized will take their place in the “royal, priestly and prophetic” community that is the Church, and so will exercise the spiritual gifts with which they have been endowed for service in the Church and the world. The place of a rite of “confirmation” in this process of growth in Christ is discussed in §40-41.

37. It is in the interplay of the three aspects of the pattern of baptismal life, and in the manner in which they are enacted in their lives, that the churches can find some way forward in the mutual recognition of various traditions. For example, some churches which describe themselves as “believer baptists” have come to appreciate the practice of churches which baptize infants when baptism takes place in the presence of a believing community, which will provide the context for the ongoing Christian nurture of the baptized as they grow in their life in Christ. Similarly, some churches which baptize infants have come to take more seriously the process of ongoing formation, in the light of dialogue with churches which baptize only those able to declare personally their faith in Christ.

38. The close connection between baptism and the eucharist is most evident in a unified rite of initiation in which the baptized receives communion for the first time. Baptism has been seen in many churches as admitting to communion. If this is not possible, baptism should be celebrated in the immediate context of a eucharist, in the presence of the faith community into which the newly baptized is being initiated. This would also allow members of the congregation a further opportunity to remember, and reaffirm, their own baptismal vows. For this reason, at the very least baptisms should take place in the midst of the congregation gathered in worship. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*<sup>13</sup> encouraged the administration of

<sup>12</sup> Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, “Baptism”, §1, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> “Baptism”, §23, pp. 6-7.

baptism during public worship, and particularly on great festival occasions intimately connected with baptism such as Easter, Pentecost and Epiphany. In fact, since the eucharist is usually composed of a word-service and a table-service, when the water-rite takes its place between these two, the whole service may be seen to reflect the larger three-fold pattern of baptism: hearing the word and learning the faith; the central water-rite; receiving nourishment for a life marked by growth into Christ.

39. Another reason for the celebration of baptism during public worship is that this offers a means through which churches rediscover the *corporate* significance of baptism. In many churches, this has become a time at which the whole Christian community can affirm its Christian commitment together. There is a growing awareness among churches of the importance of the celebration of the eucharist as a regular public affirmation of the baptismal covenant, including its commitment to Christian service. Similarly the presence of the community at the baptism expresses its involvement in the whole process of initiation, and its responsibility for the continued growth in Christ of the newly baptized. It would be fruitful to explore this and further ways in which Christian commitment can be affirmed corporately. For example, many churches are finding that both personal and corporate faith is strengthened by a more frequent practice of re-affirming baptismal vows. This can take place not only through the eucharist but on other occasions in the life of the church, not least on ecumenical occasions.

40. As “growing in newness of life” is an ongoing, life-long process, various traditions put different emphases on the means, and timing, of moments of affirmation of Christian commitment. For some traditions this has been ritualized in the practice of confirmation, understood as an affirmation of baptismal faith. This is a matter of some discussion among and within churches which have different sources for, and understandings of, confirmation.

a) In some churches confirmation has its origins in a post-baptismal, episcopal anointing in early Christianity – an event which, in the course of history in the West, became separated in time from the baptismal ritual. In other churches, particularly those whose roots lie in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, confirmation has its source in the more mature profession of faith expected of adolescents. Thus for some traditions confirmation is a sacramental part of the baptismal action (even if performed years later, when a person baptized as an infant reaches an age of “maturity”). For other traditions confirmation has an independent life and is understood not as “completing” a person’s earlier baptism – *that* is viewed as complete in and of itself – but as an act, by a person now mature, which publically witnesses to and affirms it. These two quite different understandings of confirmation are further confused when, in some languages, the same word is used for both practices. (There is less difficulty in languages where the names for the two rites are linguistically distinct, for example the German *Konfirmation* vs. *Firmung*, or the Czech *konfirmace* vs. *birnování*.)

b) The relation of confirmation to church membership, which varies among churches, bears further investigation and reflection. In some traditions confirmation may be seen as conferring Adult membership in a particular church, rather than the church universal.

c) Recent years have seen considerable confusion as some traditions, seeking to clarify their understanding and practice of confirmation, have drawn on the practice of others, often imposing on their own rites theologies which may be incompatible with their origins. For example, perhaps the various theologies of the Orthodox practice of chrismation will not be able to resolve the theological confusion within Western churches about the practice of confirmation. Further difficulties arise when some within a tradition advocate restoring the original close temporal link between baptism and confirmation, while others would have confirmation take place much later in life. Thus the place and role of confirmation within the practice of Christian initiation is a matter of some discussion among the churches, and needs to be clarified through further conversation within and among them. (For this conversation an important resource would be the experience of churches which have practiced joint confirmation, thus affirming the confirmands’ relation not only to a particular church, but to the Church in its wholeness.) In all cases, however, it would be useful to the participants in this discussion to accentuate the pre-eminent importance of baptism and to see that many of these various proposals have sought, in diverse ways, exactly that pre-eminence.

41. The issue of recognition of ministries is also important for the discussion on confirmation. Confirmation may be repeated for a person moving from one church to another, even where recognition of baptism exists between them, because the “receiving” church does not discern an apostolic pattern of the ministry of oversight in the other.



### III. BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH

42. As baptism is the means of entry into the new life in Christ, and as it prompts us to take seriously faith formation and community participation as well as the water rite itself, so it is utterly bound up with what we believe the church to be. The Church is the *koinonia* of those who have come into faith – who have been baptized and who are witnesses to the saving grace of God. God, acting through the Holy Spirit, establishes a lasting relationship with each and every believer, drawing the baptized into a firm relationship of love with the other members of the body of Christ

#### A. The Biblical tradition

43. The Church is the *koinonia* of those who have come into faith and are baptized into Christ's one body. In baptism, God, acting through the Holy Spirit, establishes a new and lasting relationship with each believer, thereby also drawing the newly baptized into a new relationship with all the other members of the body. A rich variety of biblical images describe baptism and the baptismal relationship (*cf.* §10) providing a foundation for baptismal ecclesiology (*cf.* The Nature and Purpose of the Church, section on baptism).

44. Some biblical texts stress the pneumatological and trinitarian aspects of baptism: for example, the gift of the Spirit and the presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the water bath in the Jordan.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:9-11, *cf.* Synoptic parallels Mt. 3:13-17 and Lk. 3:21-22).

In Christian baptism, the baptized become, through incorporation into Christ, adopted heirs of the Father, and receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. By this adoption and anointing, the Church participates in the trinitarian life of God. The name of God in the water-rite, in creeds and confessions and in baptismal catechesis is one expression of this ecclesiology. Baptismal anointing is another.

45. Other biblical passages identify baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ and stress the new life of the baptized:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

The act of baptismal immersion is the sign of the Christian dying and rising to new life in Christ. By this unity with Christ, the Church participates in the Paschal mystery.

46. Other scriptural texts teach that baptism expresses the reconciliation of Christians with God, and with one another and the Church's task to bring divine reconciliation to the world.

- But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 6:11b)
- As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27-28)
- All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

Through baptism each Christian is entrusted with the mission of the Church to bring the good news to the world. The sign of peace, with which the assembly greets the newly baptized, is one expression of this ecclesiology. The missional formation of the baptized is another.

47. Other biblical texts express the eschatological dimension of baptism. For example:

- Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. For if we have

been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom. 6:4-5)

- If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him (2 Tm. 2:11b-12a).

In passages such as these Christians are reminded that their true citizenship is in the kingdom (*cf.* Phil. 3:20). The Church is an anticipation of the reign of God in which the Church's fulfillment is to be found. The eucharist, the eschatological meal given by God already now, expresses this ecclesiology.

## B. Baptism as entry into the Church

48. In Acts 2:16-42, in response to Peter's proclamation that God had made the Jesus who had been crucified both Lord and Messiah, the people asked, "Brothers, what should we do?" (v. 37) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). Those who welcomed his message were baptized (v. 41), and "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and koinonia, to the breaking of bread and the prayers". (v. 42) In drawing nearer to Christ, they drew nearer to each other. As also John 17 points out, through the Holy Spirit Christ continues to be present in the life of the Church after his ascension. The Spirit brings Christians into Christ and into a bond of unity with one another. All this is reflected in the initiatory events: proclamation, profession of faith, baptism, participation in the eucharist and life in community.

49. As the baptismal process gathers us into membership in Christ and into the ongoing reception of the Holy Spirit, so these are maintained and nurtured in the eucharist. Baptism and eucharist realize the same mystery by the action of the Holy Spirit, namely, the anamnesis (active remembering, *re*-presenting) of the paschal events of Christ's dying and rising in expectation of their fulfillment in the coming of the kingdom (*cf.* 2 Cor. 5:17 and Lk 22:15-18). Both baptism and the eucharist lead to incorporation into Christ and the Church. The faith community, which has been entered by baptism, finds expression of its life in Christ and the Spirit in the celebration of the eucharist.

50. The Church is both the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit. Baptism in Christ, and in the Spirit, is inseparable from Christian life in community. The baptized are "temples" because the Spirit dwells in them. But they are temples not in isolation, but as a community. Contemporary culture often emphasizes individualism. Baptism and a recovery of the life in the Spirit, however, challenge Christians and the churches to recover a sense of life in common in Christ and in the Spirit.

51. The rite of baptism includes a profession of faith. In churches whose worship life includes regular use of creeds, this often includes the Apostles' or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Significantly, neither of these creeds is specific to a particular communion (*cf.* §62). Likewise in churches where creeds are not regularly used, the same Trinitarian faith is professed at baptism through other forms. A person is baptized into "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). Indeed, reflecting this reality the liturgical rites of baptism are essentially similar in many churches.

52. Baptism, however, always occurs in the context of a particular local community which shares in a specific confessional identity. Consequently, it is the faith of the church as expressed in that community in which a person is baptized that determines - either intentionally or as a matter of fact - the confessional identity of the baptized.

53. These confessional communities are, in too many cases, not in full communion with one another. This results in a paradox: while baptism brings Christians into the unity of Christ's Body, which is One, at the same time the location of baptism within a specific confessional community means that the baptized experience disunity with many other Christians.

## C. Baptism and the eucharist

54. Both baptism and the eucharist lead Christians into communion with the Triune God and into communion with one another. In the ordinary way of things, the one unrepeatable baptism leads a Christian to the regular, repeated participation in the Lord's Supper: the birth of baptism leads to the ongoing feeding of the meal. So much is clear within each church; but how far is this intimate and intrinsic link between

baptism and the eucharist maintained *across* churches, so that a person baptized in one church is able to partake of the eucharist in another church?

55. The actual practice of the churches today reveals three main situations:

a) Where there is mutual recognition of baptism, some churches understand this as leading to their members' sharing eucharist together: the relationship among these churches is such that their communion finds its logical and most complete expression in their partaking together at the Lord's table.

b) In other cases there is mutual recognition of baptism, but without the possibility of a common eucharist. Here a kind of "asymmetry" seems to exist between the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist: all baptized persons have been incorporated into Christ's one body, the Church; but they are not all able to partake together in the eucharist. As is well known this is due to a lack of recognition not of baptism, but of ministries. Here we see most clearly, and painfully, the inter-relation of baptism, eucharist, and ministry – and, for some, of collegiality and primacy. These form, so to speak, an interlocking package of ecclesial life, so that mutual recognition in one area alone does not achieve a state of full ecclesial communion among churches.

c) In cases where mutual recognition of baptism does not exist, the churches may or may not be able to share in a common eucharist depending on their understanding of baptism, the nature of the church and its membership, and of the eucharist.

#### D. Baptism, initiation and church membership

56. What constitutes full initiation into the Christian church? In earliest Christianity, "Baptism upon profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern" (*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, "Baptism" §11). By the fourth century, in the ancient church, the unified rite of initiation - including baptism, chrismation (later developed into confirmation in some churches) and eucharist - clearly marked full entry into the Christian church. To some extent these acts of initiation have still been kept together today, for example in the case of infant baptism in the Orthodox church and a number of other churches, and in the case of the baptism of professing believers wherever this is practised. However the historical break-up of the rites of initiation in many churches has led to their being received separately over a (sometimes quite lengthy) period of time. As a result, the relationship between baptism and church membership has become quite complex.

57. Among the churches "membership" now seems to occur at varying points along a continuum of practices. Some churches have developed rites for the welcoming and blessing of children as an initial step toward membership. In some communions, catechumens are considered church members, as reflected in their right to a Christian burial. Some traditions consider faith to be sufficient for church membership, even prior to baptism. For yet others, full membership seems to come only with confirmation, even if this is separated from baptism by several years. Theologically and liturgically, membership appears to be "incomplete" prior to admission to the eucharist; yet some baptized are barred from the eucharist because they have not reached a certain age, or because they are not yet confirmed. This wide diversity of practice among - and sometimes within - the churches indicates discrepancies between theology, symbol, and practice. This suggests that the churches might need to reflect further on the theological implications of their particular baptismal practices.

58. *Christian initiation*, understood as the process of conversion leading to conformity to Christ and participation in Christ-existing-as-community, is a richer concept than that of church membership. The latter is too often based on modern uses of the word "member" without the New Testament symbolism of the limbs and parts of a body; this produces an understanding of the church as an organization, rather than as the *ekklesia* of believers in communion with Christ, with the Spirit, and with one another. Through initiation a person is drawn into the mystery of life in Christ. Initiation, centered and complete in the water-rite, still leads to a life-long process of formation and responsible discipleship. Thus, as stressed throughout this text, baptism is part of the larger process of an individual's growth into the body of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The churches differ in their understanding, not so much of the goal of this process as of its constituent parts and when, within the individual's lifetime, they should occur.

#### IV. BAPTISM AND FAITH

59. In the search for unity, the churches together confess that “there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4: 5). United in the one Lord, all churches affirm that faith accompanies baptism; but what is the relationship between faith and baptism, and how is the faith of the community related to the faith of the baptized person?

#### A. The faith of the Church and the faith of the believer

60. The source of faith is God who calls persons “by name” (Is. 43:1; cf. Acts 9:4). Even the freedom to respond in faith is God’s gracious gift. Faith begins in persons when God sows in them the seed of simple trust. By the witness of the Holy Spirit they grow up into Christ, in whom the fullness of God dwells (Col. 1:19). It is not on the basis of their understanding or ability that human beings can receive God’s gift, but only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:26ff).

61. As Christians mature, their faith grows into deeper participation in the faith confessed, celebrated and witnessed to by the Christian community, both locally and worldwide, both now and through the ages. The believer’s faith grows and deepens in the relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and that faith discovers its congruence with the faith professed by the whole church throughout the ages. Thus, the faith which the believer comes to confess as his or her own is *that* faith and no other, in the sense that the “we believe” of the Christian community and the “I believe” of personal commitment become one.

62. In the early centuries of the Church’s life, this convergence of the “we believe” and the “I believe” found expression in various ways, and especially in baptismal confession and worship. Christian communities shared their baptismal creeds as a basis of their unity. Before the Creed was introduced into the liturgy the eucharistic prayer was itself the ancient confession of faith made by the believing community in each Sunday worship. Later, when they met together in councils, they expressed the same faith in the shape of more extensive formulations. The most universally acknowledged creeds in use today are the Nicene-Constantinopolitan and the Apostles’ creeds<sup>14</sup>. At the heart of this faith is the affirmation of the triune nature of God, as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

63. This faith, professed and recognized across the churches, handed down by our mothers and fathers in the faith, is the faith which is celebrated in baptism. When a person is baptized into this trinitarian faith, a living unity is created which transcends geographical, social, ethnic and temporal boundaries; that person is brought into relationship with the whole body of Christ in all places and all times.

#### B. The divine invitation and the human response in faith

64. The churches affirm the priority of the divine initiative in the process of Christian initiation, as in all aspects of the Christian life. God issues an invitation and enables a response in faith. These two aspects come to fruition in the act of baptism, which is the visible sign of belonging to Jesus Christ, and of the commitment to walk with the community which follows him. While the scriptures insist on the necessity of baptism (Matt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4), they may be understood as encompassing a diversity of practice. In the process of initiation, the churches historically have made a distinction between those who may profess faith for themselves, and those who cannot. In both cases, faith needs to be discerned.

65. The person who asks for baptism for himself or herself, asks to walk with the church on a life-long journey, trusting Christ in all things<sup>15</sup>. At this stage, faith may take only rudimentary forms, but the church needs to discern in these the call of the triune God. Central to this is repentance before God - the willingness to renounce evil and all the “principalities and powers” (Rom. 8:38, Eph. 6:12) which hold persons captive, to turn to Christ, and to pledge faithfulness to the Holy Trinity. In all this, the church rejoices to see God’s work - the divine invitation and the human response in faith.

66. Among those whom God calls are some who are too young to articulate faith. The Church welcomes them into the community of faith that lives in the love of God. Rejoicing that they belong to the kingdom of God, the congregation accompanies them on their journey of faith. In this way, children are enabled, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to express their Christian commitment in and through the fellowship of the community.

<sup>14</sup> The importance of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed was recognized by Faith and Order Commission when it decided to use this creed as the basis for the explication of the Apostolic Faith (see *Confessing the One Faith*).

<sup>15</sup> The Armenian tradition provides an example. Someone who seeks baptism is asked, “What do you seek of God’s Church?” The reply is “Faith, hope, love and baptism!”

67. God calls others who, owing to certain disabilities, may never be able to articulate faith. The church embraces them in its faith, giving thanks to God who chooses “what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27).

68. In exercising special responsibilities for these groups, the congregation lives out its baptismal faith as a community of worship and service, so that everyone, old and young, of any ability, may grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the knowledge and love of God. Included in the congregation’s obligation is its duty to ensure that parents, godparents and sponsors also each have their responsibilities within the process.

### C. The nurture and growth of faith after baptism

69. The act of baptism is a new beginning; it marks a particular point on the journey with Christ and into Christ. The community of the disciples is assured by the love of God that its origin, and its eschatological completion, rest in the community of the Holy Trinity (2 Cor. 1:21-22). Looking to this completion, the baptized have not yet reached their goal. They must seek above all to grow in faith and to become what they are: the children of God (John 1:12). The reality of baptism needs to be lived out as a daily experience; again and again, the baptized will need to repent and turn to Christ (Rom. 6:1-11, Eph. 4: 21-5:2).

70. Throughout the whole of their lives, Christians are to seek faith, hope and love. God grants deeper insight, greater love, maturing faith as believers engage in the study of the scriptures, prayer and worship and love of neighbour. In sufferings and other trials, faith is tested. In all these, Christians need to make evident their participation in the *koinonia*, the fellowship of the church, amongst whom Christ is present in word and sacrament. They are to trust God’s promises to feed His followers on the way with the bread of thanksgiving (John 6:51; 1 Cor. 11: 23-25). Both the Christian family and the worshipping community should play a significant role in the nurture in faith of the newly baptized.

71. On the journey of faith, the Christian family is a small unit of the larger church, which is a foretaste of the kingdom. Parents have a special responsibility to give an example of living faith to their children. Where godparents are appointed, they need to be mature Christians, able to teach and care for their spiritual children. In cultures where the choice of godparents has become a “favour” to family members and friends, or a mere social custom, the faith community to which the family belongs should exercise its influence in the choice of appropriate sponsors.

72. The responsibility which devolves upon parents who come from different churches can be especially difficult to fulfil. Often, they are unable to share in the same eucharist, and also they face great challenges when they have to make decisions about the baptism and growth in faith of their children. These cases should be treated with pastoral sensitivity and ecumenical openness by each of the Christian communities concerned.

73. The local church needs to make specific provision for the nurture in faith of all the newly baptized. Such matters should not be left to chance. This is vitally important, given the breakdown in some cultures of the family unit. Many churches around the world have found fresh encouragement through the recovery of Christian formation as a life-long process. In some places, the ministry of “mentor” is being rediscovered. The ministry of bishops or other regional leaders has sometimes involved a recovery of “mystagogy” (post-baptismal catechesis) among the newly baptized. Workers in Sunday schools or Christian education programmes need to be aware of their great responsibility for building up the congregation in faith, hope and love. However, the “building up” of the congregation is not only a matter of receiving instruction in Sunday schools or Christian education programmes, but also a matter of participation in worship. For this reason it is especially important that children be fully involved in the worship life of the congregation. The experience in worship of a living relationship with the triune God is the way in which, in the deepest sense, all discover what it is to be a disciple of Christ.

## V. TOWARDS MUTUAL RECOGNITION: STEPS FOR THE JOURNEY

74. The mutual recognition of baptism is fundamental to the churches’ search for visible unity and in so far as it has been achieved it has become a basis for their increasing common witness, worship and service. As the churches work on issues related to the mutual recognition of baptism, they are hindered by difficulties of various kinds. Some involve fundamental questions of ecclesial recognition, as well as the connection of theology with liturgical, pastoral and congregational practice. Other difficulties relate to

continuing differences in the practice of baptism. Insofar as these matters pose problems for the mutual recognition of baptism they need to be addressed by the churches, both individually and in an ecumenical context.

#### A. Baptism as symbol and pattern.

75. The consultation has sought to clarify the notion of the “pattern (*ordo*) of baptism” as a life-long process including formation in faith, baptism in water, and participation in the life of the community. This approach takes up and develops the suggestions in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* that churches might arrive at a mutual recognition of baptism through recognizing and affirming the similarity of wider patterns of initiation and formation in Christ.<sup>16</sup> The consultation thinks that this would be a better way forward towards unity than simply comparing practices of the water rite in isolation from its context.

76. Differences in the understanding and practice of baptism remain *between* churches which baptize infants and churches which baptize only those able personally to profess their faith. Differences also remain *among and within* churches of both kinds. The consultation has explored the way that these differences are rooted in different understandings of the nature of the Church and the place of the baptismal rites in the whole pattern of baptismal initiation and lifelong formation. The difference between believer-baptist churches and churches also baptizing infants, for example, does not seem to be essentially a difference between the view of baptism as ordinance or sacrament. As we have seen, sacrament and ordinance are not mutually exclusive concepts. While some churches may decline to baptize infants on the basis of an expressive view of the act, others decline to do so because they think that it is the baptism of believers which best allows for the full sacramental meaning of baptism. The churches are thus asked to consider what seem to be the substantial differences involved. One issue is the relation between personally-expressed faith and membership in the Church. Another important question for many churches is the extent to which the validity of a sacrament performed in another church depends upon the prior recognition of that community as Church.

#### B. Baptism and the Church

77. In this area this document has suggested three dimensions of mutual recognition in relation to baptism: (a) mutual recognition of the liturgical water rite; (b) mutual recognition of the pattern of Christian initiation; (c) mutual recognition of the full ecclesial context for the life long process of formation and responsible discipleship. Although churches do not enjoy full eucharistic sharing they may still mutually recognize each other's baptism in some respect. The churches are thus invited to consider what is needed to achieve deeper *koinonia*. They are asked to consider whether they might offer recognition based on various dimensions of the baptismal pattern, ranging from the baptismal rite itself through patterns of initiation to the broadest sense of an ongoing baptismal life. Through a study of the patterns of Christian initiation including catechetical materials, spiritual formation, pastoral care, and liturgical celebrations, the churches could be mutually enriched by a greater appreciation of other ecclesial practices.

78. It was noted above with respect to creeds (cf. §51) a church's baptismal rites do not generally contain material specific to its own confessional tradition. This is true not only of creeds but of other aspects of the baptismal rites, so that they typically include components shared widely among the churches. This raises the possibility of recognizing one another as Christian churches on the basis of the degree of unity implied in the performance of highly similar rites, together with a similar pattern of initiation that surrounds the act of baptism. The churches are therefore asked to reflect carefully on the relation between liturgical practice and the theological understanding of the pattern of initiation. They are also urged to reflect on the ecclesiological and pastoral implications of the churches' common liturgical practices.

79. The importance of common elements, particularly the water rite and the trinitarian formula, for the mutual recognition of baptism has been stressed in §14a), where it was noted that these elements function as signs of the common faith shared by Christians through the ages. Some communities, however, hold that the meanings expressed by these components may also be conveyed in other ways. This raises serious questions of discernment within and among the churches: which variations in baptismal practice reflect the healthy *diversity* belonging to, and building up, the one body of Christ? Which variations represent a *divergence* from acceptable baptismal practice, obstructing the *koinonia* among the churches and threatening the unity of Christ's body?

<sup>16</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 15 (p. 6); Commentary 12 (p. 5); cf. 12 (p. 4). See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses* (Faith and Order Paper 149; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), p. 109.

80. There are churches, members of the World Council of Churches and manifestly Christian in their witness and service, which perform baptism without water;<sup>17</sup> and there are churches, members of the World Council of Churches and manifestly Christian in their witness and service, in which entry into the Christian community is effected without baptismal rites<sup>18</sup>. This raises questions requiring common discernment: which components - however they may be expressed - are essential to Christian initiation? How may Christian initiation be discerned in the absence of an identifiably common baptismal rite? And finally: how can the churches practise discernment *together* in these matters?

81. Questions of theological and liturgical language are particularly sensitive in some places today. The replacement in the baptismal rite of the traditional trinitarian formula "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" by such words as "Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier" is raising new questions about the mutual recognition of baptism. The churches must ask together whether this reflects a legitimate diversity, or is rather a divergence from common faith, raising additional obstacles to mutual recognition.

### C. Baptism and faith

82. In the deepest sense, a dynamic relationship exists between the faith of the believer and the faith of the Church: the faith which the believer comes to own is that of the whole Church of Christ. This process of growth into Christ, to which all believers are called, is the work of the triune God who, both in the church and the believer, is the beginning and end of faith. This gives rise to certain questions which may be posed to the churches for further consideration.

a) How is faith discerned? All agree that there needs to be a correspondence between the "I believe" of personal faith and the "we believe" of the Church. This is related to the issue of the *sensus fidelium*. However, the question remains: How can one be certain that a Christian community expresses the true faith and that the *sensus fidelium* is consistent with divine truth? Because of the divergent answers which the churches individually have offered to this question, we recommend that they work together in pursuit of a common perspective in the light of their various ecclesiologies.<sup>19</sup>

b) How can the churches deal with the reality of mixed marriage – that is, the marriage of partners coming from different Christian backgrounds? The consultation is aware that churches have been working together for a long time to produce practical guidelines for couples contemplating such marriage, as also for Christian communities called to minister to these couples in their lifelong growth into Christ. It is hoped that this work will be enriched by insights into baptism and initiation from this present study.

83. Churches have begun to take positive steps toward mutual recognition in some of the ways suggested in *Becoming a Christian* (Faverges I). These include: the recovery of the catechumenate and the ecumenical preparation of catechists; the more frequent use of immersion fonts; a common baptismal certificate for different churches; and adult education that is done across the churches. A full list of practical proposals from *Becoming a Christian* that may move churches and local congregations toward unity may be found in Appendix I of the present document.

84. There are many important issues that have not been extensively explored in this document and which deserve further consideration. Some of them are: practical guidelines for relations of mutual respect between churches while they do not yet fully recognize each other's baptisms; the relation between baptism and salvation and how an understanding of this is hindered by lack of mutual recognition; the implications of a mutual understanding of baptism for more effective sharing in the mission of God; and the far-reaching consequences for unity in ministry and eucharist which flow from mutual recognition of baptismal practices.<sup>20</sup>

85. We should be one at the one Table of our one Lord. For all Christians who have received their baptism as the one baptism into the one Church, have also received a radical calling from God to communion with all the baptized. The churches are thus called to renewed efforts towards full ecclesial communion, in order

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* [1982], "Baptism", §21, Commentary (c), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. The "Canberra Unity Statement", in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, 1993*, §3.2, p. 270; and *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and the Responses*, pp. 53-54 and 147.

<sup>19</sup> One appropriate place for achieving this would be the ongoing study of the WCC Faith and Order Commission on "The Nature and Purpose of the Church".

<sup>20</sup> This challenge has been taken up by the study of the Joint Working Group on the implications of the mutual recognition of baptism.

that the unity which Christ has forged among all Christians through the waters of baptism may find its realization at his one table.



## Appendix I

### Practical Suggestions for Expressing the Mutual Recognition of Baptism

*As noted in §83 of the text, the following suggestions – posed as questions which the churches are invited to ask themselves – are taken (with slight modifications in para. 25b) from the report of the first Faverges consultation on baptism (1997). See “Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism: Report of the Consultation” in *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism*, ed. Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, Faith and Order Paper No. 184, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1999, paragraphs 25 – 27, pp. 81-83.*

#### **C. Towards Renewal and Mutual Recognition of Baptism**

25. In matters of *renewal*, the *ordo* may assist the churches to ask themselves the following questions, as many are already doing.

##### *a) Concerning the catechumenate:*

- Are we holding baptism and formation in faith sufficiently together?
- Can we welcome again the ministry of catechists and restore the importance of baptismal sponsors among us?
- Can sponsors actively accompany every adult coming to baptism and uniting with the church's life?
- Can sponsors also accompany those who cannot answer for themselves as well as the parents or others who may be bringing these little ones?
- Can such catechists and sponsors be trained and assisted by the prayers of the whole congregation?
- Can we recover the catechumenate, or a pattern like the catechumenate, for both adults and for those who are bringing children?
- Can we pray regularly in the Sunday assembly for all the candidates for baptism, strongly claiming them already as Christ's own and strongly asking the Spirit to cast all evil out of their lives?
- In churches which do not baptize infants, can the children be enrolled and blessed and accompanied toward their own day of baptism?

##### *b) Concerning the baptismal rite itself:*

- Can we practise a strong use of water for all candidates, recovering immersion fonts where possible?
- Can we always hold our baptisms in the presence of the church - or of representatives of the church - letting the whole assembly gather around the place of the water?
- Can we reclaim the great Christian festivals, especially Easter, “Pentecost” and Epiphany, as particularly appropriate times for baptism?
- Can we understand the principal minister of baptism as ordinarily the presider in a local assembly of Christians - someone authorised and recognized by the wider church - acting in and with that assembly?
- Can we declare in our rites that the Spirit of God is poured out on these new members of the body of Christ and symbolised in acts such as the laying on of hands, sealing with the sign of the cross (signation) or anointing with oil (chrismation)?
- Can we lead all the newly baptized immediately to participation in the eucharist?
- Can we consider together whether any secondary signs - other anointings or new clothing or other local expressions of new life in Christ - can further unfold the meaning of the *ordo* itself?

##### *c) Concerning incorporation into the life of the community:*

- Can we assist the baptized to find their place in the mission and service of the church, the expression of their baptismal vocation?
- Can we enable a life-long learning of the faith, by all people - clergy and laity, old and young, old-timers and newcomers - together, side by side in our churches?
- Can sponsors and catechists continue to accompany children baptized in infancy in a post-baptismal catechesis which helps them to appropriate their own baptismal gift of faith?
- Can we find occasions to remember our baptism, celebrate its powerful gift and renew our own promises, occasions which may occur in persons' lives at moments of crisis, change or renewal?
- Can we see every Sunday eucharist as the repeated remembrance and renewal of baptism?

And can we do these things by teaching, love and invitation, opening up and strengthening what is already in our churches, and not by constraint and compulsion?

26. In matters of *recognition*, the *ordo* may assist the churches to ask themselves the following questions:

- Can we see this great pattern operative in our own and in other churches? Can we treasure ways each church may have been able to give special emphasis to certain parts of the *ordo* - even while calling each other to a recovery of fullness in our understanding and practice?
- Can churches which baptize infants trust in the blessing and dedication of children among those who baptize only believers who can answer for themselves, seeing these children as in a rich catechumenate of long duration?
- Can churches which baptize believers who can answer for themselves trust the recovery of catechumenate and life-long learning among the churches which baptize infants, as a sign of their baptismal seriousness?
- Can all churches, whatever their formula of baptism, acknowledge that the whole *ordo* and all of its catechesis must express the triune name?
- Can we ensure that our catechesis teaches, and our rites express, that baptism is always into Christ's whole body?

And can such reflections and new patterns of thinking about baptism as *ordo* foster new, creative and trustful ways to approach old controversies over re-baptism?

27. Our answers to these enquiries may lead the churches to ask themselves new questions which could change their way of living with one another:

- Are there matters of renewed baptismal practice which divided local churches could begin undertaking together?
- Could a renewed catechumenate (the process of forming in faith) or a training of catechists and sponsors be undertaken together?
- Could we be present at each other's baptisms, whether through representatives or as entire congregations?
- Could we do baptism together, side-by-side, at great feasts we have in common?
- Could local churches provide a common baptismal certificate?
- Could we consider constructing a common font or baptistry for the local churches in a town or village?

And could we begin to do some of these things out of love, out of new insights into the *ordo*, out of the conviction that through baptism the Holy Spirit ever draws us into *koinonia*, into the very unity and life of the triune God?

## Appendix II

### Faith and Order Work on Baptism – The Development of this Study Document

1. This text stands within a process of reflection on worship in relation to the search for Christian unity. This reflection has been pursued in meetings organized by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and in other ecumenical contexts, including the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg and the Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church.
2. Stirred not least by the experience of worship at its fifth world conference in at Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1993, Faith and Order has turned anew to the study of worship as an essential part of its work for the unity of the church. It has gained a greater awareness of the liturgical dimension of the life of the church, and of the importance of closer engagement with liturgists and worship leaders as well as with theologians.<sup>21</sup>
3. Baptism, and the mutual recognition of baptism, has been at the heart of this renewed focus on worship in relation to Christian unity. In Santiago de Compostela there was a widespread response to the daily worship service in which the churches' delegates "affirmed and celebrated together 'the increasing mutual recognition of one another's baptism as the one baptism into Christ'".<sup>22</sup> The conference then recommended that Faith and Order "put in process for consideration by the churches a way for the mutual recognition of baptism".<sup>23</sup>
4. An initial consultation held in Ditchingham, England in 1994 reflected broadly on the *ordo* (basic patterns or structures) of Christian life and worship as "an ancient yet ever-new pattern which the churches already possess, which they are invited to recognize in each other and to renew in themselves";<sup>24</sup> discussed criteria for the inculturation of worship; and reviewed actual experiences of worship fostering the search for unity at the local level.<sup>25</sup>
5. These themes of the *ordo* and inculturation of worship were taken up at a consultation in Faverges, France in 1997 specifically in relation to *baptism*. (Significantly, recalling *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry's* linking of baptism with the whole of the Christian life,<sup>26</sup> the consultation also introduced a new line of reflection on the understanding, and experience, of baptism as normative for Christian *ethics*.) Central to the discussion in Faverges was notion - taken up from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*<sup>27</sup> - of the broader "*ordo* of baptism" as a life-long process of growth, within the Christian community, into Christ.
6. A planning meeting was held at the Communauté de Grandchamp in Areuse, Switzerland in 1998 to review Faith and Order and other ecumenical work on baptism<sup>28</sup> and to plan future work on baptism

<sup>21</sup> See the survey in Janet Crawford, Faith and Order Work on Worship: An Historical Survey", and Worship at Previous Faith and Order World Conferences", in *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, 4-11 January 1994, Crêt-Bérard, Switzerland*, Faith and Order Paper No. 167, Geneva, WCC, 1994, pp. 45-52 and 53-59.

<sup>22</sup> See the *Worship Book, Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, 1993*, English, pp. 10-12; Spanish, pp. 30-33; German, pp. 51-54; French, pp. 72-75, as noted in "Report of the [Faverges] Consultation", in *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, ed. by Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, Faith and Order Paper No. 184, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1999, para. 68, p. 95. The Report has also appeared in *Studia Liturgica*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1999, pp. 1-28. See Janet Crawford, "Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Challenge of our Common Baptism" [Moderator's Introduction to the Consultation], in *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, 1993*: Faith and Order Paper No. 166, Geneva, WCC, 1994, pp. 242-52.

<sup>24</sup> *So We Believe, So We Pray: Towards Koinonia in Worship*, ed. by Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, Faith and Order Paper No. 171, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1995, para. 7, p. 7. The Letter and Report from the consultation also appear in *Studia Liturgica*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1995, pp. 1-31.

<sup>25</sup> *So We Believe, So We Pray: Towards Koinonia in Worship*, pp. 2-26.

<sup>26</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, "Baptism", para. 10, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> "Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth into Christ". *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, "Baptism", para. 9, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> For other work noted see *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, ed. by Michael Root and Risto Saarinen (Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France), Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and Geneva, WCC Publications, 1998; the

within the context of Faith and Order work as a whole. The meeting offered detailed proposals to the WCC Faith and Order Commission for further work in the following six areas:

- different understandings of sacrament as central to the differences among the churches in their understanding and practice of baptism (significantly, the churches in their official responses to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* had identified issues of sacrament and sacramentality as a crucial topic for further work<sup>29</sup>);
- the “baptismal *ordo*” (involving formation in faith, the water rite, and incorporation into the life of the community) as a basis for mutual recognition among the churches;
- the churches’ current liturgical practice related to baptism;
- the churches’ current pre- and post-baptismal practice of catechism and Christian formation;
- baptism as normative for the understanding and practice of Christian ethics;
- the relation between the Christian identity formed through baptism and ethnic and national identities.<sup>30</sup>

7. The Faith and Order Standing Commission at its meeting in Toronto, Canada in 1999 identified how these tasks were to be carried forward. Proposals (a) on sacrament and (b) on *ordo* were to be addressed through a consultation, and possibly further work, within the study programme on worship.<sup>31</sup> The present text “One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition of Christian Initiation” is the result of that work, as described in paragraphs 9ff. below.

8. (Proposals (c) on current baptismal liturgical practice, and (d) on catechetical practice and Christian formation, would also be done within the study programme on worship, but through correspondence with the churches. Proposal (e) would be taken up through correspondence with ethicists, and (f) would be addressed within the Faith and Order study programme on Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and the Search for the Unity of the Church.<sup>32</sup>)

9. The work on sacrament and on “*ordo*” in relation to baptism (proposals (a) and (b) as described in paras. 6 and 7 above) was pursued at a consultation held in Prague, Czech Republic 29 May- 4 June 2000. The meeting was charged with furthering the mutual recognition of baptism among the churches by:

- working on the churches’ understandings of sacrament in relation to baptism, and on the “*ordo* of baptism” (its structure or pattern), as a help to wider mutual recognition of baptism;
- clarifying terms and issues central to the discussion, particularly the relation between the mutual recognition of baptism and sharing in the eucharist; and
- identifying areas for further work by the churches, both individually and together.

10. Participants included some 22 persons hailing from many and diverse countries and cultures, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Australia, Korea, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Czech Republic, Romania, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, and the United States. A wide range of churches were represented including Anglican, Armenian Orthodox [Cilicia], Baptist, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Czech Brethren, Hussite, Kimbanguist, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox Church in America, Presbyterian/Reformed, Roman Catholic, Romanian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox [India], and United.

11. The consultation met at a Capucin (Roman Catholic) retreat centre near Hradcany Castle in the heart of Prague. Thanks are offered to the staff of the house, who welcomed us courageously as the

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“Chicago Statement on Worship and Culture: Baptism and Rites of Life Passage”, paras. 2.1 -2.4, in *Baptism, Rites of Passage, and Culture*, ed. by S. Anita Stauffer, Geneva, Lutheran World Federation, Department for Theology and Studies, 1998; and in addition *Eucharistic Worship in Ecumenical Contexts: The Lima Liturgy - and Beyond*, ed. by Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1998; the section “Celebrations of the Eucharist in Ecumenical Contexts: A Proposal” (pp. 29-35) has appeared in *Studia Liturgica*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1997, pp. 94-101.

<sup>29</sup> See *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and the Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No. 149, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990, pp. 42, 110, and 143-147.

<sup>30</sup> *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Board, 15-24 June 1999, Toronto, Canada*, Faith and Order Paper No. 185, Geneva, Faith and Order, 1999, pp. 100-107.

<sup>31</sup> See “Worship in Relation to the Unity of the Church”, in *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Board, 15-24 June 1999, Toronto, Canada*, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> “Worship in Relation to the Unity of the Church”, in *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Board, 15-24 June 1999, Toronto, Canada*, p. 84.

first international – and the first ecumenical - group which they had hosted, and to local participants and hosts, particularly Rev. Dr David Holeyton, Mr Joseph König and Mr Pavel Kolar.

12. The results of the consultation were brought together in the document “The Sacramental Dimension of Baptism” (the “Prague text”).

13. The Faith and Order Standing Commission at its meeting in Matanzas, Cuba in October 2002 reviewed and commented on the Prague text, and directed that (a) it be circulated for additional reaction and comment and (b) a consultation be held to revise the text.<sup>33</sup> The Prague text was then sent to a wide range of churches, ecumenical bodies, study centres, and individuals (theologians, liturgists, pastors and worship leaders). Almost 50 responses were received, many offering detailed and substantial suggestions for improving the Prague text, as well as identifying areas for further work on issues related to recognition of baptism.

14. The revision of the Prague text was carried out at a second consultation at Faverges, France 5-12 October 2001. This consultation was charged with furthering the mutual recognition of baptism among the churches by:

- developing the Prague text in light of comments made by standing commission and within the response process;
- clarifying the text where necessary and, where appropriate, making it more accessible to the reader;
- identifying areas for future work by the churches, both individually and together.

15. The meeting included some 17 theologians, liturgists, pastors and worship leaders from such widely-diverse countries and cultures as Argentina, Belgium, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A wide range of churches and traditions were represented including Anglican, Baptist, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Greek Orthodox, Methodist, Orthodox Church in America, Reformed/ Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Romanian Orthodox, and Syrian Orthodox [India].

16. The consultation met (as had the first baptism consultation in 1997) in the Château de Faverges, a family-oriented vacation and conference centre overlooking the town of Faverges, in Haute Savoie, France. Thanks are offered to Ms Catherine Albert, director of the centre and to her staff for their warm welcome and professionalism in supporting our work.

17. The result of this consultation was the text “One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition of Christian Initiation” (the “Faverges II” text). As a basis for further work in the study, this text replaced that which had been produced in Prague in 2000.

18. The Faverges II text was sent to a wide range of liturgists, theologians, pastors and churches, including a number of persons who had been active in earlier stages of the study process. These correspondents were asked to offer suggestions for revision of the text, particularly in four areas which also emerged from discussions at the Faith and Order Standing Commission meeting in Gazzada<sup>34</sup> as needing further work: (1) baptism as decisive event, but within a process of life-long growth into Christ, (2) the necessary elements (an *ordo*) of Baptism, (3) the relation of baptism to the eucharist, and (4) the role of the Holy Spirit, both at the moment of baptism and throughout the believer’s whole life. Some forty responses were received, including many detailed proposals for improvement of the text.

19. At its meeting in Strasbourg in 2003, The Standing Commission also worked on the text, being asked to focus especially on the four topics given in §18 above.<sup>35</sup> In addition to suggestions for structural revision of the text, comments were offered mainly on topics (1) and (2) above.

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<sup>33</sup> See *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, 30 September – 7 October 2000, Matanzas, Cuba*, Faith and Order Paper No. 188, Geneva, Faith and Order, 2000, pp. 65-66.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, 9 – 16 January 2002, Gazzada, Italy*, Faith and Order Paper No. 191, Geneva, Commission on Faith and Order, 2002, pp. 45-64.

<sup>35</sup> *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, 3 – 10 July 2003, Strasbourg, France*, Faith and Order Paper No. 193, Geneva, Commission on Faith and Order, 2004, pp. 18-24, esp. p. 23.

20. On the basis of these inputs the text was revised significantly, producing the document "One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition of Christian Initiation (Favergeres II/Revised)".

21. This text was presented to the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in July/August 2004, where extensive comments were received both in plenary session and in regionally-based discussion groups.

22. The present document, "One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition" (FO/2004:30 Revised), is substantially that presented to the Plenary Commission in Kuala Lumpur. The most visible change is that the term "Christian Initiation" has been removed from the title. This was done in view of comments made in Kuala Lumpur, and pending further discussion of the most appropriate title for the document. In addition, some formatting changes have been made which do not affect its content.

23. Two stages of work on the present text are therefore outstanding: first, the development of topics (3) and (4) from § 18 above, on baptism in relation to the eucharist and to the Holy Spirit; and second, the full consideration of the comments received from the Plenary Commission at Kuala Lumpur.

24. The present document will be reviewed by the Faith and Order Standing Commission at its meeting in June, 2005.