

A Catholic Contribution Toward Revising *The Nature and Mission of the Church*

INTRODUCTION

From a Catholic perspective, the present version of the ecclesiological text of Faith and Order, now known as *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper 198, hereafter NMC), has many positive qualities. Some of these repeat its impressive predecessor *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper 181), while others represent positive advances over that text. It is clear that NMC builds upon many earlier steps toward agreement about the Church, both those of Faith and Order – one thinks of the ecclesiological implications of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* of 1982, of *Confessing the One Faith* of 1991, of *Church and World* of 1990, of the various General Assembly statements prepared by Faith and Order, especially those of New Dehli, Nairobi and Canberra, and of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order devoted to the theme of Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness and which set in motion the present work of Faith and Order on ecclesiology – as well as the work of many bilateral dialogues, which have increasingly taken up discussion of the nature and mission of the Church. Among the points in this text that Catholics welcome are the following:

- the change in title with the inclusion of and treatment of mission,
- the reorganization of the chapters by integrating the *koinonia* material into the first chapter and the consequent overall structure of the document into four chapters,
- the way the text begins by recalling the goal of visible unity,
- the enriched use of scripture,
- the relation of the Church to the persons of the Trinity,
- the embrace of the language of instrument and sign,
- the *effort* to maintain balance between an historical and an eschatological understanding of the Church;
- the text’s communal rather than individualistic view of salvation,
- the additions about the ministry of the whole people of God, and
- the additions about conciliarity and primacy.

If our present contribution to continuing work on the text seems to give prominence to possible further changes, it is only because we believe that this is the way in which we can make our most constructive contribution to its ongoing improvement. As the Catholic Response to BEM in 1987 pointed out, our church was and remains convinced that ecumenical dialogue needs to focus more and more on ecclesiology¹ and the current Faith and Order ecclesiology project seems to be one of the most promising results of the whole BEM process. Our hope remains that Faith and Order’s work on ecclesiology can lead to a kind of convergence text similar to that which BEM represented regarding Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. We hope that our many suggestions for improvement in the present contribution will not obscure the fact that we do appreciate the many positive traits already to be found in NMC.

¹ “It is our conviction that the study of ecclesiology must come more and more into the centre of the ecumenical dialogue.” From the response under the heading “Roman Catholic Church,” in Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. VI, “Faith and Order Paper 144,” Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988, 1-40 at 5.

In the following pages, we have tried to keep in mind the four questions addressed to the churches in paragraph 8 of NMC, that is 1) concerning the correctness of its identification of our common ecclesiological convictions and the issues which continue to divide us, 2) concerning whether the text reflects an emerging consensus on the nature and mission of the Church; 3) regarding concerns of our church which are not adequately addressed; and 4) concerning the future development of the text. Since the text is still in the state of revision, it did not seem appropriate at this time to consider the first part of the fourth question, concerning concrete steps toward unity in light of this text. There seems to be a certain similarity between the first two questions, which call for an assessment of the text's positive qualities, and the last two, which call for the identification of points not adequately treated and suggestions for improvement. The following contribution will not follow the four questions slavishly but, instead, will keep these questions in mind as it addresses the basic content of NMC, both those aspects which we positively appreciate and those aspects which we feel need to be treated in a more adequate way. Before beginning our comments on the individual chapters and numbered paragraphs, we would like to offer four general suggestions as overall observations which could well serve the Faith and Order Commission in its revision of the entire text.

The Catholic Response to BEM singled out three general themes that, in light of BEM, seemed to call for deeper study and, hopefully, convergence: sacramentsacramentality, apostolic tradition and authority.² Faith and Order's succinct, yet very helpful summary of the BEM process, on the basis of an overview of all of the responses, included a chapter entitled "Major Issues Demanding Further Study: Provisional Considerations," that individuated three themes rather similar to those urged by the Catholic response: A) Scripture and Tradition, B) Sacrament and Sacramentality and C) Perspectives on Ecclesiology in the Churches' Responses.³ *The Nature and Mission of the Church* clearly has taken up these topics, though equal attention has not been given to each of them. As a first general suggestion for the next phase of work on the text we would hope that the way in which these themes have been addressed could be analyzed and that the commission examine whether further progress toward greater convergence could be achieved about sacrament, tradition, authority and other ecclesiological issues. If further convergence does not seem possible on these topics, could further precision about the precise areas of difference be sought?

A second general suggestion concerns the methodology used. NMC's separation of the main body of the text containing common affirmations from the boxes illustrating remaining differences or disagreements is useful. Nevertheless, we believe that it would be desirable to reflect upon and, if possible, make explicit the relation between these two levels of discourse. As it now stands, one sometimes gets the impression that what is affirmed in the agreed sections seems to be retracted or called into question in the boxes. Do the differences or disagreements discussed in the boxes express different theological interpretations of the common convictions included in the main body of the text? Might the fact that we do not today see the compatibility of these differences still allow for the possibility that we may come to see them as compatible in the future? Or are these differences so contradictory that they substantially limit the extent and importance of the convergences recorded in the text as a whole? Most Christians seem to agree that communion between churches includes diversity and that diversity can be seen even as a necessary dimension of unity. To express more clearly the relation between unity and diversity perhaps the text should consider using that method which, in some bilateral dialogues, has led to what has been called "differentiated consensus." This method allows one to affirm that, on the basis of an acknowledged agreement in the profession of fundamental truths of the Christian faith, differing affirmations, which do not directly

² *Ibid.*, 6-9.

³ See *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, "Faith and Order Paper No. 149," Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990, 131-151.

contradict one another and which may even compliment one another, are possible according to the unique sensitivities of various theological traditions. Such diverse, yet non-contradictory, affirmations are able, nevertheless, to reflect the same Christian faith. In *The Nature and Mission of the Church* there does not seem to have been sufficient reflection on such a question. As a result, a deeper grasp of the relation between unity and diversity seems to be lacking.

A third general suggestion concerns a more extensive use of the previous work of Faith and Order and of the bilateral documents. Greater reference to earlier agreements will enhance the authority of this ecclesiology text. Many bilateral documents have taken up ecclesiological themes in recent years, sometimes producing particularly felicitous formulations about one or another aspect of the Church. Quoting some such formulations could improve both the content and authority of the present text.

In general, perhaps a bit more attention to eschatology and to the Church's relation to the Kingdom of God throughout the four chapters of the text could deepen its theological content and allow for a more hopeful vision of Church. Some helpful insights into this topic can be seen in the recently published report of the third phase of international dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches – *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*⁴.

COMMENTS ON THE TEXT

Concerning the Introduction of NMC

Numbers 5-7 in the current "Introduction" speak of the methodological question mentioned above. As it stands now, it could appear to be trying to juxtapose two different methods: the main body of text follows a convergence method and seeks a common outlook on various aspects of our fundamental belief about the Church, while the boxes seem to follow a comparative method of listing side by side apparently incompatible positions. Certainly it is valuable to clarify remaining differences that need further dialogue. At the same time, if the method mentioned above is adopted, some revision of these paragraphs would be called for.

Chapter I: The Church of the Triune God

Common ecclesiological convictions, as well as issues that continue to divide us (1st question of par. 8)

It seems that the present text does identify a significant number of our common ecclesiological convictions. To avoid repetition, these will be listed below in our response to the question concerning emerging convergences. We believe that further revisions should ask whether it may be possible to increase the number of common convictions as well as to explore if and how our common convictions may relate to our differences. Not many differences appear in Chapter One, which currently has only one box (The Institutional Dimension of the Church and the Work of the Holy Spirit [after paragraph 13]). We believe that the differences contained in that box are over-stated, such as the suggestion that seeing sacraments as effective signs need be in contrast of seeing them as witnesses to the activity of the Spirit, or contrasting confidence in institutional continuity with reform of institutional structures. If, as we wish to suggest, a second box be moved up to Chapter One – that concerning the Church as sacrament – (see below comment on par. 45) then other differences will appear in this chapter. But, once again, as our comments below will show, we hope that there is room for more convergence about this theme and that the current box overstates the differences or at least could explore the possibilities of greater convergence.

⁴ Printed in *Reformed World* 57, 2007, 105-207.

Emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the Church (2nd question of par. 8)

There is much evidence of emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the Church in Chapter One. Whether the participle “emerging” is always appropriate in describing these points is a valid question, since some of these common convictions may well have been shared by the churches for a long time. But these common convictions or elements of an emerging convergence would include at least the following rather significant points:

- the fact that the foundations of our understanding of the Church are rooted in Scripture — the “highest authority in matters of faith” to the interpretation of which tradition is indispensable (cf. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, par. 79) — without implying that we subscribe to the principle of *sola scriptura*, since we could not do so for serious reasons that are related not only to faith but also to commonly held philosophical and hermeneutical principles;
- the profound relation of the Church to the Father’s plan of salvation and to the missions of the Son and the Spirit;
- the fact that the Church exists as a realization in history of God’s salvific plan and is meant by God to serve as a sign and instrument of the realization of the Kingdom;
- the legitimacy of diverse descriptions of the Church as reflected in the diversity of ecclesial images, reflections and structures in the New Testament;
- the prominence of the three biblical images which relate the Church to the persons of the Trinity: the people of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit;
- the very positive embrace of the **notion of koinonia/communion** as a fitting way of describing both the nature of the Church and the goal of the ecumenical movement in seeking to cooperate with God’s action to restore full visible unity according to his will;
- the essential missionary nature of the Church;
- the relevance of the mission of the Church to the healing of broken human relationships and to serving as a force for promoting justice, peace and the protection of the environment;
- the acceptance of the essential traits of the Church which were discerned in the course of tradition and expressed in the four notes of Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed (so named from the ecumenical councils held in 325 and 381): one, holy, catholic and apostolic;
- the acknowledgement that, in line with biblical teaching (cf. Eph. 1 and 5), the Church is of the nature of “mystery” in such a way that her visible and organizational dimensions should not and cannot ultimately be divorced from the actions of divine grace which are at the very heart of the reality of the Church.

Significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed and Suggestions for the future development of this text (3rd and 4th questions of par. 8)

Some slight changes in the subtitles of Section “A. The Nature of the Church,” could produce a significant improvement in the text. As it stands now, the subtitle “II. Biblical Insights” appears only before paragraph 14, even though there are abundant references to the Scriptures in paragraphs 9-13. In fact, paragraphs 9-33 are all strongly biblical and somewhat Trinitarian. For this reason, we would suggest changing the subtitles in the following way:

- (A) The Nature of the Church: Biblical and Theological Perspectives
- (I) The Church as gift of God: Creation of the Word and of the Holy Spirit (creatura

- Verbi et Creatura Spiritus) (paragraphs 9-13)
- (II) The Church in relation to the Persons of the Trinity (paragraphs 14-23)
 - (a) The Church as People of God (paragraphs 18-19)
 - (b) The Church as the Body of Christ (paragraphs 20-21)
 - (c) The Church as Temple of the Holy Spirit (paragraphs 22-23)
- (III) The Church as Koinonia/Communion: paragraphs (paragraphs 24-33)

We believe not only that this would make clearer the role of the Bible in the whole of Section A of Chapter One, but also it could highlight to some degree the theme of koinonia, without in any way separating it from the other themes. The reason for so highlighting koinonia within a distinct section, still included in this biblical and Trinitarian chapter, is that it has become a favoured ecclesiological concept in the work of Faith and Order and of the World Council of Churches. While emerging even earlier, this theme was embraced in a prominent way by the Canberra Statement of 1991 and the Fifth World Conference of 1993. It has also played a central role in the work of many recent bilateral dialogues. Moreover, many churches have recourse to this notion in their own ecclesiological doctrines or theologies. Perhaps some notes to or citations of ecumenical texts which have produced fundamentally converging statements about koinonia could be included. As such, the text could be seen as even more explicitly adopting communion as a golden thread echoing the bilateral dialogues and the commitment of both the World Council and Faith and Order to this concept.

Section “B. The Mission of the Church” is a very welcome addition, echoing and fleshing out the very important change in the title of the overall text (from “purpose” to “mission”). At the same time its eight paragraphs (34-42) seem to repeat some of the same ideas. It would be good to review and bring out more explicitly the precise point being made in each paragraph, eliminating any repetition.

Concerning **paragraph 9**: the text misquotes scripture: Jn 3:16 does not say that the Father so loved the world but that God so loved the world. To be more accurate, especially in sensitivity to the convictions of those who are quite attached to the literal words of Scripture, why not reformulate it in a manner such as: ... by the Father, the “God who so loved the world ...”

Par. 9: it is advisable to use a different text for the Holy Spirit other than Jn 14:26, which presents the Spirit along the lines of a school master. Instead move 1 Cor 12:3 up from the beginning of par. 11, to emphasize that it is the Spirit who brings the saving mission of the Son to realization in persons and communities by “applying” or interiorizing the good news of Salvation in Christ. The Holy Spirit engenders faith in Christ proclaimed: confession of Christ as Lord is only by the Holy Spirit – 1 Cor 12:3 – and the Spirit made the word a vital reality in the hearts of those who heard the apostle in Acts 10:44-48.

Par. 10: the commission might consider replacing the word “service” with “ministry” so as to acknowledge that ministry is not simply a reality belonging to the elements of communion addressed later in Chapter Three but also needs to be considered when the text deals with the essential nature of the Church [see the comment below on the box on “The Institutional Dimension...”].

Par. 11: replace the overly optimistic “full accomplishment” in the last line with an expression from the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration*: “.. and renews [their] hearts while equipping and calling [them] to good works.”

Par. 11: There is a strong treatment of the Holy Spirit who “forms Christ in believers and in their community” here, though it is odd that there is no specific link made between the Holy Spirit and the gift of *communion/koinonia*, e.g. by reference to 2 Cor 13:13.

Par. 12: It would be good to nuance the theological reason underlying the four notes. Church unity stems primarily from the unicity of the God’s one plan for the salvation of the whole human race across time and space. Holiness should be related to the fact that the Church is the Body of Christ, who is without sin: God is holy, the Body of Christ is holy, the temple of the Holy Spirit is holy. The note of catholicity should express not only “fullness” as

it does now but also universality, which is the other side of the coin of the fact that unity is based in God's one plan for all. Catholicity stems from the fact that this one plan embraces the totality of all human beings in time and space. Apostolicity is not only based on the fact that the Word is sent by the Father, but also that the prophets and apostles and their successors are sent. The Lutheran-Catholic text *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2007) could be referenced as evidence of significant agreement among Christians that "apostolic endowments are central in the life of our churches."

The material in the box entitled "The Institutional Dimension of the Church and the Work of the Holy Spirit" (**after par. 13**) invites the question of whether NMC really addresses the significance of the visibility of the Church. How does the hesitancy about institution remain in harmony with the affirmation of the Church as both a divine and a human reality in the sentence which precedes the box? Perhaps further reflection on the incarnational nature of the economy of salvation could help. The box suggests that preaching and sacraments can be seen either as "means" or as "simply witnesses." Being "means" or "witnesses" need not be mutually exclusive; preaching and sacraments can be both. The ordained ministry is introduced here for the first time and in a problematic way. More should be said about ordained ministry at the end of **par. 10** as part of the fundamental structure of the Church related to its foundation by Christ. Against the objection that some Christian communities may resist the mention of ministry as fundamental to the Church one might recall that all have some forms of ministry, and Paul noted in Rom 10:14-15 that one can't believe without hearing the proclamation or hear it without a preacher. The use of the impersonal pronoun "it" instead the personal pronoun "she" seems to opt for an institutional view of the Church, that may reflect some protestant mindsets but which seems little supported by Scripture, against the more biblical Orthodox, Anglican and Catholic view of the Church as the spouse of Christ. We believe that the commission should reconsider its choice of avoiding the feminine pronoun when speaking of the Church. At the very least, it should be acknowledged that there are various views among Christians concerning this issue and that many feel that the use of the pronoun "it" for the Church savours of an ecclesiological mindset that is less open to the fully personal nature of the Church. If some contend that such a way of speaking about the Church is offensive to women, an attempt could be made to consider how such language does not intend and need not come across as such.

Finally, this box seems to posit a sharp opposition between institutional continuity and reform, which implies some break in continuity. We think that this point needs to be expressed in a more nuanced way. There certainly can and have been many institutional changes – either in the sense of development of new structures or new ways of exercising ministry or of conversion from behavior contrary to the Gospel – which could be fully compatible with basic institutional continuity. Those who affirm the need for continuity in apostolic succession of bishops do not rule out reform for the sake of continuity in apostolic faith. We believe that the Church, "at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal," as expressed by Vatican II (cf. *Lumen gentium* 8). We see no contradiction between institutional continuity and reform. The text within the box seems to suggest that some Christians believe that there is such a contradiction. Catholics fully share the desire for and promotion of reform. Reform is holy, in that it responds to Jesus' call to repent and believe in the Gospel. But it does not contradict institutional continuity with those fundamental elements of the Christian community which emerged in the course of tradition but which stem ultimately from the foundations laid by Jesus Himself, as attested to in the inspired words of the New Testament. Fidelity to the New Testament includes both institutional continuity and reform. Since the Church comes from Christ, who followed the plan of the Father in the Spirit, we must prize continuity; since we are sinners, we must reform our lives. Furthermore it would be helpful explicitly to assert that there is no contradiction or necessary opposition between institution and charism. The development of doctrine – a theme appreciated by Catholic theology and discipline and by such notable

figures as John Henry Newman – could illustrate the Catholic acceptance of the possibility and need for reform. Such development presupposes that the current expression of faith and practice is always open to refinement on the basis of a more adequate understanding of God's Word and formulation of its meaning for today. Finally, perhaps further reflection about the commonly accepted biblical material on the Church's relation to the missions of the Word and of the Spirit and her human and divine dimensions might allow for greater convergence about the harmony between continuity and change.

Par. 16: "It is essential to acknowledge the wide diversity of insights into the nature and mission of the Church [in the NT]..." seems to overstate the point. Would it not be more accurate to state modestly that "it is important to" or "one can" acknowledge such diversity?

Par. 18: twice uses the word "communion" in this paragraph on the Church as the "people of God" in order to express the idea of covenant. Since "communion" is not spoken of in the sections on the Body of Christ (20-21) or Temple of the Holy Spirit (22-23) and forms a section in itself, might it not be best to leave it out here and save it for the part devoted to communion?

Par. 18-19: God's fidelity to the covenant should be more explicitly brought out in these paragraphs. This could provide a basis for a more hopeful view of God's presence and action within the Church, helping to offset the more gloomy vision which seems to come through, especially later in Chapter Two.

Par. 20: the text states that "Christ is the abiding head of his body"; it would be good to add in parentheses references to Eph 1:23 and Col 1:18 on Christ being head of the body. In addition, a reformulation of the final sentence could make more precise what are "these two dimensions" which are referred to.

Par. 21: speaks of the Church's vocation to be "the servant of the Lord," an expression used in the Scripture for Mary (Lk 1:38,48), but not for the Church. Perhaps ecumenical sensitivity to communities which prefer a close following of Scripture would advise against using that expression here for the Church.

Par. 21: The second citation should read 1 Cor 10:16-17, instead of just 1 Cor 10:16, since it notes that *because* there is one bread we (who share that bread), although many, are one body, the ecclesial body of Christ. This is central to the "Eucharistic ecclesiology" of major Orthodox and Catholic authors. By making the sacramental action central to church unity, they escape undue emphasis upon a juridical bond or submission to certain authority figures.

Par. 24: It would be helpful to add a note with references to some bilaterals on communion, adding more collective witness to and authority to what is being affirmed.

Par. 30: the Galatians reference should be included in the parentheses with 2 Cor 5:17 and at the end of the sentence one should insert another set of parentheses with the verses 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:20-22; 3:16-17; Co12:6-7.

Par. 34-41: could not some reference be made in this section to God's saving activity on the universal scale of the whole human family? This does not involve stating or even suggesting that all people are saved, but it implies that all humans are offered, in ways known to God, the real possibility of being in Christ. Such a consideration, even if it were only briefly indicated, would serve to rightly frame a good theological understanding of the mission of the church. The church's mediation of saving communion with God through word and sacrament to those who confess Christ is not the only way in which God's salvation comes to human beings.

Par. 38: a parallel could be drawn between this text – "the Church ... signifies, participates in, and anticipates the new humanity God wants" – and the Orthodox-Catholic, *The Mystery of the Church...* (1982) 11,3 – "The ecclesial community is .. called to be the outline of a human community renewed."

Par. 45: saying that "the visible organizational structures of the Church must be seen and judged ... in the light of God's gifts of salvation" suggests that those structures are of merely human origin, while some of the visible structure of the Church is of divine institution and itself part of God's gifts of salvation. It would be more in line with this to use a more

respectful formulation than “must be seen and judged,” such as “appreciated and evaluated,” which still conveys the possibility of a critical approach to structures, without however suggesting that nothing of them has its origin in Christ, which the word “judged” seems to presuppose. Also, a link could be made between this paragraph and the Orthodox-Catholic, *The Mystery of the Church...* (1982) II,1, which states: “The eucharist ... understood in the light of the Trinitarian mystery is the criterion for the functioning of the life of the church as a whole.” Finally, it would be useful to mark how these structures are intended to promote communion by adding to the end of the paragraph a short phrase such as “and of the promoting of communion.”

Shift and Content of the box on “Church as ‘Sacrament?’”: It seems unfortunate that the box entitled “Church as ‘Sacrament?’” appears toward the beginning of Chapter II instead of after the final section of Chapter I, which is entitled “C. The Church as Sign and Instrument of God’s Intention and Plan for the World.” It would be much better to move the material which appears in this box up to the first chapter, which, for its part, currently has only one section treating controversial issues, that on the institutional dimension of the Church and the work of the Holy Spirit. For Catholics, there is a certain similarity in saying that the church is sign and instrument of God’s kingdom, on the one hand, and that the church is sacrament, on the other. Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, opens by describing the word “sacrament” precisely in terms of being “sign and instrument.” Here, it seems that the box and the text as a whole is dissociating these two notions: “sign and instrument” seems easily accepted by all; “sacrament” not. A good place for it would seem to be after paragraph 46, thus allowing the chapter to end not with a box but with the common affirmations of paragraph 47.

This first paragraph of this box affirms that “all churches agree that the church is sign and instrument,” but the text continues by affirming that not all attribute the concept of sacrament to the Church because not all understand the Church “as an effective sign of what God wishes.” Must one then conclude that the Church is considered by some as an ineffective instrument? Would not that mean admitting that Christ’s promise to remain always with his Church (Mt 28,20) becomes ineffective because of the sinfulness of Christians and that realization of the divine plan of salvation is thwarted?

It should not be forgotten that Vatican II was careful in applying the word “sacrament” to the Church, using the formulation “the Church is like a sacrament” (*veluti sacramentum*; cf. LG 1). This wording not only indicates an analogous similarity between the sacraments and the Church but also maintains a distinction between them. The first reason given in the box for not wanting to use the word “sacrament” to describe the church is to distinguish adequately between them. The need for such a distinction is fully shared by Catholic ecclesiology. Also the second reason given for avoiding the term “sacrament” in describing the church is the desire not to overlook the fact that members of the church are subject to sin. Again, Catholics fully share this desire without in any way seeing it as implying that the concept “sacrament” should not be applied in an analogous way to the Church.

Furthermore, the analogous use of the concept of sacrament for the Church and her activity intends to affirm that the Church owes all that she is and does to what God accomplishes in and through her. Thus the Church is understood totally in relation to God and God’s plan of salvation, for which God established her as sign and instrument. This perspective dominates Chapter One of Vatican II’s *Lumen gentium*, in which the notion of “sacrament” is synonymous with the word “mystery.” It seems that this fundamental outlook is shared by *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, which speaks of the Church as a prophetic sign oriented toward the Kingdom of God (cf. its paragraphs 43-47, especially 45). Perhaps by deepening the text’s reflection on the Church as mystery, room for further convergence on the Church as sacrament will open up.

In this context it is also possible to understand the affirmation drawn from Catholic theology that, in the celebration of the sacraments, the Church actualizes herself. The third paragraph states that “the sacraments are the means of salvation through which Christ

sustains the Church and not actions by which the Church realizes or actualizes itself...” This is understandable only if one thinks that the Church is not an end in itself. The self-actualization of the Church is always in service to the salvation of persons. Therefore we cannot accept language suggesting that church is an end in herself. A repeated theme in NMC is that the church is not an end but an instrument. If it is seen as an instrument and means by which God brings about the plan of salvation, why would not a more active role be possible, in such a way that, in complete dependence upon God, the Church responds to grace and thereby carries out, even if in a way affected by human weakness and sinful failures, the mission given to her to serve the coming of the kingdom? In actualizing herself and in responding to her true vocation, the Church realizes her mission as sign and instrument for the world.

In light of these considerations, one can appreciate the fact that, though discussed in the present Faith and Order text, the theme of the sacramentality of the Church does not seem to have reached the depth for which one might still hope. The sacramentality of the Church makes sense only in light of the mystery of Christ’s plan of salvation to reconcile the whole world. The Church is part of this plan; in the Church the revelation of God in Christ through the Spirit takes place so that the Church can proclaim this mystery of God to the world. The double character of the Church, which is mentioned in other places, of visibility and hidden mystery should not be overlooked.

The use of the word “sacrament” for the Church has often been discussed in dialogues between the Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation, even being considered as expressive of the fundamental difference between Catholic and Protestant ecclesiologies. While such an assessment may have some plausibility, still a sharp contrast between two supposedly contrasting views of Church runs the risk of generalizing in a way that is not entirely accurate. Rather than adequately specifying the precise differences between two sides, the potentialities and limitations of the application of the word “sacrament” to the reality of the Church point to a positive common task incumbent upon all of the various communities: how can we articulate the interrelation of the divine activity and the human activity within the Church in ways that are less simplistic and one-sided than those ways which, at the present time, tend to be unacceptable to dialogue partners?

Perhaps it would be very valuable in this section on sacramentality to point out and explain that what the Western church call “sacraments” the Eastern church call “mysteries.” This could highlight the profound link between the two concepts.

This section and box on sign, instrument and sacrament could be enriched if reviewed and revised in light of Chapter M “Kingdom – Church – Humanity,” of *Church and World*, “Faith and Order Paper 151,” Geneva 1990, especially its subsections “4. The Church as Mystery” (par. 16-23) and “5. The Church as Prophetic Sign” (par. 24-42). One might also incorporate something from *Confessing the One Faith*, such as par. 216: “Christians believe and confess with the Creed that there is an indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the *reality* of the Church. This is the testimony of the Scriptures. The origin of the Church is rooted in the plan of the Triune God for humankind’s salvation. The New Testament connects the event of its manifestation with Pentecost. The Church has its basis in the ministry of Christ himself who proclaimed the kingdom of God in word and deed, called men and women and sent them out, empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23), to proclaim the same message.”

Chapter II: The Church in History

Shared convictions and emerging convergences

The general perspective of the second chapter dealing with the church in history is to be welcomed as it highlights from the outset the tension between the eschatological and the historical dimensions of the church, offering in this way an interpretative key to the relationship between what in the church reflects the sanctity of God’s gift and what, in

contrast, is an expression of human limitation and sin. If an understanding of the church in an eschatological perspective is to be welcomed, and it does indeed constitute one of the main strengths of the entire document, one may ask whether the eschatological nature of the church and the anticipation already of this definitive reality might not lead to a greater focus on the *hope* that, despite its limitations and human failings, the church continues to be the effective means of fulfilling the divine plan of salvation.

This hope must cast light also on an understanding of the historical, sacramental and institutional reality of the church. In some parts of Chapter II, however, weakness and human sin are emphasized to the point that the solid theoretical basis of the sacramentality of the church begins to flounder in the description of the tangible ecclesial reality. From the Catholic point of view, this is not necessarily inevitable. The text does affirm that God's plan is fulfilled through the church, whose members are "still subject to the conditions of this world", that is, whose members are exposed to change, to various types of conditioning, and to the "power of sin" (**par. 50**). Thus, from the point of view of an understanding of the church it may be useful to bear in mind the insights of Catholics and Lutherans in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999): "[T]he enslaving power of sin is broken on the basis of the merit of Christ. It no longer is a sin that 'rules' the Christian for it is itself 'ruled' by Christ with whom the justified are bound in faith (**par. 29**).

While the concerns that are close to the heart of the Protestant tradition and that have frequently emerged in the ecumenical dialogues are understandable, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Incarnation means precisely the entry into the conditions of this world of the Son of God, who instituted the means of grace, the sacraments, in order to continue to convey his salvation to a fallen world. Thus, Christians cannot hold that sin and the conditions of this world render ineffective the salvation accomplished by Christ in the world and for the world. If Christ is the Saviour, we can confidently trust that he instituted sure means through which we can encounter him during our pilgrimage in this world. To lack such trust implies that our sinfulness is more powerful than his saving action.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that there is a difference between the perfect eschatological reality of the kingdom of God and its historical anticipation in the church and in the world. When considering the journey of the church in history, which has not yet reached its definitive end, there must be due regard for the need for conversion and repentance, which is rightly highlighted in the text. In distinguishing the historical reality of the church from the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom of God, one must not forget the degrees of the Church's partaking in the gifts of the eschaton: the word of God and the sacraments entrusted to the church partake of the eschatological truth and perfect holiness of God to a greater degree than do other forms of ecclesial life marked more deeply by historical contingency and human failing.

The Church and sin

The ways in which the witness to the church's essential unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity is hindered are carefully outlined in **par. 53—56**. At the same time, there is a balanced treatment of the "holy words the Church proclaims and the holy acts it performs in the name of God, the All—Holy" (**par. 54**), thus implicitly recognising that God's holiness triumphs over human sin and that His purpose cannot be thwarted by human weakness. In the same way, **par. 56** affirms that the church is continually called to renewed apostolicity which "does justice to the apostolic Gospel which is already given to it and works in it in the Spirit, making it the Church", thus recognising that the church is continually sustained and renewed as church by the work of the Holy Spirit.

In general, one should avoid considering the relationship between holiness and sin in the church in static terms. Indeed, Ephesians 5 speaks of the action of Christ that *purifies* his church so that it may become his unblemished bride. It is therefore through constant purification, through the sacraments and especially the eucharist and reconciliation, that Christ sustains his church so that it may be what he would want it to be for the salvation of

the world. The sanctifying action of Christ finds its counterpart in the action of the church that unceasingly calls for conversion and offers pardon. **Paragraphs 51—56** rightly speak of the simultaneous and paradoxical juxtaposition of divine gifts and human failings in the historical life of the church. It would be similarly important to highlight that most churches do not simply accept this imperfection as a *status quo*, but that they strive to overcome sin and mediocrity by such means as preaching, catechesis, bible study and the reinvigorating energy of charismatic figures. While reference to this is made in **par. 54**, which states that in the Church we find “God’s ever—new offer of forgiveness”, overall the section limits itself to reiterating what we already know about our sad failings without saying much about the dynamic commitment to renewal and ongoing formation which are so characteristic of the life of our churches. Thus, the two contradictory realities of holiness and sin must not be considered to co—exist in the church at the same level, but must take into account the process of reconciliation and sanctification to which the church is committed and which belongs to the heart of her very mission.

Unity in diversity

Paragraphs 57—58 include valuable insights into the relation between *koinonia* and mission, on the imperative of visible unity, and on the universal scale of the communion among Christians, which embraces both the past and the future and within which the current search for unity must be located. **Paragraph 62** cogently summarises the relationship between unity and diversity: authentic diversity in the life of communion must not be stifled; authentic unity must not be surrendered. **Paragraphs 64—65** are particularly interesting for their description of the life of communion and the interdependence of the local churches since antiquity, and for an appraisal of the ecclesial tradition as a witness to the ways in which the church has experienced communion in time and space. There can only be full agreement on the affirmation that communion is “not an optional extra but ... an essential aspect of what it means to be the Church” (**par. 65**). In Catholic teaching these themes are linked to the concept of “mutual interiority” between the universal church and the local/particular church and to the Petrine ministry (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communio in Notio* [1992], n.13). **The box following par. 66** on the local church accurately describes the different meanings of this term.

In contemporary ecumenical theology expressions such as ‘unity in diversity’ or ‘diversity in unity’ are universally recognised. It is an incontrovertible fact that Christian life and witness today are marked by a rich diversity, and this does not require any verification. In this light, one can appreciate the document’s perspective that authentic diversity must not be surrendered, and that it is an essential feature of ecclesial life. Each church in its particular context is responsible for unity and overall legitimate diversity in doctrine and practice. It is right, then, to affirm that diversity is not the same as division, but it is equally clear that there are limits to diversity. In this regard, the contemporary ecumenical debate presents a disparity in articulating the relationship between diversity and unity. The reason that the concept of diversity is so widely recognised today is that it reflects in an immediate way the current situation in the ecumenical movement. However, one has the impression that articulating this relationship with respect to a more fundamental understanding of unity and ecclesial communion has not yet been given sufficient attention; indeed, that the issue of church unity may even seem superfluous within a vision limiting itself to merely acknowledging and sanctioning diversity.

Communion among Christians and churches embraces diversity, which — from a certain point of view — is even an expression of unity. A more careful appraisal of the relationship between unity and diversity may benefit from a deeper reflection on the implications for an understanding of ecclesial communion of the concept of “differentiated consensus” spoken of in the introduction. In this regard, one must bear in mind the many ways to consider the issue of diversity in the church. The concept of diversity must first of all fall within a descriptive terminology in such a way that the different expressions of faith,

worship and common life are presented together with the different origins and meanings they have had and continue to have for given communities. However, theological reflection cannot limit itself to simply acknowledging and describing observable facts, but must be able to identify criteria for distinguishing between legitimate diversity from differences which damage or destroy the unity of the church.

For this reason, the discussion on the limits of diversity proposed by *The Nature and the Mission of the Church* undoubtedly captures an essential aspect of the reflection on the conceivable form of ecclesial communion. One could ask whether the use of the concept of 'limit' might not be unduly negative. In positive terms, the question of the limits of diversity could be considered in relation to the criteria for reciprocal recognition between different expressions of faith and Christian life, and to the conditions necessary for sharing the eucharist. The limit of diversity is not an arbitrary imposition unjustifiably limiting the legitimate plurality of Christian life and faith, but an essential condition for recognising our belonging to the one church of Christ. Similarly, the question of the relationship between diversity and unity implies a fundamental ecclesiological understanding of the relationship between the universal and particular church.

Catholic concerns and suggestions for improving the text

For the—reasons explained in part I, the text in **the box after par. 48** (*Church as "Sacrament"?*) should be included in the first chapter and considered in the light of the theme of the church as sign and instrument of God's purpose and plan for the world.

The box following par. 56 looks at the theme of 'the church and sin' and traces the different views on the theological traditions back to the New Testament passages of Ephesians 5 and 1 John 1:8-10. However, the fact that both of these passages are scriptural means that they cannot ultimately be in contradiction.

The formulation proposed for the relationship between holiness and sin in the church ("The relationship between sin and holiness in the Church is not a relationship of two equal realities, because sin and holiness do not exist on the same level") is better than the previous draft of the document as it recognises that holiness and sin in the church are not realities on the same level. Holiness and sin cannot be placed on the same level because holiness expresses what the church is called to be as the bride of Christ, while sin contradicts this vocation.

It is not clear why in this context there is a reference to 1 Cor 15:21-26, which does not speak explicitly about sin, but about death; the relationship between sin and death is established later on in 1 Cor 15:56. It may be more appropriate to cite Rom 6:1 ff., in particular 6:22-23.

Paragraph 59 rightly affirms that the new life of communion builds upon and transforms what was first given in creation. However, we have some perplexity with the affirmation that the new life of communion "never completely overcomes the distortions of the relationship between human beings caused by sin". While this may be so within our known historical context, Christian hope places its trust in the final victory of divine grace over sin. The words "confident anticipation" in the sharing in the fullness of communion in the life to come are too weak to express the trust engendered by faith, as Scripture tells us of a hope that "does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5) and Revelation closes with God's words "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). This is the hope of the church, and while it is highlighted at the end of the document (**par. 118**), it would be useful to give it greater emphasis in Chapter II in order to draw attention to God's effective action for our salvation and the salvation of the world.

With regard to communion within the diversity of the cultural expressions of faith and Christian life, the three points mentioned in **par. 61** should be considered more attentively; each of these three points relating the Gospel to cultural expressions raises problems of a differentiated nature, and it would be useful to clarify the distinct consequences that each would have in relation to the communion of faith. It may also be

worthwhile to reflect on the fact that the emergence of new divisions among the churches has accompanied the development of the ecumenical movement and its achievements. What are the underlying reasons and what relationship is there between these developments and the efforts of the ecumenical movement to attain a unity capable of withstanding the differences between cultures and ecclesial traditions?

It may be useful to move **par. 62**, which looks at the question of authentic diversity and its limits, so that it comes before **par. 61**, which considers the disintegration of ecclesial unity under the weight of cultural diversity.

Moreover, **par. 62** recognises that a pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity is one of the charisms given to the church by God. We believe that this ministry is exercised primarily in each local context by a bishop, although the text seems to refer in particular to the universal level and perhaps even to the ministry of a universal primate, echoing the way in which John Paul II described the Petrine ministry in his encyclical *Ut unum sint*. It may be useful if the document, which discusses universal primacy later on (**par. 103-104**), could at this point affirm that such a pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity is valid for the church not only at the local level, but also at the universal level.

The box following par. 63 offers valuable insights into a) the enriching contribution of diversity to communion and b) the openness required to make our journey one step at a time towards visible unity. The text in this box is rather vague as it refers to different points of view and different types of ecclesiology without identifying their respective sources. This indistinctness obstructs a serious discussion on these different points of view, to the extent that it is not clear what exact positions are being referred to.

The first type of ecclesiology — which “identifies the Church exclusively with one’s own community”, dismissing others “into an ecclesiological void” — could allude to the pre—Vatican II position of the Catholic Church; but one could ask who maintains this position today and for what reasons? Vatican II took up a profoundly different approach, recognising ecclesial “elements” in other churches and ecclesial communities (*cf. LG 8; UR 3*). Thus, it is incorrect to interpret the perspective based on the recognition of ecclesial elements in other churches and ecclesial communities simply as a modified version of the first type of ecclesiology, for in fact this perspective gives up the exclusivity that is its principal characteristic, while maintaining a criterion for distinguishing the *full* realisation of the church from those realities which — from the institutional point of view and not necessarily in terms of the efficacy of the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit — do not attain this fullness.

With regard to the second type of ecclesiology, the expression “*tropoi* theory” is unclear; perhaps *typoi* theory is meant?

The “third type” of ecclesiology is particularly elusive. In particular, there is a reference to churches in which “the Gospel is enveloped in official teachings and practices that contradict it”. To which churches is reference being made and for what reasons? In the absence of specific details, these elements are far too abstract and generic to be of any use.

It is certainly important for churches to define their self—understanding and their perception of the ecclesial status of other churches, but this must be done with great care, truthfulness and goodwill. In its present form, however, in addition to being very lengthy the text in this box runs the risk of yielding to misunderstanding regarding the profile of the diverse ecclesial understandings. It would be more useful if it were more concise and, if possible, more accurate.

Chapter III: The Life of Communion

Common ecclesiological convictions emerging

There is much evidence of an emerging common understanding of the Church in the elements of apostolic faith, worship and order that are described in this third chapter. The text affirms the role of Scripture and the witness to the faith that is expressed both through

the living tradition of the Church as well as through the confession of faith set forth in various Creeds. Other elements of the apostolic faith include the proclamation and interpretation of the Gospel, the two foundational sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist as well as the handing on of ministerial responsibilities through the ordained ministry, communion in prayer, charity, and pastoral care and concern for creation.

The document's understanding is indicative of an emerging ecumenical conviction that sees the sacraments playing an important role in the structuring of the church. There is a fundamental conviction that the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist participate in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord thereby integrating the believer into Body of Christ.

In this context the special or ordained ministry is understood as *diakonia* or service necessary for the upbuilding of the whole church. This understanding demonstrates a profound reception of the work accomplished through the BEM process. The NMC text represents a growing consensus on the method of treating the issue of ministry, namely from expanding concentric circles. At the widest level, the ministerial dimension of the whole people of God is affirmed before speaking about a special or ordained ministry at the service of this ministerial dimension. This method was used by the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, the Faith and Order text *Baptism Eucharist Ministry*, and by many of the International bi-lateral dialogues that treated the question of ministry, such as the Canterbury Report ARCIC-I,⁵ the Lutheran-Catholic international dialogue,⁶ and the Methodist-Catholic reports from Denver⁷ and Singapore.⁸ Many other examples could be cited also from the local bi-lateral dialogues.

The ministerial question is treated first by looking at the ministeriality of the people of God as a whole before considering the special or ordained ministry of some at the service of the ministry of all. The advantage of this is to place the special ministry with its particular service to the Word of God within and *vis-a-vis* the church. There seems to be a clear consensus that the purpose of the ordained ministry is to keep the church orientated toward Christ as its sole head and to remain focused on the mission entrusted to all (Eph 4).⁹

While the necessity of a special or ordained ministry is clearly affirmed, the text is more cautious about the importance of the three-fold ministry. A strong position was taken in the text of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela in 1993. In this regard it appears that more progress has been made within the bi-lateral dialogues and some other multilateral discussions such as Porvoo, Meissen and others, even though there is no coherence between these on the question of three-fold ministry.

Furthermore the discussion on the relationship of the apostolic continuity of the church and apostolic succession in ministry benefits from the re-articulation of these two elements together in ecclesiological thinking. We have witnessed this method in the BEM text as well as in the International Theological Commission's text of 1973¹⁰ that deals with the relation of apostolic continuity and apostolic succession in this relational way.

The eschatological dimension of the church has been spoken about above. It is also affirmed here when speaking about the ministry especially the ministry of oversight. The use of the description of the special ministry according to the categories of personal, communal, collegial has become widely accepted since the BEM text. Understanding the ministry of oversight from this perspective appears to help the churches arrive at a greater agreement on how the *episkope* and the *episkopos* may be seen at the service of maintaining continuity in apostolicity, in truth and in unity of life (**par. 92**).

⁵ *A Statement on The Doctrine of the Ministry Agreed by the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission Canterbury*, 1973 (par. 3-13).

⁶ *The Ministry in the Church* 1982 (par. 15-24)

⁷ *Christian Home and Family* 1971 (par. 87-98).

⁸ *The Apostolic Tradition* 1991 (par 62-77).

⁹ Par. 86, 84 see also LG 10.

¹⁰ International Theological Commission, "Catholic Teaching on Apostolic Succession" in M Sharkey (ed.), *Texts and Documents 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) 93-104.

Several other points may be further identified as emerging convergences concerning the nature and mission of the church.

First, the relation of Scripture to Tradition is seen as a positive framework of the articulation of the apostolic faith through the centuries. Both at the World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal in 1963 and the work of the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* point to this important convergence which is confirmed in the current NMC (**par. 69, 70, 71, and 73**). The clear convergence on the understanding of the apostolic faith as evident in this whole section may be seen as well in many of the bilateral dialogues, for example in reports of Catholic dialogues with Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodist and even some Pentecostal churches.

NMC makes an important step forward toward convergence on the nature and mission of the Church in the section on conciliarity and primacy. Can we bring out more the witness of Tradition in relation to primacy, authority, *episkope* and conciliarity? It is clear that further work needs to be done here. Nevertheless a very significant step has been taken by recognizing the importance of dealing with the questions of primacy as it is exercised on different levels (local, regional and universal) and its relation to conciliarity. Again in many of the bilateral dialogues of the Catholic Church with the Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans and Methodists, these themes have been taken up with growing conviction as to their importance in the articulation of an ecumenical ecclesiology. Such affirmations have recognized that while those who are at the head of the church have a responsibility to be at the service of the “edification of the whole church in love and truth” (**par. 101**), they do so by respecting the integrity of the local churches.

Lastly, the understanding of the role of and need for authority in ecclesiological reflections has been another point of convergence. This taken together with the proper exercise of jurisdiction at the service of the building up of the Body of Christ in unity, the safeguarding and spreading of the gospel and the fulfillment of the mission is now considered as a fundamental aspect of the special ministry.

Significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed

When talking about “tolerable limits to diversity in confessing the faith” (**par. 72**) it could be helpful to discuss the practice mentioned in Acts 15:28 of not imposing any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary (cf. also John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 78). “What does the Gospel demand and what, on the other hand, is left to the free choice of believers?” Obviously, although asked not to eat food sacrificed to idols, culturally diverse believers in Christ were accepted without needing to observe the dietary laws of the Old Covenant, even though they were very dear to Jewish Christians.

The box following par. 81 implies a serious imbalance or even misunderstanding when it speaks of Eucharistic hospitality. The word “hospitality” is not the best word to use in this context and is problematic. All Christians believe that it is the Lord who invites us to the communion table but he does so through the Church which has the responsibility to interpret the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist. Churches which believe that Eucharistic sharing is only coherent and therefore possible within the context of full communion in faith and order are not, for that reason, “inhospitable.” The present formulation seems to leave no room for the Catholic position of hope for a future reunion when full Eucharistic sharing will be possible.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of apostolicity is articulated in an all encompassing way (**par. 89**). Apostolic continuity is comprised of many elements (Scriptures, life of charity, mission, sacraments, ministry, etc.) while apostolic succession in the ministry serves the continuity of communion within the local church and between churches. In this case, ordination is essential since other apostolic churches (represented through their *episkopos*) confirm the apostolicity of the church where the episcopal ordination is taking place. At the same time the local church receives her *episkopos*. He has apostolic succession because he presides at the head of a church recognized by other churches through their bishops. This was

the original sense of the presence of at least three bishops while all the bishops in an ecclesiastic district needed to confirm the elect. In this way the *communio ecclesiarum* is linked with the Apostolic church in space and time and is maintained in and through the person who presides at the Eucharist of that apostolic church. It is necessary to give more attention to the eschatological reality of each local church and the role that the ordained ministry plays in maintaining this apostolicity in continuity with other apostolic churches.

In the Faith and Order text the fundamental role of presiding at the celebration of the eucharist is not attached to the role of the one who exercises the ministry of oversight within the church. **Par. 96** only mentions baptism. It could be helpful to state the second sentence thus: The communal life of the Church is grounded in the Sacrament of Baptism and realized in the Eucharist.

Section F “Oversight: Personal, Communal, Collegial” does not have sufficient clarity. The question may be asked if these three qualities (personal, collegial, communal) apply only to the ministry of oversight or do they apply to all special ministry within the church? In addition there needs to be a clearer articulation of the way the ministry of oversight is related to both the episcopal and presbyteral offices. Related to this section, **par. 92, 93** and **102** moves too quickly from the medieval developments to the Reformation understanding and functioning of the synodical structure. How are these latter structures related to the conciliar and patriarchal oversight of late antiquity?

In Section G, a Catholic concern would see the need to have an effective authority for the one who convokes and presides a synod, especially on the universal level, in order to carry out this function. A distinction needs to be made between a synodical meeting on a local or regional level and one on a universal level. Concerning the Pope, there is a difference in his role as Bishop of Rome and in his ministry in service to the unity of the whole Church though they are also interrelated. This is an issue currently under discussion in the Catholic/Orthodox dialogue and needs to be clarified in relation to the churches of the Reformation. In the 2007 statement between the Orthodox and Catholic churches the exercise of primacy was seen as taking place at three levels: local, regional and universal. From the Catholic point of view, further discussions on primacy, synodality and conciliarity with the churches of the Reformation would also be helpful.

We very much appreciate the way in which **par. 102** shows the harmony and full compatibility between the conciliar exercise of authority by the ecumenical councils and the personal exercise of a ministry of primacy. We would suggest that the addition of a few more details could enhance even further the value of this paragraph. First, it would be useful to note explicitly that canon six of the very first ecumenical council (Nicea, 325) not only maintained the ancient custom of acknowledging wider areas of oversight by the first three mentioned cities — Alexandria, Rome and Antioch — but also that canon seven of the same council acknowledged the ancient tradition of recognizing the special dignity of Jerusalem. One might further add the detail that the special role of Constantinople was acknowledged in a canon of the second ecumenical council in 381. Finally, with the passing of time, the ordering of these five cities as follows — Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem — became very widely accepted. Since many Christians may know of this ordering, it could be important to include it in the text. Beyond these factual details which, as such probably would not be controversial, the commission might also consider whether it would be possible at this time to include any comment on the motivation underlying the ordering of these five cities and their churches. Various rationales had been proposed, including that which would base this order merely upon the civil organization of the Roman empire. While historical research shows possible secular influences, according to Catholic belief merely secular conditions can never fully account for Church order. Catholics believe that the fundamental reason underlying Rome’s position in the above cited list is rooted in that city’s relation to the presence and witness unto martyrdom of the great apostles Peter and Paul, a fact that was much appreciated by the early Church. Catholic faith places the special accent on Peter, however, since, according to various New Testament writings, he was singled out

from the other apostles to exercise a special role among them. The gospels even attribute this selection to Jesus himself. In addition to Catholics, scholars from the Orthodox and Reformation traditions, as well as exegetes from various traditions working together in specific ecumenical dialogues, have produced illuminating studies on the role of Peter in the New Testament. That role is for us the basis for believing that Jesus wills there to be a unique ministry in service to the universal unity of the Church (what the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order referred to as “the question of a universal ministry of Christian unity”).¹¹ A special role for the bishop of Rome finds echoes in a various patristic sources as well, such as in the prologue of Ignatius of Antioch’s early letter to the church in Rome, in Irenaeus of Lyons’ list of the bishops of that city whose church was founded on the apostles Peter and Paul and the practice, sanctioned by some regional councils and by the action of such figures as St. Athanasius, of having recourse to the bishop of Rome regarding disputes of a doctrinal or disciplinary nature. It would be worth while for the Faith and Order commission, especially in light of the mandate it received at the Fifth World Conference, to explore whether or how much of these considerations might be added to the current text.

Lastly in regards to **par. 106/107** the question of magisterial authority needs to be addressed. The teaching office is not addressed in a way which does justice to the Catholic position. What is the teaching authority of those who exercise *episkope* on each of the three levels (local, regional, universal)?

Suggestions for the future development of this text

It is suggested to use as the title of section III simply the following: “The Life of Communion” leaving ‘in and for the world’ for section IV since the present section deals mainly with internal matters.

It could be helpful to also see the Eucharist as a confession of faith and not only the creeds and baptism. In this line **par. 70** could add this point to the discussion on the apostolic faith. The early church’s confession of faith was the weekly Eucharist since the eucharistic celebration did not have what we call today a creed or confession of faith. Irenaeus of Lyons stated “Our doctrine is conformed to our eucharist and our eucharist to our doctrine”.¹²

Concerning the three fold ministry it would be the Catholic position that the Episcopal ministry is an essential part of the structure of the church. Even though LG 26 speaks of a historical evolution, the function of oversight was never missing from the church. The churches need to consider this issue in the light of the way the Apostolic Tradition interpreted the Scriptures in the first millennium and continues to be integrated by the East and West today as well as by the various bi-lateral dialogues.

Par. 95-97 requires greater clarity concerning the use of the descriptive terms “personal, communal, collegial” in relationship to ministry. There seems to be some question as to whether these terms are being applied to ‘ordained ministry’ or to the ‘ministry of oversight’ alone.

Par. 105-108 needs to be expanded in the light of the bi-lateral dialogues. Here again the eschatological dimension of ministry and authority may be deepened and more said about an official teaching office. In this regard, the fact that authority comes from God, and that its nature is to be self-emptying, relational and interdependent need to be expanded and related to the act of ordination.

Some observations for improving individual paragraphs

Par. 70: It could be helpful to state that the apostolic faith was celebrated and proclaimed above all in Baptism and Eucharist before being articulated in the later developed Creeds. For

¹¹ See T. Best and G. Gassmann, ed., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, “Faith and Order Paper no. 166,” Geneva 1994, 243.

¹² *Adv. Haer.* IV, 18, 5.

example, the basis for St. Basil's teaching on the divinity of the Holy Spirit is found in the formulae of the liturgy especially in the Eucharistic doxology. The Creed is implicit in doxology and it becomes more explicit in liturgical forms. There is no liturgy without doxology. The two fundamental sacraments of the church, baptism and Eucharist also served as the confession of the apostolic faith of the community and were clearly related to the Word proclaimed, celebrated and lived. The advantage is to see the sacraments clearly as part of the articulation of the apostolic faith and not just the Creeds. Paragraph 71 then correctly goes on to speak of the living tradition of the transmission of the apostolic faith.

Par. 74/75: Missing from the articulation of 73 and section B on baptism is a clear link with the confession of the apostolic faith. This document on the nature of the church needs to make a clear link between the sacraments and the confession of the one apostolic faith as the basis for affirming the sacraments "as a means of grace to create and sustain the *koinonia*" (cf. Par. 67).

Par. 77 box: There needs to be more consistency regarding the position on the efficacy of the sacraments as a means of grace affirmed in **Par. 67** then apparently questioned in boxes following 13 and 77d. This text was written before the new Faith and Order text on baptism (2007 in progress) which does not hesitate to make the affirmation of the efficacious nature of baptism.

Par. 81 box: The Catholic position is that the Eucharist is both meal and thanksgiving. In Catholic thought, the sacrifice of Christ is understood to be present in the Eucharist because of the way in which it is related to the Paschal mystery. **Par. 75** affirms baptism to be a participation in the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Catholics, this is so because one is united to the living Lord who is risen and who is actually present in all sacraments (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7). The risen Lord contains within himself the mysteries of his life, sacrifice, death and resurrection, and comes to us in baptism, as also in the Eucharist, not from the past, but really from God's Kingdom, from the *future*. The recent Catholic-Methodist agreed statement presents the Catholic viewpoint as follows: "The sacramental presence of Christ himself is at once the sacramental presence of his sacrifice also, because the Christ who is present is he who has entered the sanctuary once and for all bearing his own blood to secure an eternal redemption (Heb 9:12)."¹³

Par. 82: By its word, life and mission in the world the church serves God's full economy of redemption. The church's mission gives witness that no human person will be saved by himself and by his own powers. The mission of the church gives the necessary testimony that all human beings are sinners and under God's wrath and that no human effort and no human religion can save them, for all salvation comes from Christ. In mission, God is exhorting through the church, "For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). For Catholics then this concept of mission needs to appear in this paragraph.

Par. 87: Probably the first sentence should say there is "no single pattern of ministry" rather than there is "no single pattern of conferring ministry" since the rest of the paragraph speaks about patterns of ministry rather than conferral of ministry. BEM 22 does not hesitate to confirm the three-fold ministry as a way of serving the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it. Catholics would prefer the emphasis given by BEM rather than this text as given here. There is an impression that this three-fold ministry is an option. This does not reflect the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican point of view.

Par. 89: It is important to see the role that ordination (especially episcopal) has for the apostolicity of the church. This needs to be stated clearly in section F. Following on some issues in the box at 89 the question of the sacramentality of ordination might be helped by the response of the Catholic Church to BEM in general and the specific statement of the Methodist-Catholic 2006 dialogue:

¹³ International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church* (Lake Junaluska: World Methodist Council, 2006) n. 31.

The person who is truly active for our salvation in the power of the Spirit is always Christ himself, in accordance with his final promise: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The confidence that Catholics have in the effectiveness of all the sacraments is ultimately rooted in this promise, which actually gives rise to a whole realm of sacramentality. Though the Lord is no longer visibly present, in countless ways he is truly present, and the key actions when his presence is proclaimed and trusted are called ‘sacraments’. Catholics believe that when the Church ordains those who will officially act in the name of Christ in the midst of his people, those acts of ordination are of such decisive importance that they, too, are sacraments, moments of prayer and of absolute confidence in the active presence of Christ himself, faithful to his promise.¹⁴

Par. 89 box: It is difficult to see how the differences named in the box relate to the main body of the text. In what do these differences consist? For example, the explanation of the position of the ordained ministry (inserted within the people of God and not above it) was made very clear in BEM and even in this current text but then it seems to be called into question by the box.

Par. 93 box: What needs to be brought out here is that the succession through the imposition of hands was understood also as relating to the transmission and continuity of apostolic teaching. The concern of the early Fathers such as Irenaeus was for continuity in apostolic teaching by means of the one who sat on the Episcopal chair; in their view this was connected to the rite of imposition of hands.

Par. 95-98: These issues need to be sorted out. First, all ordained ministry needs to be exercised in a personal way (i.e. by an individual), communally (not clear from the text what this really means), and collegially, since no one is a minister alone but rather as a part of a college of ministers.

Par. 102: First of all it is necessary to give an accurate translation of Canon 34. As it is stated it needs to read: “..the first among the bishops in every nation would only...”. Further reflection is needed as to what light canon 34 might shed on the ministry of unity. In the light of par. 100 a further charge is that of the presidency of an ecumenical council. The Ravenna statement from the Orthodox/Catholic dialogue now begins to treat the question of the application of primacy to three levels local, regional and universal.

Par. 104: We would suggest placing footnote 21 after collegial ways and add a new note that includes references to various dialogues on ministry, such as to ARCIC, Methodist/Catholic, Lutheran/Catholic (also in the USA) and the Orthodox/Catholic dialogue. In both East and West there has been significant discussion on the issue of a ministry of unity.

Par. 105: The eschatological dimension of authority needs to be expanded.

Par. 107: It would seem that there needs to be a development of the biblical understanding of *exousia* related to the central idea of ministry, i.e., *diakonia*.

Par. 108: It would be helpful to explicate more clearly how the Holy Spirit acts through the role of various members of the church. This may be done by considering the diverse ecclesiological processes involved in the calling of a minister to serve through ordination. First by a process of election wherein there is a discernment. Then there is the act of ordination itself where the ordaining minister acts with the assent of all (Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition*, 2 “all pray for the descent of the Holy Spirit, while one at the request of all imposes his hands and prays thus...”). Finally, the newly ordained carries out the first actions of ministry on behalf of all. Hence a strengthening of the pneumatological dimension of authority reveals a more communal dimension.

Conclusion

In general this section of the text has been remarkably improved but there still needs to be a clarification of the points noted above. The majority of the work that remains has to do with the ordained ministry and especially the ministry of unity in the church including the

¹⁴ *The Grace Given You in Christ*, n. 132.

question of primacy, synodality, conciliarity. However, this text has certainly made a giant step forward in arriving at a significant degree of consensus.

Chapter IV: In and For the World

There is a renewed emphasis in Chapter IV on God's plan that embraces the whole universe and is intended for the transformation of all creation (**cf. par. 109—111**). Thus, the church — which is constituted by communion with God in Christ — is called to a life of service and of passion for the transformation of the world. This theme is of great importance and deserves more extensive consideration than the brief account given here with respect to other parts of the document.

In this context, it could be useful to mention that the church, as communion, is at the heart of the witness it offers to the world of the kingdom of God. Indeed, there is a crucial link between communion and witness: “may they all be one ... so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). In this regard, the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 affirmed: “The Church as communion is a sacrament for the salvation of the world” (1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final 'Relatio', II, D, 1*). An understanding of the church's instrumentality in relation to God's action in the world is effectively delineated in the Catholic—Reformed document entitled *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* (2007), which defines the close bond between the pneumatological and eschatological dimensions: “The Holy Spirit actualizes Christ's work of redemption in the hearts of individuals by bringing about their conversion and regeneration. As such, the Spirit is the principal agent in establishing the kingdom and, in guiding the church so that it can be a servant of God's work in this process. [...] Relating the kingdom instrumentality of the Church to the Holy Spirit allows us to acknowledge together a more historical and dynamic vision of the church as ‘sacrament of the kingdom of God’. The Spirit is the basis both of the efficacy of Word and sacrament, and of the emerging presence of the reign of God” (**par. 195**).

This perspective also offers a better understanding of the use in Catholic theology of the concept of sacrament to designate the church, and offers insight to help overcome the difficulty expressed in the text with regard to the use of this concept. What is affirmed by saying that the church is a sacrament is that it is not an end in itself, but is at the service of God's plan for the world “a sign and instrument” both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race (*Lumen gentium* 1). Thus, communion is both the gift by which the church lives and, at the same time, the gift it offers to the world, especially to a wounded and divided humanity to which it offers the word of reconciliation.

With regard to the text on the witness of the church in the world, it is undoubtedly true that Christians must seek to promote the “values” of the kingdom of God in every way (**cf. par. 115**), but simply promoting values is not enough. What Christians must above all promote is the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, without any separation between the full profession of the apostolic faith (orthodoxy) and action according to the criteria of the kingdom of God (orthopraxis). It may also be useful for the document to affirm more clearly that the church is called to offer witness to the Gospel, which is the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, the text clearly states that Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel in obedience to the command of Jesus (**par. 110**), but this does not directly affirm that they are called to proclaim the good news of the life of Christ himself.

The final paragraph (**par. 118**) is excellent and places the focus on the anticipation of the future coming in glory of the Lord who sustains the church on earth and its mission to bring light and salvation to humans until he comes. The reiteration of the theme of mission at the end of the document is positive, although it would also be useful to mention the theme of hope founded on the certainty that the church on its historical pilgrimage is loved and sustained by the Lord.