Ecumenical Partnership Committee

Basic Documents

1986-1987

"Baptism in the Ecumenical Partnership"

"Eucharist in the Ecumenical Partnership"

"Ministry in the Ecumenical Partnership"

BAPTISM
IN THE
ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP

1. Common Affirmations About The Church

There are, of course, many things that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ affirm in common about the Church. I want to remind us of three because, in my opinion, they set the context for a fruitful discussion of baptism as part of our Ecumenical Partnership.

A. The Church of Jesus Christ is one, and this essential unity must be made visible for the sake of God's mission in the world. Most traditions affirm that, according to scripture, unity is a divine gift, and that a divided Church is a scandal, but the DC and UCC have made this affirmation of unity and the resolve to overcome human-wrought division central to their identities (SC, pp.7-8). This has led both churches to active participation -- indeed, leadership -- in the modern ecumenical movement whose goal is the unity and renewal of the universal Church. Our Ecumenical Partnership is understood to be "firmly set within and related to [this] wider ecumenical context" (SC, p.8). In particular, the Steering Committee's report emphasizes our common participation in the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) and acknowledges that the work of these two bodies forms a solid foundation for our growth together. Thus, our discussion of baptism should properly take full account of agreements reached in the WCC's Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document (BEM) and the COCU Consensus. In this way, the search for the unity of the whole Church is kept constantly before us.

B. The unity for which we seek allows for -- in fact, welcomes -- great diversity. The heart of the modern ecumenical vision (and rooted in scripture, e.g. Romans 14-15) is a common commitment to and experience of God in Christ that enables us to live trustfully with differences in community (SC, p.7). We envision, said the Steering Committee, a dynamic sharing of gifts through partnership "that will produce new patterns of life which exemplify greater diversity and flexibility than is now present in our separate denominations" (SC, p. 9). This hope grows out of the conviction that no church has an absolute grasp on God's truth, and, thus, that we need each other with our diverse perspectives if we are serious about being more truly the Church God wills. While consensus is needed on certain fundamentals of the gospel, there is also a biblical imperative to expand the community of unlikeness in order to effect broader dialogue about God's will within the committed eucharistic fellowship of the church. (When Paul speaks about the power of Christian fellowship, he does not use the wood philia, which means the love of that which is similar and beautiful, but agape, the love of those who are different alien, ugly to whom we are bound, through the spirit, in baptism.) Our discussion on baptism, therefore, need not aim at a tidy consensus statement that resolves every area of past dispute. (This principle has, of course, a built-in reservation: there are

some in our churches who will even disagree with the principle! That does not remove our responsibility, however, to identify as clearly as possible areas of needed consensus and legitimate diversity. That is surely a part of the task given to this committee.)

C. The Church lives in the tension between memory and anticipation, constantly retelling the stories of what God has done for human salvation while longing for the day when God's sovereign reign will be complete. The orientation of Christian community is both traditional and eschatological, priestly and prophetic, affirming both continuity in the faith and the conviction that God can do a new thing. Having said this, the distinctive focus of our churches is the prophetic and anticipatory. Disciples, while looking always to scripture, are also the people of the Millennial Harbinger(!). The UCC, writes Gabriel Fackre, understands itself as "a voyaging company, on the way as surely as Pilgrims make the trek to the Celestial City. It follows a trail cut through the wilderness by One who goes before, Jesus Christ, the Pioneer of Hebrews 12" (Encounter [Winter 1980], p. 39). Both churches need to be periodically reminded that Tradition is important; authentic hope is always rooted in the memory of God's salvific acts. But we also insist that, thanks be to God, the Spirit is not confined to the past. The Church that has been is not synonymous with the Church we are called to be.

This has profound implications for our approach to unity. The goal of our conversations, we have said to each other through the work of the Steering Committee, is not the negotiating of agreement based on what we have been (though a remembrance of the great Christian Tradition is essential). Rather, we have committed ourselves to grow as partners toward a vision of the Church that is theologically more comprehensive, missiologically more engaged, and worshipfully richer than what we now are or have been as severed limbs of the one body (SC, pp. 11 ff.) Thus, the question before us is not simply "What have our churches previously thought or practiced regarding baptism?" but "How can we move -- with the guidance of the Spirit and within the context of the universal Church and its Tradition -- toward a truer understanding and practice of baptism?"

II. Ecumenical Affirmations Regarding Baptism

The past decade has witnessed a startling, unprecedented amount of theological convergence among the Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches involved in the ecumenical movement. Representatives of these churches in the WCC's Faith and Order Commission and in the various bilateral dialogues and church union conversations have been able to acknowledge 1) that these dialogues reveal a large area of agreement regarding such things as sacraments and ministry, and 2) that many disputes which once divided us are actually examples of legitimate diversity in the body of Christ. Since the DC and the UCC have been deeply involved in these efforts, the work of this committee (according to the Steering Committee's report) is not necessarily to reach new agreements but to encourage both churches to claim this wider theological convergence, especially as

reflected in BEM and the COCU Consensus (SC, p. 13). The following six points are drawn from these two texts as well as our official response to BEM. Other contemporary documents, including the covenant study materials, have also been consulted.

A. Baptism and Faith: "Baptism," says BEM (Baptism ¶8) in one of its crucial passages, "is both God's gift and our human response to that gift." In this act, grace and faith -- the objective, universal work of God through the spirit and our personal appropriation of its benefits through trusting response -- are inseparably linked to Baptism; to put it another way, is not a magical ritual but the worshipful celebration of a believing community; but in that context it is indeed a means of grace (and thus properly called a sacrament) in which we pray for the transforming presence of God's Spirit with confidence that God will answer that prayer. Thus, BEM can speak of baptism as "a gift of God" and "a work of the Holy Spirit" as well as "a rite of commitment" that implies "confession of sin and conversion of heart." While different churches may emphasize one pole or the other, the ecumenical convergence insists that "either/or" arguments do not do justice to the full Tradition of the Gospel.

The Disciples and other "believers' baptism" traditions, have, of course, stressed the significance of the individual decision of faith at the time of baptism. The DC response to BEM acknowledges, however, that faith, understood biblically, is neither a momentary nor entirely individualistic act. In the baptism of infants (a powerful witness that in God alone is our salvation), there is a corporate response of faith, though "personal commitment is [eventually] necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ" (BEM ¶8).

I begin with this affirmation of grace and faith because it also has helped overcome the sticky question: to what extent does the performance of signs produce the reality they signify? The ecumenical convergence is now able to claim that baptism is both an effective means of grace and a symbol of grace received. In the language of both COCU and BEM, it "effects" and "signifies" -- it is God's gift and our human response to that gift.

B. Meanings of Baptism: The breakthrough here is the willingness of churches to acknowledge that the biblical witness regarding the meaning of baptism is richer than our separated traditions have taught. Scripture confronts us with multiple images -- participation in Christ's death and resurrection, washing away of sin, renewal and new birth, exodus from bondage ... (BEM, B 2) -- which yet point to a single reality. An admirable summary is found in the COCU Consensus (VI, 10): "The act of baptism effects, or signifies, the incorporation of the baptized into Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-11, Colossians 2:11-15), makes them living members of the Church universal (I Corinthians 12:13), and by the power of the Holy Spirit enables them to confess their faith, to renounce sin and overcome death (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:8), and in their new identity to commit themselves in a new life and ministry of love and righteousness, which are a foretaste here and now of the life of the Kingdom (Ephesians 1:13-14)."

Two aspects require further comment: 1) Since "through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place," it is a "basic bond" of Christian unity (BEM, B 6). This face was emphasized by Vatican II in one of its most important ecumenical advances, and yet is curiously missing in the report of the DC-UCC Steering Committee. Having said that, both churches, I suspect, would agree with the UCC response to BEM that baptism is not the sole means of incorporation into the Church. Friends and Salvationists are surely our brothers and sisters in Christ. 2) While the ecumenical convergence underscores that baptism is fundamental to the Christian life, neither COCU nor BEM insists that it is necessary for salvation. Again, we must take the Friends and Salvationists into account. Several responses to BEM (including that of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops) refuse to deny that the gift of the Spirit is often at work among those who profess God but don't practice water baptism; and BEM explicitly affirms that the Spirit is active "before baptism" (B 5). It is not for us to place limits on the sovereignty of God's saving power.

C. Baptismal Practice: Convergence on the question of grace and faith and on the multiplicity of biblical images has enabled churches in the ecumenical movement to bridge the gap between believers' baptism and infant baptism. Indeed, this convergence shows that our terminology is wrong: there are not two baptisms (Ephesians 4:5), but two distinctive moments at which persons may experience the one baptism that is both gift and response.

Both COCU (IV, 9) and BEM (B 12) see baptism within the context of Christian nurture as a process that includes 1) the growth of the child within a supportive Christian community, 2) a personal, public confession of faith at an appropriate age, and 3) faithful discipleship throughout one's life. The DC-UCC covenant study materials affirm such growth but go on the say "We differ on this: At what stage in the development of faith are we to be baptized?" The point of the ecumenical convergence is that this is a secondary question. If an infant is baptized, she or he must be nurtured toward mature commitment in Christ; if baptism is deferred until the person is able to make a personal confession of sin and faith, it must be made clear (perhaps through services of dedication or thanksgiving) that he or she is placed within the nurturing community.

It is no secret that some individual Disciples reject this agreement on the diversity of baptismal practice; but the DC General Assembly and the UCC General Synod have both endorsed a 1974 COCU initiative by mutually recognizing the baptized members of other COCU churches (thus implicitly accepting their baptismal practices). COCU has now gone a step further, suggesting that a diversity of baptismal practice "reflects different dimensions of the meaning of baptism" and that it is, therefore, appropriate for alternative practices to be maintained in the future Church Uniting (VI, 11). Disciples in India and the United Kingdom have already endorsed this principle by entering into church unions that allow for the baptism of infants and "believers" as "equivalent alternatives" in one fellowship.

D. Rebaptism: On this issue the ecumenical convergence is clear: "Baptism is administered only once" (COCU, VI, 12), and churches should avoid "any practice that could be interpreted as rebaptism" (BEM B 13). There are many reasons for such imperative language: 1) Rebaptism questions the sacramental integrity of other churches; 2) baptism marks incorporation into one Church of which our present denominations are but fragments; 3) since baptism depends on God's grace and not simply on the "readiness" or "worthiness" of the person, rebaptism calls into question what God has done in that moment (whether or not we "remember" it); 4) baptism is not a momentary experience but marks the beginning of a life-long growth in Christ. It is important, therefore, that baptism be "continually and responsibly reaffirmed" (COCU VI, 13). Confirmation and the Lord's Supper can be understood as "effective signs" of such continuing growth (VI, 14).

The problem, however, is more complex. Several churches concur in rejecting "rebaptism" while still immersing those adults who come to them having been sprinkled in infancy. The issue at stake is authority; these churches generally regard scripture as an unambiguous authority for theological proclamation, and they claim to find no biblical warrant for baptizing babies. Thus, when a believer is immersed, he or she is being baptized for the first time.

There are two responses found in the ecumenical literature: 1) The biblical evidence is not unambiguous. Acts 16:15 (the baptism of households), Acts 2:39 ("For God's promise was made to you and your children ... "), and Matthew 19:14 ("Let the little children come to me ... ") at least raise alternative possibilities. 2) Scripture is not the only authority to which we appeal. BEM (in line with COCU) speaks of its authority as the "Tradition of the Gospel" (preface), stressing that neither scripture nor Tradition is authoritative in isolation. In the case of baptism, for example, it is undoubtedly true that most baptisms in the apostolic age were of adult converts; but once believing parents began to bring their children into the community, new theological understandings emerged.

All of this presents Disciples' ministers with difficult pastoral situations. Even if we are beyond insisting that all members be immersed upon profession of faith (and the large majority of Disciples' congregations are "open membership"), what do we do when a previously-baptized person requests adult immersion in accordance with the dominant/biblical practice? The primary answer is to suggest ways of renewing the original baptismal vows. It is clear, however, that much education is needed, along with much patience from our UCC partners.

E. Baptism and Mission: A hallmark of modern ecumenical theology is its insistence that sacraments have ethical, missionary implications. According to BEM, baptism should not only call us to personal sanctification but also "motivate Christians to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life" (B 10). Baptism is a commissioning to ministry (COCU, VI, 10), signifying our commitment to participate in Christ's victory over the powers hostile to God. Still, several churches (including the UCC) in their responses to BEM recommend even stronger language regarding the relationship

between baptism and mission. What is the relevance of water baptism to lives of genuine discipleship? We will return to this in Section III.

F. Celebration of Baptism: There is broad agreement that baptism is administered with water (an evocative, biblical symbol) in the name of the triune God (though some object to the masculine imagery of the traditional formula, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"). Baptism is not a private affair but an act of public, corporate worship (BEM, B 23). Normally it is administered by an ordained minister (i.e., one who represents the unity and continuity of the Church), but the "validity" of the rite clearly does not depend on that.

BEM (B 18) reflects a growing conviction that immersion can be a powerful sign of participation in Christ's death and resurrection; but there is also agreement that the "mode" of baptism, the amount of water used, is a secondary issue on which legitimate diversity is certainly possible.

The convergence outlined above should not imply that all churches understand baptism in the same way. The baptism of infants calls attention to human need and God's initiative for our salvation. Theological emphasis is on the covenant of grace in which the children of believing parents participate. The baptism of those who make a personal confession of faith calls attention to the necessity of responding to God's grace with repentance and a decision for discipleship. The point is that these are no longer seen as divisions which force us to break the fellowship that is our gift as followers of Christ but as diversities that enrich Christ's Church.

III: Possible Directions for Future Growth

My argument in this paper is not that discussion on baptism is unnecessary but that churches often spend too much time debating obsolete issues, too much time reinventing the wheel in their various ecumenical conversations. In my opinion, the ecumenical movement has developed such theological convergence and trust regarding the old questions "Who is a proper candidate for baptism?," "What is the meaning of baptism?," and "What is the proper mode of baptism?" that we can now put these behind us. That would free us to address ourselves together to the following: "What steps can we now take to give visible expression to the achieved convergence?" and "How can we grow together in an understanding of baptism as an act of witness against the idolatry of our age?"

A. COCU's 1979 document, "Beyond Affirmation to Action: Manifesting the Mutual Recongition of Members," suggests ways of giving flesh to the theological convergence, of helping this theological work make a difference in our congregations. Among them: 1) Invite representatives of the partner church (particularly from nearby partner-church congregations) to participate (not just to be present) in all services of baptism and confirmation as a way of symbolizing that baptism is into the whole Church and not merely into a congregation or denomination. 2) Develop common materials for baptism and

confirmation as well as a common baptismal certificate. (Disciples pastors in open membership congregations are increasingly asking for confirmation materials to meet the needs of previously-baptized youth whose parents have joined that congregation by transfer.) 3) Develop common catechetical materials for persons, or the parents and/or sponsors of persons, who are preparing for baptism. Churches involved in the ecumenical movement are widely recognizing the need to strengthen their catechetical practices in order to avoid "indiscriminate baptism" at any age. 4) Explore together the possibility of simultaneous membership in DC and UCC congregations. The role of this committee might be to encourage (1), to arrange for the preparation of (2) and (3), and to develop a statement on (4).

Another step which has already proved successful in various parts of the country is the ecumenical celebration of a reaffirmation of baptismal vows. DC and UCC congregations in a state or region, for example, might come together during Pentecost to recall what God has done for us through baptism and to renew the commitments made at baptism (and confirmation).

Finally, consideration could be given to a national celebration which reminds us of the mutual recognition of members our churches have already effected through COCU. Alternatively, this reminder could form a part of the worship service being planned to celebrate the Ecumenical Partnership itself.

B. I have argued throughout this paper that the Church can live in unity with a wide range of diverse theological perspectives. That observation should never prevent us, however, from constantly asking what it means to be the Church that lives ever more obediently to God's will in our age. Context helps determine which theological current we lift up at a given moment as we seek to participate in God's mission.

Baptism is a good example. Lesslie Newbigin has rightly argued that baptism necessarily looks different in the missionary situation of the apostolic period than it does in the church of the post-Constantinian era. "In the former situation, ministry is primarily leadership in mission, baptism is commitment to that mission, and the eucharist is the continual renewal of that commitment ... In the 'Christendom' situation, ministry is primarily pastoral care of established communities, baptism is usually administered to infants as a rite de passage, and the eucharist is the feeding of the community with the bread of life." Neither understanding is "wrong." And neither situation necessarily presupposes a particular baptismal practice. While the missionary situation is usually identified with "believers' baptism," it is quite possible to understand the baptism of infants as the prophetic beginning of a life of mission. Conversely, the baptism of those able to make a confession of faith is no guarantee that the sacrament will be seen as foundational to committed discipleship. "Believers' baptism in Disciples practice," as Clark Williamson has written, "has been shown quite capable of giving us generation after generation of culture-religionists!"

The Church is always in a missionary situation (though we often seem to forget it). But isn't there a particular need in North America of the late Twentieth Century to recover the missionary vision of the New Testament church by speaking of Christian life as a witness against the idolatries of the world? Isn't there a need to see baptism, especially through our educational materials, as the beginning of a life that goes the way of the cross? (While one cannot undo or repeat baptism, it is certainly possible to "fall away" from it by a life that gives ultimate allegiance to less than ultimate things.) Isn't there a need to proclaim that in baptism, at whatever age it is administered, the Church distinguishes itself from the world, asserting that its identity (and that of its members) is only in Christ? Isn't there a need to acknowledge more forcefully than we have that Christ's claim on the one baptized is greater than all other claims and that this makes a significant difference in the way one thinks about and deals with war or the distribution of the world's resources?

In my opinion, these are the kinds of questions we should now be asking about baptism; and there are questions we can best ask together. A church cannot finally renew itself alone (even acknowledging that all renewal is from God) because it is nearly impossible to challenge one's own assumptions. But together, in the context of the whole ecumenical movement, such renewal is possible -- indeed it is happening already. That, I take it, is a basic conviction behind our partnership.

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EUCHARIST
IN THE
ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP

> Regarding the meaning of the Lord's Supper, Disciples and the UCC are in broad agreement. We are also on common ground in the practice of open communion. Since we believe it is the Lord Jesus himself, through the Holy Spirit, who is the host at the Table, we invite in his name all those who will respond to his call: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
>
> Study Series on the Covenant

This paper, like the previous one on baptism, does not aim at highlighting or reconciling differences between our branches of Christ's one Church regarding the eucharist (the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion). As our covenant study points out, the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are already in "broad agreement" on the meaning of this sacrament. Beyond that, we both celebrate "open communion" and, thus, already share at each other's tables -- however infrequently.

The intent of this paper is, rather, to summarize recent ecumenical thinking on the eucharist (ecumenical thinking to which we have both contributed) in the hope that our churches will begin more vigorously to claim this ecumenical reflection as a source of common renewal. As I understand it, this committee does not see its primary task to be the negotiating of agreements based on what we have been in the past. [1] Instead, we have committed ourselves to grow as partners toward a vision of the Church that is theologically more comprehensive, missiologically more engaged, and liturgically richer than what we have been or now are. And we see the broader ecumenical movement as the framework within which our work takes place. Thus, the question before us is not simply "What have our churches previously thought or practiced regarding the Lord's Supper?" but "How can we move, with the guidance of the Spirit and within the context of the universal Church and its Tradition, toward a truer understanding and practice of this central sacrament?"

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[1] *With regard to the eucharist, there would be little to negotiate beyond the frequency of celebration and the question of whether lay elders may preside. And even on these two points, genuine convergence is already underway. Recent UCC worship publications indicate that the church's normative service is one of word and sacrament and express the hope that the UCC will grow into the practice of weekly eucharistiac celebration. It is increasingly common, meanwhile, for an ordained minister to preside at the Table in Disciples congregations. I expect that this trend will be strongly encouraged when the Disciples Commission on Theology and the Council on Christian Uity produces its "Word to the Church" on the Lord's Supper (probably in 1989).*

I must quickly add that common study is not enough. We need to find ways to turn our common claiming of the ecumenical convergence into living acts of unity and renewal in our congregations. With that in mind, recommendations for action are offered at the end of this paper. I would hope, however, that our conversations in New York City will add significantly to this list.

Before turning to the body of this paper, I need to make three preliminary observations. First, my discussion of ecumenical thinking on the eucharist will concentrate on the WCC document, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) for several reasons: a) it is the most extended discussion of the eucharist in which both churches have participated (the COCU Consensus devotes only two pages to the topic); b) BEM is widely regarded as a seminal ecumenical text, in large part because it was written by Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant scholars; c) the official responses of the Disciples and the UCC to BEM indicate fundamental agreement with it; and d) BEM is generally representative of other ecumenical documents (e.g., COCU and the reports of bilaterial conversations) dealing with Holy Communion -- indeed, it is the starting point for much of this other work.

Second, it should be stressed that neither BEM nor any other ecumenical text is, in and of itself, a normative authority for the Church. Renewal of our sacramental life can only be based on scripture, Tradition (the teaching and practice of the universal Church through the centuries), contemporary experience, and reason (by which we attempt to interpret each of the other authorities). The reason BEM commends itself to us is that it represents an effort to reflect on these normative sources of the faith in "an expanded community of interpreters." Our readings of scripture, Tradition and experience are inevitably shaped by our historical, cultural and confessional contexts. It makes good sense, therefore, to re-examine our particular understandings in light of the work accomplished by three generations of Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic theologians from around the world. The Disciples and the UCC need each other, but we, in turn, need the witness of the wider Church.

Third, the exciting thing, for me, about recent ecumenical thinking on the eucharist is the way it insists on the integration of theology, worship and mission -- the three areas of this committee's work. As the UCC response to BEM puts it, "BEM holds great promise for bringing our operational emphases on ethical considerations into the heart of our liturgical practice where they belong." I have tried to structure this paper in order to highlight that integration.

* * *

I want to lift up five elements of the BEM convergence on the eucharist for our discussion:

1. Nearly all commentators on BEM have observed that the heart of the eucharist section is a more biblical understanding of anamnesis or "memorial." The sterile impasse over whether the eucharist is a sacrament of Christ's real presence ("this is my body") or a memorial of his death and resurrection ("do this in remembrance of me") has been overcome, at least to a great extent, through this scholarship. There is now broad agreement that memorial -- when set in the context of proclamation, thanksgiving, and

invocation of the Holy Spirit -- "is not an exercise in retrospective sentimentality" (covenant study series), but a way of making the reality of God's saving act in Christ newly present for each generation.

> The biblical idea of memorial as applied to the eucharist refers to this present efficacy of God's work when it is celebrated by God's people in a liturgy (par. 5). Christ himself with all that he has accomplished for us and for all creation ... is present in this anamnesis, granting us communion with himself (par. 6).

It is not either/or; "memorial" and "real presence" go hand in hand.

Let me try to clarify these assertions. The Church now generally affirms that the eucharist does not repeat Christ's unique sacrifice (par. 8); but we also affirm that, in the breaking of the bread, Christ is made known to us in a special way, becomes present to us in a special way through the power of the Holy Spirit (par. 14) -- just as he made himself known to his disciples at Emmaus (par. 1). The Lord's Supper is, thus, properly spoken of as "the Church's effective proclamation of God's mighty acts and promises" (par. 7). It is properly understood as "a sacramental meal which by visible signs communicates to us God's love in Jesus Christ" (par. 1), including the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and the pledge of eternal life (par. 2).

How much agreement is necessary before we can acknowledge that we celebrate the same meal as a memorial of the same crucified and risen Lord? BEM deliberately refrains from pinning the mystery down too firmly, implying that the Church can live with considerable diversity provided it is able to agree on certain fundamentals (e.g., Christ's real and effectual presence in the meal). This is particularly evident in the text's treatment of the vexing question: How is Christ's presence linked to the elements of bread and wine? Some churches hold that the bread and wine are transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit into Christ's body and blood; others (including Disciples and UCC) speak of the bread and wine as "signs" or "symbols" of a real, though spiritual presence, a presence identified more with the action of the eucharist than with the elements. BEM points to this continuing disagreement in two commentaries (pars. 13 and 15) and simply notes that it is now up to the churches to decide if they can live with such theological diversity within one fellowship. [2] Thus far the response from the churches is remarkably positive. The response of the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) contends, for example, that other churches need not accept "the developed Catholic explanation of the mode [of Christ's presence in the eucharist]" as long as we commonly affirm the reality of this sacramental presence.

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[2] *This should sound very familiar to Reformed Christians (e.g., the UCC but also the Disciples) since John Calvin affirmed that Christ is really present in the Supper without attempting to explain how and tried to overcome the "literal-symbolic" impasse by speaking of Christ's presence as the work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin's is arguably the dominant theological perspective in this section of the text.*

Before leaving this discussion of eucharist as memorial, we need to take note of a significant, but often overlooked, passage in which BEM claims that "the anamnesis in which Christ acts through the joyful celebration of his church is both representation and anticipation" (par. 7). This important tension permeates this section of the document. Paragraph 3, for example, notes that the eucharist is an offering of thanks "for everything accomplished by God" and "for everything that God will accomplish." This same tension is found, of course, in the institution narratives themselves. We eat and drink in remembrance of Christ and in anticipation of the day when we will feast with him in his Kingdom. We celebrate that Jesus is Lord; but our celebration is tinged with restlessness: Come, Lord Jesus! There is too much injustice! There is too much hatred! There is too little sharing! Therefore, come in the fullness of your reign! It is this precise tension which gives the eucharist much of its prophetic, ethical thrust and which shapes the character of our communion prayers. We offer prayers of thanksgiving in remembrance of what God has done for our salvation, and we offer prayers of intercession with the confidence that God can and will do a new thing (see par. 8) [3]

2. BEM is clear that at the Lord's Table the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of Christian life are fully intertwined.

> The eucharistic communion with Christ who nourishes the life of the Church is at the same time communion within the body of Christ which is the Church. The sharing of one bread and the common cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places (par. 19).

To be united with Christ in this meal is to be united with the members of his body. In one sense, such unity is a divine gift. In another, however, such talk is nothing but empty rhetoric unless it results in committed opposition to those things that disrupt Christian community. Thus, in the next paragraph (one of the most frequently quoted in commentaries on the document), BEM contends that

> The eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life. All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ(par. 20).

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[3] *The structure of this section of BEM ("thanksgiving to the Father," "memorial of Christ," "invocation of the Spirit") also parallels the structure of the traditional eucharistic prayer, a structure which many of our churches are now recovering. The prayer begins with thanksgiving to God, reciting God's marvelous work of giving life, calling us to be a special people, and saving us from sin. Next the prayer focuses on Christ and his saving work. The Words of Institution are incorporated here as a way of connecting us even more intimately with Jesus and the disciples gathered around him in the Upper Room. Finally, the prayer concentrates on the Holy Spirit, asking that through the Spirit's work the sacrifice of Christ may be made real in our lives here and now.*

Unity, this implies, is not only a matter of overcoming confessional barriers, but also of confronting, with God's help and in response to God's lead, the human barriers which split our communities. The eucharist is a summons to a more inclusive, sharing community; it opens us to the model and power of the cross and invokes the Spirit that we may be enabled to tear down the "dividing walls of hostility" in the Church.

The concept of koinonia, so central to Pauline thought, is instructive of the biblical perspective. As used by the apostle, koinonia has two particular meanings: a) participation in (fellowship or communion with) Christ, and b) mutual participation in (fellowship or communion with) the community of believers. Such fellowship with Christ, says Paul, is experienced most directly in the sacramental life of the Church, and especially in the eucharist. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is not a communion [participation, koinonia] in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ?" (I Corinthians 10:16). This well-known passage goes on to affirm that common participation in the eucharistic of (the body of Christ) unites the many who partake into one body (the body of Christ). And because of this we dare not say to one another "I have no need of you" or "I will not care for your needs" (I Corinthians 12:21). So foundational is our communion, our sharing, with Christian brothers and sisters that it is presented in Matthew 25 as the basis of judgment upon our history.

This double meaning of "communion" is also expressed in BEM's unusually strong emphasis (at least for the Western church) on the activity of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit

> who make the historical words of Jesus present and alive. Being assured by Jesus' promise in the words of institution that it will be answered, the Church prays to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that the eucharistic event may be a reality (par. 14).

The point, of course, is that the eucharist is not a magical act (something we do) but an expression of faith that God, through the Spirit, will act to answer our prayer for the fellowship promised by Christ. Thus while the eucharist does not depend on faith, which would again make us the primary actors, faith is certainly required to discern the presence of Christ [par. 13].

The aspect of BEM's discussion which I want to underline, however, is the text's insistence that the prayer of epiclesis (invocation) in the eucharistic liturgy is not only concerned with the bread and the cup but is an invocation that the faithful may be transformed by the Spirit. "The Church, as the community of the new covenant, confidently invokes the Spirit, in order that it may be sanctified and renewed, led into all justice, truth and unity, and empowered to fulfill its mission in the world" (par. 17). In other words, our prayer, in line with the previous discussion of koinonia, is a) that we may have communion with the crucified Lord, and b) that we may become more truly what we eat -- the body of Christ broken and given for each other and the world. All of this seems especially important today when both liberals and conservatives so often split the

"ethical" and the "spiritual," the life of mission in and for the world from the life of worship. Such bifurcation is foreign to the ecumenical convergence -- and to the gospel.

3. Thus far we have been talking about the call to mutually-loving fellowship among those who gather around Christ's Table; but BEM does not stop with internal Christian relations.

> The eucharist involves the believer in the central event of the world's history. As participants in the eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world's situation and the human condition (par. 20, emphasis added).

Since Christ died for all humanity, since "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (II Corinthians 5:19), our eucharistic experience of Christ's real presence should move us, says BEM, to "responsible care ... for one another and the world" (par. 21). Indeed, we are placed under judgment by the persistence of injustice and division in both society and Church (par. 20).

Nearly all traditions at one time or another, have allowed the eucharist to be seen as a private, individualistic act, as an affair "between me and God" that has little to do with the person in the next pew, let along those outside the sanctuary. This is most definitely not the spirit of BEM. It regards the eucharist as a bond of unity among Christians and as a commission to social engagement beyond the church. Participation in the eucharist signifies the obligation to live, and the possibility of living, in a new way.

There are, of course, those who are impatient with the effort expended on reading a deeper, common understanding of the Lord's Supper at a time when so many are hungry and homeless and the world lives with the threat of nuclear cataclysm. BEM's response is not to ignore these realities but to call us back to the source of effective opposition to them. Christianity has always known that, given the overwhelming reality of sin, a purely human struggle against evil would ultimately be doomed to frustration. But that is where the good news comes in: through faith we know that we do not struggle alone. The primary activity for our salvation, and for renewal of the human community, is God's -- a fact which we recall and for which we give thanks around the Lord's Table. Yes, active participation in God's mission is the ultimate test of the faithfulness of the Church to its life of sacramental celebration; but the proclamation of Christ in word and sacrament is the cornerstone of Christian mission. "The eucharist is precious food for missionaries ..." (par. 26). Having tasted God's reconciling love, we are encouraged and empowered to be "servants of reconciliation among men and women" (par. 24).

The problem, therefore, is not that we fiddle with dogma while the world burns but that we fail to live out the implications of our sacramental life in the world. We so often fail, in the words of the Vancouver Assembly, to live "a eucharist way of life" that gives thanks (eucharistia) for what God has done, is doing, and will do on our behalf through acts of joyous self-offering. BEM goes on to insist that, not only are we sent from the Table nourished for mission, "the very celebration of the eucharist is an instance of the Church's participation in God's mission to the world" (par. 25). In its liturgy, the Church

gives thanks to God on behalf of the whole creation and intercedes through Christ for the world's restoration. Prayer for the world is not a substitute for bread for the world, but it is an important, even indispensable complement.

4. BEM is noteworthy for its strong emphasis on the Kingdom of God. The eucharist, it contends, signifies and anticipates "what the world is become ... a Kingdom of justice, love and peace in The Holy Spirit" (par. 4). The most explicit statement is found in paragraph 22:

> The eucharist opens up the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as the final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it. Signs of this renewal are present in the world wherever the grace of God is manifest and human beings [of whatever religion or ideology] work for justice, love and peace. The eucharist is the feast at which the Church gives thanks to God for these signs and joyfully celebrates and anticipates the coming Kingdom of Christ.

The Church is not a cult for promoting the personal salvation of its members but a community formed in response to the good news that God is sovereign lord of all life, a community which lives in the promise that life in this world can and will be transformed. The central Tradition of the Church avoids the extremes of, on the one hand, attempting to build the Kingdom on our own (following the model of the Great Teacher) and, on the other, leaving everything to God. Geoffrey Wainwright, a scholar deeply involved in the writing of BEM, puts it nicely in his book, Eucharist and Eschatology.

> The eucharist community will act in the world in such ways as to display the righteousness, peace and joy of the Kingdom, and so it will bear witness to the giver of these gifts, cooperating in the establishment of the Kingdom without ever a thought of denying that the work is entirely God's and will be drastically completed by him. (p. 148).

"Foretaste" is a word used often in this section of BEM (e.g., par. 6 and 18). Since believers of all races, classes and cultures are invited to this common table (at least when the eucharist is properly celebrated) and share in the fruits of Christ's sacrifice, it is a foretaste of divine justice. Since believers exchange words and gestures of peace as they approach Holy Communion and are there at peace with God, it is a foretaste of God's shalom. Since at this table we remember God's love for us in Christ and experience Christ's presence through the Spirit, it is a foretaste of the day when this love will be universal.

All of this means, of course, that the eucharist is inevitably a threat to the world as it is. As a word of promise, it is also a word of judgement on our present idolatries. the gathered community -- breaking one loaf, sharing one cup -- is a "sign" (another frequently used word in BEM) of this judgment and promise. But how much truer and more effective a sign we would be if our fellowship were less visibly divided (par. 26)!

5. The preceding discussion indicates why BEM maintains that the eucharist is "the central act of the Church's worship" (par. 1; COCU: the Lord's Supper "stands at the heart of the Church's worship"), and, therefore, recommends that it be celebrated

frequently -- "at least every Sunday" (par. 31). Some churches worry that this undervalues the proclamation of the Word, but, in my opinion, it is a groundless concern. Paragraph 3 stresses that eucharist necessarily includes both Word and Sacrament, while paragraph 12 points out that our memorial of what God has done for our salvation through Christ is the content of both preaching and Holy Communion. As the NCCB response puts it, "the and in word and sacrament must be seen as connective, not disjunctive." The Roman Catholic tendency to minimize preaching, and the tendency of most protestant traditions to emphasize it at the expense of sacrament, should both be reconsidered.

Elements of the eucharistic liturgy are listed in paragraph 27, but the following paragraph makes clear that "liturgical diversity" is "healthy and enriching." Convergence on an understanding of this sacrament does not, and need not, imply uniform worship. The text goes on to say that it is Christ who invites us to the meal and presides over it, but quickly adds that "in most churches, the presidency is signified by an ordained minister" (par. 29). BEM does not suggest that the validity of the eucharist depends on having an ordained minister preside, but this practice is recommended (as it is in all ecumenical documents) as a sign of unity with the Church universal.

* * *

I hope that the preceding pages have adequately outlined the basic contours of the ecumenical convergence represented by BEM, a convergence which our churches have helped shape and which our churches (judging from our responses to BEM) generally endorse. With this in mind, I would like to offer two recommendations for our discussion:

1. That the Ecumenical Partnership Committee (EPC) urge the 1987 General Assembly and General Synod to acknowledge that there are no theological barriers to regular eucharistic fellowship between our churches and to recommend that, wherever possible, UCC and Disciples congregations join together for celebrations of the Lord's Supper on a regular basis. The following lines from COCU's covenanting proposals (Covenanting Toward Unity) reinforce the importance of this proposal.

> The observance of the Lord's Supper is always a sign of the unity of the Church, yet our practices have made it also a sign of our disunity. As Christians gather, in all their diversity, at the one Table of the Lord, they manifest their given unity in Christ ... The consultation's experience of interim eucharistic fellowship over the past decade has convincingly revealed the dynamism of regular eucharistic sharing for the sake of Christian unity ... [Therefore] among covenanting churches it is essential that there be an intentional regularity about such eucharistic sharing. The frequency of such a common sharing ought to be at least four times per year, in addition to a church's own eucharistic practice.

It would make sense for the Assembly and Synod to recommend the "four times per year" model to our congregations as a way of anticipating the COCU proposal and of signifying that our Partnership is firmly set in this larger context. The worship materials

being prepared for this committee for the local celebration of the Partnership might be commended as a model for the quarterly communion services. The EPC might also prepare a booklet that brings together examples of communion services from both traditions for use at these joint worship experiences.

2. That the EPC produce study materials reflecting the ecumenical convergence on baptism and the eucharist and recommend, through the General Assembly and General Synod, that these be studied jointly, wherever possible, by UCC and Disciples congregations. This, of course, is consistent with the recommendation regarding baptism made at our last committee meeting. It also reflects the intention of the former Steering Committee that a central purpose of the Partnership be the fostering of renewal within our traditions through regular contact with the partner church. Indeed, that is a clear intention behind BEM, COCU and similar ecumenical efforts. After centuries of hostility and division over questions of "real presence," "memorial," and "sacrifice," churches involved in the ecumenical conversations are now able to say "any of these disputes can be put behind us." And, thus, we are in a position to address <u>together</u> the questions that press on us in this era: e.g., What is the relationship between a church's life of worship and its participation in God's mission of reconciliation in and for the world? How is our eucharistic celebration related to our efforts to be a more humanly inclusive community?

There are, of course, various renewal efforts going on in both of our denominations. But, as Gabriel Fackre points out in a recent paper on the UCC reception of BEM, these usually reflect particular theological streams within our traditions and, thus, often take place in relative isolation. A part of this committee's work, it seems to me, is to stress to our churches that renewal needs to take place in an ecumenical context, not a narrowly confessional one. The Disciples land the UCC need each other and the diversities we represent if we are to be more truly the Church God wills.

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MINISTRY
IN THE
ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP

I have found this a difficult paper to write for two reasons. First, I am firmly convinced that there are no theological obstacles to the mutual recognition of our ministries as part of a relationship of "full communion." The Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ are in basic agreement on every major issue raised in ecumenical discussions on ministry (see Appendix). Our denominations, however, are internally divided about the very nature of the church with ministry serving as a convenient focal point for this division. The response to recommendations from BEM and COCU that we adopt an episcopal ordering of ministry is a good illustration. Many in our churches see this as a logical outcome of our ecuenical commitments and an important way of strengthening pastoral oversight. Others regard it as a dangerous betrayal of things we have always stood for -- liberty and equality in Christ. Partnership will be difficult unless we address this internal division; but, partnership can also provide a significant opportunity for dealing opening with these frequently polarized conceptions of the church.

Second, while there may be no theological barriers to mutual recognition of our ministries, there are numerous practical, polity questions which must be answered before we can authentically speak of full communion. And for this the "emerging ecumenical consensus" is of little help since neither COCU nor BEM takes up such issues as ministerial standing and access to placement procedures.

With these difficulties in mind, this paper will take a different form from the previous two. Part I will attempt to identify what I take to be the major split in our fellowships. Both of our churches are heir to a dual legacy, both sides of which stand for valid things but are in need of the other. I am convinced that facing this directly can help us 1) overcome some of the fear associated with ecumenical growth and 2) appropriate new ecumenical insights without relinquishing the best of our heritages. This section of the paper calls for no particular action (at least in the short term); its main purpose at this meeting is to help us better understand the issues before us.

In Part II I will tackle some of the practical questions related to ministry and, in this way, indicate what I think full communion means for us -- concretely. This section deserves much discussion, but it is my hope that it will lead to some agreements at this meeting which we can bring to the Executive Council and Administrative Committee next spring.

This paper, like the two before it, is not conceived as a definitive position statement of the EPC. It is written for the purpose of stimulating internal committee discussion toward the end of developing General Assembly and General Synod recommendations and related study materials. The EPC may, of course, wish to recommend that the paper be made available in its present or a revised form, as a resource for discussions in congregations.

I

Why does talk of bishops, of strengthening ministerial oversight and teaching responsibility, provoke such strong reactions -- pro and con? The answer, I think, lies in a distinction -- familiar to many from the work of Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr -- between "church" and "sect." In order to avoid the negative connotations associated with the term "sect," I will describe this dichotomy as a tension between the "affirming church" and the "protesting church."

Since the Reformation, churches of the second category have been marked by their protest against two things. First, they have objected to the tendency of "established" churches to cast their nets too widely, embracing the committed and the nominal in one fellowship. The church, protesting churches have agreed, should be a voluntary society of those who know the Lord and freely offer their lives to him. A person does not enter this fellowship because of parental conviction or national ethos but as a result of genuine repentance and conversion. Protesting churches are, thus, frequently identified by the practice of "believers' baptism."

Second, protesting churches have consistently rejected any tendency to exalt the fallible, relative structures and practices of our ecclesial earthen vessels. To paraphrase Reinhold Niebuhr, [4] they have been more conscious of the corruptions of church order, theological formulation and liturgical structure than appreciative of them as means of grace. Protesting churches know that ministerial hierarchy can threaten the freedom of all Christians to interpret scripture and to be seen as a community of diverse and complementary gifts. This has usually led to a preference for lay ministry (or, at least, to the limiting of clerical authority) and congregational polity. They know that credal affirmations can be absolutized, detracting from the immediacy of religious experience (the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit) and, in this way, sapping the vitality of faith. They know that liturgical forms can become empty rituals and that sacramental actions can be experienced in nearly magical terms. Thus, they prefer spontaneous prayer (or, at least, prayer prepared for each worship occasion) and forms of worship that are close to the model of scripture.

What I am calling the affirming churches regard the church in much more positive terms, seeing it as a community of grace, a sign and instrument of God's purpose in and for the world. Where the protesting churches have a keen sense of corporate sinfulness, the affirming churches have a deep awareness of individual falleness and of our consequent need for structures through which we encounter God's sustaining grace. Where protesting churches emphasize the necessity of a faithful response to God's saving acts, affirming churches stress the initiative of God which may touch the lives of saints and sinners, the committed and the lukewarm. Where protesting churches fear that an overemphasis on on order can destroy freedom in Christ, affirming churches fear that disorder can destroy our continuity in the one, apostolic faith.

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[4] *See his essay "The Ecumenical Issue in the United States" in Essays in Applied Christianity (Living Age Books, 1959), pp. 265-78*

These Christians and their churches know that if ordained ministers are not allowed and enabled to exercise oversight and to teach the faith, the church may lack ethical and theological discipline. They know that without liturgical structure worship can become banal and sentimental, relying more on the performance of the leader than on the full biblical witness. They know that the Lord's Supper can become a rite in which we remember Christ and baptism a ceremony in which God acts, vivid reminders that we are saved by grace not works. They know that without theological affirmations which attempt to express the catholicity and continuity of Christian faith, churches can be tempted to take their bearings from secular culture. They know that if the congregation is made the locus of authority the unity of the church across time and space (of which the bishop is a prime symbol) may be minimized.

As you are aware, and as this brief comparison hopefully demonstrates, our partner churches have both affirming and protesting roots. Congregationalism -- with its suspicion of structures beyond the local and its distrust of ministerial hierarchy -- is basically in the protesting tradition; but the Reformed side of the UCC heritage -- with its concern for right order and its tradition of credal affirmation and theological elaboration -- is of affirming church lineage. I have heard it suggested (especially by Europeans unfamiliar with the nuances of the American church situation) that the UCC was a relatively "easy" union of two similar church families. In actual fact it bridged what Niebuhr and others have identified as the most intractable split in American Protestantism. Most observers would probably agree that the coming together of these two streams remains "uneasy" at best.

The Disciples emphasis on church unity and on eucharist as the center of the church's worship give evidence of sacramental, church-affirming foundations; but Disciples quickly gave these a protesting church coloring as signified by their practice of believers' baptism, their emphasis on informal worship and locally-rooted ministry, and their preference, until recent years, for congregational polity. Our partnership faces important theological differences, but they are not so much between us as within us.

The situation is even more complicated by the fact that protesting churches, unable to sustain the vitality of their original protest, often (not always, as H. Richard Niebuhr suggests, but often) begin to adopt affirming church characteristics. The problem is that they frequently do so without either acknowledging the true importance of the church as a community of grace or preserving the power and legitimacy of their initial protest. Disciples, for example, moved in the last century toward a professional clergy for functional reasons, but the importance of having persons set apart through the power of the Holy Spirit to preach and teach the gospel, to preside over the liturgical and sacramental life of the church and to assemble, equip and watch over the community has never been fully affirmed. [5] A knee-jerk opposition to bishops and ministerial authority remains alive and well, but serious discussion of the issues at stake in the affirming church -- protesting church dialectic is seldom heard.

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[5] *The list is derived from the COCU Consensus. For a fuller discussion of the possibility for renewal offered by the ecumenical convergence on ministry, Appendix.*

There are signs that these generalizations are less true today than they were even ten years ago. The excellent new UCC Book of Worship seems to be a deliberate attempt to recover a more formal liturgical structure without becoming formalistic. The Disciples Commission on Theology and Christian Unity has labored for nearly a decade on a series of "words to the church" designed to strengthen (or, at least, become more self-conscious of) the affirming church dimension of that heritage. Still, we have a long way to go. Let me be as provocative as possible: Instead of reflecting the best of our dual heritages, our churches have often appeared to be amalgamations of their worst characteristics (i.e., emphasizing neither discipleship nor catholicity). Instead of deliberately claiming that the church must be a community that lives in constant awareness of God's grace and a community that lives in constant awareness of its own fallibility, we have frequently polarized into slogan-wielding camps, unaware of the basic issues at stake.

The great ecumenical task in America, Reinhold Niebuhr once wrote, is to validate the church against the sect and the sect against the church. "The task is to find an institutional form broad enough, and a comprehension of the Christian faith rich enough, to give a solid basis for the instruments of grace which the historic church has rightly developed and at the same time to appreciate the validity of the sectarian protest against the corruptions which periodically appear in these means of grace." [6] Exactly! And it is a task to which our partnership can contribute by deliberately anticipating, in light of our protesting and affirming roots, the wider process of ecumenical growth -- especially COCU. This committee's previous affirmations of 1) believers' and infant baptism (baptism as God's initiative of grace and our human response of faith) and 2) the Lord's Supper as a memorial and as an experience of Christ's real, sacramental presence are clearly attempts to claim both the affirming and protesting traditions. If our partnership is (as we have repeatedly said) set within the context of COCU and the work of the WCC, then now is also the time to face the challenge -- together, if at all possible -- of developing episcopal ministry that yet retains a healthy suspicion of clerical authority and acknowledges the decision-making responsibility of the whole church.

Interlude

Before moving on to the second part of this paper -- the practical part, the part that "makes a difference" -- and I must admit that I am bothered by what I have already written. In many ways it still seems right. 1) Simply to deal with questions of polity adjustment on the grounds that our churches are not theologically divided about ministry would be to ignore profound differences regarding ministry within our denominations and to miss a possible opportunity for addressing them. In that sense, the abstract discussion of Part I is the appropriate context for the practical considerations of Part II. The protesting-affirming split in our churches should not hinder us from proceeding quickly with mutual recognition and all that entails, but it clearly needs to be taken into account if we are to grow together beyond that point. 2) The preceding discussion also underscores the potential contribution of our partnership to COCU -- a stated goal of the whole enterprise.

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[6] *Essays, p. 269*

The Disciples and UCC are the COCU churches which most obviously embody the protesting ethos. (The Methodist heritage in this country has exhibited several marks of the protesting church, but it has also retained aspects of its Anglican origins.) The partnership should reinforce our resolve to carry that ethos into any future Church of Christ Uniting. 3) Finally, the preceding discussion might help allay fears that part of our heritage is being overlooked by the partnership or COCU -- or both. Champions of the protesting church are particularly likely to feel betrayed by ecumenical developments since it is far easier (as COCU has found) to deal affirmatively with theological formulations, sacramental practices and orderings of ministry than to prescribe suspicions regarding them -- however legitimate. If our partnership were to say loudly that we are committed to becoming a church that is affirming and protesting, it might evoke interest in circles where there has been little to date.

What bothers me, however, is the feeling that the partnership and the EPC are not taken seriously enough about what we recommend makes any real difference. Perhaps all of this talk about "anticipating wider ecumenical growth" and "renewing our life together" is just so much hot air, a way of making work for ourselves to do. Perhaps our mandate is much more modest: to help increase the level of cooperation between Disciples and UCC without questioning anything basic. Perhaps there simply are no structures of processes which would enable us to undertake common renewal or common response to ecumenical initiatives toward the end of "being more truly the Church God wills." These questions, too, deserve discussion.

II

Part of our mandate from the Steering Committee is to develop recommendations regarding the "mutual recognition of ordained ministers" to be presented to the General Synod and General Assembly in 1989. It would seem that the Steering Committee did not envision major structural changes in our churches (at least in the short run), but modest -- though consequential -- steps that could be implemented in the near future. I think this is wise. Several regions, conferences and associations are already being pressed to provide guidelines and procedures regarding ordination and standing in the context of the partnership. The EPC needs to act quickly to develop acceptable church-wide policies for what are, after all, church-wide issues. The EPC is also the appropriate body to make longer-range (and, possibly more radical) recommendations regarding common growth in the theology and practice of ministry, but these should come after 1989 (i.e., once mutual recognition is accomplished).

With this in mind, the following recommendations maintain as much of our present structures and procedures as possible while still attempting mutual recognition on a substantive, reciprocal basis. I have put them in the form of brief prescriptive propositions in order to facilitate discussion.

1. The 1989 General Assembly and General Synod resolutions should mutually recognize that the current ordained ministers of the other church are true ministers of word and sacrament and should affirm the understanding of ministry found in the other church's

official documents (i.e., Policies and Criteria for the Order of Ministry of the Disciples and the UCC Manual on Ministry which is based on the UCC Constitution and Bylaws). I would hope that the GA and GS resolutions will also go further to offer specific guidelines on ordination and standing such as those found below. Full communion should involve not simply a "passive" recognition but an active affirmation that the ministers of the other church are, in some genuine sense, now "ours."

2. Future ordinations in the two churches would follow the procedures set forth in the Policies and Criteria (PC) and Manual on Ministry (MM) but should, whenever possible, involve participation by a representative(s) of the other church, including in the laying on of hands. This would simply mean making more explicit what is already accepted practice in many regions and associations. (The PC [III.D.3.], e.g., recommends that the "ecumenical church" participate in the act of ordination, but does not make specific mention of the UCC.) Who participates from each church would be up to the region or association involved. From an ecumenical point of view, the most appropriate person would be the Regional or Conference Minister (i.e., the person charged with the task of episcope), but that may prove too great a burden on these positions.

I agree with the memorandum from the Indiana Joint Task Force that it is not appropriate to speak of "dual ordination" since this terminology implies that ordination is normally into the ministry of a particular denomination. What we want to signify, it seems to me, is that our denominations commonly participate in the one ministry of the one Church of Jesus Christ and that ordination is entry into the set-apart, representative ministry of that universal fellowship. Common participation in the act of ordination within the context of the partnership would help to symbolize that reality.

3. The general procedures for candidacy and the nurture of candidates for ordained ministry would also remain as presently constituted. (For the UCC, this responsibility is located in the association [Constitution, par. 18], while, for the Disciples it is located in the region [PC III B].) A representative of the other church should serve, however, on the ordination council (Disciples) or ecclesiastical council (UCC) of each candidate whenever possible.

4. Regions and associations should also be urged to require that candidates be familiar with the history and polity of the other denomination. Ideally, students preparing for ministry would be urged, if not required, to take a course on the history and polity of the other church during their seminary career.

5. Our churches should develop a common certificate of ordination with symbols of both denominations and explicit place for the signature of the participating representative from the other tradition.

6. The standards or qualifications for ordination are similar in the two churches (PC I.C. 1. and 2., III C and MM 74-75) and should require no modification at this time. Long-range study of this issue may be undertaken.

7. The question of standing demands particularly careful attention. In the UCC, ordination follows the call to a particular approved ministry and confers standing automatically (Constitution, par. 19 and Bylaw 107). There is no reason why this pattern could not continue for those seeking ordination through a UCC association. An ordained minister of another denomination who wishes standing in the UCC currently must apply for "privilege of call" to the association in which he or she lives (Bylaw 126). He or she is then examined by the Committee of Ministry of the conference and association with regard to his or her reasons for such a request, ministerial abilities, educational background, knowledge of UCC polity and history, and Christian faith and experience. If found qualified, the applicant is granted "privilege of call" by the association; and after accepting a call, he or she may apply for standing in the UCC. My recommendation is that, following the mutual recognition of ministry, such privilege of call should automatically be granted upon petition to an association to all new ministers ordained by Disciples regions (i.e., those who have probably had UCC participation in their ordination councils and ordination services and who have studied UCC polity and history as part of their ministerial preparation). Standing would still be granted only after the call to a ministry recognized by the association.

8. In the Disciples of Christ, ordination is not automatically linked to standing (an ordained minister is eligible for standing) and it often precedes the call to a particular approved ministry (PC V.B.1.). This pattern, too, could continue for those seeking ordination through a Disciples region. According to current policy (PC V.C.), a minister ordained in another denomination may gain admission to ministerial standing upon fulfillment of the following requirements:

a. Membership in the Disciples or "recognition by a region of the applicant's participation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),"

b. acquaintance with Disciples history and polity,

c. fulfillment of prerequisites and preparation for the Disciples order of ministry.

Again it is my recommendation that, following the public act of mutual recognition, it be assumed that all new ministers ordained by UCC associations meet these conditions. The possibility of call and standing should, thus, be automatically granted upon petition to a region -- though, standing should be granted only after the call to a ministry recognized by the region. (This seems consistent with PC V.B.3.a).

9. To summarize, the public act of mutual recognition would mean that all ministers ordained in both churches after that date would, if they requested it, receive "privilege of call" in a region or association of the other denomination without further examination. Standing in the other church would not be automatically conferred but would follow upon receiving a call to a ministry approved by the region or association. A minister would, of course, be subject to the discipline of any church in which he or she holds standing.

10. For ministers already ordained at the time of mutual recognition (i.e., those who probably have not had participation of the other church in their candidacy and ordination), the normal published procedures for granting standing should be followed. It is hoped, however, that regions and associations would not hinder but encourage such applicants from the partner church.

11. The UCC (Bylaw 129) makes explicit provision for associations to grant "dual standing" to an ordained minister of another denomination if the person a) serves as a pastor of a UCC congregation, b) serves in an agency or instrumentality of the UCC, c) serves as pastor of a federated congregation affiliated with the UCC, or d) serves in an ecumenical ministry which includes the UCC. (The Disciples make no explicit provision for dual standing but, in fact, seem to follow the same general guidelines.) According to the Manual for Ministry (p. 87), however, persons with dual standing are not entered on the rolls of the association as ordained ministers, will not appear in the UCC Yearbook, and are not entitled to a "ministerial profile" on file with the Office of Church Life and Leadership. My recommendation is that, following the act of mutual recognition, ministers of the partner church meeting the requirements for dual standing be given the full privileges of standing in both churches (e.g., voting membership in the association or General Assembly, the possibility of serving as delegates to the General Synod, and listing in the respective Yearbooks).

Note: This proposal would not allow for dual standing unless a person ordained in one church entered an approved ministry of the other. A Disciples minister serving a Disciples of Christ congregation, e.g., would not be granted dual standing -- except in the case covered by the following proposition.

12. Along with mutual recognition, the EPC should develop recommendations for the establishment of "partner congregations," congregations of one denomination within the context of the Ecumenical Partnership. Such congregations might, for example, establish partner relations with a congregation of the other tradition (not necessarily in the immediate vicinity) and undertake congregation-wide study of the other denomination. My recommendation is that ministers serving such congregations be considered eligible for dual standing by both churches. (This would require slight modification of PC V.B.3.a. and c. and UCC Bylaw 129.)

13. Mutual recognition should also involve agreement to develop structures for promoting collegiality between regions and conferences or associations. Joint clergy retreats, for example, should be the norm in most parts of the country after 1989.

14. The ordained ministers of each church should have access to the placement/relocation system of the other. This means that Disciples ministers may request that their ministerial profile be kept by OCLL and that it be shared with associations or congregations in which they desire consideration. Similarly, UCC ministers may request to have a relocation file placed with the Division of Homeland Ministry's Department of Ministry and shared with congregations or regions in which they desire consideration. Lists of ministerial openings maintained by national or regional units should also be available upon request to ordained ministers of the partner denomination.

15. Licensed and commissioned ministers would continue to fall under current guidelines.

16. Mutual recognition would not affect lay congregations offices (e.g., deacons and elders) in either denomination.

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MINISTRY
IN THE
ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP

APPENDIX

Challenges for Common Growth

While the ecumenical movement has not "resolved" all of the long-standing controversies over ministry, remarkable progress has been made in reaching a common mind on certain essential questions. In my opinion, this ecumenical convergence offers valuable pointers for the renewal of ministry in both the UCC and the Disciples. The following brief and necessarily subjective examples give indication of these challenges for common growth, growth which I'm convinced we can best undertake as partners. In this sense, this appendix might constitute a partial, tentative agenda for future work.

1. One of the greatest instances of theological transformation in our era is reflected in BEM's simple affirmation that "ordained ministry has no existence apart from the community." I know of no ecumenical dialogue since Vatican II which has not endorsed this principle. The fullest discussion for Disciples and UCC comes in COCU which boldly declares that "lay status in the church is not a residual status, but rather the primary form of ministry apart from which no other Christian ministry can be described." Through baptism, "all members of the church are in a certain sense ordained to the whole, corporate ministry."

That is, of course, familiar language for our churches, but I am concerned that we have not spent enough effort in recent years reflecting on what this means or how we make it more of a reality in local communities. In many congregations with which I am familiar, lay and ordained persons are still not true partners in ministry, valued for their "diverse and complementary gifts" (BEM). In fact, the increasing professionalization of ministry (to which I will return) means that many persons now regard ministry as something done by "experts" who must be specially trained to accomplish it.

2. When it comes to the "nature" of ordained ministry, most ecumenical documents use the language of "representation" -- though what the ministry represents receives different emphasis in different texts. COCU argues that ordained ministers "symbolize and focus the ministry of Christ and the apostles as well as the ministry of the whole church," but the emphasis is clearly on the latter. A subsequent paragraph, for example, contends that "...ordination marks them as persons who represent to the church its own identity and mission in Jesus Christ." The minister does not represent Christ in a particular way since the church is the body of Christ and all of our ministries are rooted in his. The ordained minister brings the multi-faceted ministry of the church to concentrated expression; it gives leadership by representing to the church that which we are all called to do (our mission) and be (our identity).

BEM, with its Roman Catholic and Orthodox participation, reverses the emphasis. It says in a commentary that "the ordained ministry fulfills its functions in a representative way, providing the focus for the unity of the life and witness of the community," but in the text it speaks of ordained ministers as "representatives of Jesus Christ to the community." The dominant metaphor has changed. Instead of stressing that the church is the body of Christ, this understanding of ministry rests on the idea that Jesus is the head of the body whose ministry is focally represented by those set apart.

Our churches certainly lean toward COCU; but we would both benefit, I am convinced, from a deeper probing of this issue. Our churches speak too little, in my opinion, about the gracious initiative of God or the living presence of Christ in our communities (the "vertical" dimension of Christian life), and, as a result, our ordained ministers frequently become (as one friend puts it) "priests of the horizontal needs of the people." Shouldn't a genuinely incarnational ministry represent Christ to the people as well as the people to themselves?

3. When we turn to the tasks of ordained ministry, there is again broad ecumenical agreement. COCU speaks of a three-fold purpose; a) preaching and teaching the gospel, b) presiding over the liturgical and sacramental life of the church and c) assembling, equipping and watching over the community. BEM asserts that those ordained are, above all else, "publicly and continually responsible for pointing to the community's fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ." It goes on to say that "the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry."

The thing I want to underscore from these two, nearly identical lists is the primary place they give to the teaching responsibility of ministers -- a departure, I suspect, from how most overworked American Protestant pastors understand the priorities of their calling. In a recent, influential book, Christian Identity and Theological Education, Joseph Hough and John Cobb contend that "the expectations for leadership in society as a whole have increasingly been adopted as normative for church leadership as well. Following the general pattern of bureaucratization, the churches, too, have focused on routinized problem solving in the organization and maintenance of their institutions as the chief focus of leader effectiveness." As a result, the dominant paradigms for ministry in our age are "minister as manager" and "minister as therapist." Hough and Cobb are convinced, as am I, that the church today needs and wants something more than implementers, problem solvers and counselors. It needs and wants guidance about what it means to be Christian in such a world; it needs leaders who can teach the church its own history and thus enable the community's active reflection on how to live shaped by the "dangerous" memory of our Lord. The Disciples and the UCC have tended toward the utilitarian conception of ministry, in practice if not in theory, and thus could benefit, in my estimation, from this ecumenical challenge.

4. Another topic with which ecumenical discussions on ministry have had to wrestle is the proper balance between the pastoral or priestly and the prophetic. The church needs both a) institutional stability and integrity and b) prophetic, charismatic

insight. Most responses to BEM find it too priestly and insufficiently prophetic, too apostolic and not sufficiently eschatalogical, but at least the issue of their proper relationship is raised and focused by the ecumenical text.

There is much we can learn from this debate. As I see it, much ministry in our churches displays an understandable but unhealthy desire "to please" the congregational constituency (another characteristic borrowed from worldly models, especially American democracy). Our ministers, to offer a wild generalization, become pretty good at comforting the afflicted, but are far less able to afflict the comfortable -- because people are not pleased by being made uncomfortable. Yet this is surely an essential responsibility of a ministry that is "publicly and continually" to remind us of our dependence on the God who was in Christ.

Serious confrontation with this issue could lead to far-reaching renewal, including renewal of our ecclesiastical structures. As long as congregations have the power to get rid of pastors who don't please them, we can hardly expect ordained ministers to speak with prophetic authority no matter how idolatrous the community may become.

5. A related issue is the authority of ordained ministry. Here BEM and COCU use the same language: "Because Jesus came as one who serves ... to be set apart means to be consecrated for service." The authority of the ordained ministry is not a possession but a gift to be used for building up the community. The fear, of course, is that ministers will become isolated or autocratic, and thus BEM uses words like "inter-dependence" and "reciprocity" which members of the Disciples and the UCC will applaud.

The problem with all this is similar to that mentioned above. We often read "service" to mean "doing what the congregation wants," a kind of authority by Gallup Poll. The ecumenical convergence also warns against this tendency. Ministers, says BEM in a commentary, should avoid two dangers: a) disregarding the faithful and b) becoming dependent "on the common opinion of the community." The authority of ministers, the text goes on to suggest, "lies in their responsibility to express the will of God in the community." One does that lovingly, as a servant, but forcefully as one whose service may involve the correction of those one serves. There is much we can learn from this discussion.

6. With regard to the act of ordination itself, both COCU and BEM speak of a balance between divine and human initiative. Ordination, says BEM, is "an action by God and the community by which the ordained are strengthened by the Spirit for their task and are upheld by the acknowledgment and prayers of the congregation." Neither text explicitly calls ordination a sacrament, but they do affirm that the laying on of hands is, as COCU puts it, "a visible and effective sign of the gift of the Spirit." We pray in that moment that God will establish a new relation between the one ordained and the church, that God will use this relationship for God's purposes, and we do so with the confidence that God will act to answer this prayer.

Our traditions have shied away from sacramental language, but I think it is time to worry about the opposite problem. COCU warns that "ordination is apt to be confused with 'professional' status in the church," but that is exactly what we need to do without a healthy understanding of God's action in ordination. We succumb to the secular model of the "expert" whose authority rests on the skills which she or he has acquired to perform certain tasks. And nothing builds up a clerical elite faster than this since the laity become content to leave ministering to the experts who are professionally trained and functionally set apart to do it. Once again there is much, in my opinion, we can learn together from the ecumenical conversations.

7. I have saved what may be the most controversial question for last. Both BEM and COCU recommend the adoption of the traditional "three-fold" ordering of ordained ministry (i.e., bishop, presbyter and deacon). Indeed, <u>every</u> union conversation or theological dialogue involving a church that is episcopally ordered has endorsed this pattern. If anything in the ecumenical movement is certain, it is that any broadly united church of the future will include bishops ordained in apostolic succession.

This assertion, however, needs clarification. a) Both COCU and BEM observe that no particular ordering of ministry can claim absolute scriptural warrant (and certainly not dominical institution). The church can and has existed without bishops; and these other orderings of ministry have also been blessed with the gifts of the Spirit. What the ecumenical documents are saying, therefore, is not that the three-fold ministry is <u>essential</u> but that it can be <u>beneficial</u> to the church in our area. The bishop symbolizes the fact that the church extends through space and time far beyond the local church, and does so in a way that is sacramental and pastoral not just bureaucratic and juridical. In the face of the historical forgetfulness and cultural narrowness so typical of our age, this symbolic function can be most significant. b) The ecumenical movement is not suggesting that Disciples or UCC should become Episcopalians or Roman Catholics. Both COCU and BEM talk about "ordering" rather than "orders" -- about three "offices" within one pattern - in order to avoid past hierarchical connotations. A bishop, they imply, is not better than a presbyter, only different. e) A common ordering of ministry need not eliminate diversity in the way ministry is exercised. "The three-fold ordering," writes COCU, "will be continued in the Church Uniting in ways appropriate to the differing traditions of the uniting churches." In the history of the church, the actual practice of ordained ministry has varied greatly in different ages and cultures even though the structure has remained relatively fixed (and thus a point of continuity in the midst of change).

On the closely-related issue of apostolic succession, BEM makes what may be a major ecumenical breakthrough by emphasizing "the apostolic Tradition of the Church as a whole," with the "transmission of ministerial responsibilities" as only one element of this apostolicity. Continuity in the faith is essential, but insofar as Christian communities preach the Gospel of Christ and attempt to live as he commanded -- through prayer, witness, worship and service -- they can be called "apostolic" whether or not they have retained the historic episcopate. Once again the argument is utilitarian: episcopal ministry in apostolic succession can be an important sign (though not a guarantee) of our unity in faith with Christians throughout the ages; it is to be commended. But churches which currently do not have the historic episcopate, writes BEM in what may be its most crucial

sentence, "cannot accept any suggestion that the ministry exercised in their own tradition should be invalid until the moment it enters into an existing line of episcopal succession."

This, it seems to me, is not only a challenge from the ecumenical movement but a significant test of our willingness to model a new kind of partnership, one which insists less on negotiating than on creative envisioning together. It is true that our respective responses to BEM indicate an openness to explore the three-fold ministry. But public discussion of the question meets with predictable opposition. Several speakers at the 1985 Disciples General Assembly responded to the "Word to the Church on Ministry," with its endorsement of the three-fold ordering, by saying in effect, "That isn't our heritage. We shouldn't be worrying about that." My hope is that the EPC will proclaim "Our heritage is the one, universal Church" and, therefore, insist that consideration of bishops is necessary and appropriate, despite the fact that neither of our denominations has been episcopally ordered.

At our last meeting we heard an outstanding plea from David Taylor to anticipate future ecumenical growth by reflecting on the COCU proposals in light of our distinctive congregationally-centered, "protesting-church" heritage. What does a bishop look like when rooted firmly in the shared and dispersed authority of the local community? That is the kind of question we can profitably ask together through our partnership as together we anticipate wider ecumenical advance.

I am aware that, for the purposes of this committee's actual work, I have developed this section on possible renewal in too much detail. Behind the detail, however, I hope you hear my sense of desperation: Our churches, like all churches, are in great need of reform! Yet, instead of commonly addressing the problems between us inherited from the sixteenth or nineteenth centuries! Let's set a new agenda, one that reflects the real issues of our era, and openly acknowledge that common attention to this agenda is no less ecumenical than the resolution of past conflicts. That, alone, would be a contribution of this partnership to the ecumenical movement.