

Cheryl L. THOMSEN: Beginning with Forgiveness

Moving Forward

When a system—marriage, family, work, education, politics or religion, of any size—breaks down and disengages from dialogue for a period of time, healing will need to occur, allowing the victims and the perpetrators to come together peacefully.

Roman Catholics would be remiss to think that they can engage in dialogue with other religions with which they have been in conflict for hundreds of years without acknowledgement of past injustices and a sincere, genuine offer of forgiveness.

Pope John Paul II modeled forgiveness as a practice to break down barriers in relationships, healing memories, building unity and new bridges for dialogue. As partners in dialogue, listening to the movement of the Holy Spirit leads us to a new relationship and remembrance of the past.

Models throughout history, beginning with Jesus Christ, call us into a new unity founded on re-membering, setting each other free—the victim and the sinner—through forgiveness, prayer, peace and dialogue.

Suggested Reading

ACCATTOLI Luigi, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness. The Mea Culpas of John Paul II*. Boston, 1998.
International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: the Church and Faults of the Past*. Vatican, 1999.

KNITTER Paul F., *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, 2004.

MÜLLER-FAHRENHOLZ Geiko, *The Art of Forgiveness*. Genève, 1997.

O'GARA Margaret, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange*. Colledgeville, 1998.

SCHREIBER Robert J., *The Ministry of Reconciliation. Spirituality and Strategies*. Maryknoll, 2002.

SPOHN William C., *Go and Do Likewise. Jesus and Ethics*. New York, 2000.

SWIDLER Leonard, *The Dialogue Decalogue*. <http://global-dialogue.com>.

TUTU Desmond, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York, 1999.

Called Together to be Peacemakers. Report of the International Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference. www.bridgefolk.net/calledtogether.htm.

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John George HUBER

Eucharistic Convergence

in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

This paper represents research by what could be called a “tamed ecumenical optimist.”¹ This present effort hopefully will reflect a greater measure of ecumenical realism that serves as a corrective to what was an overly optimistic appreciation of the four interconfessional initiatives selected for the research project.²

This is our thesis: Despite the significant interconfessional agreements that have been reached on a bilateral and multilateral level, some remaining challenges—primarily ecclesiological—need to be identified in order to realize a more objective evaluation and a more complete consensus.

Recent interconfessional developments are called “initiatives” for the sake of originality and to emphasize the intentionality of these ecumenical efforts.³ The initiatives represent a pro-active commitment to the pursuit of Christian unity and the breaking down of historic walls of separation.

Initiatives and Convergences

Some Faith and Order convergences (which also included Lutheran participation) are added to this research in order to explore important ecumenical contributions that are being made by the wider spectrum of confessional traditions through the facilitating role of the World Council of Churches. This section will focus on the Eucharist, because we are convinced that this issue should be given high priority in the ecumenical quest for unity.

¹ This term was inspired by the title, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, authored by Reinhold NIEBUHR, Chicago, 1929.

² What follows is adapted from one of the chapters of a major research paper that was written for the Master of Ecumenical Studies program at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland. The title of the paper is: *The Real but Imperfect Communion: Significant Agreements and Some Remaining Challenges in Four Recent Interconfessional Initiatives Involving Lutheran Participation*.

³ The term ‘initiatives’ is used in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993) to describe the decisive ecumenical action taken by the Holy See and “bishops, synods of Eastern Catholic churches and episcopal conferences.” *Origins* 1993/23. 134. But it is used in this paper to indicate that ecumenical efforts are also being initiated by churches outside the Roman communion.

The interconfessional initiatives have realized a unity that is authentic, but still incomplete, a “communion” that is “real,” but “imperfect.” Although the expression was used by Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*⁴ to invite “Church leaders and their theologians to engage ... in a patient and fraternal dialogue” regarding the papacy as an “office of unity,”⁵ its broader ecumenical application will be demonstrated in what follows.⁶

Faith and Order is the component of the World Council of Churches that is committed to seeking doctrinal agreement. One of its early historic interconfessional milestones is the First World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927.⁷

In contrast with the Life and Work movement, whose initial conviction was that “doctrine divides and service unites,”⁸ Faith and Order—as its name implies—attempts to deal with the theological and ecclesiological issues that stand in the way of Christian unity.

The bylaws of the Faith and Order Commission define its fundamental aim as follows: “To proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ and to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, in order that the world may believe.”⁹

It is this statement of purpose that prompts the study of an ongoing Faith and Order initiative in Eucharistic Convergence. The term “ongoing” indicates a commitment to interconfessional study that extends into the future and also includes a process of reception.

The primary Faith and Order document for demonstrating a convergence on the Eucharist is *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), finalized and accepted during the Commission on Faith and Order meeting at Lima, Peru, in 1982.¹⁰

⁴ *Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II on Commitment to Ecumenism*. Boston, 1995. 96. Some parallel expressions in the encyclical are: “real although not yet full communion” (45); “basic but partial unity” (78); and “the communion between our communities, even if still incomplete” (84).

⁵ *Ut Unum Sint*. 96.

⁶ The writer, however, is also aware of the narrower ecclesiological intention disclosed in the “Decree on Ecumenism” of the Second Vatican Council, which speaks of those who “believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.” Abbott Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966. 3.

⁷ GASSMANN Günther (ed.), *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*. Faith and Order Paper 159. Genève, 1993. vii.

⁸ VAN ELDEREN Marlin, *Introducing the World Council of Churches*, Revised Edition. Genève, 1992. 21. Its first major conference was held at Stockholm in 1925.

⁹ FALCONER Alan (ed.), *Faith and Order in Moshi: The 1996 Commission Meeting*. Faith and Order Paper 177. Genève, 1998. 323. One of the principles of Faith and Order, also included in the bylaws, guarantees that in interconfessional studies “no one shall be asked to be disloyal to her or his convictions nor to compromise them. Differences are to be clarified and recorded as honestly as agreements.” *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁰ Faith and Order Paper 111. Genève, 1982. 9–17.

This Faith and Order paper also provides a definition of convergence and consensus, as well as an explanation of the process of reception that is recommended to the churches as a means of attaining a greater level of unity.

Some points of similarity and dissimilarity will be noted between this Faith and Order convergence on the Eucharist and the agreement recorded in the U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue III Report on *Eucharist as Sacrifice*.

I. BEM as a Major Faith and Order Achievement

Before focusing specifically on the exact wording of the agreement reached on the Eucharist in BEM, a concise history and an assessment of the significance of this document will be now presented.

As the Preface indicates, the three statements on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry are “the fruit of a fifty-year process of study, stretching back to the first Faith and Order Conference at Lausanne in 1927.”¹¹

The Preface then identifies Faith and Order meetings at Accra in 1974, Crêt-Bérard in 1977, and Bangalore in 1978, which preceded the decisive Lima meeting in January 1982.¹² Max THURIAN of the Taizé Community in France gave leadership to a steering group that worked further on drafting the final text from 1979 to 1982.

He notes that part of the history of BEM involves a change in Faith and Order methodology. The first stage, from Lausanne 1927 to Lund 1952, made “doctrinal comparisons between the definitions given by the different churches of their own identity,”¹³ a process that was called “comparative ecclesiology”¹⁴ at the Lund Conference.

The next stage was “that of common building on the Biblical and Christological foundations” in order to “formulate a consensus.”¹⁵ The culmination of this lengthy procedure of study and consultation was the unanimous passage of the following motion

¹¹ BEM. viii.

¹² *Ibid.* For three other concise, but more detailed histories of BEM, see *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982–1990: Report on the Process and Responses*. Faith and Order Paper 149. Genève, 1990. 6–16.; GASSMANN 22–25.; and RUSCH William G., *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry—and Reception*. Journal of Ecumenical Studies 1984/21. 129–143.

¹³ THURIAN Max (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Text*. Faith and Order Paper 129. Genève, 1986. 3.

¹⁴ TOMKINS Oliver S. (ed.), *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order Held at Lund, August 15 to 28, 1952*. (London, 1953. 15.

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at the Lima meeting of the Faith and Order Commission in 1982:

“The Commission considered the revised text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to have been brought to such a stage of maturity that it was then ready for transmission to the churches, in accordance with the mandate given at the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi 1975, and re-affirmed by the Central Committee, Dresden, 1981.”¹⁶

One clue to the significance of BEM is its fulfillment of this ecumenical assumption presented in its Preface: “If the divided churches are to achieve the visible unity they seek, one of the essential prerequisites is that they should be in basic agreement on baptism, Eucharist and ministry.”¹⁷

The interconfessional significance becomes rather obvious, when noting the exceptionally wide range of confessional identities represented among the more than one hundred theologians who gathered at Lima.

Included were Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, United, Disciples, Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal, according to a list on the back cover of the BEM document.

Although the Roman Catholic church is not a member of the World Council of Churches, this communion has been represented as a full member on the Faith and Order Commission since 1968.¹⁸

A glowing appraisal of BEM was made by the Faith and Order Commission during its meeting in Budapest, Hungary, in 1989: “This fruit of many years of ecumenical discussion has become the most widely distributed, translated and discussed ecumenical text in modern times.”

Then statistical evidence for this evaluation is offered: “Some 450.000 copies translated into thirty-one languages”; “over a thousand written reactions have so far been published”; and “never before have more than one hundred and eighty churches reached out to each other by responding officially to an ecumenical document.”¹⁹

¹⁵ THURIAN 3. The Lund Conference spoke of the need “to penetrate behind our divisions to a deeper and richer understanding of the mystery of the God-given union of Christ with his Church.” TOMKINS 15.

¹⁶ KINNAMON Michael (ed.), *Towards Visible Unity, Commission on Faith and Order, Lima, 1982*. Faith and Order Paper 112. Genève, 1982. 83–84. But William G. RUSCH points out that “the Commission on Faith and Order at Lima did not approve the text. This distinction is important. It transmitted the text to the churches.” RUSCH 139.

¹⁷ BEM. viii.

¹⁸ GASSMANN viii.

¹⁹ BEM 1982–1990: *Report on the Process and Responses*. 155.



While the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order was in session in 1993, Günther GASSMANN—who had been Director of the Faith and Order Secretariat since 1984—described the wider impact of BEM as having “helped to enrich and renew theological thinking, worship and practice in many churches.”

He added: “BEM has become an ecumenical reference text, which is evoked in bilateral conversations and negotiations between churches.”²⁰ Examples of this latter claim are the references to BEM in three bilateral documents.

These are: *Concordat of Agreement between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* of 1997; *Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion: Report of the Lutheran–Moravian Dialogue with Recommendations for Full Communion in Worship, Fellowship and Mission* of 1997; and *Called to Full Communion: The Waterloo Declaration* of the Evangelical Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada, 2000.

In addition to these illustrations from bilateral conversations that have used BEM as “an ecumenical reference text,” there is also the papal encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, which mentions “in particular, the Lima document: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982).” This historical survey of BEM and evidence for its significance sets the stage for examining the agreements recorded on the Eucharist.

²⁰ BIST Thomas F. – GASSMANN Günther (eds.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993*. Faith and Order Paper 166. Genève, 1994. 14.

II. Convergence on the Eucharist as a Step toward Consensus

When Pope John Paul II proposed “the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ” as one of five dialogue topics in his encyclical of 1995, he included it as one of “the areas in need of fuller study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved.”²¹

The *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document makes a distinction between consensus and convergence. Referring to the “Lima text,” the Preface says, “We have already achieved a remarkable degree of agreement,” but then adds: “Certainly we have not yet fully reached consensus (consentire), understood here as that experience of life and articulation of faith necessary to realize and maintain the Church’s visible unity.”²²

The BEM document thus indicates that consensus is not simply doctrinal. It is first of all experiential: such consensus is rooted in the communion built on Jesus Christ and the witness of the apostles.

As a gift of the Spirit, it is realized as a communal experience, before it can be articulated by common efforts into words. Full consensus can only be proclaimed after the churches reach the point of living and acting together in unity.²³

In the meantime, says the BEM document, prior to a more complete consensus, “The churches have begun to discover many promising convergences in their shared convictions and perspectives.”

The BEM text “aims to become part of a faithful and sufficient reflection of the common Christian Tradition on essential elements of Christian communion,” so that “in the process of growing together in mutual trust, the churches must develop these doctrinal convergences step by step, until they are finally able to declare together that they are living in communion with one another, in continuity with the apostles and the teachings of the universal Church.”²⁴

This Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, articulates a convergence on the Eucharist under three main

headings: (I) “The Institution of the Eucharist”; (II) “The Meaning of the Eucharist”; and (III) “The Celebration of the Eucharist.”

Because the section on meaning is the longest and most theological of the three, this will be given primary attention in what follows. In light of the broad spectrum of denominations represented in the production of BEM, it is significant that the agreed text uses the terms ‘sacramental meal’ and ‘sacrament’ in reference to the Eucharist.²⁵

Perhaps this sacramental vocabulary contributed to some churches in the Reformed tradition seeing in the BEM document “a ‘catholicizing tendency,’ which they say subordinates the Word to the sacraments.”²⁶

For this writer, BEM’s affirmation that “in accordance with Christ’s promise, each baptized member of the body of Christ receives in the Eucharist the assurance of the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26,28) and the pledge of eternal life (John 6,51–58)” is especially meaningful because of the critique of this document by representatives of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS).

The official LCMS response claims that “the most serious deficiency ... is the almost complete absence of discussion about what we regard as one of the major benefits of the Eucharist, namely, that in it God graciously offers ‘forgiveness of sin, life and salvation.’”²⁷

While insisting that the Eucharist is “essentially one complete act,” BEM arranges its eucharistic statement of agreement under the following five “aspects”: (A) “Thanksgiving to the Father”; (B) “Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ”; (C) “Invocation of the Spirit”; (D) “Communion of the Faithful”; and (E) “Meal of the Kingdom.”

It is under the category of “The Eucharist as Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ” that BEM makes clear the deeper meaning of *anamnesis*: “It is not only a calling to mind of what is past,” but “Christ himself with all that he has accomplished for us and for all creation (in his incarnation, servanthood, ministry, teaching, suffering, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit) is present in this *anamnesis*, granting us communion with himself.”

²⁴ *Ibid.* Note the ecumenical goal, “communion,” to be further documented below. The three stages of the quest for Christian unity—“comparison, consensus and conversion”—that include a series of ten steps, from conflict to communion, as described in Alan D. FALCONER’s article, *Beyond the Familiar Landscape*. In FALCONER, *Faith and Order in Moshi*. 40–53. See endnote 13 for the ten steps.

²⁵ BEM. 10–15.

²⁶ VAN ELDREVEN. 162.

²⁷ *The LCMS Response to the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches to the Text of “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.”* Prepared by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Saint Louis, 1985. 13.

²¹ *Ut Unum Sint* 79.

²² BEM. ix. The Preface, authored by William LAZARETH (Faith and Order Director) and Nikos NISSIOTIS (Moderator), is not part of the Lima text, according to Günther GASSMANN.

²³ *Ibid.*

In light of the centuries of debate among representatives of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches regarding the presence of Christ in Holy Communion,²⁸ this strong affirmation of Christ's presence is worth quoting in full:

"The words and acts of Christ at the institution of the Eucharist stand at the heart of the celebration; the Eucharistic meal is the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, the sacrament of his real presence. Christ fulfills in a variety of ways his promise to be always with his own even to the end of the world. But Christ's mode of presence in the Eucharist is unique. Jesus said over the bread and wine of the Eucharist: "This is my body ... this is my blood." What Christ declared is true, and this truth is fulfilled every time the Eucharist is celebrated. The Church confesses Christ's real, living and active presence in the Eucharist. While Christ's real presence in the Eucharist does not depend on the faith of the individual, all agree that to discern the body and blood of Christ, faith is required." (13)

III. Some Points of Similarity and Dissimilarity between BEM (1982) and L-RC III (1967)

When the Eucharistic agreements in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) of 1982 are compared with those of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue III Report, *Eucharist as Sacrifice* of 1967 (L-RC III),²⁹ there are numerous points of similarity.

Despite the former being a later multilateral document, and the latter being an earlier bilateral statement, both use the term "Eucharist" as a primary designation of what is also called the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

Both documents refer to the Eucharist as the Church's "sacrifice of praise"; make a connection between the Eucharist and the "forgiveness of sins"; call the Eucharist a sacrament; affirm the presence of Christ; and relate the presence of his body and blood to the words of institution: "this is my body ... this is my blood."

They both identify the role of the Holy Spirit in regard to Christ's presence; speak of the Eucharist and the Lord's Supper as an

"effective sign"; and state that Christ's presence does not depend on the faith of the individual or believer.

There are at least three points of dissimilarity when BEM and L-RC III are compared. A primary difference in the wording is the emphasis on *anamnesis* or memorial in BEM, and an absence of this language in L-RC III.

Günther GASSMANN once pointed out that the accent on *anamnesis* can be traced to a contribution by the Groupe des Dombes, an independent ecumenical group of Roman Catholics and Protestants in France. Another factor is that the main focus of L-RC III is stated as Eucharistic sacrifice and presence.

A second point of dissimilarity is the use of "real presence" in BEM, and its omission in L-RC III. The Lutherans and Roman Catholics, however, say that "our confessional documents have in common affirmed that Jesus Christ is 'really', 'truly' and 'substantially' present in this sacrament."

Technically, the formulation "real presence" is not located in the Lutheran Confessions of the XVIth century. Among laity and clergy, however, it remains a popular way of describing the presence.

A final point of dissimilarity between the two statements of agreement is the connection between the Eucharist and concerns of the world that are so prominent in BEM. The reference to "a kingdom of justice, love and peace in the Holy Spirit" is one example.

The "search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life" is another. In this context of linking "secular" problems to "sacred" solutions, BEM states: "All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged, when we share in the body and blood of Christ. ... Reconciled in the Eucharist, the members of the body of Christ are called to be servants of reconciliation among women and men, and witnesses of the joy of resurrection."

Again, the absence of these kinds of references to social and other issues of human need in the L-RC III statement may be due, at least in part, to the narrower objectives set by the dialogue team.

In summary, it is interesting to note that, despite the points of dissimilarity, there is a partial convergence of Eucharistic faith that is evident when the BEM and L-RC III agreements are viewed together.

²⁸ EMMÉ Paul C. – McCORD James I. (eds.), *Marburg Revisited: A Re-examination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions*. Minneapolis, 1966. 40-51.

²⁹ *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue III: Eucharist as Sacrifice*. Published Jointly by Representatives of the USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1967.

IV. The BEM Process of Reception and its Results

The Preface of BEM concludes with an invitation to “all churches to prepare an official response to this text at the highest appropriate level of authority.” An outline of four points is presented “in support of this process of reception.”

William G. RUSCH explains the significance of Point 1: “The question BEM poses to all Christians is not whether we find our denominational confessions in it, but rather whether we find in BEM ‘the faith of the Church throughout the ages.’ ... And, if we do, what does this mean?”³⁰ A target date for responding to this 1982 document was set for the end of 1984.

During the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983, an Issue Group Report on “Taking Steps Towards Unity” explained that the official responses to BEM submitted by the churches are “an initial step in a longer process of reception.”

Then they went on defining reception as “the long-range process, by which the churches seek to recognize the one apostolic faith in and through the words of the text and freshly to lay hold of the new life which that faith promises.”³¹

From the time that BEM was released in 1982, the Faith and Order Commission received one hundred and eighty-six official responses from various Protestant, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and other churches, and published these responses in six volumes, dated from 1986 through 1988, edited by Max THURIAN.³²

A summary listed and analyzed all these responses, prepared by the Faith and Order Commission in Faith and Order Paper 149, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982–1990: Report on the Process and Responses*.

Of particular interest is the fact that there is a total of ninety-three Lutheran responses and one common official response from the Roman Catholic Church. This latter communion offered an appreciative comment:

“BEM is perhaps the most significant result of the (Faith and

Order) movement so far,” thus typifying the “positive, sometimes enthusiastic, appraisal” that came “from churches of all traditions and from all parts of the world.”³³

As would be expected, the ecumenically dedicated Lutheran Church in America (one of the three predecessors to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) said it “rejoices over the convergence in the text with its promise of the realization of great visible unity of the Church.”³⁴

Despite its largely critical review of BEM, with “serious reservations,” even The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod was able to offer this positive assessment: “At many points the ‘faith of the Church through the ages’ is clearly set forth, and we rejoice at the progress that has been made in achieving a common expression of some aspects of that faith.”³⁵

As for the ongoing process of reception, some of the issues in BEM that need further theological reflection, as a result of the official responses, are being studied by sub-committees. The topics include “Scripture and Tradition,” “Hermeneutics,” and “Ecclesiology.”³⁶

As more agreements are reached on the Eucharist and other theological questions, the Message of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order suggests that “the task before the churches now is to receive these convergences into their life.”³⁷

In this way, Faith and Order attempts to live up to its insistence that “BEM calls neither for surrender, nor compromise, nor total acceptance, and certainly not for ambiguity or confusion. It calls rather for common affirmations by divided churches struggling towards universal communion. ... Thus the process of response is itself a visible sign of our movement into unity.”³⁸

³⁰ RUSCH, 140. This former Director of Faith and Order in the NCCUSA has authored *Reception: An Ecumenical Opportunity*. Philadelphia, 1988.; GASSMANN Günther, *From Reception to Unity: The Historical and Ecumenical Significance of the Concept of Reception*. In POOMORE Colin (ed.), *Community–Unity–Communion: Essays in Honour of Mary Tanner*. London, 1998. 117–129.

³¹ GILL David (ed.), *Gathered for Life: Official Report, VI Assembly World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada 24 July–10 August 1983*. Genève, 1983. 46. The date for official responses was extended to the end of 1985, anticipating a Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order expected in 1987 or 1988, which was finally held in 1993.

³² BEM 1982–1990: *Report on the Process and Responses* 3. *Summary of US Churches’ BEM Reception Processes*. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1984/21. 22–33.

³³ BEM 1982–1990: *Report on the Process and Responses*. 17–18. The Roman Catholic response is in Vol. VI of *Official Responses*, edited by Max THURIAN.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 18. Also see Vol. I of *Official Responses*.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 34. Also see Vol. III of *Official Responses*, 141.

³⁶ Alan D. FALCONER, personal interview by telephone, 19 April 2001. Examples of this ongoing reception and study process are published under *Major Programmes of Faith and Order*. In FALCONER, *Faith and Order in Moshi*. 57–179. This section also includes helpful articles on reception.

³⁷ BEST–GASSMANN. 226.

³⁸ BEM 1982–1990: *Report on the Process and Responses*. 157.

Pauline Target for a Petrine Trajectory

This research began with the proposal of a thesis: “Despite the significant interconfessional agreements that have been reached on a bilateral and multilateral level, some remaining challenges—primarily ecclesiological—need to be identified in order to realize a more objective evaluation and a more complete consensus.” But how can Christians whose communion is real but imperfect realize a communion that is more perfect, with a more complete consensus?

Significant agreements like the U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogues, the Faith and Order convergences on the Eucharist and in defining the ecumenical goal, the international Lutheran–Roman Catholic consensus on the doctrine of justification, and the relationship of full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and five other churches, indicate a theological basis for a communion that is real, together with a consensus that is emerging.

As for remaining challenges, ecclesiological obstacles to a more complete unity have been brought to the surface, indicating that not only matters of faith, but also of order need to be addressed.³⁹

A major ecclesiological challenge is the insistence by the largest Christian church that “the communion of the particular churches with the church of Rome, and of their bishops with the bishop of Rome, is—in God’s plan—an essential requisite of full and visible communion.”⁴⁰ The ongoing dialogues, studies and reception process connected with the interconfessional initiatives are dealing with these kinds of ecclesiological issues.

Meanwhile, Pope John Paul II reminds us that the doctrinal and ecclesiological problems that separate Christians will ultimately have an eschatological solution. He speaks of a “full communion” that “is already perfect” among “the saints—those who, at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory.”

This all-embracing, all-inclusive fellowship, not yet realized here on Earth in this life, is possible because “these saints come from all the churches and ecclesial communities, which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation.”⁴¹

³⁹ The writer has learned to appreciate the personal dimension of authority in episcopally ordered churches, in contrast with the documentary emphasis of the historic Lutheran Confessions. A relationship with a bishop, rather than a document, may be a resource to prevent institutional schism. But the resignation of ELCA Bishop Paul EGERSON, because he participated in the ordination of a lesbian, indicates other remaining challenges for unity. <http://listserv.elca.org/archives/elcaneews.html>.

⁴⁰ *Ut Unum Sint: Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II on Commitment to Ecumenism*. Boston, 1995, 97.

⁴¹ *Ut Unum Sint*, 84. BROND Sven-Erik, *A Communion of Martyrs: Perspectives on the Papal Encyclical Letter Ut Unum Sint*. The Ecumenical Review 2000/52:223–233.

But prior to this future eschatological reality of perfection in glory, can there also be an existential experience of a more perfect communion here and now? The writer offers several insights from ecumenical, confessional, Biblical, and experiential sources.

This is an effort to locate an approach to visible Christian unity that goes “beyond the limits of the familiar landscape” and the ordinary dialogical and ecclesiological channels of the ecumenical movement. A four-point agenda is submitted for consideration.

First, some ecumenical sources point to the necessity of “conversion” and a “change of heart” as a prerequisite for communion. Included among the advocates of this inner spiritual process of transformation are: Alan D. FALCONER⁴² of the Faith and Order Secretariat; the Groupe des Dombes⁴³; Pope John Paul II⁴⁴; and Robert TUCCI SI, in his address at the Uppsala 1968 Assembly of the World Council of Churches.⁴⁵

Second, a confessional source, drawn from the Church of the Augsburg Confession, reminds us of the centrality and sufficiency (*satis est*) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the foundational basis for unity (Augsburg Confession, Article VII).

In the language of the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, it is like saying that highest in the “hierarchy of truths”⁴⁶ is the Good News of God’s cross-shaped love proclaimed and celebrated in Word and Sacrament.

⁴² *Beyond the Limits of the Familiar Landscape*. In FALCONER Alan (ed.), *Faith and Order in Moshi: The 1996 Commission Meeting*. Faith and Order Paper 177. Genève, 1998. 43–52. It includes forgiveness and “a vision of kenotic ecclesiology.”

⁴³ *For the Conversion of the Churches* (1993). In KINNAMON Michael – COPE Brian E. (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*. Genève, 1997. 164–166.; *The Conversion of the Churches*. In GROS Jeffrey – MCMANUS Eamon – RUGGS Ann (eds.), *Introduction to Ecumenism*. New York, 1998. 105–109.

⁴⁴ *Ut Unum Sint*, 15, 34, 35. He also cites the *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio)* 7. The Pope exemplifies a spirit of conversion and spiritual renewal in his prayer for forgiveness for sins of the Roman Catholic Church “against ... Orthodox sisters and brothers.” *That We May Walk Together in the Ways of the Kingdom*. Papal Address to Orthodox Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece, 4 May 2001. <http://www.zenit.org/english/archive/0105/ZE010504.htm>. He also speaks of “full communion, which is neither absorption nor fusion, but a meeting in truth and love (Slavorum Apostoli 27).” Other requests for forgiveness are in the Apostolic Letters *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (1994) and *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001).

⁴⁵ *The Ecumenical Movement, the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*. In GOODALL Norman (ed.), *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala July 4–20, 1968*. Genève, 1968. 327. “The union of all Christians in the one Church of Christ cannot be the victory of one church over another, but the victory of Christ over divisions, our conversion to Christ.”

⁴⁶ *Decree on Ecumenism* 11. *The Notion of Hierarchy of Truths—An Ecumenical Interpretation*. A Study Document Commissioned and Received by the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (1990). In RUSCH William G. – GROS Jeffrey (eds.), *Deepening Communion: International Ecumenical Documents with Roman Catholic Participation*. Washington, 1998. 561–571.

⁴⁷ LINDBERG Carter, *Luther’s Motif simul iustus et peccator as an Approach to the Novus Homo and to the Nova Creatura*. In MANN Peter – MEYER Harding (eds.), *Luther’s Ecumenical Significance: An Interconfessional Consultation*. Philadelphia, 1984. 159–181. Note a Roman Catholic critique of this concept in ALLEN John L. Jr., *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican’s Enforcer of the Faith*. New York, 2000. 232–233.

Martin LUTHER's concept of *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time justified and sinful) is a realistic paradoxical acceptance of our state of human imperfection that finds its perfection not in ecclesiological solutions, but in God's soteriological forgiveness revealed in Jesus Christ within a communion of saints and sinners.⁴⁷

Third, a Biblical source provides what could be called a "Pauline target" for a "Petrine trajectory."⁴⁸ The New Testament's projections of Peter's gradually expanding role of leadership among the disciples appear to this writer to have been extrapolated by the Roman Church into papal primacy, which has become the *sine qua non* for full communion (*Dominus Iesus* 17), with the implication of greater perfection.

This is counterbalanced by a Pauline passage in Philippians 3,12–14 that affirms a perfection that is not yet attainable, but is in the process of becoming, as we press on toward the ultimate goal.⁴⁹

Fourth, an experiential source called the Bossey Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches near Genève, Switzerland, is where "many have testified to life-changing experiences in this 'ecumenical laboratory.'"⁵⁰

In addition to the academic discipline of lectures, seminars, assigned readings and writing research papers, there is the daily relational experience of an interconfessional, intercultural and international community of Christians living, studying, dining, playing, praying, singing, dancing, debating, forgiving, celebrating, worshipping and, at times, sharing the Eucharist together.

Students and faculty experience first-hand—not just in ecumenical textbooks—"the real but imperfect communion." The Institute is presented here as an illustration of the ecumenical importance of these personal, experiential encounters.

Also significant in this regard is the basis for consensus (*consentire*), which is defined in the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* Faith and Order document as "that experience of life and articulation of faith necessary to realize and maintain the Church's

⁴⁸ Peter in the New Testament also suggests the possibility of "the effect of theological retrojection upon exegesis." 168.

⁴⁹ The root Greek word, **τελειωω**, can mean "bring to an end, bring to its goal or to accomplishment in the sense of the overcoming or supplanting of an imperfect state of things by one that is free." This same word is used in John 17,23, "that they may be brought to complete unity" (NIV). Also see **τιὰντες** (all), 1Corinthians 10,17, for a Pauline Eucharistically inclusive target.

⁵⁰ WEBER Hans-Ruedi, *A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life: The Story of Bossey, 1946–1996*. Genève, 1996. Also see LINDNER John et al. (eds.), *Ecumenical Formation: The Case of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey*. Theological Education 1997/34.

⁵¹ BEM. Faith and Order Paper 111. Genève, 1982. Preface, ix.

visible unity. ... Full consensus can only be proclaimed after the churches reach the point of living and acting together in unity."⁵¹

As a result of this research regarding significant agreements and some remaining challenges in recent interconfessional initiatives involving Lutheran participation, there is a new realistic understanding about the ecumenical paradox of a communion (*koinonia*) of Christians that is "real but imperfect."⁵²

Despite this imperfection, the now Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, reminds the churches that "more common ground has been reached in the last almost forty years than in the 450 years since the Reformation." He then adds a word that seems intended for a tamed ecumenical optimist: "More than ever we need a new ecumenical optimism."⁵³

Suggested Reading

- Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Genève, 1982.
Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982–1990: Report on the Process and Responses. Genève, 1990.
 BIST Thomas – GASSMANN Günther (eds.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993*. Genève, 1994.
 ABBOTT Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966.
 FALCONER Alan D., *Beyond the Limits of the Familiar Landscape*. FALCONER Alan D. (ed.), *Faith and Order in Moshi: The 1996 Commission Meeting*. Genève, 1998. 40–53.
 GASSMANN Günther (ed.), *Documentary History of Faith and Order, 1963–1993*. Genève, 1993.
 JOHN PAUL II., *Ut Unum Sint*. Vatican, 1995.
 RUSCH William G., *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry—and Reception*. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1984/21. 129–143.
 BURGESS Joseph A. – GROS Jeffrey (eds.), *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States*. Paulist Press, 1989. 91–124.
 WEBER Hans-Ruedi, *A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life: The Story of Bossey, 1946–1996*. Genève, 1996.

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⁵² Perhaps the title of an American motion picture also expresses this less-than-perfect reality: *As Good as It Gets* (1997), directed by James L. BROOKS.

⁵³ KASPER Walter, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: Cause for Hope*. *Centro Pro Unione Bulletin* 2000/1. 6. Note disagreement between Cardinal KASPER, who "argues that the diocesan ... church takes precedence over the universal Church, whereas Cardinal RATZINGER holds that the universal Church is prior to the local church," while "Cardinal DULLES sides with RATZINGER's argument." *Cardinal Dulles Weighs in on Ratzinger-Kasper Debate*. <http://www.zenit.org/english/archive/0105/ZE010528.htm>.