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'We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.'

From the Church's statement of faith to the challenge to accept one another just as Christ accepted us (cf. Rom. 15:7)

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It is a commonplace in the various circles of the ecumenical movement to state that the unity of Christians is above all a divine gift and calling. Thus, from a human point of view, it is a response to that call. Firstly, Christ has accepted us 'in order to bring praise to God' (Rom. 15:7). It is Christ who calls each one of us. But Christ is not a person like any other, standing before us, to whom we draw nearer leaving behind the world and our fellow human beings. Christ gives us a new identity and opens up to us a space in the whole of creation and thus leads us in a new way into the created world itself and transforms it into Church. The Church is thus the community of men and women who in faith perceive creation and their togetherness in a new way and form a community where each and every one is capable of accepting one another as a gift. One of the early images used by the Church Fathers to describe the Church was that of 'paradise regained'.¹ That is not simply a metaphor: it is an image that expresses the experience of faith. The Church is the place where the creation regains the form it originally had and is, at the same time, an irrevocable promise of God.

It is possible to state that the world was created for the sake of the Church, because in the Church we see the beginning of the fullness of joy of accepting one another as a gift. It is the fulfilment of creation. Thus our Christian calling cannot stay secret or hidden, and cannot remain an inner feeling known only to ourselves and God. This calling, indubitably driven on by its own inner dynamic, requires outward expression. It is a profound reality, which, however, by its very nature, is called to be a sign. We discover and receive our calling in and by God's Word, which we proclaim and accept in faith and which invites us to be witnesses. We thus form a witnessing community (martyria). We discover and receive this calling, moreover, in other sacramental acts, in which we celebrate our life and which are able to bring us into the deepest communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. We are thus members of a community of adoration and praise (leitourgia). This way of regarding our togetherness, our being Church, as a response to Christ, enables us to accept our calling as also a service in God's great plan for the whole of creation. We are thus a witnessing and serving community for humankind (diakonia). Only thus will the world believe God's Word. The joy of accepting one another would be very meagre, and we would be betraying our calling, if that joy were not given visible expression so as to be seen by all.

Do we accept one another in one baptism?
Some remarks on the present situation

Is baptism, which we declare to be one, in close relationship with the Word, the first of these sacramental acts able to bring us into communion with God and with our brothers and sisters? If I were asked that question spontaneously by a parish member of my own church, by someone just beginning to be ecumenically aware, or by a participant in an introductory course on ecumenism, my immediate unhesitating answer would be 'yes'. I would then encourage them to draw out the consequences of that discovery. However, if I were asked that question in a different setting, by someone ecumenically aware, the same answer would be followed by a 'but', followed by a series of qualifications. I believe that both answers, in a

¹ This image appears in the Shepherd of Hermas, cf. Shepherd of Hermas ii, ch.4.

simplified way, are indicative of developments in our approach to baptism in the ecumenical movement over recent decades, and that the title of this presentation is in its way an attempt to describe the confession of one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and the current challenge to accept one another out of the recognition of this baptism, which is at the present time administered in each one of our churches. Confession and challenge: the ecumenical optimism of some decades ago and the inevitable present need to examine the complexity of the issue.

In fact, the convergences noted in BEM have not prevented recent Faith and Order consultations from making us more aware of the complexities that arise when we approach baptism, and, even more, when we consider the possibility of moving forward towards mutual recognition of this sacrament. We have had some very clear presentations of what is at stake in the present situation,² and I am indebted to them. Furthermore, apart from recent Faith and Order consultations, other ecumenical actors have approached the issue and made their contribution.³

The published material reveals the importance that the confession of 'one baptism' had in the early days of the ecumenical movement. In those days it was necessary to establish a 'firm ground for communion', based on something deeper than mere Christian goodwill, in order to be able to move forward. That was perhaps possible because the majority of those involved were heirs, in one way or another, of the same tradition, and were not faced with the immediate demand to examine deep rooted confessional beliefs. Now, decades later, ecumenical awareness has changed, for various reasons: there are new participants, coming from traditions differing more from one another;⁴ there is a more insistent demand to advance toward visible communion; and there is the need to accept the possible ecclesiological consequences arising from baptism.⁵

Theological dialogue, after its study of particular issues, has now enabled us to have a more comprehensive overview. That has made abundantly clear, perhaps in a new way, the difficulty we face in receiving convergences and consensus in the 'spiritual liturgical and theological universe' of each confessional tradition. Our experience with baptism raises questions such as the following:

To what extent is it possible to speak of one baptism if baptism does not have the same meaning for all or does not produce the same effects?

Is it possible to think of baptism as a bond of communion while ignoring its ecclesiological consequences and its relation to the eucharist?

And to these a third question needs to be added:

Is it possible to consider a reality such as baptism without also considering the place it occupies in each tradition, which has its own internal consistency, and the nature of the reality being administered?

Obviously, these questions challenge the adequacy of an approach that would be content with examining only the requirements necessary for the sacrament to be canonically valid. Here we come up against questions – and not minor questions – that enter into the realm of ecclesiology,⁶ of how we understand the relation between faith and sacrament or between faith and the Church, and, equally important, how we can approach confessional differences

² cf. A Birmelé, 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church in Ecumenical Dialogues', in M Root and R Saarinen (eds), 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church', Eerdmans/WCC Publications, Grand Rapids/Geneva, 1998, pp.104-129; D Heller, 'Le baptême – fondement de l'unité des Églises? Foi et Constitution et la question du baptême', *Irenikon* 72, (1999) pp. 73-93; and W Kasper, 'Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of Baptism', *Ecumenical Review* 52 (2000), pp. 526-541

³ I refer to the consultation arranged by the LWF in Hvittorp, Finland in 1996. cf. M Root/R Saarinen (eds), 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church' op. cit.; to the colloquium held at Chevetogne in 1998, cf. *Irenikon* 71 (1998) pp. 435-504 and 72 (1999) pp. 94-113; to the statement by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultative Theological Commission (French version), 'Baptême et "économie sacramentelle": Déclaration d'accord' (1999), *Unité des Chrétiens*, no. 119 (2000) pp. 19-25; and to the inclusion of this issue in the agenda of the Joint Working Group of the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church. To this can be added numerous treatments in various journals, such as the aforementioned issue of 'Unité des Chrétiens' and 'La Maison-Dieu', 235, 2003/3, and useful articles in others, such as 'The Ecumenical Review', 54, 2002/1.

⁴ The growing presence of Christians affirming 'believers' baptism' (Baptists and Pentecostals), or who even consider baptism unnecessary.

⁵ As has been possible between the signatory churches of the Leuenberg Agreement.

⁶ These are not new issues for Faith and Order, cf. 'The Nature and Purpose of the Church', p. 38 (box).

as a single consistent whole. Many questions remain to be answered, and they form a large part of the Faith and Order agenda! However, that should not prevent us from making use of the insights we already have – the gift already given and the faith already confessed in common⁷ – and attempt to take steps enabling us to accept one another as Christ has accepted us.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins

Giving a reason for our faith at different times

For the Catholic Church, unity – and the need to re-establish it when it is injured – is based on a sacramental reality: all Christians have been baptized in the name of the same God, i.e. ‘in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ All those who have been accepted by Christ in the waters of baptism, acknowledging that they have been favoured with the same gift of grace, should be capable of accepting one another. By means of baptism, then, we are already living in a profound communion of grace. That is why we state that the obligation to work for unity is rooted in a prevenient gift of God committing us to that task. This baptismal fellowship has its own internal momentum towards full ecclesial fellowship, because ‘to live our baptism is to be caught up in Christ’s mission of making all things one.’⁸ However, for the Catholic Church to be able to make that affirmation, gradual in-depth examination and developments have been necessary.

That is what leads me to limit myself this morning to a presentation of what the Catholic Church upholds concerning baptism; what it has discovered in the last forty years; and how it has made room in its own life for its ecumenical commitment. It seems important to me to examine this process at some length because in it I see the tension between the confession of the faith that does not change and the need to respond to unprecedented situations, just as it has been an unprecedented necessity in the twentieth century to discover the foundations enabling us to accept other Christians as true brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Since the third century, when Western Christian thought had to provide a response to the situation produced by the schisms tearing the one and only Church apart and to consider the resultant consequences, the Latin Church, in the belief that baptism is one and unrepeatable, has recognized baptisms administered outside its visible boundaries.⁹ However, because of the anomaly produced by the administration of baptisms by those not in full communion, such baptisms would come to fruition only within the one and only Church.¹⁰ That view, taken first by Stephen I and later by Augustine, thus acknowledged the primacy of Christ and the work of the Spirit in sacramental acts. It is Christ himself who acts in the sacraments. Thus, when the Church baptizes, it does not do so on its own initiative or authority, but in obedience to its Lord. Christ himself, by instituting baptism, has given it its meaning.

Since that time, as a consequence of that understanding, the Latin Church has recognized the validity of all baptisms administered with water, by immersion or affusion, in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, and with the intention of doing what the Church does. Since it is a gift of God, irrevocable as all God’s gifts, the Church’s obedience to its Lord is also consequently expressed in the belief that it is not possible to repeat the administration of this sacrament. There thus emerged a way of regarding the relation Christ-Church-sacrament, different from that obtaining in the Christian East, but without that being at the time a reason for breaking fellowship.¹¹

⁷ cf. ‘Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed 381’, Faith and Order Paper no. 153, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1991, pp. 90-96.

⁸ Directory for the application of principles and norms on ecumenism. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Para 22. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/pccuecu.htm>.

⁹ There is no need to repeat the arguments of Cyprian, Stephen, Optatus of Milevis and Augustine, which are well known. For the ways in which this characterized developments in East and West, I refer to: A De Halleux, ‘Orthodoxie et catholicisme. Un seul baptême?’, in *Revue théologique de Louvain* 11 (1980), pp. 416-456, and to Y Congar, ‘Unis dans le baptême, désunis dans l’eucharistie?’, in *Essais oecuméniques*, ‘Les hommes, le mouvement, les problèmes’, Le Centurion, Paris, 1984, pp. 242-254.

¹⁰ While acknowledging the normative value of this ecclesial practice, some questions, however, still arise: how did the Church perceive itself in the time of Cyprian and Stephen, and later in the time of Augustine? What was the ‘schism’? What sort of heresies were being referred to?

¹¹ To this must be added the increasingly different forms in which the so-called ‘initiation sacraments’ are celebrated.

But, apart from validity, there is another aspect to all sacraments – their relationship to faith. Since confession of the Trinitarian faith is an expression of the sum and substance of Christian belief, baptism in the name of the Trinity cannot be reduced to a mere formula, but is a true confession of faith in what the rite effects thanks to the Lord's promise. Thus the early Church considered baptism as 'the sacrament of faith', and its observance was an irreplaceable ecclesial and theological occasion. Out of the baptismal confessions of faith the creeds arose and developed,¹² finding their complete expression in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. In it, in the context of confession of belief in the Trinity, in the third article concerning the Spirit, Christians 'acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.' The stress here is certainly on the faith of the Church, the Church's objective faith, which the candidates for baptism are making their own.¹³ This emphasis was to become more pronounced in the case of the baptism of infants.

A third feature, related to the foregoing, is that baptism introduces the one baptized into the full life of the community of the Church. In practice, this found full expression in the community's observance of the Paschal Vigil. In subsequent centuries in the Latin Church, this has been easier to demonstrate in the administration of baptism to adults.

As we examine past centuries, it is worthwhile to ask this question: have these implications of baptism, taken as normative in the Western Church, always been able to provide an adequate response to situations arising from time to time in the history of the Church? In the light of the reactions produced, my impression would be not. Although we all know that in the reality of the Christian life there are variations and sensitivities in every age, there is always the risk of a gap developing between what is believed and the way in which it is lived out at any given moment. It does, however, seem clear to me that, while in the past the attempt has been made to respond to concrete situations, it has not proved possible to foresee all the demands that new unprecedented situations would make of us, perhaps making it necessary to draw out other aspects implicit in baptism. I have stated that the reality of a sacrament cannot be seen as lying exclusively in its validity, and that it is necessary to bear in mind that the rite itself produces certain effects and that they have consequences. Moreover, in the context of a divided Christendom, if the relationship sacrament-faith-Church is differently understood in each confessional tradition, is it possible to have the same understanding of that relationship, with the same consequences, when Christians are living in a situation of explicit rejection of communion, or when they are committed to the journey towards a reunited Church? For the Catholic Church, the ability to distinguish between different situations has been decisive.¹⁴ Those who have studied the theology of baptism and attempted to make space theologically for ecumenical openness have contributed to this process.¹⁵

In the teachings of the Council, those who have passed through the waters of baptism have been incorporated into Christ and his Church¹⁶ and been regenerated to participate in the divine life. Because they have been baptized into the one single body¹⁷ a sacramental bond, a unity in grace, has been formed between them. Thus oneness transcends the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church and embraces all Christians, since despite divisions a real but imperfect communion is recognized between all the baptized.¹⁸ Thus the Council does not only recognize the validity of baptism administered in other Christian communities, but it also

¹² For the relation between creeds and baptism, cf. J N D Kelly, 'Early Christian Creeds', 3rd edition, 1972, Longman, p.30; and H de Lubac 'La profesión de fe apostólica', *Communio* 1 (1979/II), p.23.

¹³ There can be seen here a very significant difference in the churches practicing believers' baptism, where faith is understood above all to be the subjective faith of the individual Christian.

¹⁴ For a full presentation of baptism in the conciliar texts, cf. K J Becker, 'La doctrina sobre el bautismo del Concilio Vaticano II' in R Latourelle (ed.), 'El Vaticano II: balance y perspectivas', Sígueme, Salamanca, 1989, pp. 483-517.

¹⁵ I am thinking of the contributions made prior to Vatican II by theologians associated with the 'spiritual ecumenism' movement, which emerged in Lyon under the inspiration of P Couturier: P Michalon, 'L'étendue de l'Église', *Irenikon* 20 (1947), pp. 140-163; L Richard, 'Une thèse fondamentale de l'oecuménisme: le baptême, incorporation visible à l'Église' in *Nouvelle revue théologique* 74 (1952), pp. 485-492. There is wide recognition of the contribution made by Cardinal A Bea during the Council, cf. E Lanne, 'La contribution du cardinal Bea à la question du baptême et l'unité des chrétiens', in *Simposio Card. Agostino Bea* (16-19 December 1981), Segretariato per l'unione dei cristiani, Libreria Editrice, Rome, 1983, pp. 159-185.

¹⁶ 'Lumen Gentium' 11, para. 1; and 14, para.1, in 'Vatican Council II', ed. Austin Flannery, Dublin, 1988, pp. 361 and 365.

¹⁷ 'Lumen Gentium' 7, para. 2, in *idem.*, p. 355.

¹⁸ 'Unitatis Redintegratio' 3, para. 1, in *idem.*, p.455.

maintains that this sacrament produces all its fruits and is a source of grace. This recognition is not limited to Christians as individuals, but entails ecclesiological consequences: it is within their own communities that other Christians have been incorporated into Christ. That is why the Catholic Church accords such great importance to baptism when it engages in ecumenical debate and why it cherishes well-founded hopes for an explicit recognition of it.¹⁹

The two stages mentioned above show how the Church's thinking on baptism has been conditioned by the need to respond to particular situations. The confession of faith is thus understood in the tradition of the Church as a living dynamic reality. The need to give a reason for our hope is not limited to making responses that may be true in themselves, but whose initial formulation was perhaps a response to a different situation not totally equivalent to the present one. As a Roman Catholic forty years after the Decree 'Unitatis Redintegratio', this leads me to examine the two aims that the Decree proposes for ecumenical dialogue: to study doctrinal questions on which there are divergences,²⁰ and to examine our 'own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church', which allows us to 'undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform'.²¹ This enables us to speak of dialogue as 'a dialogue of conversion'.²²

In examining our own faithfulness, which invites us to renewal, and in an attempt to face some of the challenges coming from other confessional traditions,²³ I feel it important that we do not avoid two questions. First, what is the ecclesiological significance of baptism being one and unrepeatable? Especially, when the recognition of the communion conferred in baptism does not lead on to eucharistic communion. And, secondly, what is the significance of baptism as one and unrepeatable, as a 'sacrament of faith', in our present situation as divided Christians? I shall now attempt a response to both questions, inspired by the thinking of J-M R Tillard²⁴ and as a tribute to his memory.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13)

In baptism, God continues to give his grace and justify separated believers. Catholics, who for generations had been taught a particular understanding of the adage 'Outside the Church there is no salvation', in which a particular image of the Church was determinative, have had to make important distinctions. It is not possible to state without qualification that oneness in grace requires the restoration of visible unity. If we were to make such a statement, the existence of the one and only Church, preserved by God's faithfulness, would remain hidden, always living, despite the sin of division. What it is correct to state is that visible unity will be achieved only in the measure that the oneness of grace, still present, at least in its essential basis, as the effect of baptism, will have produced all its fruits. That will only be possible if there is a real commitment by the churches to the demands of baptism.

¹⁹ Ecumenical Directory, 92-95. This issue has also been dealt with in the plenary meeting of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, November 2001, cf. Information Service, N. 109, (2002/I-II) pp. 20-25.

²⁰ cf. 'Unitatis Redintegratio' 22, para. 3, in 'Vatican Council II' op. cit., p. 469.

²¹ cf. 'Unitatis Redintegratio' 4 para. 2, in *ibid.* p.457.

²² 'With regard to other Christians, the principal documents of the Commission on Faith and Order and the statements of numerous bilateral dialogues have already provided Christian Communities with useful tools for discerning what is necessary to the ecumenical movement and to the conversion which it must inspire. These studies are important from two points of view: they demonstrate the remarkable progress already made, and they are a source of hope inasmuch as they represent a sure foundation for further study. The increase in fellowship in a reform which is continuous and carried out in the light of the Apostolic Tradition is certainly, in the present circumstances of Christians, one of the distinctive and most important aspects of ecumenism. Moreover, it is an essential guarantee for its future. The faithful of the Catholic Church cannot forget that the ecumenical thrust of the Second Vatican Council is one consequence of all that the Church at that time committed herself to doing in order to re-examine herself in the light of the Gospel and the great Tradition.' (The Encyclical 'Ut Unum Sint', Catholic Truth Society, London, 1995, para. 17, pp. 21-22).

²³ cf. P Nogaard-Hojen, 'Baptism and the Foundations of Communion', in M Root/R Saarinen (eds), 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church', op. cit., pp.72ff. Even in Catholic circles some concern has been expressed arising from Catholic teaching from the Council as it is being perceived, cf. J Famerée, 'La communion dans le baptême. Point de vue catholique, questions oecuméniques', *Irenikon* 71 (1998), pp. 448-455.

²⁴ cf. J-M R Tillard, 'L'oecuménisme, une exigence spirituelle', *Unité des Chrétiens*, no. 39, (1980), pp. 28-30. These ideas also underlie 'Préparer l'unité. Pour une pastorale oecuménique', *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 100, (1980), pp. 164 ff, which he later took up, with some nuancing, at the Plenary Commission on Faith and Order meeting at Moshi in 1996, cf. 'From BEM to Koinonia', in *Faith and Order in Moshi*, Faith and Order Paper 177, WCC, Geneva 1998 p182-187.

While it is correct that oneness is the gracious gift of the Spirit, it is necessary to specify that this grace continues to be offered in baptism by the divided People of God.²⁵ Now, in Catholic understanding, baptism is, in itself, 'a beginning... wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. Baptism is thus ordained toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation... and finally toward a complete integration into eucharistic communion'.²⁶ In that perspective, in the present situation, we Christians are already living in communion with one another, but not yet in full communion. While it is certain that the grace of God is always active and that the one Church exists by that grace, it is also certain that, historically and visibly, the Church does not appear as one in the eyes of the world. All Christians suffer from the sin of division. Even the Catholic Church, despite its belief that it enjoys the fullness of the means of salvation, finds itself limited in the expression of its catholicity.²⁷ It is thus necessary to make manifest, visibly, the one Church in one single Church. The conversion of the churches to the cause of unity has arisen out of the irrevocable gift of God's grace. It is thus important for Christians to be able to experience this as an evangelical call arising from the Church's inner being. A first response to this call is becoming aware that the grace of God is constantly at work and thus becoming able to recognize the implications of the gift of baptism in each and every Christian. This vision enables us to see how the divided Church remains the object of God's grace and how it includes all the baptized in one dynamic whole.

This experience, while it is to be welcomed with praise and adoration, demands that we strengthen our desire to overcome the obstacles set up by the churches to the grace of oneness. These obstacles prevent us from moving on from oneness to unity. For while, in the Catholic perspective, the one Church does find sacramental expression in the one single baptism, that one Church cannot yet find such expression in one single eucharist.²⁸ We must celebrate our already existing oneness: but we can only desire and prepare for unity.

A 'yes' to God that unites all believers.

In the gift of God conveyed in baptism, the churches have a further constant point of oneness that comes out of themselves and is a response: faith. Through baptism each Christian becomes a member of the one Church by the grace of the Holy Spirit of God and the response of faith. That statement also requires qualification. This 'yes' of faith, spoken in baptism, which makes us members of Christ and of the one Church, is a universal 'yes'. It is a 'yes' spoken through the Holy Spirit to the inner core of the Gospel: God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. This 'yes' incorporates us into the one Church. Each one of our communities in its pastoral and liturgical life strives to keep its faithful under the seal of this baptismal 'yes'. When the Council recognized that the 'elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church' and 'in ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or community... can truly engender a life of grace', it was acknowledging that these communities 'can aptly give access to the communion of salvation'.²⁹ That means that, for a Catholic, a baptized person is not saved despite being Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed or Methodist, but through being Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed or Methodist. It is in that particular Christian community that the 'yes' of faith has been spoken.³⁰ The separated parts of the one Church are, despite the sin of Christians, at the service of the one mystery of salvation. By the grace of God, they are communities of faith that freely accept

²⁵ This should be understood within the framework of Catholic ecclesiology, which affirms that, while the one and only church is split by schism, its unity 'subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose' (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4 para. 3, in 'Vatican Council II', op. cit., p.457).

²⁶ cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 22, para.2, in *ibid.*, p. 469, and *Ecumenical Directory*, 92. It is very probable that this understanding of baptism as a beginning is linked in Catholic theology with the separation in time that has progressively developed between baptism and the eucharist, despite their continuing to be considered as integral parts of one single initiation process. Hence Catholic theologians and liturgists indicate the importance in ecumenical discussion of not disregarding the ritual action as bearing a particular significance. cf. S K Wood, 'Baptism and the Foundations of Communion', in M Root/R Saarinen (eds), 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church', op.cit., pp. 57-59; and P De Clerck, 'Vers une reconnaissance de l'écclésialité du baptême', *La Maison-Dieu* 235 (2003/3), pp. 143-152.

²⁷ cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4, para. 10, in 'Vatican Council II', op. cit., pp. 458-59.

²⁸ It is clear that, from a Catholic perspective, in addition to baptism, it is necessary to consider here outstanding questions concerning the eucharist and ministry.

²⁹ cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3, paras. 2 & 3, in *Vatican Council II*, op. cit., pp. 455-456.

³⁰ cf. J Willebrands, 'Subsistit in', *Information Service* N. 101, (1999/II-III), p. 149.

God's plan and purpose. In communion with the initiative of God, this 'yes' of faith explains the enduring nature of the one Church. But for that 'yes' the Church of God would disappear from human history. Thus, despite divisions and mutual condemnations, all communities of the baptized with a true baptism are in communion in this 'yes' of faith. This fundamental act goes beyond verbal formulations, even those of the baptismal creeds, which are an intelligible expression of the content of revelation, because the 'yes' of faith goes beyond ideas and images and reaches out to God in the Holy Spirit.

It is, however, a 'yes' directed towards God and marked historically by division. However, in addition to this unifying, divinely inspired and transcendent 'yes', which brings us into communion with Christ and into his body, another 'yes' intervenes, causing division and schism. This second 'yes' is a response to the particular interpretations of the given revelation in the form of confessions, doctrines and theological traditions – a whole range of phenomena that are the source or occasion of division in the one Church of God. This 'yes' gives rise to confessional groups, because, according to whether a particular point is confessed or rejected, the communion of faith with one or another confession is broken. Thus some become schismatics in the eyes of other Christians. The divinely inspired 'yes' incorporating believers into the one Body of Christ finds expression, through the sin of Christians, in a confessional 'yes', including them in one of the separated parts of the wounded body of Christ. Because, when we are received in baptism, we are not incorporated into the Church of Christ invisibly, for it is the nature of a sacrament to be a sign, a visible reality. We are incorporated into the Church through the concrete Christian community in which the sacrament is administered. In other words, through baptism we become Christians who are also Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, or whatever. The first 'yes' enables us to receive the reality of grace common to all Christians, but the second 'yes' leads to a perpetuation of the signs of division.

Is it possible to be faithful to the obligations of baptism without mutual recognition of baptism?

From what I have attempted to present, the ecumenical challenge is basically to reach an attitude of openness of mind and heart to one another, based on the first baptismal 'yes'. J-M R Tillard maintained then that this was a change of attitude in two stages.³¹ The first stage is a stage of challenge, because faithfulness to what God truly intended and attempted to ask of humankind is questioned in the eyes of the world. It is thus essential for Christian communities to be more motivated by a desire for the truth than by closed passionate fixation on their confessional traditions. The confessional 'yes' must not be allowed to betray or hide the essential intention or content of the first 'yes'.³² Such a conversion to the primacy of evangelical truth requires theological work and a total change of attitude on the part of believers. Frank openness to the demand of evangelical truth is necessary, which is difficult apart from truly contemplative prayer.

After that stage, there is a second stage: a stage of confidence in the sincerity of other communities. At this stage it is demanded of them a sufficient assurance that the essential intention and content of the baptismal 'yes' are maintained. This will be their recognition of the transcendent Word of God within the words conveying it.

This recognition of the faithfulness of God's grace and a conversion to the demands of baptismal faith allow us to conceive of the re-establishment of communion as a requirement to be fulfilled in the presence of God. The search for unity is thus a growth in common by all Christians. What is at stake are God's plan and the deepest needs of humankind. 'The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God. For this reason he sent his Son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love. On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they might be one, a living communion. This is the basis not only of the duty, but also of the responsibility before God and his plan, which falls to those who through Baptism become members of the Body of Christ, a Body in which the fullness of reconciliation and communion

³¹ cf. J-M R Tillard, 'L'oecuménisme, une exigence spirituelle', art. cit., p.29.

³² I consider it possible that J-M R Tillard, in his later years, may have experienced an evolution of his appreciation of 'confessional reality', in response to the growing awareness within the ecumenical movement of the place of diversity within unity, cf. 'From BEM to Koinonia', art. cit.

must be made present. How is it possible to remain divided, if we have been “buried” through Baptism in the Lord’s death, in the very act by which God, through the death of his Son, has broken down the walls of division?³³

The journey towards mutual recognition of baptism is one step towards full reconciliation and communion, and a way of demonstrating our ability to take up the challenge ‘to accept one another just as Christ has accepted us in order to bring praise to God’ (Rom. 15:7).

FOOTNOTES

¹ This image appears in the Shepherd of Hermas, cf. Shepherd of Hermas ii, ch.4.

² cf. A Birmelé, ‘Baptism and the Unity of the Church in Ecumenical Dialogues’, in M Root and R Saarinen (eds), ‘Baptism and the Unity of the Church’, Eerdmans/WCC Publications, Grand Rapids/Geneva, 1998, pp.104-129; D Heller, ‘Le baptême – fondement de l’unité des Églises? Foi et Constitution et la question du baptême’, *Irenikon* 72, (1999) pp. 73-93; and W Kasper, ‘Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of Baptism’, *Ecumenical Review* 52 (2000), pp. 526-541

³ I refer to the consultation arranged by the LWF in Hvittorp, Finland in 1996. cf. M Root/R Saarinen (eds), ‘Baptism and the Unity of the Church’ op. cit.; to the colloquium held at Chevetogne in 1998, cf. *Irenikon* 71 (1998) pp. 435-504 and 72 (1999) pp. 94-113; to the statement by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultative Theological Commission (French version), ‘Baptême et “économie sacramentelle”: Déclaration d’accord’ (1999), *Unité des Chrétiens*, no. 119 (2000) pp. 19-25; and to the inclusion of this issue in the agenda of the Joint Working Group of the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church. To this can be added numerous treatments in various journals, such as the aforementioned issue of ‘Unité des Chrétiens’ and ‘La Maison-Dieu’, 235, 2003/3, and useful articles in others, such as ‘The Ecumenical Review’, 54, 2002/1.

⁴ The growing presence of Christians affirming ‘believers’ baptism’ (Baptists and Pentecostals), or who even consider baptism unnecessary.

⁵ As has been possible between the signatory churches of the Leuenberg Agreement.

⁶ These are not new issues for Faith and Order, cf. ‘The Nature and Purpose of the Church’, p. 38 (box).

⁷ cf. ‘Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed 381’, Faith and Order Paper no. 153, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1991, pp. 90-96.

⁸ Directory for the application of principles and norms on ecumenism. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Para 22. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/pccuecu.htm>.

⁹ There is no need to repeat the arguments of Cyprian, Stephen, Optatus of Milevis and Augustine, which are well known. For the ways in which this characterized developments in East and West, I refer to: A De Halleux, ‘Orthodoxie et catholicisme. Un seul baptême?’, in *Revue théologique de Louvain* 11 (1980), pp. 416-456, and to Y Congar, ‘Unis dans le baptême, désunis dans l’eucharistie?’, in *Essais oecuméniques*, ‘Les hommes, le mouvement, les problèmes’, Le Centurion, Paris, 1984, pp. 242-254.

¹⁰ While acknowledging the normative value of this ecclesial practice, some questions, however, still arise: how did the Church perceive itself in the time of Cyprian and Stephen, and later in the time of Augustine? What was the ‘schism’? What sort of heresies were being referred to?

¹¹ To this must be added the increasingly different forms in which the so-called ‘initiation sacraments’ are celebrated.

¹² For the relation between creeds and baptism, cf. J N D Kelly, ‘Early Christian Creeds’, 3rd edition, 1972, Longman, p.30; and H de Lubac ‘La profesión de fe apostólica’, *Communio* 1 (1979/II), p.23.

¹³ There can be seen here a very significant difference in the churches practicing believers’ baptism, where faith is understood above all to be the subjective faith of the individual Christian.

¹⁴ For a full presentation of baptism in the conciliar texts, cf. K J Becker, ‘La doctrina sobre el bautismo del Concilio Vaticano II’ in R Latourelle (ed.), ‘El Vaticano II: balance y perspectivas’, Sígueme, Salamanca, 1989, pp. 483-517.

¹⁵ I am thinking of the contributions made prior to Vatican II by theologians associated with the ‘spiritual ecumenism’ movement, which emerged in Lyon under the inspiration of P Couturier: P Michalon, ‘L’étendue de l’Église’, *Irenikon* 20 (1947), pp. 140-163; L Richard, ‘Une thèse fondamentale de l’oecuménisme: le baptême, incorporation visible à l’Église’ in *Nouvelle revue théologique* 74 (1952), pp. 485-492. There is wide recognition of the contribution made by Cardinal A Bea during the Council, cf. E Lanne, ‘La contribution du cardinal Bea à la question du baptême et l’unité des chrétiens’, in *Simposio Card. Agostino Bea* (16-19 December 1981), Segretariato per l’unione dei cristiani, Libreria Editrice, Rome, 1983, pp. 159-185.

¹⁶ ‘Lumen Gentium’ 11, para. 1; and 14, para.1. In ‘Vatican Council II’, ed. Austin Flannery, Dublin, 1988, pp. 361 and 365.

¹⁷ ‘Lumen Gentium’ 7, para. 2, in *idem.*, p. 355.

¹⁸ ‘Unitatis Redintegratio’ 3, para. 1, in *idem.*, p.455.

¹⁹ Ecumenical Directory, 92-95. This issue has also been dealt with in the plenary meeting of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, November 2001, cf. Information Service, N. 109, (2002/I-II) pp. 20-25.

²⁰ cf. ‘Unitatis Redintegratio’ 22, para. 3, in ‘Vatican Council II’ op. cit., p. 469.

²¹ cf. ‘Unitatis Redintegratio’ 4 para. 2, in *ibid.* p.457.

²² ‘With regard to other Christians, the principal documents of the Commission on Faith and Order and the statements of numerous bilateral dialogues have already provided Christian Communities with useful tools for discerning what is necessary to the ecumenical movement and to the conversion which it must inspire. These studies are important from two points of view: they demonstrate the remarkable progress already made, and they are a source of hope inasmuch as they represent a sure foundation for further study. The increase in fellowship in a reform which is continuous and carried out in the light of the Apostolic Tradition is certainly, in the present circumstances of Christians, one of the distinctive and most important aspects of ecumenism. Moreover, it is an essential guarantee for its future. The faithful of the Catholic Church cannot forget that the ecumenical thrust of the Second Vatican Council is one consequence of all that the Church at that time committed herself to doing in order to re-examine herself in the

³³ ‘Ut Unum Sint’ 6, op. cit., p.10.

light of the Gospel and the great Tradition.' (The Encyclical 'Ut Unum Sint', Catholic Truth Society, London, 1995, para. 17, pp. 21-22).

²³ cf. P Nogaard-Hojen, 'Baptism and the Foundations of Communion', in M Root/R Saarinen (eds), 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church', op. cit., pp.72ff. Even in Catholic circles some concern has been expressed arising from Catholic teaching from the Council as it is being perceived, cf. J Famerée, 'La communion dans le baptême. Point de vue catholique, questions oecuméniques', *Irenikon* 71 (1998), pp. 448-455.

²⁴ cf. J-M R Tillard, 'L'oecuménisme, une exigence spirituelle', *Unité des Chrétiens*, no. 39, (1980), pp. 28-30. These ideas also underlie 'Préparer l'unité. Pour une pastorale oecuménique', *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 100, (1980), pp. 164 ff, which he later took up, with some nuancing, at the Plenary Commission on Faith and Order meeting at Moshi in 1996, cf. 'From BEM to Koinonia', in *Faith and Order in Moshi*, Faith and Order Paper 177, WCC, Geneva 1998 p182-187.

²⁵ This should be understood within the framework of Catholic ecclesiology, which affirms that, while the one and only church is split by schism, its unity 'subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose' ('Unitatis Redintegratio', 4 para. 3, in 'Vatican Council II', op. cit., p.457).

²⁶ cf. 'Unitatis Redintegratio' 22, para.2, in *ibid.*, p. 469, and Ecumenical Directory, 92. It is very probable that this understanding of baptism as a beginning is linked in Catholic theology with the separation in time that has progressively developed between baptism and the eucharist, despite their continuing to be considered as integral parts of one single initiation process. Hence Catholic theologians and liturgists indicate the importance in ecumenical discussion of not disregarding the ritual action as bearing a particular significance. cf. S K Wood, 'Baptism and the Foundations of Communion', in M Root/R Saarinen (eds), 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church', op.cit., pp. 57-59; and P De Clerck, 'Vers une reconnaissance de l'écclésialité du baptême', *La Maison-Dieu* 235 (2003/3), pp. 143-152.

²⁷ cf. 'Unitatis Redintegratio' 4, para. 10, in 'Vatican Council II', op. cit., pp. 458-59.

²⁸ It is clear that, from a Catholic perspective, in addition to baptism, it is necessary to consider here outstanding questions concerning the eucharist and ministry.

²⁹ cf. 'Unitatis Redintegratio' 3, paras. 2 & 3, in 'Vatican Council II', op. cit., pp. 455-456.

³⁰ cf. J Willebrands, 'Subsistit in', *Information Service* N. 101, (1999/II-III), p. 149.

³¹ cf. J-M R Tillard, 'L'oecuménisme, une exigence spirituelle', art. cit., p.29.

³² I consider it possible that J-M R Tillard, in his later years, may have experienced an evolution of his appreciation of 'confessional reality', in response to the growing awareness within the ecumenical movement of the place of diversity within unity, cf. 'From BEM to Koinonia', art. cit.

³³ 'Ut Unum Sint' 6, op. cit., p.10.