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**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  
December 1985

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THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Office of the President

December 19, 1985

Doctor Guenther Gassmann  
Director of the Secretariat on Faith and Order  
World Council of Churches  
150 route de Ferney  
1211 Geneva 20  
Switzerland

Dear Dr. Gassmann:

In response to the invitation of the Commission on Faith and Order of The World Council of Churches to “all churches to prepare an official response” to the text of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* “at the highest appropriate level of authority, whether it be a council, synod, conference, assembly or other body,” I am herewith forwarding to you the “Response of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to ‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’.”

Following the receipt of a June 1982 letter from General Secretary Philip Potter in which he forwarded this invitation to our church, I asked our Commission on Theology and Church Relations, in behalf of the Synod, to coordinate the preparation of the enclosed response. I am pleased that this document has now been completed and that I am able to share it with you.

It is my prayer that the responses you have received to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* will be helpful in efforts to achieve a greater degree of genuine external unity in Christendom today based upon agreement in the confession of the Scriptural Gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe that this document is a helpful resource for fruitful discussions of the apostolic faith as it is confessed in the various Christian churches of the world and that it can provide assistance in confronting those areas of disagreement in doctrine which continue to separate and divide us.

May God use the efforts of the Commission on Faith and Order to bring many to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Bohlmann  
President

Enclosure

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# Response of The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod to “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”

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## Introduction

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), distributed by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, is the culmination of some 50 years of labor by leaders and scholars from many communions. It asks for a response from the churches of the world. Four specific questions are posed in the Preface which to guide the churches in preparing their responses:

- the extent to which you church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages;
- the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogs with other churches, particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith;
- the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness;

- the suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to its long-range research project “Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today.”

Two additional points made in the Preface are important to bear in mind: (1) “Readers should not expect to find a complete theological treatment of baptism, eucharist and ministry. . . . The agreed text purposely concentrates on those aspects of the theme that have been directly or indirectly related to the problems of mutual recognition leading to unity.” (2) The text does not claim to represent a consensus of the theologians involved, but rather “the significant theological convergence which Faith and Order has discerned and formulated.” Both of these points represent judgments which are not always self-evident and which make the document more difficult to evaluate.

### **Evaluation**

We shall first make some general comments, and then consider baptism, eucharist and ministry individually.

#### **A. General Observations**

1. The text, well argued and presented, merits serious consideration and response.
2. welcome the serious attention here given to doctrinal/theological matters. This represents a positive change in the WCC. In recent years it seems that “Faith and Order” concerns have been subordinated to activist ones, and we hope that BEM represents a permanent turn toward serious theological study.

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*We believe that the ultimate criterion for the church’s confession of faith is the inerrant Scriptures, always viewed in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

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3. We applaud the frequent use of Biblical language and formulation. (Churches with a strong confessional or doctrinal heritage easily replace, in practice, Biblical expressions with later dogmatic ones.) At the same time, this procedure raises concerns. Biblical language is

subject to interpretation: later dogmatic formulations arose precisely because Biblical language was misunderstood, or, at least, understood differently. Unless it can be demonstrated that these varying understandings no longer exist, a resolution of disagreements will not be achieved simply by reverting to the use of Biblical language.

4. The churchly or corporate perspectives of the document are to be applauded, especially in contrast to the individualistic outlook we often confront in contemporary contexts.

5. The ultimate hermeneutical or theoretical basis of the document is unclear. The question as to whether or not we can “recognize the faith of the Church through the ages” in the document seems itself to be an inadequate formulation of the task at hand. At worst, it sounds reductionistic to some “least common denominator” approach to unity in the church. And if not that, it appears to put the accent on the church’s faith or tradition rather than on an objective norm. We believe that the ultimate criterion for the church’s confession of faith is the inerrant Scriptures, always viewed in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It does not suffice to use Scripture only as a “witness” to the Gospel. The Gospel “interprets” Scripture, and Scripture “interprets” the Gospel.

Other formulations in BEM are similarly weak or misleading. The “tradition of the Gospel” sounds strange to our ears. We are aware that “tradition” can be used neutrally, but the document’s use of this phrase appears to accent human receptivity and activity unduly. It appears to us that at times tradition assumes normative status in this document. Moreover, “apostolic faith” is never defined. Similar questions arise with respect to the juxtaposition of phrases such as “experience of life” and “articulation of faith” in seeking doctrinal consensus. Not only does BEM appear to place the accent on human activity, but it seems to concede to experience a place alongside of Scripture as a source and norm of faith.

6. Not surprisingly, then, the Gospel itself appears to be muted in the document. Themes such as “justification by grace through faith” and “vicarious atonement” are attested only weakly and indistinctly. We understand that these topics are not BEM’s primary concerns as such, but their centrality in the Christian faith makes discussion of any article of faith deficient without them. The themes of sin and grace in relation to baptism and eucharist are conspicuous by their near absence, as we shall note.

7. The division of the document into (1) the main text, which asserts “major areas of theological convergence” and (2) added

commentaries, which should “either indicate historical differences that have been overcome or identify disputed issues still in need of further research and reconciliation,” is helpful. However, concerns must be registered about the way in which the distinction has been carried out. First of all, it is less than clear at times that certain differences have actually been overcome. Secondly, the language of the text is frequently ambiguous, thereby suggesting that it may have resulted from a search for a “least common denominator.” It is often not clear when the document intends to be descriptive and when prescriptive. Although each of the three sections of the document must necessarily take up liturgical activity as well as doctrinal matters, it is often not made clear whether BEM is referring to the church’s “service” and grateful response, or whether the subject is God’s prior activity, when the church’s proper response must be passivity and receptivity.

Because elasticity of language may be used to conceal continuing divisions rather than point toward emerging unity, confessional statements have historically included negative as well as positive statements in order to indicate as clearly as possible what is *not* meant as well as what is. BEM would also be immeasurably strengthened if these were accompanied by antitheses as well.

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*However, the Scriptures also forbid us to sacrifice truth (full, actual agreement in doctrine) for the sake of external union.*

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8. The repeatedly stated goal of BEM “to realize the goal of visible church unity” is not developed adequately. We recognize this goal as desirable, even mandated by the Scriptures, to the degree possible. However, the Scriptures also forbid us to sacrifice truth (full, actual agreement in doctrine) for the sake of external union. Moreover, the spiritual unity of the church already exists in the body of Christ. The *una sancta* is always ultimately hidden; its extent is known to God alone. This church becomes accessible to us through its true marks, the purely preached Gospel and the rightly administered sacraments (AC VII). To seek the external unity of the church elsewhere is to attempt to walk by sight, not by faith. It may be that full visible unity will not be realized before our Lord returns.

## **B. Baptism**

1. Much in this section of the document is commendable. For example, the dominical institution of baptism and its meaning as a participation in Christ's death and resurrection is clearly linked with key Biblical passages. We fully agree that baptism "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (B1) is unrepeatable (13), and that the Holy Spirit incorporates all the baptized into the body of Christ (B6). That baptism "should normally be administered during public worship" (B23) is another laudable point.

2. That the one baptism "constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions . . ." (B6) is also to be affirmed. At the same time, the false impression is left that churches must "visibly manifest their fellowship" before it is possible to make "a genuine Christian witness."

3. We fully agree that baptism is related to "life-long growth in Christ" (B9) and that churches which practice infant baptism "must guard themselves against the practice of apparently indiscriminate baptism and take more seriously their responsibility for the nurture of baptized children to mature commitment to Christ" (B15). In that context, we can agree that a periodic rite of renewal of baptismal vows (B14), Comm.) can be helpful.

4. Certain corollaries of the preceding statements are developed unsatisfactorily in BEM, however. The initial B1 reference to baptism as a "rite of commitment" and a later reference to the sacramental as "both God's gift and our human response to that gift" (B8) signal a confusion between the monergism of divine grace and our human response which is never clarified in the document.

5. Closely related to the forgoing point is the document's attempt to countenance both infant baptism and believer's baptism. The claim that "the real distinction is between those who baptize people at any age and those who baptize only those able to make a confession of faith for themselves" does not adequately recognize that the most important difference is between those who understand baptism itself as sheer gift and actual means of grace (sacrament) and those who make conversion and confession of faith a prerequisite to the symbolization of that gift.

6. Likewise, a serious caricature results from BEM's failure to clarify the connection between baptism and original sin. It is misleading to classify the "washing away of sin" (1 Cor. 6:11) as merely one "image" among many of the meaning of baptism (B2).



7. The document concedes, but appears to gloss over, the seriousness of the fact that “Christians differ in their understanding as to where the sign of the gift of the Spirit is to be found,” whether in the “water rite itself,” in chrismation, in confirmation, or in all three, as well as in the question of infant communion (B14, and Comm.).

8. The description of baptism as “a liberation into a new humanity” (B2) and reference to its ethical implications as including motivation “to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life” (B10) can be understood unobjectionably. However, these formulations appear to leave the door wide open for a praxis or stance that is determined more culturally or ideologically than Scripturally.

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*. . . it is our judgment that more, not less, needs to be made of the “christening” aspect of baptism, and that our “Christian names” may be a powerful and continuing witness to the fact that baptism also calls us out of this world and sets us on the road to the next.*

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9. In that light, the cautions stated against “confusion between baptism and customs surrounding name-giving” (B21, Comm.) appear to be misfounded. The stated concerns are cultural, not theological: “the baptized are required to assume Christian names not rooted in their cultural tradition . . . alienating the baptized from their local culture through the imposition of foreign names.” No cognizance seems to be taken of the frequent close connection between “cult and culture,” that is, that names easily in many cultures witness to a non-Christian tradition. One cannot claim Scriptural mandate for this custom, but it is our judgment that more, not less, needs to be made of the “christening” aspect of baptism, and that our “Christian names,” may be a powerful and continuing witness to the fact that baptism also calls us *out* of this world and sets us on the road to the next. Both Biblical and ecclesiastical tradition attest to the antiquity and widespread adherence to this practice.

### **C. Eucharist**

1. Much in this section is congenial to us. Especially, commendable, from a functional standpoint, is the recommendation that, because of its

centrality, the eucharist be celebrated frequently—“at least every Sunday”—and that the faithful should be encouraged to receive it frequently. We must admit that our own contemporary practice falls short of meeting this ideal, which the Lutheran confessional writings also encourage. Other themes are laudably accented which often receive insufficient emphasis in practice: the essentially celebrative or joyful (“eucharistic”) character of the sacrament, its eschatological import, and others. The following observations are not intended to negate this positive judgment, but we must express reservations about many of the same types of doctrinal ambiguities here as under “Baptism.”

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2. The text begins with a clear accent on the gift character of the eucharist (E1 and E2, although in E2 the phrase “sacrament of a gift” is obscure), but this implied accent on “sola gratia” is not carried through unambiguously in the rest of the section.

3. Lutherans are not very familiar with some of the language and/or accents of BEM in this section. This causes us to desire greater clarity and precision. For example, the very word “eucharist” (thanksgiving) has not been our usual term for this sacrament, although our own liturgies normally surround the sacrament with hymns and prayers of thanksgiving. “Eucharist” is by no means intrinsically objectionable to us. Nevertheless, the use of this term for the sacrament of the altar may suggest a shift in accent from God’s gift to what the church does. Greater precision is needed to underscore the theological distinction between God’s unmerited gift and the church’s grateful response.

4. Closely related is our concern with the description of the eucharist as a “sacrifice.” The text does specify it as a “sacrifice of praise . . . possible only through Christ, with Him and in Him” (E4) whose self-sacrifice has been “accomplished once and for all on the cross and [is]” still operative on behalf of all mankind” (E5, cf. E10). We have no problem with such formulations, but we are still desirous that the

priority of “sacrament” over “sacrifice” and a clear theological distinction between the two be unambiguously spelled out. Acceptable and even laudable though it is in one sense, the Lord’s Supper, we believe, should not primarily or ordinarily be referred to as a “sacrifice.” The attempt of E8 (Comm.) to explain sacrifice as propitiatory “in the light of the significance of the eucharist as intercession” is, at best, only a bare beginning to the resolution of that problem.

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5. The concepts of *anamnesis* (traditionally: “memorial” or “remembrance”) and “re-presentation” are also problematic. E7 emphasizes that it is Christ who “acts through the joyful celebration of His Church,” but much of the subsequent discussion appears to concentrate on what the *church* does. In the light of persistent misunderstandings, precise logical sequences and distinctions are necessary here too. The two terms or concepts themselves, though undeniably Biblical as such, need to be defined with greater clarity. “Memorial” or “remembrance” is too easily and commonly understood in merely symbolic terms of the church’s obedience to an ordinance and as simply an affirmation of its faith. “Representation,” on the other hand, needs to be more clearly distinguished from the false notion of “repetition” accomplished by the ritual action of an ordained minister. The impression left in E1 is that the eucharist only a continuation of other meals shared by Jesus during His earthly ministry, and that it was merely “prefigured” in the Passover. Stress is needed both on the uniqueness of Jesus’ final meal on earth and a genuine sense of its typological continuity with Old Testament meals (fulfillment). The latter would also clarify the sense of “re-presentation.”

6. Not unrelated to these concerns are questions regarding section E C on the “*epiklesis*” or invocation of the Spirit. Many of the assertions in this section, if heard in a general sense, are acceptable (e.g., that it is the Holy Spirit “who makes the historical words of Jesus present and “alive” —E14, Comm.). What is lacking is clarity about the relation of the Spirit to the Word, and to the dominical words of institution. The concession in E28, Comm. that possibly “local food and drink serve

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better to anchor the eucharist in everyday life" raises the question whether the Word is considered normative at all. The accent of E12 that the preached Word should normally accompany the eucharist is laudable, but nowhere are the deeper issues of Word in relation to sacrament plumbed. The initial assertion in E14 that "the Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ really present to us in the eucharistic meal, fulfilling the promise contained in the words of institution" is a model of ambiguity, and, in spite of qualifying statements, runs the risk of identifying Christ's presence with a particular moment or action within the rite rather than with the sacrament as a whole. The appeal of Comm. 14 early liturgies where "the whole 'prayer action' was thought of as bringing about the reality promised by Christ" appears to place undue weight on the church's action or ritual.

7. At the other end of the spectrum of views is the "reservation" of the elements (implying that "Christ's presence in the consecrated elements continues after the celebration") considered in E32. It is one thing to "respect the practices and piety of the others" and in this and other respects; it is something else to allow contradictory understandings to stand side by side. The notation that the "primary intention" of this practice was the "distribution [of the elements] among the sick and those who are absent" is helpful. But we cannot pretend that serious differences in belief and piety in worldwide Christendom on this point are thereby overcome.

8. A major problem throughout this section is BEM's ambiguity about the nature of Christ's presence in the sacrament. Even though expressions such as "real presence" and "the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ" are used, the document never clearly articulates more than the presence of the *person* of Christ, nor does it speak of a physical eating of His body and blood other than by faith. More than some *purely* "symbolic" meaning is affirmed, but it is not clear how much more. The addition of adjectives such as "effective," "unique," "living," etc., do not go far enough. We appreciate the attempt to avoid philosophical speculation about the precise nature of the mystery (precisely the intent of

Lutheranism's traditional "in, with, and under"), but that may not become a cloak for a pluralism of incompatible theological views. The question posed in Comm. 13 whether confession and denial of the presence of Christ's body and blood can be accommodated must be denied. In the light of all of this, it is not surprising that nothing at all is said about the *manducatio impriorum* (that also the unbelieving receive Christ's body and blood, but to their judgment), nor about its sequel, the necessity of church discipline and of "close(d) communion."

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9. Possibly the most serious deficiency of this section 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." Conversely, disproportionate accent is placed on horizontal (this-worldly) relations. It is not clear in what sense the whole "world" is present in the celebration (E23) or that the eucharist is a "representative act . . . on behalf of the whole world" (E20). If these words are meant eschatologically, this should be specified. Otherwise, an indefensible universalism and an ideologically driven activism will be indicated. That the latter is, indeed, in view seems clear by many unfocused assertions in E20 about the eucharist as "a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life," that "all kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged," or that we must be "actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world's situation and the human condition."

Concerns similar to these had to be expressed about BEM's discussion on baptism. When regarded from this perspective, therefore, the concern with "above all, the obstinacy of unjustifiable confessional oppositions within the body of Christ" (E20), while valid as such, is inappropriate in this context.

## D. Ministry

1. The title of this section invites questions. Does “ministry” refer to a calling of all Christians, to a called and ordained clergy, or to both? And if the latter, when does it refer to each, and what is their relationship to each other? In our own church, as in others, the use of this term is by no means consistent. M7 specifies a usage in BEM where “ministry” refers to “the service to which the whole people of God is called,” whereas “ordained ministry” is employed for “persons who have received a charism and whom the church appoints for service by ordination through the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands.” Our own tradition has generally made use of “the (holy) ministry” instead of “ordained ministry.” We have usually referred to the calling of all Christians as “the *priesthood* of all believers,” while “ministry” in the generic sense has only recently become familiar. It must be admitted that the use of the same word—either “priesthood” or “ministry”—for both lay people and clergy only through the use of qualifying terms, can be helpful in summarizing what both share as well as what distinguishes them (M17 and Commentary on “priesthood” for “ordained ministry” is well done). However, the issues do not inhere in any terminology as such, but in the way it is understood and applied.

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Plainly, BEM’s overriding interest is in what it calls the “ordained ministry.” Only M1 is devoted primarily to “ministry,” although its relation to the “ordained ministry” is touched on repeatedly throughout this section, especially in M26-27. Hence, some other title might have been more accurate.

2. On the whole, M1, titled “The Calling of the Whole People of God,” will probably command as much universal assent in all churches as anything in the entire BEM. Our only regret is that it is so brief. Nevertheless, unguarded, ambiguous terminology appears here too. That God “calls the whole of humanity to become God’s people” is subject to universalistic misinterpretations (M1). M4 almost invites “liberation

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theology” caricatures of “Gospel” and “Kingdom of God.” M5 on the “gifts of the Spirit” glides over a host of problems and disagreements.

3. On the whole, our problems with this section are few, precisely because of our fundamental agreement with the assertion that “the New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministry in the Church” (M19). Hence, the issue is, as such, an adiaphoron. Ministerial ordering or structure is contingent on and can ultimately be judged only by its usefulness in the proclamation of the Gospel.

4. It does not appear to us, however, that BEM is content to leave the matter at that. There appears to us to be a definite tilt in a certain hierarchical direction, especially on the basis of “tradition” in the early centuries of the church. Lutheranism has always regarded tradition highly, also with respect to the doctrine of the ministry, but utmost care is required that it not be conceded a *de facto* authority alongside of Scripture.

5. The precise meaning of “ordination” or of the relation between the “ordained ministry” and the “priesthood of all believers” is given short shrift in this section. Lutherans themselves have not always been of one mind on the issue, and BEM apparently tries to have the best of both worlds. On the one hand, to speak of ordained ministers as having received a “charism” (M7 and M32, “variety of charisms”; cf. M28-31) appears to want to accommodate congregationalistic, if not “charismatic,” views of the ministry, where ordination is either repudiated or conceded only a formal, nominal role. On the other hand, to speak of the act of ordination as “conferring” authority on the ordained ministry (M15), or as a “sacramental” sign, where the church “enters sacramentally into contingent, historical forms . . .” (M43) points in a sacerdotalistic direction. We are aware that “sacramental” (especially if put in quotation marks) can be used in an acceptable generic sense (God’s use of *any* external forms), but to many this terminology will signal much more than this. Other statements, however, seem to maintain an acceptable balance. We welcome statements affirming both that “the authority of

the ordained minister is rooted in Jesus Christ” (M15) and that his “call must be authenticated by the Church’s recognition of the gifts and graces of the particular person” (M45). It would have been helpful, however, if BEM had spelled out more clearly wherein that “authority” consists, namely, the “power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments.” (AC XXVIII, 5)

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6. The discussion of “the Forms of the Ordained Ministry” (M III) focuses largely on the development of the threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon. We have no problem in principle with that type of structure. We are not accustomed to the term “bishop,” but as long as it is clear that his episkope or “oversight” differs only in extent or degree, not in quality, from that of the “presbyter” or local pastor, there is no intrinsic objection. The “considerable uncertainty” about the diaconate, of which M31, Comm. speaks, is also true of our church.

7. Nevertheless, it appears to us that BEM makes more out of the ancient tradition of a threefold pattern than Scripture will sustain. It is debatable whether it “may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.” (M22). There is no evidence that a common form of ministry bespeaks a unity of doctrine, and no evidence that its common adoption would hasten genuine unity of faith. Ironically, part VI at the end of the document (“Towards The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries”) seems to say that forms do not ultimately matter. As regards “the mutual recognition of ministries” (M51), the Lutheran Church has always recognized the validity of the public ministry in historic trinitarian churches.

In general, there seems to be a tendency to interpret the “ordained ministry” and its ordering in a hierarchical direction. (We note in passing that no mention whatsoever is made of the papacy, surely the most serious ecumenical issue with respect to “ministry” today.) On the one



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hand, it is clearly affirmed that “the authority of the ordained ministry is not to be understood as the possession of the ordained person but as a gift for the continuing edification of the body in and for which the minister has been ordained” (M15). But on the other hand, we have talk of the ordained ministry as reminding “the community of the divine initiative” (M12; cf. E29) or as being the “visible focus of the deep and all-embracing communion between Christ and the members of His body.” (M14)

8. What is said about “apostolic succession” in part IV appears to be quite moderate. The document attempts a distinction between the “succession of the apostolic ministry” and the “apostolic tradition of the whole church” (M34 and Comm.). The accent is laudably placed on the latter, defined as primarily “an expression of the permanence and therefore, of the continuity of Christ’s own mission in which the Church participates” (M35). There is much to be said for the historical continuity and accountability implied, but the statement would have been strengthened by greater attention to definition of the concept as faithfulness to Scriptural doctrine. In development of this theme, more appears to be made of tradition than is supportable, however. It may go too far to describe episcopal succession “as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church” (M38). To assert that it “not only points to historical continuity; it also manifests an actual spiritual reality” (M36, Comm.) has no Scriptural basis. The laying on of hands, though surely a laudable and Biblically attested custom, cannot be urged as necessary for transmission of the succession on the basis of “apostolic tradition.” (M52; see the helpful discussion, however, in M40, (Comm.)

9. In a major inconsistency and radical departure from tradition,” BEM leaves undecided, although it does not require, the ordination of women. The major argument cited against it again appears to be only tradition. The two viewpoints are simply set side by side (M18 and Comm.). On the one hand, “an increasing number of churches have

decided that there is no Biblical or theological reason against ordaining women”; in fact, they do so “because of their understanding of the Gospel and of the ministry,” and “reinforced by their experience . . . none has found reason to reconsider its decision.” On the other side are churches which “consider that the force of 19 centuries of tradition against the ordination of women must not be set aside” and which “believe that there are theological issues concerning the nature of humanity and concerning Christology which lie at the heart of their convictions . . . .”

BEM itself, however, introduces the topic by appealing to Gal. 3:28 (in Christ “neither male nor female”) with the apparent implication that thus the church will be faithful to its call “to convey to the world the image of new humanity” (M18). In any case, “differences on this issue . . . must not be regarded as substantive hindrance for further efforts towards mutual recognition. Openness to each other holds the possibility that the Spirit may well speak to one church through the insights of another” (M54).

It is our judgment that BEM has not adequately summarized the weighty Biblical and theological arguments against the ordination of women, nor does it recognize what serious barriers these are to full doctrinal unity.

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## **Conclusion**

As noted above, BEM has positive features. 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.

At the same time, we must also register serious reservations about BEM. The document frequently bases its conclusions on tradition, the faith or experience of the church, or the like, rather than on the clear teachings of the Scriptures. As a result, it leaves critical questions undecided, or resorts to artfully ambiguous language which can be read or understood in many different ways. Such ambiguity in the confessing of

the “faith of the Church through the ages” is not acceptable to a confessional church.

Furthermore, this document does not provide a solid basis for external unity in the church. Throughout the assumption which seems to be that there can be unity at all costs by means of a “reconciled diversity” despite pluralism of doctrine and practice. This is an assumption which we cannot accept.

Thus, both in relation to other churches as well as in our internal use of BEM for “worship, education, ethical, and spiritual life and witness,” we judge that BEM will prove more helpful as a guide for discussing the vast gulfs of disagreements still dividing Christendom, especially on the issues of baptism, eucharist and ministry, than as a basis for overcoming them by reaching a full, common understanding of Gospel and Scripture.

#### FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup>In June 1982 General Secretary Philip Potter of the World Council of Churches, in a letter to President Ralph Bohlmann, invited The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to respond to the statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (“Lima Document”) prepared by the WCC’s Commission on Faith and Order. In response to this invitation President Bohlmann asked the CTCR to coordinate the preparation of an evaluation of this document for the Synod. After soliciting and receiving reactions and suggestions from the St. Louis and Fort Wayne seminary faculties, the Commission has prepared this response.

To obtain a copy of the original document provided to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by the World Council of Churches, write:

World Council of Churches  
475 Riverside Drive  
Room 439  
New York, NY 10027  
212-870-2533

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD



International Center  
1333 South Kirkwood Road  
Saint Louis, Missouri 63122-7295