

CALLED TO BE ONE

Churches Together in England

1996, 2002

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PREFACE TO 1996 EDITION

by the Presidents of Churches Together in England

What kind of church is required to bear witness to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in our divided world today? What kind of church can help a country with racial tensions, with a growing gap between rich and poor, employed and unemployed and with a very high divorce rate? What kind of church can serve a Europe struggling to overcome the enmities of past centuries, but finding them breaking out afresh where the established order has been overthrown? What kind of church can bring reconciliation in a world in which a few powerful nations dictate the terms of trade to the poor nations, and in which ethnic and racial conflict is increasing?

As they look forward to the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era the churches in England have realised that they cannot preach the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and expect to be believed, while they are not reconciled to one another. In 1990 therefore they committed themselves to one another under God 'to become more fully, in his own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission'.

What kind of unity is required if the many churches are to be more fully one? At present the divided churches are not agreed on this. **Called To Be One** is a first attempt to set down the various ways in which the different churches understand visible unity, to set out where their views converge and where they still diverge. It also challenges the churches to seek renewal from God, for unity cannot come without renewal. Christian unity is not only an end in itself. It is also for mission- and evangelisation. **Called To Be One** reminds the churches that they have committed themselves to 'common witness and service in the world'. This book, therefore, is not commending a process by which the churches turn in on themselves to seek mutual comfort in a hostile world. On the contrary it recognises that if the churches are to be more faithful and effective ambassadors of reconciliation in the world, they must no longer ignore the inherited divisions which have prevented them from being reconciled to one another, and renewed together for common witness.

Not everyone will agree with everything in this book. That is not intended. Its purpose is to start a widespread, ecumenical discussion in all our churches, undergirded by persistent prayer united to the prayer of Jesus *That they may all be one that the world may believe*. We warmly commend **Called To Be One** to all our member churches.

+George Cantuar
Archbishop of Canterbury
+Basil Hume
Archbishop of Westminster

Kathleen Richardson
Moderator of the Free Churches Council
+Bishop Basil
Russian Orthodox Bishop of Serviego

God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation in a divided world. Our integrity as ambassadors of Christ requires us rigorously to struggle to be reconciled with one another as Christians. Living with diversity as Christians is not an easy option, and requires a quality and depth of relationship which itself is a powerful expression of unity.

For unity is both the journey's end and the way of journeying now.

Churches Together in England Forum, 1997

FOREWORD TO THE 2002 EDITION

This book was written as a resource for the **Called To Be One** process through which the member churches of Churches Together in England agreed to discuss with one another the nature of the visible unity of the church, and was published in Spring 1996. The process was focussed on the July 1997 Forum held at Swanwick, Derbyshire. That Forum was attended by the representatives of Member Churches, Bodies in Association and intermediate ecumenical councils. The Report from the Forum to Churches Together in England's governing body, the Enabling Group, is Appendix G.

The process of discerning God's way ahead for his Church continues. July 1997 was a stage, indeed a land-mark, in the journey; other discussions and contributions to the national and international debate are listed in Appendix H.

This 2002 edition is essentially a re-print of the 1996 book, and has respected its integrity and historical context. So, although some terminology and many structures have changed in the intervening six years, the text has remained untouched. The book is a much-used resource for the churches and text book for many courses. It should be seen alongside *Such a feast – Spiritual nourishment and the churches* (CTE 2001).

Thanks are due to those who prepared substantial papers on five subjects closely concerned with the visible unity of the church. These were Revd Dr David Calvert (Church & Mission), Revd Dr Morris West (Christian Initiation & Church Membership), Very Revd Mgr Michael Jackson and Mr David Carter (Eucharistic Communion), Revd Canon Alan Dawkins (Ordained Ministry), and Revd Dr Alan Sell (Authority and Decision-Making). David Carter also produced the list of documents and dialogues. Members of the Theology & Unity Group worked on these papers and also made a very large number of corrections to the book in its final stages.

The text of the book is the responsibility of a Working Party which held nine meetings in 1994 and 1995. Its members were: Dr Mary Cecily Boulding OP, Jenny Carpenter, Mr David Carter, Revd Pauline Huggan, Revd Dr Donald Norwood, Revd Roger Nunn, Revd Dr Hazel Sherman, Dr Mary Tanner (Consultant) and Revd Flora Winfield. The Working Party was convened by Canon Martin Reardon, General Secretary of Churches Together in England: he wrote the Foreword to the original edition, and the credit he deserves is understated there. In this current edition a proper tribute can be paid to Martin's diplomacy, interpretative skill, theological understanding and committed determination, without which this book would not have been the acclaimed achievement that it remains in this new century.

Bill Snelson
General Secretary, Churches Together in England

June 2002

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Geography and history have conspired to give the churches in England a privileged role in the ecumenical movement. Three major Christian traditions - the Church of England, the Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church - live as close neighbours serving the same communities. Alongside them and under the same social and political structures, there are also a great variety of smaller churches. The British Council of Churches was established in 1942 to provide a meeting place and framework of co-operation between the Church of England, the major Free Churches and some smaller churches. After the Second World War an increasing number of local councils of churches brought Christians together locally. In the 1960s and 1970s several union schemes between different Free Churches and also between the Church of England and some Free Churches were proposed, but only one came to fruition when churches of the former Congregational and Presbyterian Churches and of the Churches of Christ formed the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom. Some Congregational churches chose not to be part of this and constituted the Congregational Federation. When the Proposals for a Covenant between the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church and the Church of England failed to receive the approval of the General Synod in 1982, for the first time in twenty-five years there were no discussions about union.

1.2 The visit of Pope John Paul in the same year encouraged conversations between the third major Christian tradition in England, the Roman Catholic Church, and the member churches of the British Council of Churches. This led to the establishment in 1984 of the Inter-Church Meeting, which brought together not only the three largest Christian traditions in England, but also a wide range of other churches including the Orthodox, the Lutheran and some African & Afro-Caribbean Independent, Pentecostal and Holiness churches. The Inter-Church Meeting initiated the Inter-Church Process, *Not Strangers But Pilgrims*, including the 1986 Lent course, *What on earth is the church for?*, and three national conferences in England (Nottingham), Wales (Bangor) and Scotland (St. Andrew's) in 1987.

The Process culminated in a major British and Irish conference at Swanwick in Derbyshire, at which the following 'Swanwick Declaration' was adopted by acclaim and personally signed by those present on Friday 4th September 1987. The Conference asked that it should be read in churches in England, Scotland and Wales on one of the Sundays in October.

The Swanwick Declaration – No Longer Strangers - Pilgrims!

1.3 *'Appointed by our churches and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we declare that this, the broadest assembly of British and Irish churches ever to meet in these islands has reached a common mind. We are aware that not all Christians are represented amongst us but we look forward to the time when they will share fully with us.*

'We came with different experiences and traditions, some with long ecumenical service, some for whom this is a new adventure. We are one band of pilgrims. We are old and young, women and men, black and white, lay and ordained and we travelled from the four corners of these islands to meet at Swanwick in Derbyshire. There we met, we listened, we talked, we worshipped, we prayed, we sat in silence, deeper than words. Against the background of so much suffering and sinfulness in our society we were reminded of our call to witness that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. We affirmed that this world with all its sin and splendour belongs to God. Young people called on us to be ready to sort out our priorities so that we could travel light and concentrate on our goal. Driven on by a gospel imperative to seek unity that the world may believe, we rejoiced that we are pilgrims together and strangers no longer.

'We now declare together our readiness to commit ourselves to each other under God. Our earnest desire is to become more fully, in his own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission. Such unity is the gift of God. With gratitude we have truly experienced this gift, growing amongst us in these days. We affirm our openness to this growing unity in obedience to the Word of God, so that we may fully share, hold in common and offer to the world those gifts which we have received and still hold in separation. In the unity we seek we recognise that there will not be uniformity but legitimate diversity.

'It is our conviction that, as a matter of policy at all levels and in all places, our churches must now move from co-operation to clear commitment to each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed and in common evangelism and service of the world.

'We urge church leaders and representatives to take all necessary steps to present, as soon as possible, to our church authorities, assemblies and congregations, the Report of this Conference together with developed proposals for ecumenical instruments to help the churches of these islands to move ahead together.'

'Continuing to trust in the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, we look forward with confidence to sharing with our own churches the joys of this historic Conference. We thank God for all those who, from Lent '86 and before, have been part of this pilgrimage. We feel their presence with us. We urge our churches to confirm by decision and action the hopes and vision on which we have laid hold, and which we shall not let go.'

'This is a new beginning. We set out on our further pilgrimage ready to take risks and determined not to be put off by 'dismal stories'. We resolve that no discouragement will make us once relent our avowed intent to be pilgrims together. Leaving behind painful memories and reaching out for what lies ahead, we press on towards the full reconciliation in Christ of all things in heaven and on earth, that God has promised in his Kingdom'.

*Lord God, we thank you
For calling us into the company
Of those who trust in Christ
And seek to obey his will.
May your Spirit guide and strengthen us
In mission and service to your world;
For we are strangers no longer
But pilgrims together on the way to your Kingdom.*

Churches Together in England

1.4 Those who signed the Swanwick Declaration presented it to their respective churches. Each church considered its response, and then all the churches discussed together how to implement it.

On 1st September 1990 members of 20 churches in England worshipped together in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Southwark where their representatives formally signed the Basis and Commitment of Churches Together in England as follows:

'Churches Together in England unites in pilgrimage those Churches in England which, acknowledging God's revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, and, in obedience to God's will and in the power of the Holy Spirit commit themselves:

- to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which is his body; and
- to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'

Representatives of the churches then moved to Christ Church & Upton Chapel, a joint Baptist & United Reformed Church, for the first meeting of the Forum of Churches Together in England. Both this church and the Roman Catholic cathedral are members of a local ecumenical group, Churches Together in North Lambeth. Similar services and assemblies were held in Scotland and Wales on the same day by churches in those countries, and a week later in Liverpool by representatives of all four nations in Britain & Ireland. Thus churches in these nations committed themselves to a new stage in the ecumenical movement.

1.5 What does this commitment amount to? Putting together the Swanwick Declaration and the Basis and Commitment of Churches Together in England, it amounts to this:

- i.** To a recognition that Christian unity ('One Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission ... in which there will not be uniformity but legitimate diversity') is the will of God; that God desires to give it to us by the power of the Spirit; and that we have begun to experience this gift growing among us already; and therefore to a commitment that we will continue to seek a deepening of our communion with Christ and with one another in the Church and that we will never give up on this.

ii. To a recognition, against the background of so much suffering and sinfulness in our society, that the gift of unity is not for the benefit of the church only but for the health and wholeness of humanity which Christians believe will be the result of the reconciliation in Christ of all things in heaven and on earth in God's promised reign of justice and peace, the Kingdom of God; and therefore to a commitment by the various churches to proclaim the Gospel together by common witness and service in the world - by our words, our actions and by our life together.

1.6 In all that follows, this dual commitment the churches have made to unity and to common mission needs to be kept in mind. It is very easy for the concern for church unity to become an end in itself, unrelated to surrounding society. Yet all around in the life of the world, a struggle is going on to find patterns of unity that are consistent with the need for diversity. What is the right balance between the United Kingdom and the various nations that make it up? What kind of united Europe do we want? How can this be reconciled with the need for national identity to be affirmed? How can the divided peoples of Northern Ireland or Bosnia live together in both justice and peace? Within our own society, how can our common humanity be affirmed at the same time as our different racial or ethnic identities? The question of 'what kind of unity' is one facing humanity as a whole. The church understands itself to be the place where the Spirit sustains a profound unity in the midst of all the diversities as a sign and instrument of reconciliation in the world. Mission and unity belong together. The Gospel of the reconciliation of our divided and sinful world to God, and consequently to itself, can credibly be preached only by a church faithfully reflecting the unity and love of God. This dual commitment to unity and to mission was affirmed at the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1993:

We say to our churches "there is no turning back either from the goal of visible unity or from the single ecumenical movement that unites concern for the unity of the Church and concern for engagement in the struggles of the world." (*On the Way to Fuller Koinonia, WCC, 1994, p225*)

In *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) Pope John Paul II recalled that the Second Vatican Council had committed the Roman Catholic Church *irrevocably* to the ecumenical venture. This commitment to unity, however, is not given a high priority by everyone, nor a sense of urgency. There are many reasons for this. Some people have been disillusioned by the relative failure of the efforts of the last thirty or forty years to bring the churches in this country together in an institutional unity. The inertia and resistance to change of denominational institutions has meant for these people that to work for Christian unity has absorbed energy rather than released it, and they now prefer to expend their energy in evangelism, or social service or prophetic witness - through their denominations or in some voluntary organisation alongside the churches.

1.7 For some others unity is still associated with uniformity, a kind of unity which the state and the established church tried to impose on everyone following the Reformation, and against which the dissenters asserted their convictions about free choice. The concept of an imposed uniformity has now been abandoned, but its spectre still haunts many, and they fear its return.

1.8 For many others the contemporary culture of individualism and consumerism, which pervades so much of society, has invaded even their religion. It encourages Christians to choose a local church which fulfils their own personal or family needs, and tends to remove motivation for the wider unity of the church. If the church exists only to fulfil the needs of individuals, and if different individuals have different needs, then, it is assumed, the greater the variety of churches, the more people's needs they are likely to fulfil; and it is not surprising that such people become apathetic about the search for a wider and deeper unity.

1.9 This negative picture of the ecumenical movement has been the picture portrayed by many in the media, who frequently claim that the movement for Christian unity has 'run out of steam'. However there is a much more positive picture. In the last five years local churches in many parts of the country have continued to come closer together in shared buildings, joint worship and study and to engage in witness and service together. There are now more than 2,000 local churches together groupings or local ecumenical partnerships throughout England. Some 50 intermediate ecumenical bodies (bringing churches together in metropolitan areas, new towns, counties and unitary authority areas) have developed in association with Churches Together in England. These 50 bodies are intermediate between those working for unity nationally and those working locally, and as such they hold a key position in giving coherence to the whole movement.

1.10 Many local churches caught a vision of Christian unity in the 1960s and 1970s and entered into areas of ecumenical experiment which allowed them to do things together which were not as yet permitted nationally. They saw themselves as scouts sent out in advance to explore the new ecumenical territory, which, at that time, they expected the main body of the

churches soon to occupy when national unity schemes and proposals came to fruition. The United Reformed Church was formed in 1972; but other schemes did not come to fruition. As a result the advance guard in local ecumenical partnerships often feel isolated and frustrated. In many places they regard themselves as the locally united church exercising a joint mission in their neighbourhood, to a large extent sharing church membership and ministry, offering and receiving eucharistic communion together, and having one church council. For them working together ecumenically is the norm and not the exception.

1.11 There has been considerable ecumenical progress nationally and internationally. For example, the Anglican churches in Great Britain & Ireland have entered into communion with some Lutheran churches in the Nordic & Baltic countries. Theological agreements such as that on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* by the WCC Faith & Order Commission have been welcomed by many churches. The major Christian World Communions have published the results of very many international bilateral dialogues in which they have been engaged. However these agreed statements have not been fully accepted and received into the life of all member churches. The churches also have some way to go before they can set out a clear vision of what a visibly united church would look like. Although in some localities churches of different denominations have found ways to live and work closely together despite remaining differences, the lack of full agreement still causes frustration and hinders common mission.

The Visible Unity of the Church

1.12 The first residential Forum of Churches Together in England in July 1991 followed shortly after the 7th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra. That Assembly had produced an agreed portrait of the unity of the church. It emerged at the Forum that differing understandings of the meaning of the word 'church' in the Canberra document meant that people were interpreting it very differently. It became clear that differing interpretations of what was meant by the 'visible unity of the church' were leading Christians to misunderstand one another, and causing considerable frustration as they tried to deepen their unity with one another and to engage together in common mission. It was suggested that frustration with the slowness of progress towards Christian unity was not caused so much by apathy, as by confusion over the goal. If different groups, different churches have different interpretations of that goal and are wanting to go in different directions to reach that goal, and are wanting to do it together, it is no wonder that there is a certain confusion, frustration and lack of progress.

Called To Be One

1.13 In 1993 therefore, after consulting all its member churches, Churches Together in England established a process entitled *Called To Be One*. It was intended to discover what member churches understood by 'the visible unity of the church'. Are their visions of the goal of unity radically different? Are they merely focusing on different aspects of the same vision? Or is it that some churches are content to focus on the next few steps on the pilgrimage, while others have fixed their sight on the distant goal of perfect unity? Thirteen member churches gave provisional replies and chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this book summarise and examine these replies in order to discover convergences and remaining disagreements.

Chapter 2 considers the answers to the question: *How does your church understand the meaning of the word 'church', and how do you use the word?...*

Chapter 3 considers the answers to the question: *How does your church understand the meaning of the word 'unity'? What kind of unity are you seeking? ...*

Chapter 4 considers the answers to the question: *How does your church understand the meaning of the word 'visible' in this context? ...*

In order to benefit from several decades of local attempts to embody unity, the 50 county ecumenical bodies and other bodies in association with Churches Together in England were also invited to respond with their experience and 23 did so. This experience is outlined in Chapter 5. These display differing patterns of unity which may show different ideas of the goal of visible unity, or different stages on the way to that unity, or perhaps both. The last two chapters attempt to paint a portrait of emerging unity, and challenge the churches individually and corporately to renewal in specific ways. They suggest possible ways forward in common mission and in the deepening of the churches' communion with Christ and with one another. Five issues which are closely linked with the visible unity of the church are considered in the appendices: church and mission, Christian initiation and church membership, eucharistic communion, ministry, and authority and decision-making.

2. THE CHURCH

How does your church understand the meaning of the word Church, and how do you use the word?

2.1 The churches who responded to the questions about the visible unity of the Church gave *provisional* responses only. Some churches specifically stated that their responses were not for publication. Although therefore the bulk of the material in this and the following two chapters is drawn from the responses of the churches, the responses are not usually quoted. The authors and not the churches are responsible for what is written. Moreover some churches have a more clearly articulated understanding of themselves and of the visible unity of the church than others. Some responses run to a much greater length than others. The authors of this book have attempted to do justice to each of the responses. Readers are asked to take account of this, and not to assume that more importance is being given to the views of those churches to which more space has been given. That is not intended. Unity demands that due attention is given to the understanding and teaching of each participating church.

RESPONSES OF THE CHURCHES

2.2 For those churches which have a basic congregational structure (these include the churches of the **Baptist Union**, **Congregational Federation**, the **Independent Methodist** and many of the **Black Majority Churches**), the principal meanings of church are:

i. The local gathered and covenanted community of believers meeting together in one place for worship, nurture and mission. Authority resides in the local church meeting seeking the mind of Christ, however imperfectly this may be expressed and lived. Those who are not personally covenanted believers cannot be *members* of the local church, though they may attend worship, and may be given some kind of associate status.

ii. The universal communion of saints glimpsed imperfectly in the total reality of churches, denominations and Christian networks across the world and across time. This universal sense of the word ‘church’ should not be used to describe any particular visible denomination, nor is the word ‘church’ normally used of any structure beyond the local. Thus Baptists do not describe their national structure as a church but a *Union* bringing together local churches and county associations of churches; and they call their international structure an *Alliance*. The Congregationalists have a national *Federation* of local churches. Many of the Black Majority churches have a *Council* of churches to enable local churches to co-operate nationally. This reluctance to use the word ‘church’ of the national or international manifestations of Christian community should not be taken to suggest that these churches do not value the wider interdependence of local Christian churches. On the contrary Baptists, for example, have a very strong sense of Baptist solidarity across the world, and their representatives meet together every five years in an international assembly.

2.3 In **Roman Catholic** understanding the whole mystery of the church is:

i. present in every diocese (the local or particular church united to its bishop) and expressed and embodied in each congregation gathered to hear and proclaim the word of God and celebrate the Eucharist – the chief means by which the communion of the whole body is sustained and built up;

ii. expressed also in the universal church which consists in and arises out of these local churches. The church is both universal in time and space, a spiritual community of all those throughout the ages united to the Trinity, and also a worldwide society structured with hierarchical organs, where unity is symbolised and sustained by communion with the see of Rome.

From the beginning the church was considered a visible society whose membership was defined by faith, baptism and participation in the eucharist, (cf. Acts 2: 38, 42, Acts 5: 12-13). Outside this society there was no salvation. When divisions arose among Christians one party considered the other to be in schism, that is to have separated from the church. Over the course of history however it has become evident that the boundaries of the visible church cannot be so sharply defined. Roman Catholics still affirm that the unity and grace bestowed by Christ on his church are fully and dynamically present in the Roman Catholic Church, though obscured by weakness and sin, but the Second Vatican Council carefully stopped short

of identifying the one Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church. In adopting the formula, the one church ‘*subsists* in the Roman Catholic Church’, it acknowledged that the universal church extends beyond its boundaries. Roman Catholics therefore recognise that all who have been sealed in baptism are brought into ‘real though imperfect communion’ with the one catholic church.

It is not only individuals who share this real, though imperfect, communion, for many aspects and manifestations of the mystery of the church also exist within other churches and ecclesial communities. Precisely as churchly communities these are constituted by the Holy Spirit as means of salvation, whose life and activity nourish and support the Christian's life of grace. They are, therefore, in varying ways authentic manifestations of the mystery of the church.

2.4 In **Orthodoxy** the basic unit which is given the title of ‘church’ is the eucharistic community gathered around its bishop, which in due course developed into the diocese. But each such ‘local’ church is united to every other in the universal church, and contains within it the fullness of what it is to be church. For administrative reasons the local churches were gathered together into autocephalous (self-governing) churches, often related to ethnic or national groupings (Greek, Serbian, Russian etc.). Yet even though these autocephalous churches govern themselves, no one of them is empowered to make important decisions on matters of faith and order independently of the others. Such decisions require an ecumenical or universal council. Such councils were called in ancient times by the Roman Emperor, since the unity of the (Christian) Empire was his responsibility. The ending of the Empire has therefore left a hiatus, and it has not been until the second half of the 20th century that Orthodox Patriarchs and bishops throughout the world have begun to discuss the preparation of another ecumenical council under the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople who has a primacy of honour. This primacy means that the Ecumenical Patriarch has a special role in summoning and presiding at an Ecumenical Council; but he has no canonical jurisdiction outside his own patriarchate, and within the Council his teaching role is exercised only in collegiality with the rest of the bishops.

2.5 Other churches which have a very strong sense of the world-wide dimension of the church include The **Salvation Army** and the **Moravians**. The latter would take no major step affecting the faith and order of the church in Britain without consulting the Unity Board, the body at world level which maintains unity between the 19 Provinces of the worldwide Moravian church, and the Unity Synod, which meets every seven years. The Salvation Army elects a General every few years, and the General has authority in the Army worldwide, in consultation with senior officers and councils.

2.6 The **Church of England**, while also recognising the primary nature of the universal and the local church, also uses the term ‘church’ of national or provincial churches. The Anglican Communion is comprised of autonomous, yet interdependent, provincial or national churches, each one taking on something of the cultural character of the people that comprise it. The interdependence of the autonomous provinces was strengthened in the last century by the Lambeth Conference of Bishops (called together by the Archbishop of Canterbury as first among equals), and in this century by meetings of the Primates (the leading bishops in each province) and also by meetings of an Anglican Consultative Council which includes representative lay people as well as priests and bishops. This interdependence of the provinces has been tested as different provinces have taken different decisions, for example on the ordination of women. The Church of England uses the words ‘local church’ to refer both to the diocese and to the parish. The Church of England was established by law at the Reformation through Acts of Uniformity, and for many years citizens were obliged by law to conform to it. After the attempted suppression of other churches, Parliament eventually passed a series of Toleration Acts allowing freedom of worship. Gradually the Church of England recognised other churches within England, although it still sees itself as having a particular vocation to the nation as a whole. During this century it has gradually come to govern its own affairs, having to resort to Parliament’s approval for fewer measures, although in law Parliament still retains ultimate authority in many matters. With the rise of synodical government, the Church of England describes itself as ‘led by bishops and governed by synod’. It regards itself as *part* of the universal or worldwide church.

2.7 For the **Church of Scotland** the church is the whole people of God, called to share in the ministry of Christ to the whole world. The Church of Scotland, like the Church of England, also recognises the importance of the national, as well as the local and universal church. However the Church of Scotland, though it is conscious of itself as the national church of Scotland, is not answerable to Parliament in the same way as the Church of England. It recognises itself as a member of the family of Reformed or Presbyterian churches throughout the world, and uses the word ‘church’ to describe a denomination. However it also recognises that divisions between denominations have to be overcome.

2.8 The **Methodist Connexion** began as a Society within the Church of England, rather than a church, and still retains some of the characteristics of a missionary movement, including an itinerant ministry deployed by Conference. However increasingly it has adopted more and more of the characteristics of church over the last two centuries. The Methodist Church emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of the church at every level (The Connexional Principle). The sharing of resources and fellowship across the societies (local congregations), circuits and districts can be seen as integral to the Methodist understanding of the church as communion. Historically, and still in many congregations, the most basic unit of fellowship is the 'class meeting'. At the national level the Conference consists of equal numbers of ordained ministers and lay people. It has final authority, but leaves as much as is consistent with the welfare of the whole to more local decision and discretion. Notwithstanding their emphasis on the appropriateness of connexionalism, Methodists affirm the authentic churchly existence of sister Trinitarian churches, which are organised in other ways.

2.9 It is interesting in this context to compare Methodism with the **House or New Churches**, and indeed some of the **Black Majority Churches**. The House Churches pay at least as much attention to the meaning of apostleship and apostolate for their missionary communities, as they do to the meaning of church as a called-out assembly or meeting. Gradually, however, as they have grown in size they have begun to meet in special buildings rather than in homes, and they have also had to attend to matters of structural organisation. The Black Majority churches too have come into existence out of a strongly missionary motivation, particularly towards the black community in this country which has often been made to feel unwelcome in the traditional English churches. The Black Majority church leaders are now concerned to bring about a greater mutual accountability among their growing number of local churches.

2.10 The **Religious Society of Friends** does not usually use the word 'church', because it was associated with what in their early days they regarded as 'the great apostacy', the dead weight of tradition, power and ritual from which they felt themselves to have been freed. However Friends do have a positive understanding of the church universal and local. For Robert Barclay, whose *Apology* (1675) remains important for Quaker understanding, the concept is fundamentally one of the gathered church. The universal or catholic church comprises the whole number of those who have been called out of the world and turned to the light by the Spirit of God. These include those who are secretly united to God, whether they have made a conscious commitment to Christian teaching or not. This universal or catholic church is made partially visible in particular or local assemblies of those gathered by the Spirit to worship God, to bear witness to the truth and to care for one another. For Barclay these assemblies profess a common faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ, but such a profession is not absolutely necessary for every individual's membership of the invisible catholic church.

2.11 The **United Reformed Church** understands the term 'church' to mean the universal church of Jesus Christ of all Christians in every land and age. It also uses the word 'church' to describe the local congregation of members (and their children) committed to its life and work. It sees the local congregation as an outcrop of the universal church. It also uses the word 'church' to describe all believers in a particular village, town or city, as well as of the wider councils of the United Reformed Church, or of similar congregations, councils and national bodies of other denominations. It thus draws upon both the Congregational and the Presbyterian understandings of *church*. In its Basis of Union it recognises a particular responsibility, as a united church, to take further steps towards the unity of all God's people.

DIFFERENCES

Differences in the understanding of the church and the obstacles they create for mutual understanding and practical co-operation

2.12 There is no doubt at all that the differences in the understanding of church, and in particular the different weight given in practice to different levels or aspects of the church in different denominations, create a formidable obstacle both to mutual understanding and to co-operation on the way to closer unity. These differing emphases are examined under three headings: the universal and world-wide church, the national church, and the local church.

The universal and world-wide church

2.13 As has been noted (para. 2.3 above) the Roman Catholic Church holds closely together a concept of the universal church, which includes all Christians past, present and future, with a world-wide concept of the visible, international organisation which at any moment in history is in communion with the Bishop of Rome.

2.14 For the Orthodox the faithful who participate in the liturgy are united with Christ and the faithful throughout the ages, and are, as it were, transported into heaven. Church and Kingdom meet at this point. Because they see the church in this light the Orthodox are unwilling to attribute any imperfection to the church. This does not mean, however, that for them individuals and groups within the historical church have not sinned and erred and that some institutions are not in need of reform. Orthodox use the word 'church' to describe the Orthodox church. Out of respect it is also widely used for other denominations who are not in communion with it, but this usage does not presuppose unqualified recognition of other Christian bodies as 'churches'.

2.15 By contrast the Religious Society of Friends tends to see the universal church as a reality which is invisible and known only to God. For Baptists the universal church is glimpsed imperfectly in the total global reality of churches, denominations and Christian networks. In a divided Christendom Anglicans nevertheless recognise that the universal church is in part embodied in the Anglican Communion and other World Communions, those world-wide associations of churches of the same tradition which maintain the faith of Christians through the ages.

2.16 The Christian church came into being at a period in history before the nation state and when Rome had extended its Empire almost to the limits of the world the Romans knew. The Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches have had a continuous tradition since that time, as have the Oriental Orthodox churches which did not accept the decision of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. (the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Malankara and Syrian churches). These churches therefore tend to see the future of the church in terms of themselves and their world-wide structures renewed and schisms healed.

2.17 By contrast the churches which came into being at the Reformation developed alongside the rise of the nation state. The Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed or Presbyterian churches tended to develop in distinct nations and never saw themselves as being the whole universal church. They looked to the time when the whole church would be reformed, and then there would be no warrant for continuing divisions.

2.18 The multiplication in the number of different denominational churches since the Reformation, together with some loss of a sense of why they began in the first place, has led to a widespread view among some of them that they are all more or less equally valid churches, that people are free to belong to whichever one they choose, and that, if there were to be a united church, it would be a kind of amalgam of the best elements of all of them.

2.19 The viewpoint of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches on the one hand and that of some of the more recently formed denominations on the other seem so totally different that it is not surprising that people who have been schooled in one of them feel alarm and a sense of threat when they hear the viewpoint of the other one propounded.

2.20 Another difference is that between those who emphasise a world-wide structure for the church as both desirable and the will of God revealed through the guidance of the Spirit, and those who believe that the title of 'church' should properly be used primarily of the local community of covenanted Christians. This difference is profound and should not be glossed over. On the other hand it should not be exaggerated. Churches which maintain the independence of the local congregation, for example in the Baptist Union or Congregational Federation, are not isolationist, but affirm spiritual dependence on others. They believe in *interdependency* within a free association of local churches. What they are afraid of is hierarchical structures and external control. The churches of the Congregational Federation are those Congregational churches which decided not to become part of the United Reformed Church. The churches of the Baptist Union have a similar polity, though it is interesting that they are currently discussing whether their regional Associations of local churches and their national Union have a certain churchly reality.

2.21 The Church of England is part of the world-wide Anglican *Communion* of churches. The word 'church' is used by them of provincial and national church bodies, but they do not speak of a world-wide Anglican 'church'. The distinction is similar to that of the churches of independent polity, but transposed to the wider level. The Church of England is autonomous at national level and is not controlled by any international body. However it would not make major decisions touching faith and order without consulting other Anglican Provinces. Its bishops meet every ten years with the bishops of the other provinces of the Anglican communion in the Lambeth Conference, there are regular meetings of its Primates and it sends bishops, priests and lay representatives to regular meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council. Moreover the Archbishop of Canterbury holds an important role as the convenor of the Lambeth Conference and, although he holds no legal authority or control in other provinces of the Anglican Communion, his moral authority is considerable.

2.22 The different origins and histories of the churches, and the different ways in which they understand themselves have affected how they make decisions. Some decisions affecting the Roman Catholic Church in England can be taken only in the Vatican. Some decisions affecting the Orthodox have to await the agreement of all the autocephalous Orthodox churches. The Church of England is autonomous, but it is reluctant to act on certain issues without a consensus of the other Provinces of the Anglican Communion. The Moravian church needs to consult its international structures on certain matters. The Salvation Army is an international organisation under the authority of its General.

The National Church and Churches at national level

2.23 There are two major issues which cause difficulties between the churches at national level. The first is pragmatic. The Church of England is one of few churches whose boundaries and decision-making structures are co-terminous with England. Methodist Conference and the United Reformed Church Assembly make decisions for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches respectively in England, Wales and Scotland. The Baptist Union of Great Britain has churches in England and Wales, and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference brings together the bishops of the Roman Catholic dioceses in England and Wales. Yet even where geographical boundaries do coincide the level of decision-making does not necessarily do so. Thus decisions about the placing of most ordained ministers are taken by Baptists locally, by the United Reformed Church locally and at district level, by Anglicans and Roman Catholics at diocesan level, and by Methodists at circuit and national level. Decisions about appointments of bishops however, are made in the Vatican by the Roman Catholic Church, and appointments of bishops or equivalent senior ordained leaders are made at national level by most other churches. The making of decisions on matters of faith, morals and order is even more complex. Major teaching statements of universal application on these matters in the Roman Catholic Church would be decided in Rome after consultation with bishops around the world. Any major development of Orthodox attitudes on such issues could be taken only by an Ecumenical Council. Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and many Reformed churches, though legally able to take decisions on these issues nationally, after appropriate consultation throughout their churches, would not be likely to do so without consulting their world-wide Christian Communion. The national bodies which bring together local Baptist and Congregational churches cannot decide issues of faith, morals and order for their local churches; but, at least in the case of Baptists, local churches are expected to take these decisions seriously into account when seeking the mind of Christ themselves. Moreover these national bodies could refuse specific local churches accreditation if they strayed too far from what was generally agreed to be Baptist or Congregational teaching or practice.

2.24 The second major issue which causes difficulty in church relations at national level is the establishment of the Church of England. Establishment is a complex web of church-state relationships and attitudes, many of which have changed considerably in this century. The opposition of many Roman Catholics and Free church people to establishment is therefore less virulent than it has been in the past. Indeed there are some Roman Catholics and Free church people who wish to preserve many of the benefits of establishment, and many Anglicans who wish to share these benefits with other churches. It is seen to give a foothold in the secular world for mission, service and for prophetic witness. It is also a reminder to the church that it exists for the sake of the world. However both the Congregational Federation and the United Reformed Church mention the establishment of the Church of England as a hindrance to unity. There is still resentment against certain aspects of the establishment among some members of all churches, and in particular against the perceived attitude of those Anglican clergy who appear to claim a superior status in their parish, and do not see a need to consult other churches and their ministers, but either ignore them or expect them to follow the Anglican lead. The role of the Crown in the Church of England, and the power over the church still retained by Parliament is resented by many non-conformists, for whom 'the crown rights of the Redeemer' must have priority over the rights of Parliament. This issue of the effect of the establishment on the nature of the church, and more particularly the establishment ethos and attitude, require further ecumenical discussion.

The Local Church

2.25 The local church for most denominations is the congregation or parish, but technically for Roman Catholic and Orthodox (and Anglican) theology, at least, it is the diocese and for Presbyterian theology it is the presbytery. In spite of this many Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Orthodox normally use the words *local church* to describe their parish church; however the theological distinction carries with it practical significance. Many equivalent decisions, which would be taken in *local* Baptist or Congregational churches, will be taken in Methodist *circuits* or in Anglican, Orthodox or Roman Catholic Churches at *diocesan* level. This mismatch is related to what is perhaps the single greatest practical difficulty constantly complained of by those working together locally – the failure of church boundaries to co-incide. This is not

simply a matter of lines on a map. It is also an issue of how churches take decisions and at what level. For example, Roman Catholics and Anglicans and, in different ways perhaps, Methodists and members of the United Reformed Church, see in principle the value of ecumenical bodies bringing churches to work together at diocesan, district and equivalent levels. The fact that diocesan and district boundaries may not co-incide is a practical problem, not one of principle. It is perhaps less clear to congregationally ordered churches why such 'intermediate' ecumenical bodies need to exist. However such churches do have an intermediate structure. Most churches in the Baptist Union, for example, are also members of a County Association.

2.26 There is also quite a different ethos in local churches of different denominations. A Roman Catholic parish church may have several masses each weekend and most parishioners attend mass at the same time each weekend. Therefore many people in the congregation may not get to know other parishioners who attend at other times. There is no formal congregational membership roll. Local membership of the world-wide church is defined by parish boundaries, but often local community is made more difficult by the size of the parish and of the congregation. In many Roman Catholic parishes a pastoral council, through which the parish priest will consult lay people on parish policy, has been formed since Vatican II. It is consultative and legally decision-making rests with the priest, but in practice increased lay participation means that decision-making is becoming shared in some places. In Free Churches membership of the denomination is dependent normally on baptism and on membership of a local church. Each local church has a clear membership roll. In most Free churches all members are entitled and expected to attend regular church meetings, and these meetings decide church policy either on all matters, or on those matters agreed within the constitution of their denomination. (The Methodist practice is different with decision-making entrusted to a representative church council.) The Church of England holds a midway position. church membership is dependent on baptism, and any who are baptised may declare themselves members of the church in whose parish they live. However they may not normally exercise a role in the government of the church unless they put their names on the electoral roll of the parish.

2.27 Note also should be taken of churches or congregations which have a strong ethnic, cultural or linguistic base that is distinct from that of the majority of the local population. The members of these churches often travel very large distances to worship. It is often very difficult to include them in local ecumenical work or worship. In some of these churches the ethnic, cultural or linguistic element is intrinsic to a particular denomination not otherwise present locally (as in some of the Lutheran, Black Majority or Welsh-speaking churches). In others (as in the Roman Catholic Church) they are part of a wider communion of churches but the ethnic, cultural or linguistic element distinguishes them from all other churches in the locality, and can make it difficult for them to co-operate even with other churches of their own communion.

CONVERGENCES & CHALLENGES TO RENEWAL

2.28 There is a remarkable agreement in almost all the responses from churches that the two primary or basic senses in which they use the word 'church' describe the *local* and the *universal* manifestation of the people of God. This had already become apparent in 1986, when about a million Christians took part in an ecumenical Lent Course. Those who participated were given nine definitions of the word *church* and were asked to signify which five they considered most important. 83% opted for *the body of all Christians, past, present and to come*, and 75% opted for *the local congregation (assembly) of Christians*. These were by far the most popular options (*Views from the Pews*, BCC & CTS, 1986).

The Local Church

2.29 The agreement that the two basic understandings of the church are *local* and *universal* does not however mean that there is complete agreement on the *nature* of the local and universal church. The local and the universal aspects of the church are approached very differently. However it may come as a surprise to many others to discover that Roman Catholic and Orthodox doctrine lays enormous emphasis on the local church, in which the fulness of the whole church exists (see paras. 2.3 and 2.4 above). Where the local eucharistic community is duly gathered to hear and proclaim the word of God and to celebrate the eucharist according to the Lord's command, there the catholic church is manifest in its fulness. The local church (that is the diocese) has all that is ordinarily required to be the church. The role of wider councils of the church and, for Roman Catholics, the involvement of the Vatican in the affairs of a local church are to strengthen, to maintain unity between local churches and to deal with crises, and not to control the everyday working of that church. To emphasise this there has been much discussion in Roman Catholic circles of the concept of 'subsidiarity', namely that "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lesser order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need, and help to co-ordinate its activities with the activities of the rest of society, always

with a view to the common good" (Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*, n.48). In Orthodox churches lay people already have a very important role in church government and management. As we have seen, this is beginning also in the Roman Catholic Church. As it is encouraged, it will make relations between Roman Catholics and others at local level much easier.

2.30 The Roman Catholic Church, and to an extent the Orthodox and Anglican churches, are encouraged

- i. to help others to understand their theology of the local church;
- ii. to embody, as they have already begun to do, appropriate lay participation in the life and government of the local church; and
- iii. to show that the resources of the local church, by the grace of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are sufficient for the *normal* running of that church, provided that the local church maintains proper fellowship with the wider church;
- iv. to show that all who work in the central structures of the church are, like the Pope, Patriarchs and Archbishops, servants of the servants of God.

This would go a long way towards overcoming the real fear of hierarchical structures and the external exercise of power and control over the body of Christian believers gathered in a particular place that is felt in many independent churches.

2.31 The meaning of the 'local' church however needs to be explored between those who consider it to be the diocese, and those who understand it to be the congregation. There are two distinctions here. One concerns size: a diocese covers a much larger catchment area than that normally served by a local worshipping congregation. The obvious distinction in size between a diocese and a congregation makes it appear that a diocese is quite a different structure or layer of church life, and that a congregation is equivalent to an Anglican or Roman Catholic parish. However there may be much more in common between the understanding of the local church as diocese and as congregation in history and in theology than is obvious in practice today. In most Free churches the normal minister of the eucharist is the local minister. In Roman Catholic and Anglican theology the *normal* president of the eucharist is the bishop. However in practice the *usual* president is the local priest. The bishop, who is the primary local minister in Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican understanding, has the primary pastoral responsibility, which he then shares with the parish minister. Would the local Free Church minister therefore have a role in some ways more similar to that of an Anglican or Roman Catholic bishop than that of a priest?

2.32 The other distinction concerns character: a diocese is defined geographically whereas a congregation is defined by its membership. A diocese (or parish) is a geographical area, and the church in a diocese (or parish) is thought of as consisting of and serving all the baptised Christians within its boundaries. A congregation in most Free Church understanding has no clear geographical boundaries, but comprises the gathered community of believers that have covenanted to worship and serve their Lord together. This distinction is very important for the understanding of the nature of the local church, its membership and mission. In a town or city with several gathered congregations how do they develop a common mission to the whole community in its complex life, and not only in terms of ministry to those who come to the church building?

2.33 Free churches are therefore encouraged

- i. to consider how their concept of church relates to secular understandings of 'local'.

Episcopal churches are encouraged

- i. to consider whether their dioceses are so large that it is difficult for the bishop to have a real pastoral relationship to all the people of the diocese, and in what sense he can be a leader in mission for all its centres of population;
- ii. to consider how the role of auxiliary, suffragan or assistant bishop fits in with the church's basic understanding of the ministry of the church;
- iii. to consider whether the size of the diocese is chosen more for administrative convenience than out of pastoral or missionary concern?

2.34 Behind these challenges lies the whole understanding of locality and how best the church should be structured to serve the extremely complex modern society in England today. This is touched on when the mission of the church is considered in Appendix A. However it may be noted in passing that, although the churches have such differing histories and self-understandings, in practice there are many convergences. Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses and deaneries and Methodist districts and circuits are of roughly comparable size, though they are often not co-terminous. The Church of England diocese and the Methodist district is governed by a synod in which respectively the bishops and chairmen sit with representative laity and ministers. Not totally dissimilar structures of government and oversight have been developed in the United Reformed Church and, to a certain extent, in the Baptist Union. Already an Anglican deanery and a Methodist circuit have been aligned so that they can work more closely together in mission. In four other places the Methodist circuit and United Reformed district are being operated as a united area (see chapter 5). As our churches come more closely together these examples invite and challenge them to consider the needs of the locality and where possible to align their boundaries in the service of common mission.

The world-wide church

2.35 What is meant by the *universal* church? There is general agreement that the ‘universal’ or catholic church in its fullest sense is ‘the body of all Christians, past, present and to come’. Some traditions however use the word ‘universal’ also in a more limited geographical sense to describe the world-wide Christian community as distinct from ‘particular’ local churches. When used in this way the reference to the past and the future tends to fall into the background, and the word ‘universal’ refers to ‘all Christians at this moment of time spread throughout the geographical world’. Although there remain profound differences between the churches on the understanding and practical outworking of the world-wide nature of the church, there are pressures today that encourage the churches to work together more effectively across national boundaries. The World Alliance of Reformed churches declared in 1982 that the Dutch Reformed church in South Africa was guilty of heresy because of its theological justification of apartheid. The World Alliance had no direct control over the Dutch Reformed church, but its declaration effectively excluded it from the counsels of the Alliance and carried great moral authority. More recently the Dutch Reformed church has retracted much of its teaching on apartheid. Other church groupings in South Africa declared that apartheid was too strong for a divided church, and appealed to churches across the world to support their struggle for freedom. Many churches and Christian world communions did this, and had a considerable influence in the overthrow of apartheid.

2.36 Some churches already have a world-wide structure which holds together local churches, and provides means for common decision-making. These include the Moravian and Roman Catholic Churches, The Salvation Army and the Orthodox Churches. Methodism developed the principle of connexionalism in order to preserve Christian fellowship, cohesion and discipline throughout every level of the life of Methodist societies from the local class meeting to the national Conference. Those Methodists who stem from North American Methodism have indeed extended this to the international level. It can be combined with a high degree of local autonomy and is not incompatible with personal oversight.

2.37 Many other World Communions have international structures of consultation but these fall short of having the authority to make decisions binding nationally or locally. These include the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches and the Religious Society of Friends. It is significant however to note that it was the international 1988 Lambeth Conference which formally pronounced the Anglican Communion’s response to the *Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

2.38 At this point those churches that have no international decision-making body are encouraged to consider

- i. the positive advantages of such a body;
- ii. the character and authority they would be willing to give to such a body; and
- iii. what dangers they would wish to avoid and what authority they would not be willing to yield to such a body.

3. UNITY

How does your church understand the meaning of the word unity? What kind of unity are you seeking?

3.1 The 20th century became known as the ecumenical century during which many Christians became convinced that Christian unity is the will of God. Between them the responses of the churches referred to more than thirty biblical texts in support of their convictions about the unity of the church. Prominent among them were Jesus' prayer for the unity of his disciples in St. John's Gospel, chapter 17, showing that the unity of Christians is grounded in the unity of the Father and Son, and is directed to mission – 'so that the world may believe'. There were also references to the letters to the Ephesians and other New Testament letters likening the young church to a body with many different members working together and depending on one another; and appealing to Christians to love one another. Some responses also referred to recent theological dialogues between different churches quoting some measure of agreement between churches on the nature of Christian unity. The member churches of Churches Together in England have committed themselves 'to become more fully, in God's own time the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission' (*Swanwick Declaration*, 1987). But what do they mean by 'one Church'?

RESPONSES OF THE CHURCHES

3.2 For the **Religious Society of Friends**, because unity consists in a common relationship to the Spirit, there is a sense in which it is intrinsically invisible. It also essentially includes creative diversity and any attempt to contain it in a uniformity of belief or practice is counter-productive, since that is bound to exclude. Visible *signs* of unity almost inevitably become the fulcrum for division. For Friends the Spirit leads into unity primarily in the silence of the meeting for worship and in the ordering of their business affairs which are understood as meetings for worship for business. While Quakers have a wide spectrum of belief, though 'within a broadly Christian perspective', they endeavour to discern the leadings of the Spirit which guides them into a common mind and practice.

3.3 Churches of a congregational or independent polity share the antagonism of the Religious Society of Friends to uniformity. The responses of both the **Baptist Union** and the **Congregational Federation** point out what they see as a contradiction in one of the questions asked of the churches. If unity is a gift of God, then there cannot be 'closer unity' with some Christians than with others. They allow, however, that the visible expression of that unity may be closer with some than with others. The Baptist Union response points out that unity flows from the grace of God in forgiving sinners, and that unity between groups must be based on the gospel of Jesus Christ and of openness to the Spirit of God in worship and mission. The same response refers to, but does not quote, the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle, which is Bible-centred and Trinitarian, and specifies believer's baptism by immersion.

3.4 The **United Reformed Church** emphasises that the unity of the whole Church must be 'as Christ wills and in the way he wills' (a quotation from the Roman Catholic priest, Paul Couturier). The United Reformed Church is a union of churches from the Churches of Christ, the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian Church of England. It values highly the mutual recognition of membership (in baptism and communion) and of ministry achieved in that union. It is constantly looking for wider unions. It sees the quest for unity as a journey into the unknown.

3.5 The **Moravian Church** quotes Count Zinzendorf, who helped to revitalise it in the eighteenth century, as seeing the various Christian denominations as jewels in the crown of Christ. Each jewel is to be valued for its distinctive contribution. The unity of the crown is unimpaired, provided that each jewel is correctly set in relation to its neighbours.

3.6 The **Church of England's** response affirms that the full manifestation of unity will be seen only at the coming of the kingdom at the last time. It is God's gift, but it is also the Christian calling, and the church should seek to realise and express it in practical, tangible and structured ways. The church's unity is grounded in a common baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism calls for unity in the eucharist. Sharing communion in the eucharist is both a sign of unity given and a means of achieving it. For Anglicans visible unity requires certain bonds of communion - an agreed faith, a shared moral vision, a common sacramental life, an ordained ministry expressing the continuity of the church through time and space, ministers and members of the Church working together as colleagues and making decisions together in councils, and a common commitment to mission. However, because they see unity as dynamic, Anglicans have judged that where there is a

sufficient sharing of these bonds, even where unity is incomplete, there may also be an interim sharing of the eucharist as a means of achieving a fuller expression of visible unity. The Church of England values its tradition of comprehensiveness and toleration within this shared faith and order, and looks for a unity that includes diversity.

3.7 The **Roman Catholic** response lays almost as much emphasis on what it calls ‘spiritual ecumenism’ as the Quaker response does on the community of the Spirit. However the unity towards which the Spirit impels Christians demands ever fuller realisation and expression. Since the church is the sacrament or sign of reconciliation, its unity must by its very nature be visibly embodied in appropriate bonds of communion. Our common baptism is thus ordered towards a common confession of faith, a full integration into the economy of salvation, and to the sharing of eucharistic communion. The unity which the Roman Catholic Church seeks is aimed at the reconciliation of all Christians in the bond of charity, professing a common faith, served by a common ministry in union with the Bishop of Rome and sharing in the same sacraments. This unity is in no way incompatible with a diversity of customs, observances, and even of theological expressions of doctrine.

3.8 The Roman Catholic Church does not understand this quest for unity as the ‘return’ of other Christians to her unbroken unity, but rather as a common quest for a new and deeper realisation of the unity the Lord wills and gives to his church. On account of Christian divisions the Roman Catholic Church itself is deprived of graces and aspects of catholic truth which have developed outside her visible communion. Roman Catholics recognise in the search for full communion a movement towards the completion of a process already well advanced; nourished by a common history before and even since Christian divisions; by shared possession of the Holy Scriptures and many Christian traditions and institutions; in the common confession of many fundamental teachings; in the experience of shared prayer, worship and reflection; in ecumenical dialogue; and in practical co-operation in pastoral and social action. The extent of this existing unity varies with circumstance and place, and is understood by Roman Catholics as gradual and progressive. Its speed and extent is determined by the existence of shared conviction, compatible structures and also by pastoral need. But organisational unity in itself can never be an end for the church, which exists only as an instrumental sign of the unity of humanity in God’s love, righteousness and truth. It is in a common commitment to this ministry of reconciliation that the churches will best discover the specific means towards the healing of their own divisions.

3.9 The **Orthodox Church** believes itself to be ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’. The unity to which the Orthodox Church bears witness has its constituent bonds, unity in faith foremost among them. Greater or lesser differences in faith cannot but prevent eucharistic communion with any other member churches of Churches Together in England. Communion is not a means to union, but a manifestation of its full achievement. It is difficult to speak of ‘degrees of unity’ between churches. It might be better to speak of ‘degrees of fellowship’. Although the Orthodox are clear on what they believe is necessary for visible unity, they do not seek to pass judgement on other member churches. In the words of a former Patriarch of Moscow ‘We know full well where the Church is: we cannot know where the Church is not’.

DIFFERENCES

Differences in the understanding of unity and the obstacles they create for mutual understanding and practical co-operation

3.10 The most obvious difference between these responses focuses on the visible nature of unity. For the Religious Society of Friends unity is intrinsically invisible. Visible signs of unity almost inevitably become the fulcrum for division. For Roman Catholics unity must by its very nature be visibly embodied in appropriate bonds of communion. The responses of the churches form a spectrum on this issue, some churches including the Baptist Union and the Congregational Federation pointing to some visible elements or bonds of unity, and in particular the bible and agreement in faith. The Baptists also include believer’s baptism. Other churches such as the Church of England mention a more extensive list. Visible unity, however, is the theme of chapter 4, and will be dealt with there.

3.11 Another difference which could lead to confusion, and thus possibly become an unnecessary obstacle to unity between the churches, is the use of such words as ‘uniformity’ and ‘diversity’. In general uniformity is considered bad and diversity good, but it is necessary to ask in each case what kind of uniformity and what kind of diversity. There is a strong antagonistic undercurrent to uniformity in, for example, the responses of the Congregational Federation, the Baptist Union, the Religious Society of Friends, and in some parts of the responses of the Moravians. For the Friends this antagonism, means that they reject uniformity of belief, whereas the Baptist Union is based upon a Declaration of Principle; and most churches apart from the Religious Society of Friends acknowledge the authority of the Apostles’ and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds, whether or not they normally recite them in worship. The Roman Catholic response requires the

common confession of many fundamental teachings, but allows that unity is in no way incompatible with a diversity of theological expressions of doctrine.

CONVERGENCE & CHALLENGE

Unity, gift of God

3.12 The area of convergence is considerable. Unity is a gift of God and reflects the very nature of God who is three Persons in one God. Christianity is a religion of persons constituted as persons in a relationship of love with one another; for such are the Persons of the Holy Trinity. True Christian unity is therefore not a human creation nor the product of human organisation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore in the deepest sense is fundamentally a spiritual unity. Insofar as it is the work of God in Christ, it already exists.

Koinonia

3.13 Much reference is made in several responses of the churches to the New Testament word '*koinonia*' which is variously translated as fellowship, participation, sharing, communion. The use of this word in the New Testament has been fully examined in detail in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, WCC, 1994 pp. 36-69. It emphasises the divine origin and goal of all ecumenical work. Unity is God's gift and our calling. It places the Holy Trinity in Unity at the heart of all unity. It recognises the inter-personal, relational character of unity. It allows the active and initiating role of the Holy Spirit in work for unity. It goes back behind the sacramental basis and expression of unity in baptism and communion, and allows a developing growth of unity from lesser to fuller, from imperfect towards perfect unity.

That this is no mere abstract theological concept is witnessed to in the responses from those working together locally, particularly in local ecumenical partnerships (see chapter 5). A common experience in such partnerships between churches of different traditions is that the fellowship, mutual participation, sharing in the worship of God has been very deep, leaping across the gaps between our different practices as a revelation from God. Indeed, as was noted at the Montreal Faith & Order Conference in 1963, 'the ecumenical reality takes shape faster than we can understand or express it'. Local churches together have discovered it as they have gone out together in evangelism and service to the community around them, even when their understandings and practices of service and evangelism may have had differing emphases.

God's call to mission

3.14 This experience shows that God's unity is not only a gift. It is a gift which also has to be lived out in the life of the church. It is also God's will and calling. Unity is God's will not only for the church, but also for the world. Several responses of the churches emphasise that the church's unity is for the sake of the world that is in need of reconciliation and redemption (the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the United Reformed Church etc.), that the church should be an example (International Ministerial Council of Great Britain) and model (the Congregational Federation) of unity for the world.

3.15 There appear to be a number of mutual challenges to the churches inherent in these responses:

i. Those churches, whose understanding of church includes the concept of *koinonia*, but whose response emphasises the invisible character of the church, are encouraged to consider how in fact this *koinonia* is expressed in the life, structures and relationships between Christians.

ii. Those churches which emphasise the visible character of the church are encouraged to consider what churchly significance they should give to churches which have maintained a consistent Christian witness over a considerable period of years without such visible elements as creeds, baptism, eucharist, or an ordained ministry. What weight is to be given to a *koinonia* not supported and expressed by these visible means?

iii. When such words as uniformity and diversity are used in dialogue between churches great care is needed in explaining the sense in which they are used.

4. THE VISIBLE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

How does your church understand the meaning of the word visible in the phrase visible unity of the church?

4.1 The various churches' understandings of the visible unity of the church obviously relate to and build on what has already been reported on their understandings of the church and of its unity. It is unnecessary therefore to repeat everything that has been written in the two previous chapters. It is necessary however to draw out further some of the things that have been said there, and to relate them to what the churches have to say specifically about *visible* unity. In what follows the focus is particularly on what the churches see as the bonds which bind them together in visible unity. These bonds cannot all be mentioned, because they are very numerous. The churches are increasingly singing the same hymns and songs. Those studying theology in different churches are reading many of the same books. Liturgical experts are meeting to agree texts for worship ... The list of things the churches have in common is growing all the time. In what follows the focus is on those bonds which seem of particular importance in binding churches together in visible unity.

RESPONSES OF THE CHURCHES

4.2 The concept of visible unity is very difficult for the **Religious Society of Friends**. Visible signs of unity are seen by them almost inevitably to become the fulcrum for division. For Friends the Spirit leads into unity primarily in the silence of the meeting for worship and in the ordering of their business affairs. It could be said that the definition of a Quaker meeting in Britain is a group that accords some kind of normative status to *Quaker Faith and Practice: the book of Christian discipline of the Religious Society of Friends*, a book which is revised approximately in every generation. A new edition was published in 1995 and it includes *Advices and Queries* which are intended for use in meeting and for private devotion as a challenge in personal and corporate commitment and as a concise expression of Quaker faith and practice. Therefore unity is sustained in the Society through a number of common practices and accepted procedures, and through the maintenance of channels of communication between local, area, regional meetings and the central structures of the Society which cover Scotland and Wales as well as England. It is not sustained by adherence to credal formulae, nor in a common sacramental practice, nor in hierarchical structures.

4.3 The **Salvation Army** has a similar approach to the Religious Society of Friends as regards sacramental practice, and does not believe that the validity of the universal church depends upon any particular form of worship or ritual, nor upon any particular ecclesiastical structure. It does however place its emphasis on spiritual regeneration through faith in Christ, and requires its members publicly to confess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and to enter into a formal doctrinal and ethical commitment. It does not believe that denominational or organisational variety can automatically and in every case be said to be contrary to God's will for his people. It does not believe it to be self-evidently God's will that The Salvation Army cast aside in haste the blessings it has received from God over the years in order to enter into a visible union with other churches, but it rejoices that it finds co-workers for God in other Christian churches.

4.4 When it comes to describing visible unity, several of the churches with a congregational or independent polity appear to be clearer on the negatives than the positives. The **Baptist Union** would find it difficult to accept any focus which did not place Scripture as an important bond of unity. It finds difficult the accent on authority in the historic episcopate, the 'Petrine supremacy' and in any model of church which has a very strong, authoritative central control by a Council, Synod, Assembly or whatever, at regional, national, European or world level. It values the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist but would have difficulty in a heavy emphasis on 'the sacraments' as a focus of unity. On the other hand there is a great diversity of views within the Baptist Union about the positive expression of visible unity. Its response gave four examples. One view, for example, includes the continuation of denominational identities at every level - local, regional, national and international. This would presumably work itself out in a pattern of 'churches together' where mutual support was deepened, inter-communion practised, strategy discussed and common mission implemented. Another view calls for a sufficiently attractive and authentic vision of a coming, visibly united church that the denominations would be willing to die for - a church in which there would be a mutual acceptance of members, ministers, sacraments and statements of faith. It would be very diverse, non-hierarchical, and loosely structured.

4.5 Members of the **Congregational Federation** were very suspicious that the phrase 'visible unity' effectively meant 'organic union'. It was widely understood to imply a unified structure of administration, hierarchy and a common liturgy.

Above all union schemes that do not unite, but actually cause further division, should be avoided. However there was some recognition that visible unity could be the demonstration of Christians working together while respecting their differences.

4.6 The **Independent Methodist** response admits that their understanding of the word ‘unity’ is somewhat vague. Visible unity is most likely to be understood in terms of informal, personal co-operation between local churches.

4.7 The churches of the Reformed tradition are more positive about visible unity. The **Church of Scotland** speaks for many of the churches who responded by making the point that the unity of the church should be visible to those who are not part of it. They find it hard to believe in a church that does not make visible what it says about being one. Unity is therefore a matter of mission and a sign of God’s solidarity with the whole of creation.

4.8 The **United Reformed Church** is anxious not to restrict ‘visible unity’ to structural unity. The very process of being and working together manifests unity, and brings Christians to a sharper realisation of what they cannot yet share of that unity which God gives. The commitment of the churches to more visible unity is tested by their willingness to address obstacles and to submit to continual reformation. ‘We cannot determine what that unity will be like, but we believe it requires a journeying (Abraham-like) into the unknown’.

4.9 The **Methodist Church** has on a number of specific occasions committed itself to the concept of visible unity, a task which it recognises as both demanding and difficult. However, commitment to visible unity does not necessarily mean commitment to what is called ‘organic’ unity. Although organic unity is the model adopted by many Methodists, others look for what is called ‘federal’ unity. These different concepts of visible unity would take on different concrete forms at local and district levels. In a small locality, it is possible to envisage one local church, worshipping and serving as one; or, a number of denominations worshipping separately in the same building and serving as one; or, a number of churches of different denominations mutually recognising one another’s baptism, eucharist and ordained ministry, and working in a close relationship, but retaining distinct identities. At intermediate (district/diocesan/county) level, it is possible to envisage either one focus of oversight (personal, collegial and communal), in which denominational oversight has been freely and willingly handed over to a richer, ecumenical oversight; or, some system whereby the continuing foci of denominational oversight are enabled to make joint decisions.

4.10 The **International Ministerial Council of Great Britain** sees the key to visible unity in mutual accountability. Visible unity is to be seen to acknowledge each other to be legitimate, not a stranger. Too often in the past, when there has been a quarrel within a church, one party has left to set up a new church without any serious attempt being made, either by the two parties or by any wider council, to examine the causes of the quarrel and to bring about a reconciliation. Mutual accountability is the opposite of allowing anyone to start his or her own church.

4.11 The unity with other Christian churches that the **Church of England** seeks would certainly have to be visible. It would have to be embodied in appropriate structural and institutional forms. This concern is grounded for Anglicans in the character of the incarnation which is the visible and real embodiment of God in human nature. In its historic formularies (The Book of Common Prayer 1662, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons), the Church of England does not claim that any particular visible structures of the church are of binding divine institution (*jure divino*). Anglicanism has generally maintained that the outward polity of the church should be shaped by reason and tradition and should not be repugnant to Scripture. It does hold, however, that Christ commissioned certain of his followers to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and care for his sheep. In this commission the Church of England believes that a ministry of word and sacrament, combined with effective oversight (*episcopate*) is entailed. The form of this *episcopate* should be of the widest acceptability though with scope for local adaptation. In practice, the Church of England is firmly committed to four criteria of unity: the Scriptures, the Apostles’ and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds; the sacraments of baptism and holy communion; and the historic episcopate (cf. The Lambeth Quadrilateral). Because Anglicans do not believe that any particular visible structures are of binding divine institution, they do not seek to unchurch non-episcopal communions nor do they call in question their ordained ministries. Anglicans are committed to the historic episcopate - though not to any one interpretation of it - as an aspect of their understanding of the catholicity, apostolicity and unity of the church. The Church of England recognises that apostolicity is an attribute of the whole church and is conveyed by the ongoing mission of the church. And while the historic episcopate is an effective sign of faithfulness to the apostolic foundation of the church, it is not a guarantee of it. The visibility of the church should come to expression at each of the various levels of the church: locally, through one eucharistic fellowship with an episcopally ordained president; in the diocese, through the one bishop acting in council through a representative synod; nationally, through a unified college of

bishops and a synod in which all sections of the church nationally are represented; and internationally, through appropriate conciliar structures with a president acknowledged by all.

4.12 The **Orthodox Church** lives by its concept of visible unity. More than that, it strives to manifest and maintain that visible unity, since it is the church's nature and vocation to do so. Not that all aspects of unity need be visible. Indeed, many of its sinews may be too deeply embedded in the church's life for that to be so. Nevertheless, a candle should not be put under a bushel, but on a candlestick: then it gives light 'to all that are in the house'. Its very visibility helps to confirm that the church heeds Christ's new commandment 'that ye love one another'. Visible unity has the power to convince, and thus a missionary role. There is an administrative side to this unity, which links each parish with its diocese or, more importantly, with its bishop. But at its heart is eucharistic unity, safeguarded and fostered by the bishop - a pattern of church life with which Ignatius of Antioch was familiar as early as the turn of the first and second centuries.

4.13 For **Roman Catholics** the unity of the church is visible in its obedience to the revealed word of God and common profession of faith, in its ministry, in its shared life of worship, and in the many expressions of charity and fellow feeling which characterise its life. Roman Catholics attach great importance to the structures by which this unity is sustained, and especially to the government of the church by the college of bishops in communion with the successor of St. Peter, which they believe to be God's gift to and will for the church. But this unity is a mystery which can be known in this world only by faith, and though manifest within its organisational unity, is never to be simply identified with it. This organisational unity is in fact always tempered and damaged by sin, and by the failures in faith, hope and charity of the church's members. 'Christ summons the church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of human beings here on earth'. (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, 6). Diversity in organisation and in the theological expression of our common Christian faith, far from damaging unity, can express by their complementarity a deeper and truer meaning of unity than that assumed in uniformity. Nevertheless, the church exists for unity, and hence must seek a unity which can be seen. In a certain sense the church is only truly visible in its proclamation, both in preaching and holiness of life, of the reconciling work of Christ. It is those who receive this proclamation in faith who are enabled to recognise the unity of mankind within the wounded reality of the church. For this reason the shared proclamation of Christ to a world whose inhabitants are profoundly alienated from each other and from God is the most urgent and most effective manifestation of the church's unity. The particular circumstances of this shared proclamation are too varied to make the devising of overarching blueprints possible or desirable.

DIFFERENCES

Differences in the understanding of the visible unity of the church, and points at which they create obstacles to mutual understanding and closer unity.

Agreement in faith

4.14 For the Religious Society of Friends there are no external pre-conditions to be met before unity is sought and experienced in response to the universal and unifying operation of the Spirit. Religious experience cannot adequately be defined in credal formulae, and unity cannot be contained within particular sacraments, forms of worship, ministry or organisations. Friends' unwillingness to sign any credal formula has meant that they have joined Churches Together in England and other ecumenical bodies under a special provision - namely that *other* member churches are content that the Religious Society of Friends 'manifests faith in Christ as witnessed to in the Scriptures ...'. Although other Christians recognise the inadequacy of all credal statements, nevertheless all the other member churches are willing to sign the Trinitarian Basis of Churches Together in England, 'acknowledging God's revelation in Christ ... according to the Scriptures'.

4.15 The position of the Religious Society of Friends raises in a sharp way the question of the extent to which agreement in faith is necessary for Christian unity, and how this agreement should be manifested. Other churches would expect agreement on the fundamentals of the Christian faith, although there might be some disagreement on what those fundamentals are. The Orthodox Churches believe that full unity implies complete agreement in matters of faith and hold very closely to the ancient creeds and in particular to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 AD (hereafter referred to as the Nicene Creed). There has been a sharp division between Eastern and Western churches over the Western addition of the words 'and the Son' (*Filioque*) to that creed. Whereas Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches use the creed regularly in their worship, this is not also so in other churches. However most of the other member churches regard the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as measures of orthodoxy.

4.16 Some evangelical churches have remained outside the membership of Churches Together in England on the grounds that there is insufficient agreement in faith among its member churches. These evangelical churches are unwilling to engage in ecumenism with others who do not accept a statement of faith that goes beyond the accepted creeds and includes, for example, the inerrancy of Scripture, the eternal punishment of the unsaved, Christ's bearing the punishment due to sinners instead of them.

4.17 The issue has also been raised about how churches **live** what they teach. This has been called 'orthopraxy' ('right acting') as distinct from 'orthodoxy' (right teaching or worship) (see *God's Reign and Our Unity*, 1984). Some of the Black Majority churches have questioned the practical commitment of other churches in England to the Christian teaching of the unity of people of all races in Christ.

Baptism & Church Membership

4.18 Obstacles to visible unity are also caused by differences over the understanding and place of baptism and church membership. On the one hand the Religious Society of Friends and The Salvation Army do not practice the external rite of baptism. On the other hand the Roman Catholic Church's ecumenical commitment has been fundamentally expressed in its recognition of baptisms performed in other Churches. The Church of England also has drawn up its canon law to enable it to co-operate with Churches who baptise in the name of the Trinity. There is a tension in local ecumenical partnerships between those who baptise babies (paedo-baptist churches) and those churches who baptise only those who are able to make a personal profession of faith (believer-baptist churches) local ecumenical partnerships. This question will be dealt with in Appendix B.

Ministry & Authority

4.19 One of the most emotive differences is the attitude of different churches to ordained ministry and leadership. The Religious Society of Friends vests no particular person or role with the function of a sign of unity, as may be invested in the bishop or the pope in other communions, nor would it wish to aspire to a sense of unity centred on the priestly office. The responses of several churches to the question 'are there ways of focusing and sustaining unity ... which you would find difficult to accept?' concentrated on bishop, pope, and hierarchical power structure (Congregational Federation). The Methodist Church would find it difficult to accept hierarchical, authoritarian and non-collegial ways of focusing unity. The Church of Scotland has a continuing, historical, and, for some, theological problem with the whole idea of bishops. The Baptist Union has difficulty in accepting 'the historic episcopate with its accent on authority, the Petrine supremacy, or any model of church which has a very strong, authoritative central control or where unity is focussed on a militaristic model'. The United Reformed Church's response puts it more positively: personal oversight and authority need to be rooted in an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God and the authority of such individuals has to be exercised within the councils of the church. In the same vein the Church of England describes its own structure as synodically governed and episcopally led. The bishops have a particular leadership role, but the government of the church is in the hands of a synod which includes laity as well as bishops and other clergy. The Moravian Church notes that its bishops have a purely pastoral role, government being by Synod and elected provincial elders. The response of the International Ministerial Council of Great Britain lays considerable emphasis on the higher leadership of the churches, and believes that unity should be focussed by the recognised leaders of the churches being seen to work together. Mutual accountability is seen to be important.

Primacy

4.20 The maintenance of a common confession of faith, and of the communion of particular churches within the universal church, has been a traditional strength of Roman Catholicism. In it the papacy exercises a crucial role of assistance and oversight. The way this has been exercised has inevitably attracted criticism not only from the Free Churches, but also from Anglicans and Orthodox. Both Anglicans and Orthodox, however, in different ways do acknowledge a primacy of honour respectively to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. The initiative of Pope John Paul II, in inviting other church leaders and theologians to a dialogue on the role of the papacy, is of great significance (*Ut Unum Sint* para. 96). There has sometimes been among Roman Catholics a tendency to conceive and articulate the unity of the Church in narrowly juridical terms. The tensions between centre and locality, between the particular churches and the central institutions which have evolved to express and service aspects of the church's world-wide character, have also become evident within the Roman Catholic church itself. The notions of legitimate local autonomy, the theological concept

of subsidiarity, and the precise implications of the doctrine of episcopal collegiality have all been explored in an attempt to overcome such tensions.

Eucharistic Communion

4.21 The institutional, organisational, juridical and theological aspects of Christian unity are held together in practice for the Roman Catholic Church, as in the Orthodox Church, in the eucharist. This leads to one of the differences which causes most frustration between churches and to the polarisation of two approaches to closer unity. (This is related to paras. 2.16 – 2.19 above.) Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches believe that fuller visible expressions of unity, and in particular eucharistic communion, are dependent on prior agreement on faith and order. Most of the Free Churches believe that progress to agreement in faith and order is dependent on a prior mutual recognition of churches and intercommunion. The question of eucharistic communion will be dealt with in greater detail in Appendix C.

The nature of visible unity

4.22 Perhaps the deepest divide comes between those who believe that all the separate denominations will disappear and unite in one, visible world-wide church, and those who believe that distinct denominations will continue. This divide does not follow exactly existing denominational lines, though most Roman Catholics will tend to hold the former view, whilst many Free Church people will believe the latter view. The issue focuses upon the extent of diversity that can and should be accepted within a united church. The response of a member of the Congregational Federation is blunt, asking for no more silly union schemes. Other responses are more cautious. The question is whether our present denominational diversity will eventually be subsumed within an organically united church, which will retain all that is of positive value in our presently separate denominations, or whether our denominations will continue their distinct existence within a wider reconciliation of churches. This issue will be considered further in Chapter 6.

CONVERGENCES & CHALLENGES ON VISIBLE UNITY

4.23 A brief account has been given of the provisional responses given by churches to the questionnaire on the visible unity of the church. There was agreement that the source of our unity is in the one God, revealed in Jesus Christ, that unity is a gift of the Spirit, and therefore in a positive sense a spiritual unity. There was agreement that the Greek word *koinonia* (participation, fellowship, sharing, solidarity, communion) provided a very helpful focus for understanding this unity. There was agreement that unity was not the same as uniformity, but that true unity entailed diversity.

4.24 The emphasis on the divine or spiritual nature of the unity of the church meant that for all the churches it was not based merely on human organisation or ecclesiastical institutions. It is something human beings cannot create, but it is given by God; their task is to discover and express it. Perhaps for this reason, and because the church is a living and growing reality, there was a universal reticence to describe what a visibly united church would/does look like. The Roman Catholic Church said that to devise an overarching blueprint was undesirable. The United Reformed Church said: ‘We cannot determine what that unity will be like’. The Baptist Union openly admitted that different Baptists had very different ideas of what a united church would be like. The Russian Orthodox regard the Orthodox Church as the church, but quoted a former Patriarch of Moscow as refusing to say that the church does not exist in some form and to some extent in other churches also.

4.25 However the word ‘visible’ clearly creates problems for some churches. Although all are prepared to admit a sense in which the church must be visible if it is to be a vehicle for the mission of God in the world, some (as the Religious Society of Friends and the Congregational Federation) are afraid that even to speak of the visible unity of the church will inevitably lead to people relying for its unity on visible, created elements, rather than on the creator God, who is Spirit.

Visible bonds of unity -

4.26 Other churches, taking as their starting point, for example, the incarnation of God in Christ and Paul’s language describing the church as the Body of Christ, believe outward and visible bonds of unity to be necessary in the church, even though all members of the church are inevitably subject to sin. This difference of approach was not developed at all fully in the responses, and requires further debate. It is necessary to explore what are the visible elements or bonds which different churches see as being instrumental in holding the denomination together and therefore holding together a visibly united

church. Ironically these bonds which should hold the churches together are none other than the obstacles to growth into visible unity which have just been enumerated. This is the result of the division of the Christian community in separate churches or denominations, each one preserving its own separate identity by using some or all of these bonds. However there is an agreement between many member churches over what some of these bonds are which would be required for closer visible unity. One of the models of visible unity proposed by the Baptist Union required a mutual acceptance of each other's members, ministers, sacraments and statements of faith, and a sharing in the mission of God. To this the Anglicans added some means of common decision-making, and the Roman Catholics added an international ministry of unity.

- Faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ

4.27 Faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Scriptures is the fundamental bond of unity that is common to all the Christian churches. The Basis and commitment of Churches Together in England spells this out in Trinitarian terms (para. 1.4 above). The exception is the Religious Society of Friends which on principle subscribes to no credal statement, but the other member churches have judged that the Religious Society of Friends 'manifests faith in Christ as witnessed to in the Scriptures', and have accepted it into membership on that basis. Most of the member churches also acknowledge the two ecumenical creeds, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, and many use them in their liturgical worship. This fundamental bond of unity in faith has not been examined in detail in this book partly because it is already assumed in the membership of Churches Together in England, and partly because the Faith & Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has already produced the substantial report *Confessing the One Faith* and sent this for consideration by the churches. Recognising that the truth of the Christian faith cannot adequately be expressed in any verbal formula, on what basis are member churches willing to recognise one another as confessing and proclaiming the one apostolic faith as revealed in Scripture? Although formulated in a very different historical context, are the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds a sufficient symbol or summary of the apostolic faith? If more is required, is there a 'hierarchy of truths', some being more important than others, so that assent to them is necessary for the visible unity of the church? To what extent do churches have to agree on the way they express their faith before they can be visibly united? The other member churches of Churches Together in England have accepted the Religious Society of Friends into membership, without subscription to the Basis of faith, on the grounds that it 'manifests faith in Christ as witnessed to in the Scriptures' (see para. 4.15 above). Does the use of the word 'manifests' mean that the underlying unity in faith is *visible*? Does that imply sufficient agreement in faith for visible unity?

- Common decision-making

4.28 It is surprising that when the Anglican Communion in 1888 set out the Lambeth Quadrilateral (so influential in the early focus of the WCC Faith & Order Commission) stating what it considered essential for a re-united Christian church, it did not specifically include a mode of common decision-making. The Bonn Agreement between the Church of England and the Old Catholic Churches in 1931 also made no provision for common decision-making. This perhaps reflects a somewhat static concept of the church prevailing at that time. Today Christians are more conscious of the need to discuss together the challenges to faith and the changes in life which, if not attended to, are likely to cause divisions. In fact all the churches have their own accepted method of reaching corporate decisions. Indeed it could be said that this is the only visible bond of unity possessed by the Religious Society of Friends. Some form of common decision-making would seem to be essential for a united church, not only in managing its day to day affairs, but also in reaching sufficient agreement on the teaching of faith and morals to preserve its continuing unity.

4.29 For Free Churches of an independent or congregational polity decision-making rests ultimately with the gathered congregation of covenanted members. Wider decisions may be taken by representative councils, but these decisions are not binding on the local congregation. These wider councils therefore are consultative rather than authoritative. However they can refuse accreditation to a local congregation. This does not give them authority over the inner workings of the local congregation; but it means that they can exclude the local congregation from membership of the wider council. The Methodist Church retains a central authority in Conference, which has a controlling and not merely a consultative role in the church. Methodist Conference operates through a Ministerial Session and a Representative Session. Some matters concerning the ordained ministry are decided in the Ministerial Session, but the majority of business is decided in the Representative Session where ministers and lay people make decisions together. The General Synod of the Church of England is composed of three houses, bishops, clergy and laity, and matters of importance have to be agreed by majorities in all three houses before they take effect. Matters touching the faith, order and worship of the church are introduced into Synod only by the House of Bishops. A similar structure of decision-making exists at diocesan level. In the Roman Catholic

Church decisions are taken by the Bishops' Conference at national level and by bishops at diocesan level but the Second Vatican Council encouraged bishops to introduce pastoral councils composed of clergy and laity, whom they could consult before taking decisions. The Roman Catholic church is also trying to apply the principle of subsidiarity (see para. 2.29 above). Although they work in very different ways, the Moravian, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches and The Salvation Army are the only member churches at present in which an international body takes decisions which are binding on national and local churches. The Religious Society of Friends is unique in never taking a vote in meetings, but waiting on the guidance of the Spirit until the whole meeting consents to a particular course of action. This consent does not mean that each member of the meeting necessarily agrees personally with the action proposed, but that he or she agrees that it is the mind of the meeting as a whole under the guidance of the Spirit.

4.30 The decision-making processes of member churches, thus briefly summarised, are in fact much more complex. Each is related to the particular church's basic understanding of its own nature. Each is in process of development, and there are many signs of convergence. This is a most significant area for mutual consultation by the churches for three reasons:

- i.** Because it is an area in which there is evidence that the churches believe there are profound differences between them.
- ii.** Because the churches have much experience to share with one another, and much to learn from one another for their own decision-making process.
- iii.** Because if the churches are to work together more effectively, they need to find better ways of taking counsel with one another and making common decisions.

- Authority

4.31 Integral to the question of common decision-making is the issue of authority. All churches agree that the only absolute authority is God, and that the truth is mediated to us through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ recorded for us in the scriptures, and through the present guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church is therefore neither a democracy nor some kind of oligarchy. However there are differing views as to how God's authority is appropriately expressed and exercised in the church. The Free Churches have expressed their opposition to a unity based upon centralised papal control, hierarchy or any form of authoritarianism. One of the key remaining points of disagreement between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church and between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church is papal supremacy. The Roman Catholic Church regards the role of the Bishop of Rome as essential for maintaining unity, and Pope John Paul II has invited the leaders of other churches to discuss his role with him. How are the churches in England intending to participate in a response to this invitation? In all this the words of the response of the International Ministerial Council of Great Britain are important - mutual accountability.

- Ordained Ministry

4.32 All churches agree that the whole people of God together exercise a ministry and priesthood. They also agree that God has given particular gifts to each member of the church. Every church has some rules of procedure over who may minister in the church, and these vary from very short-term holding of certain offices among the Religious Society of Friends to a detailed delineation of particular orders of ministry, to which people are ordained for life, in other churches. One of the issues that churches with an independent polity have had to tackle is the holding together of the right of a local church to choose its own minister with the accreditation of that minister by other local churches in the same Union, Federation or Council of Churches. However not all churches accept that the ordination for life of ministers of the word and sacraments is vital to the preservation of the unity of the church. This is not accepted by the Religious Society of Friends and some of the smaller Free Churches. The major Free Churches accept the importance of an ordained ministry for the church and its unity, but most do not distinguish different orders of ministry. Anglicans, Moravians, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and some Black Majority churches distinguish three (or more) orders of ministry, and particularly emphasise the role of the bishop for the preservation of unity in the church (see Appendix D). The United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland also ordain elders, though not to the ministry of word and sacrament, and the Methodist Church has a diaconal order.

4.33 Many of those churches which have a single order of ministry also appoint a superintendent, chairman, or moderator to exercise a wider ministry of personal oversight than that exercised by the minister of a local congregation. The ministry section of *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, WCC, 1982 recommends that ordained ministry, at both local and regional level, 'should be exercised in a *personal, collegial and communal* way. It should be *personal* because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be *collegial*, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a *communal* dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.'

The main substance of the objections found in most of the Free Church responses was not to personal oversight by ministers working at regional level, but to hierarchy and authoritarian control and to what is perceived as undue deference to the authority of the priesthood. This provides a challenge to churches who have bishops as to the manner in which they exercise oversight, whether it is also exercised collegially and how it is rooted in the life of the Christian community as a whole. It also provides a challenge to churches who have not traditionally had a personal episcopacy at regional level to consider whether such an exercise of oversight could not be complementary to a collegial and conciliar oversight.

- The Sacraments of Baptism & Eucharist

4.34 Every church has its procedure for the acceptance of new members. In all churches except the Religious Society of Friends and The Salvation Army that procedure focuses on baptism. Although the Religious Society of Friends and The Salvation Army reject the need for particular sacraments, both accept a certain sacramental principle in human life. How is this principle understood? To what extent is a sacramental action a sign that God has already been at work in a person or group's life, and to what extent does God use the sacrament as a means through which to work? This issue arises in a sharp form in the understanding of baptism. Will the churches listen more carefully to one another in order to lessen the polarisation between those who so reject or reduce the significance of the rite of baptism that it becomes for them an empty symbol which can be dispensed with for church membership, and those who so emphasise its grace-carrying nature that it suffices for church membership in such a way that its connection with personal faith and the expectation of personal commitment to Christ tend to become secondary?

4.35 Although many churches, and in particular the Roman Catholic Church, regard baptism as a fundamental sacramental bond expressing the unity of Christians, it is not fully accepted as such by all the churches. Can the differences be overcome between churches who baptise infants on the one hand and Baptists and others including most Black Majority Churches, who baptise only those who have already made a personal profession of faith?

If the churches are united in baptism what prevents them from recognising those baptised in other churches as also members of their own, and from admitting them to communion? These and other related questions need an answer if baptism is truly to be a fundamental bond of unity between the churches. (See Appendix B.)

4.36 The Orthodox Churches see eucharistic communion as the full sacramental expression of the unity of the church itself, and therefore only those who are members of an Orthodox Church and accept the fulness of its life and tradition may receive eucharistic communion. For the Orthodox *eucharistic* and *church* communion are the same. Most Protestant churches believe that the eucharist is a divinely appointed means whereby unity in Christ, already established by faith and in baptism, may be further displayed and deepened, and therefore offer what is called an 'open table'. The Roman Catholic Church believes that *communicatio in sacris* (this is a wide term covering all acts of worship, but including the eucharist) 'may not be regarded as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians ... yet the gaining of a needed grace sometimes commends it' (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 1964, para. 8). Under carefully prescribed conditions therefore those in serious, spiritual need may be admitted to communion. Anglicans have differed widely in their views, and the Church of England has included those who have held views similar to those of the Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches. In 1972 however the Church of England agreed to admit baptised members of other Trinitarian Churches to *eucharistic* communion; but in its dialogue with other churches has insisted that the establishment of *churchly* communion implies and requires full visible unity.

4.37 Thus the word ‘communion’ is used in a wide variety of senses. It can be used in a general and spiritual sense of interpersonal relations with other Christians based on a common relationship with God (some would use the Greek word *koinonia* in this sense). It can be used of the sacramental expression of this unity in receiving the bread and wine at the eucharist. It can be used of the relationships of union between different churches. These three senses are obviously related; but different churches relate them in different ways.

4.38 The different approaches of the different churches to eucharistic communion are closely dependent on their understanding of the church and what the unity of the church implies. Much deeper mutual explanation and understanding of the varying positions of the churches is urgently needed on these matters, especially as the inability of Christians to receive eucharistic communion together is probably the single issue which causes the greatest pain as churches work more closely together locally.

4.39 There are of course many other bonds of unity between the churches, but these six - the confession of a common faith, common decision-making, a commonly accepted authority, a mutually accepted ministry, a common baptism, a shared eucharist, together with a common call to mission - are the bonds most widely recognised as visible signs of the *koinonia* in Christ and the Holy Spirit which should mark a visibly united church, and which we have begun to experience in our relations with one another. Five of these are considered in more detail in the appendices to this book. It is imperative that all member churches continue to consider these in common prayer, in discussion and in their life together in a more systematic way than they have done previously, if they are to become genuine bonds of unity rather than continuing obstacles and sources of disagreement. Nevertheless they should not be considered in isolation from one another. All are inextricably related to the various churches’ self-understanding, and to their understanding of a united church.

5. EXPERIENCE OF UNITY

5.1 Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels left these words as his testament in 1926: 'In order to unite with one another we must love one another; in order to love one another, we must know one another; in order to know one another, we must go and meet one another'. Two themes stand out very clearly in the responses on which this chapter is based. One is the reality of love/sharing/*koinonia* which has come to many local groupings of Christians of different traditions as they have met and got to know one another, have prayed together, and have engaged together in mission. The other is the need to go beyond occasional *co-operation* on a number of activities which are not central to the life of local churches to a *commitment* to look together at priorities, and, where convictions permit, to work together on these. Very many groups of churches are at the stage of occasional co-operation. Fewer local groups of churches have reached the stage of commitment.

5.2 So far this book has recorded in brief what the member churches of Churches Together in England at national level understand by the visible unity of the church. Member churches have responded in greater or lesser detail, and with varying degrees of confidence. This book has noted differences and convergences in their thinking and has begun to suggest some possible lines of development to bring visible unity nearer. However, virtually all the church responses have deliberately refrained from giving a precise model of what a visibly united church might look like at local, intermediate, national or international levels. The Baptist Union response made clear that different Baptists would sketch different pictures. The Roman Catholic response said that the circumstances in which churches lived and proclaimed the gospel were too varied to make the production of blueprints desirable or possible. An exception was the response of the Church of England which included its agreements with the Evangelical Protestant Church in Germany (the Meissen Declaration) and with the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches (the Porvoo Common Statement). These include portraits of the visible unity of the church at an international level. How does this thinking relate to practical experience within England? England has become known for the way many local churches have entered into a great variety of ecumenical developments and experiments. What can the theologians learn about visible unity from these ecumenical experiments, and how does all this experience relate to the official reflections of the churches that have already been summarised? The way forward to Christian unity will not lie simply in the thinking of theologians, nor simply in pragmatic experiments, but by the constructive interplay of experience and reflection, reflection and experience, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The previous three chapters have asked what unity is and then looked to see how it might become visible. This chapter looks at what is already visible as churches work together, and asks to what extent it is unity.

5.3 This chapter is based on the responses of four ecumenical organisations associated with Churches Together in England, on the responses of twenty-three intermediate (county, new town, metropolitan area) ecumenical bodies, and on the experience of various groupings of local councils of churches/local churches together and local ecumenical partnerships.

5.4 Some of the ecumenical organisations that are in association with Churches Together in England have been in existence for many years and draw together Christians from different churches for particular common concerns. The YWCA response testified that it takes unity in Christ for granted in its work, and is encouraged and excited where it is able to work together with local churches of different traditions in its neighbourhood. However it recognises, as did *Churches in Fellowship* by Leslie Francis and Kevin Williams (BCC/CCBI, 1990, pp 75ff) in a study of the YMCA's links with local councils of churches, that too often there is little contact today between these organisations, that helped to pioneer the ecumenical movement a hundred years ago, and local councils of churches and local churches together - to their mutual impoverishment.

5.5 Nevertheless several responses from intermediate bodies did mention the vital role of voluntary ecumenical associations that fostered unity between Christians of different traditions, and especially interchurch families. One response likened the marriage covenant to the covenant or mutual commitment that churches of different traditions are called to enter into on the way to the deepening of their communion. The response of the Association of Interchurch Families claimed that interchurch families (in which the partners are committed to different denominations, often a Roman Catholic married to a Christian of another church) are domestic churches, a domestic version of local ecumenical partnerships. Husband and wife share the same building, all their resources, their lives, nurturing their children within the one Christian faith they share, but within two different churches which nourish the one family.

Interchurch families and interchurch children bring together two churches in love, and as such they can be a sign to the churches on the way to unity - to that unity in Christ which is rather like a marriage - that unity which in its ultimate form has been pictured as the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Local Churches Together

5.6 The experience of voluntary associations of Christians committed to the search for Christian unity has been crucial for the beginning and development of the ecumenical movement in this country, and it continues to be important. However the foundation of formal ecumenical relations between churches of different denominations in England is built on local churches together and local councils of churches. In 1993 some 1,200 of these were recorded in England, but this was far from being a complete list, since many are informal and unrecorded. They vary enormously in their commitment, activity and ways of working, but it is possible, by comparing various surveys that have been made of their work, to trace important changes of emphasis over the years. For several decades after the Second World War the most common activities of these councils of churches, as they were then called, were (particularly since 1956) the observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and (since 1957) house to house collecting during Christian Aid Week. In 1971 almost all councils of churches organised these two events. Some 40% of councils also organised Good Neighbour schemes or Community Care projects, youth activities, and tried to educate people on issues of world poverty. 30% engaged in mission and evangelism and only 20% discussed issues of faith and order.

5.7 The most recent survey of councils of churches in 1989 noted several significant changes of emphasis. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and Christian Aid Week collections were still the most common activities. Three other activities however came very high on the list of activities - 83% of councils engaged in ecumenical Lent prayer and discussion groups, mostly in people's homes, 75% in ecumenical events on Good Friday (often in the open air), and 57% participated in One World Week. One World Week was started by the Churches' Committee of the World Development Movement to focus not on ambulance, repair and rescue work, but on the creation of more just and peaceful structures for our world society. One World Week is important both in itself and also as an example of a wider trend of ecumenical concern, a practical recognition that the goal of a united church is not just an end in itself, but a sign, instrument and foretaste of a world united in God's kingdom of justice and peace.

5.8 Ecumenical house groups began on a large scale in 1967 when some 70,000 people were estimated to have participated in *The People Next Door* programme. In 1986 about one million people were estimated to have taken part in the *What on Earth is the Church For?* ecumenical groups. These signalled an evident rise in ecumenical concern and understanding among a large number of church members of different churches. The responses from the 1986 groups also registered the ecumenical convictions of those who participated. As a result of these and subsequent house groups there is now a substantial number of church members who have from time to time met and got to know and appreciate other Christians, and prayed with them for unity and renewal. The very large number of councils taking part in an ecumenical event on Good Friday has a double significance. On the one hand in many cases it is seen as an ecumenical act of Christian witness. On the other hand it marks, at least for some churches, an attempt to observe ecumenically an important day in their calendar which, until then, they have observed denominationally only. This is perhaps a small sign of what could be a significant development. Most of the other activities organised by local councils of churches have been *additional* to the activities organised by their member churches. Most of these ecumenical activities are highly commendable, but they do not *replace* anything the member churches are already doing. They consume rather than release energy. In some cases at least the Good Friday procession replaces what the member churches have previously done separately.

5.9 In 1990 the British Council of Churches was replaced by new ecumenical bodies at national level working in a new way. At the same time local councils of churches were encouraged to become local churches together. The intention was that the new title would commit local churches to the new style of working. Put simply this means that major decisions on unity work would no longer be taken by church representatives at an ecumenical council meeting, but would be referred by it to the decision-making bodies of the respective churches (church meeting, parochial church council ...). In this way the authorities of the local churches would be committed, and not just a few enthusiasts. Local churches were also encouraged to share what really mattered to them and lay at the heart of their life, and, where convictions allowed, to do these things together. Where this has happened ecumenism has released new energies and brought enrichment. Where it has not happened ecumenical activities continue to consume energy, because they remain additional to the daily and weekly round of denominational activities. To date perhaps a half of local councils of

churches have changed their name to local churches together. Not all of these, however, have managed to change their way of working. Where they have so far failed, they may continue to do excellent work, but they have not yet begun to bring the major part of their local churches into closer unity. Where they have begun to succeed members of different congregations have begun to value one another's distinctive styles and emphases, and to do together some important things that differences of conviction do not compel them to do separately. In some cases this change has enabled congregations who were unhappy to belong to a council of churches to join. In many towns and cities Black Majority churches have brought to a churches together a new emphasis on worship and celebration as well as personal insights into issues of racial justice and deprivation. There is now a widespread recognition that racial discrimination is one of the deadliest enemies of human unity in our times and that the churches have to combine in their op position to it. Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the Fifth World Conference on Faith & Order at Santiago in Spain in 1993 quoted a group in South Africa that had said 'apartheid is too strong for a divided church'. Moreover racial discrimination has infected the church. Certain churches in South Africa attempted to provide a theological justification for apartheid. English churches have not been exempt from this infection. When many African, Asian and Caribbean Christians arrived as immigrants in England in the 1950s and 1960s they were often made to feel unwelcome in English churches. 'Your church is round the corner' some were told. This encouraged the rapid growth of what are now often called 'Black Majority Churches'. Many of these now belong either directly or through their own conciliar groupings to Churches Together in England.

5.10 There are very many other concerns about divisions in society and damage to our world that churches are beginning to tackle ecumenically. *Church Action on Poverty* with their 'hearings' held around the country where people can express their own personal experience of poverty have struck a chord for many local churches together groups. The *Churches National Housing Coalition* is challenging local churches to tackle together issues of inadequate housing and widespread homelessness. This has the benefit of stimulating local action, in raising knowledge and awareness of the locality. In some cases churches together in a locality are caught up in research, political lobbying and a local project, however modest, which seeks to make a difference and offer a parable of justice. People's response to God is deepened in working together for justice. *The Churches' Standing Committee for London Docklands* has produced a report on the effect of Docklands' regeneration on the local communities. In Swindon church members who have made a commitment to campaigning on homelessness form the core of the management committee for a rent deposit scheme enabling homeless people to make a secure move into rented property.

5.11 At their best, local churches together are capable of prophetic action. One example is the recycling project pioneered in Milton Keynes as early as the mid 1980s. This simultaneously provides employment and self-worth and signals the importance of caring for the planet and maximising its resources.

5.12 Since 1990 a very large number of local churches have begun to engage together in evangelisation in a wide variety of ways. Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, is increasingly being emphasised as an opportunity for witness. *On Fire* in 1994 provided a national framework which evoked a widespread response of celebratory open-air events and an opportunity for the churches to 'go public' together. In Wickersley, Rotherham, evangelism is now part of the ongoing agenda of the churches severally and together. The local churches - Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist - announce 'Open House' to their community for a month each autumn. Regular worshippers are expected to bring a non-Christian friend to 'sample' what is on offer and opportunities are then provided for enquirers to attend an introduction to the Christian faith.

5.13 In towns from Abingdon through the alphabet to Wakefield, Wells and York, churches across a very broad spectrum have been engaging in evangelism together. Some were one-off high profile events such as the Great Banquet in London where in more than 200 locations groups of local churches tried to convey an aspect of the Christian gospel to a cross-section of the community in their vicinity. Others involved a variety of initiatives with which particular denominational churches felt most at home - offered under an ecumenical umbrella. Others contained ongoing, long-term strategies of evangelisation.

Local Ecumenical Partnerships -

5.14 If the foundation of ecumenical co-operation in England was built on local councils of churches, local ecumenical partnerships have served as the pathfinders and scouts of its deeper commitment. They began in the late 1960s as *areas of ecumenical experiment*, to enable the churches to serve new towns and housing estates, pooling

resources and setting up ecumenical ministry teams. They were encouraged to experiment, in ways not permissible elsewhere, in living and working together with the encouragement and under the watchful oversight of the joint leadership of their respective churches operating as a *sponsoring body*. As they became an acknowledged ongoing part of the church scene, so their description was changed to local *ecumenical* project, and much more recently to local *ecumenical partnership* (LEP). The experience of such integrated church living - often in a very secular locality - has brought insights to the sponsoring denominations. They have been challenged to develop their understandings of worship, baptism/ membership, ministry and oversight, among others. The way that the participating denominations have modified their rules is in each case appropriate to their understanding of the church. Thus the Methodist Church already had a provision which enabled ministers of sister Methodist Churches in other parts of the world to be stationed in British circuits. This provision was extended in 1975 to include ordained ministers of other churches if they were in pastoral charge of Methodist members in local ecumenical situations. Methodism, true to its connexional character, offers this 'recognised and regarded' or 'authorised' status to named ministers through the decision of its annual Conference. The Church of England, by contrast, added to its canon law in order to provide for the reality of shared, ordained ministry that is already exercised in local situations'. The changes in canon law made legal a degree of shared ministry with other denominations without as yet implying full interchangeability of ministries. 'Full reconciliation of ministries and thus complete interchangeability between the ministries of hitherto separated denominations can only be reached within the context of the reconciliation of churches and within a commitment to ministerial and conciliar forms which express unity wider than the local level' (Local Ecumenical Development, GS 642, 1984, para. 26). This preserved essentially intact Anglican practice that only ministers ordained by bishops in communion with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York could exercise a complete sacramental ministry in the Church of England. However, because Anglicans have for a long time recognised the spiritual efficacy of the ministry of many other churches, they have in certain circumstances permitted the ministers of other churches to preside at eucharistic services in Anglican churches. These services, however, are not understood legally as Church of England services, but as services of the church of the presiding minister. Their complete recognition as Church of England services would presuppose the union of the churches concerned and of their ministries.

5.15 Some local ecumenical partnerships follow the integrated pattern appropriate to a new area. In others, congregations remain distinct but increasingly share programmes of education, nurture, pastoral care and evangelisation. (For further details on the variety of LEPs see *Travelling Together* by Elizabeth Welch and Flora Winfield, CTE, 1995). The various types of LEP express different understandings of unity and varying levels of visibility.

- A single congregation LEP

5.16 The oldest churches bringing together two denominations into one integrated congregation are the *union churches* combining Baptists and Congregationalists in one Free church with one minister. Some of these date from the 17th century, and others from the beginning of this century. Having similar concepts of the local church and church membership, and recognising one another's ministers, their only substantial problem has been holding together the practices of believer's and infant baptism. These churches are recognised by the Baptist Union and also by either the Congregational Federation or the United Reformed Church as a constituent church.

5.17 More recent are the *joint churches* which have resulted from a union of Methodist and United Reformed congregations. Almost invariably they will have come together in one building, the sale of the other having enabled it to be modernised and enhanced. Usually they are served by one minister (Methodist and United Reformed traditions alternating). Because their understanding of membership is so similar, membership of both denominations can be offered to everyone, and joint confirmation is offered to new members. They are recognised as member congregations by both parent churches and are represented accordingly through the two very different structures of government.

5.18 There are now some 200 such joint churches, and in the South Western Province they account for more than half the United Reformed churches in the province. Nationally, 14% of United Reformed churches are joint with churches of another denomination. This strongly affects the way that the United Reformed denomination sees itself and its role in the ecumenical scene. There is a Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Committee which seeks at national level to support local joint churches and interpret their needs and discoveries to the denominations.

5.19 Of wider ecumenical significance are those joint congregations which include members of three or four different denominations, usually Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed. Many of these are in new towns or new housing areas where the denominations have decided to combine, for both economic and ecumenical reasons, or because the local authority or development corporation has been willing to make available only one site for a church. These churches have seen the building up of the local community as a priority, and the local people have recognised the one visible church as a symbol and an agent of unity in their community. While forming a Church of England parish, or, more usually, part of a parish, with the geographical concept of belonging which that entails, they also benefit from the understandings of local church membership associated with the participating Free Churches. Where the Anglican church is a partner, there is usually a full or part-time Anglican priest as well as at least a full or part-time Free Church minister. In some places there is just one minister in pastoral charge and he or she may be Anglican or Free Church. Many of these joint congregations have developed agreed forms of worship, including the eucharist, which have been approved by their sponsoring bodies. The Ecumenical Centre at Skelmersdale is a good example of this.

5.20 Although they may not necessarily be conscious of it, these joint *churches* are a partial manifestation of a visibly united church, such as was envisaged at the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches, that is to say one church in each place united with all other local churches in every other place (see paras. 6.5 & 6.13 below). Obviously the extent to which a joint church manifests this pattern of unity is limited to the denominations which participate in it and by the fact that such joint churches do not exist in every other place.

- A local covenant LEP

5.21 Another pattern is expressed in multiple congregation LEPs in which churches of different denominations usually retain their own buildings, forms of worship and ministers, but agree to work very closely together for specific purposes, to share specific resources, and meet regularly (but not every Sunday) for joint worship. Sometimes these are called 'local covenants' in which the churches have covenanted with God and with one another to live out together their common calling to proclaim the Gospel and serve their community. This kind of local ecumenical partnership often comprises a much wider range of participating churches than the single congregation LEP. Thornbury, in Gloucestershire, developed from a local council of churches and includes six denominations among which are the Religious Society of Friends.

5.22 In this pattern of unity distinct denominational identities are retained, but with a mutual commitment to seek deeper unity, to engage in common mission, and to encourage joint action in specific fields. Roman Catholic parishes are able to be full partners, because shared eucharistic communion is not the focus.

- Other types of congregational LEP

5.23 Although a vast number of Black Majority Church congregations hold their regular worship in buildings owned and separately used by Anglican or Free Church congregations, very few of them belong together in a local ecumenical partnership. In very few cases is there a formal *sharing* agreement under the *Sharing of Church Buildings Act, 1969*. Even when the two churches have been worshipping in the same building for a decade or more, there may not be much interaction between congregations.

Apart from racial prejudice or not having reached the necessary stage of ecumenical commitment, there could be three reasons for this. One could be the very different culture of worship between an average English congregation, expecting a restrained one hour pattern, and an African Independent Church, for example, expecting several hours of formal and spontaneous worship. A second could be the fragile nature of the 'host' church often in an area from which the original congregations have moved away and maintaining its congregational life by the skin of its teeth and with no energy or will to break new ground. A third reason could be different concepts of mission. An Anglican church, for example, will see its mission to be to care for everyone within its parish boundary, whether they come to church or not. An African Independent Church will tend to draw people of a particular ethnic origin who live over a wide area.

5.24 -The combination of a single congregation and a multi-congregation LEP is also quite common. Often, for example, Anglican and Free Churches in a single congregation will work together in a multi-congregation LEP with a distinct Roman Catholic congregation. Roman Catholic rules at present forbid Roman Catholics to receive eucharistic

communion from Anglican or Free Church ministers, and also forbid Anglican or Free Church members to receive eucharistic communion from Roman Catholic priests (apart from exceptional cases - see Appendix C). Therefore many Roman Catholic congregations who share a building with Anglican and/or Free Churches, normally worship separately. However, where there is a very strong ecumenical commitment and where the respective congregations have been thoroughly educated and prepared, the commitment to share educational and pastoral work in a few places is supported regularly, but infrequently, by what is usually called a 'parallel eucharist'. The Anglican priest or Free Church minister presides at a communion service alongside the Catholic priest celebrating Mass at a separate altar. The shared Ministry of the Word and the exchange of the peace followed shortly by receiving communion at separate tables symbolise graphically and painfully the real but imperfect communion of the two congregations. This is the practice, for example, at Thamesmead LEP. Occasional parallel celebrations of the eucharist involving Roman Catholics are not common, however, as the Roman Catholic Church gives permission for them only rarely.

- Ecumenical Centres and Specialist Ministries

5.25 So far most of the examples given are based on a concept of local neighbourhood ministry which owes much to the parochial system. There is a whole range of other LEPs, sometimes called 'sector' or 'chaplaincy' LEPs, in which ministers or officers of different churches work closely together in particular sectors of society. Examples are Industrial Mission, Hospitals, Prisons, Local Radio, and Higher and Further Education Chaplaincy. Where sacramental ministry is not a significant factor, such partnership presents few problems. In some new towns such as Telford and Milton Keynes ecumenical centres have also been established where the churches in a wider than neighbourhood area can make ecumenical resources available to the community. The development of such ecumenical centres and sector ministries could provide a complementary ecumenical pattern of ministry to the largely neighbourhood one so far developed.

- Single Church in a Village

5.26 The churches are beginning to trust one church to take responsibility in the name of many. Opportunities abound especially in rural situations. In many rural communities there is only one place of worship - in 90% of cases it is an Anglican church. People who live there can decide either to worship in their village community, which may mean foregoing their own worship tradition, or travel to worship with a congregation of their own denomination at a distance in the market town. Those with a strong sense of identification with the village or inadequate transport often opt, at least occasionally, for the church on the doorstep. There are many examples of LEPs formed when there were two places of worship in the village, at least one of which was no longer able to maintain its building, for example Leonard Stanley, near Stroud. However, there is a case for giving special ecumenical recognition to the single church which consciously celebrates the ecumenical nature of its regular worshipping congregation. The change to the Church of England's Church Representation Rules in 1995 makes it clear that members in good standing of other Trinitarian churches may declare themselves also to be members of the Church of England and on that basis may be on the electoral roll and share fully in the government of the Church of England. Many such churches have regular Methodist services, and even feature on the Circuit Plan, valuing the contribution of local preachers and readers to sustain the worship life of the church. Some Roman Catholics worship from time to time in their village as well as attending mass in their nearest Roman Catholic church. They value opportunities to have mass celebrated in the village sometimes and to have opportunities themselves, as lay people, to make input to non-eucharistic worship. During the week all Christians living in the village may also be encouraged to take opportunities for study and prayer together and to reach out in service and mission to the whole village community.

Churches Together at Intermediate Level

5.27 One of the key developments in the ecumenical scene in England during the last ten years has been the growth of intermediate ecumenical bodies covering virtually every part of the country. They have a variety of different origins and they work in a variety of different ways. Many of them began as denominational church leaders met to exercise joint oversight over the local ecumenical partnerships in their dioceses/districts/areas. Because they sponsored these LEPs they were often called sponsoring bodies (for further details, see *This Growing Unity* by Roger Nunn, CTE, 1995, E4.95.). Their responsibilities, however, have now extended beyond LEPs to cover other areas of ecumenical living as well, and most of them have developed conciliar ways of working.

5.28 One of the best known and most elaborate developments has been on Merseyside, where ecumenical ministry and oversight over the region has been exercised in a personal, collegial and communal or conciliar way. The Anglican Bishop and the Roman Catholic Archbishop have been joined by a Free Church Moderator to embody and express the personal character of church leadership in the region, which they try so far as possible to exercise as colleagues in a collegial way. At Pentecost 1985 the church leaders signed a covenant entitled 'The Call to Partnership', cast in the form of a prayer. This was reproduced as a postcard and made widely available. It reads: 'Almighty God, you call your Church to witness to the love of Jesus for all people; and you send your Church into the world filled with the power of your Spirit: Bind us together now, as partners with you and with one another in the task entrusted to us, that obedient to your command we may proclaim the Good News, and make disciples of all the nations. We ask this, through Him who came to save us all, even Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.' This covenant is renewed every other Pentecost in a large scale act of worship involving a procession along Hope Street between the two cathedrals in Liverpool. Alongside the personal leadership there has also developed the Merseyside and Region Churches' Ecumenical Assembly. This is a conciliar body, representatives of all the Merseyside churches, and is consulted on the full range of ecumenical life and work in the region, although the power to make authoritative decisions still rests with the decision-making bodies of the participating churches.

In Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire the church leaders are committed to working together on a wide range of specific concerns. In Cumbria at the launch of the Decade of Evangelism five church leaders simultaneously presided at an ecumenical act of worship in five different parts of the county; Christians of whatever denomination were urged to attend the one closest to them. This spoke powerfully of the ability of churches to recognise leadership from other traditions.

5.29 Milton Keynes has gone further in this regard than anywhere else in England (or the world) in appointing an Ecumenical Moderator to whom the leaders of the local denominations (Bishops, Chairman of District, Provincial Moderator, Area Superintendent) have delegated certain elements of their normal denominational oversight of the town. His primary function is pastoral. He focuses and symbolises the unity of the Christian community in Milton Keynes, and represents it to town and civic authorities. His personal ministry is not isolated but exists within the conciliar body of the Milton Keynes Christian Council. He has a collegial relationship with the denominational church leaders in the area, by or through whom the necessary denominational decisions are still made and ratified.

5.30 Some intermediate bodies have now reached the stage of holding strategic consultations over the use of their resources and the deployment of their ministers in their area. This has begun, for example, in parts of Staffordshire and Essex and includes the leadership of the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reformed Churches. This commitment to consultation makes it less likely that inappropriate ministerial appointments will be made and that ministry will be reduced simultaneously in the same area. The Intermediate level has also proved to be the most appropriate place for strategic planning, e.g. emergency planning in co-operation with local authorities and emergency services. In many cases, people are employed to work on behalf of the churches in local radio, community relations and social responsibility fields.

5.31 A major difficulty remains in many intermediate areas over the non-alignment of church boundaries. The strength of the denomination in that part of the country affects the size of area to which oversight can be given. This is not merely a matter of geography. It arises from differing understandings of the nature of the church, of the role of leaders, and of the locus of decision-making within churches. For this reason it is hoped that the *Called to Be One* process itself will contribute to progress in overcoming this obstacle. However, it also remains a geographical problem, and it is a widespread view that the initiative in overcoming this aspect of the problem should rest with localities. They are in the best position to know how boundaries might be altered. Local government reorganisation also needs to be taken into account.

5.32 Methodist/United Reformed Areas offer a prophetic way forward. There are three such Areas in Wiltshire and one in Essex. The 'Area' operates as a Methodist Circuit relating to the Methodist District, and as a United Reformed District relating to the United Reformed Province. It contains a mixture of Methodist, United Reformed and joint Methodist/United Reformed local churches, with ministers of the two traditions pastorally responsible for any combination of these. In Merseyside and the West Midlands the United Reformed Church Province and the Methodist District are exploring how best to integrate their structures and work, perhaps following intermediate area boundaries.

Churches Together at national level

5.33 The word ‘national’ in the British Isles is ambiguous. There are two nation states, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Irish Republic. There are four parts with different histories which claim with varying levels of patriotic fervour to be distinct nations, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Some churches are organised in one of these four nations only, some in two, and some in three. The British Council of Churches, despite its title, brought together Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches in all four nations and in both nation states between 1942 and 1990. For much of this time however there were also an Irish Council of Churches, a Scottish Churches Council and a Council of Churches for Wales. There was no equivalent English Council of Churches, although there was, within the orbit of the British Council of Churches, a body looking after local ecumenical projects in England.

5.34 In 1990 the British Council of Churches was replaced by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland; and alongside it Churches Together in England, Action for Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN). All these bodies included the Roman Catholic Church. The situation in Ireland was more complex, since the Irish Council of Churches continued without Roman Catholic membership, but alongside it there is a body which brings Roman Catholics and Protestants together. The establishment of ecumenical bodies at both four nation level and at one nation level was to meet the differing needs of different churches. Those churches that worked in three of the four nations for the most part preferred one ecumenical body only. Those churches which had work in Scotland or Wales only were keen to have four distinct national ecumenical bodies held together by a four nation council. The result has been that the four national bodies work rather differently. Churches Together in England relies on the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland for the most part to bring the churches together in the United Kingdom on matters of public and international affairs particularly in relation to governments. Churches Together in England brings the churches in England together on inter-church affairs (including education, theology and evangelisation), and services intermediate and local ecumenism in all fields.

5.35 The aim of the new ecumenical bodies is contained in their title - to bring *churches together*, and not simply to hold representative ecumenical meetings to make decisions either *instead of* or *on behalf of* their churches. This means that all major decisions are referred back to the decision-making bodies of all the member churches. To bring churches together also involves bringing them together at every level of their existence, nationally, locally and at intermediate levels in between. Christian unity cannot be achieved simply by ‘top-down’ agreements at national level, nor simply by local co-operation ‘at the grass-roots’. For this reason the two main meetings of Churches Together in England (the Forum, which meets every other year, and the much smaller Enabling Group, which meets three times each year) bring together representatives both of the national member churches and of ecumenical work at intermediate and local level. This has given a three-dimensional coherence to the experience of working for unity which might otherwise have been lacking.

5.36 The result of the creation of *churches together* at every level should in principle lead to a more visible expression of Christian unity than before. That there has been progress in many spheres is undeniable, but it is more evident in some spheres than in others.

5.37 Much of the national work of Churches Together in England is carried on in co-ordinating groups which bring together the officers or other representatives of member churches in specific areas of interest. At present there are twelve of these groups: the Christian Adult Learning Meeting (CALM), the Churches Community Work Alliance (CCWA), the Churches Co-ordinating Group for Evangelisation (CGFE), the Churches Joint Education Policy Committee (CJEPC) with responsibility for public sector education, the Churches Rural Group, Churches Together for Families, the English Churches Youth Services (ECYS), the Group for Local Unity (GLU), the Churches Committee for Hospital Chaplaincy, the Millennium Group and the Theology & Unity Group (TUG). Other informal or embryonic groups exist, for example, for Ministerial Education (both before and after ordination), and for Industrial Mission and the World of Work. In addition Churches Together in England keeps in close touch with some of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland’s consultations, commissions and networks, particularly the Social Responsibility Consultation, work in International Affairs, the Consultative Group for Ministry Among Children, and the Churches’ Commission for Racial Justice.

5.38 Through these groups the churches at national level keep one another informed of their respective activities and concerns in these particular fields. They are able to consult one another, and, where it is judged appropriate, they are

enabled to act together either corporately or by asking one member church to act on behalf of the rest. Some of these groups have found it relatively easy to work together since the policies of their churches have been compatible. Other groups for a variety of reasons have run up against what, at first at least, appeared to be incompatible policies. Insofar as the members of these groups are appointed to implement their church's policy and not to create it, it has then been necessary to go outside the group to try to overcome these difficulties. This has been done (either through the Enabling Group or directly through the general secretaries of the member churches) by appealing to the policy and decision-making bodies of the churches themselves.

5.39 At the end of 1991, as a result of a meeting of the general secretaries of member churches, the Enabling Group produced *Suggested Rules of Good Practice* for the member churches to guide them at national level as they tried to ensure that they took their ecumenical commitment seriously (see Appendix F). Some of the larger member churches have found these helpful, and have tried to implement them. Some of the smaller churches have found it more difficult since they do not have available personnel to work with all of them. Where co-ordinating groups exist it is not too difficult for the churches to remember to consult one another before acting unilaterally. Where no such ecumenical group exists it is more difficult. For example four of the five largest churches have recently re-structured or are in process of re-structuring themselves at national level with a minimum of ecumenical consultation. Obviously how a church decides to re-structure its internal working depends on its own self-understanding as a church and is primarily a matter for itself to decide. On the other hand if the churches re-structure themselves in ways which are not mutually compatible, it could make ecumenical relationships far more difficult.

5.40 One of the ways churches have decided to relate to one another's structures is to invite representatives of some other churches to attend their annual assembly, conference or synod. The United Reformed Church has gone further than any other church in inviting representatives of other churches to be voting members of their Assembly, Synods and District Councils. In doing this they are witnessing to the belief that the United Reformed Church has a calling to be a uniting church, constantly looking for greater unity. Most churches allow the representatives of other churches to speak at their meetings, but not to vote.

International ecumenical work

5.41 Several of the member churches of Churches Together in England are also members of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). This Conference has worked hard since 1959 to draw and hold together over a hundred Anglican, Old Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches in eastern and western Europe during the cold war, and to work for understanding and reconciliation between them in the upheavals and conflicts following the collapse of communism. Since 1964 it has worked increasingly closely with the Council of Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe (CCEE). In 1989 both bodies sponsored a major meeting in Basel on *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, and they are planning a second meeting in Graz in June 1997 on *Reconciliation*. Many of the divisions of Christendom began in Europe, and CEC and CCEE are very conscious that ethnic and religious divisions often coincide. These two bodies have shown a particular concern for areas of conflict such as the former Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland, and have tried to contribute to reconciliation.

5.42 In addition to membership of the Conference of European Churches or the Council of Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe, several churches in England have recently been developing relationships with particular churches on the continent. The United Reformed Church, for example, is part of the Leuenberg Concordat between many Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Europe. The Church of England has a special relationship with the Protestant Evangelical Church in Germany following the Meissen Declaration. The Church of England has also agreed the Porvoo Common Statement with many of the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, as a result of which it has been able to enter into communion with them.

5.43 Six of the member churches of Churches Together in England are also directly in membership of the World Council of Churches (WCC), viz, the Baptist Union, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church and the United Reformed Church. Several others belong to a church which is in membership of the WCC at a wider level (the Council of Oriental Orthodox Christian Churches, the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches, the Lutheran Council of Great Britain), and The Salvation Army has a 'fraternal relationship' with the WCC. Although the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of WCC, it is a member of its Faith & Order Commission, and has therefore participated in the preparation of *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* and other reports. Other churches, such as the Religious Society of Friends, have also contributed to this work.

5.44 The self-understanding of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) is very different from that of Churches Together in England. With over 300 member churches coming from every continent it would be virtually impossible to refer major decisions back to the decision-making bodies of its member churches and expect to achieve practicable common decisions. While making every effort to be fully representative of its member churches, the statement of William Temple, made before its foundation in 1948, remains true: 'Any authority the Council will have consists in the weight which it carries with the churches by its own wisdom'. Very early in its existence it had to face the difficulty that different member churches had very different understandings of the church and its unity, and therefore differing estimates of one another's churches. In the Toronto Statement of 1950 it was agreed that 'membership does not imply the acceptance of a specific doctrine concerning the nature of church unity'. However, while the Toronto Statement remains in force and important, nevertheless the persistent work of Faith & Order has enabled the WCC to agree a far more detailed portrait of the visible unity of the church than would have been conceivable in 1950. That this has been possible is due not only to the work of theologians, but also the experience of Christians of different churches and continents facing together the challenges of the last fifty years. The WCC has been in the forefront of Christian resistance to racism, of Christian pleading for justice and human rights, of working for an inclusive community of women and men, of Christian solidarity with the underprivileged and dispossessed, and latterly of Christian concern for the environment. Through this witness it has built up a world-wide fellowship (*koinonia*) of costly discipleship which has gone a long way in healing the divisions of the centuries.

6. THE VISIBLE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

6.1 In Chapter 2, 3 & 4 the provisional responses of member churches of Churches Together in England to three basic questions were summarised: *What do you understand by 'church', 'unity' and 'visible unity'?* In Chapter 5 the experience of churches working together locally, at intermediate level, nationally and internationally was described; and an attempt was made to distil from this various patterns of lived unity that are occurring in fact.

6.2 It would be presumptuous of the churches in England not to take into account some of the very wide range of descriptions and 'models' visible unity that come from a wider context, before attempting to sum up the position in England today. Two descriptions in particular are considered, those set out respectively by the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in 1974 and by the World Council of Churches over a number of years, and then a brief summary list is given of what have been called 'models' of unity. After that an attempt is made to answer the question: do the churches in England have one concept of the church and one vision of visible unity, or are their concepts and visions so diverse as to make further growth into unity unrealistic?

Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation

6.3 It has sometimes been falsely assumed that those groupings of evangelical Christians, who have tended to remain separate from the World Council of Churches, are thereby antagonistic to the whole concept of the visible unity of the church. Although this may be true of some evangelical groupings, it is certainly not true of that very large and representative congress of mainline and conservative evangelicals that gathered at Lausanne in 1974. Clause 7 of the Lausanne Covenant to which those present at that congress committed themselves, read as follows:

'We affirm that the church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognise, however, that organisational unity may take many forms and does not necessarily forward evangelism.

Yet we who share the same biblical faith should be united closely in fellowship, work and witness. We confess that our testimony has sometimes been marred by sinful individualism and needless duplication. We pledge ourselves to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission. We urge the development of regional and functional co-operation for the furtherance of the church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience.'

World Council of Churches

6.4 The statements of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the visible unity of the church have been based on the work of its Faith and Order Commission, of which the Roman Catholic Church in the last thirty years. In Assembly statements from New Delhi (1961) onwards, the WCC has gradually put content into the phrase 'visible unity'.

6.5 The Third Assembly in New Delhi produced a statement that defies abbreviation:

'We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his church is made visible as all in each place who are baptised into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such ways that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.' (*New Delhi Report, p.116*)

6.6 The Fourth Assembly in Uppsala (1968) called its member churches 'to work for the time when a genuinely ecumenical council may once more speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future'. (*Uppsala Report, p. 17*). Uppsala's contribution to the goal of visible unity lay both in its emphasis upon what came to be called 'conciliar fellowship', and in its emphasis upon the church as 'sign of the coming unity of humankind'.

6.7 The Nairobi Assembly (1975) developed this by suggesting that in conciliar fellowship each local church would aim at having sustained and sustaining relationships with other local churches in conciliar gatherings whenever they were needed for the fulfilment of their common mission. (*Nairobi Report*, p 60)

6.8 The Vancouver Assembly (1982) stressed the integral relationship between the unity and renewal of the life of the church on the one hand, and the healing and reconciliation of the world's divisions on the other. The church's unity and renewal should be a sign - a prophetic sign and instrument by which the transformation of the world can take place.

6.9 The only statement formally adopted by the Canberra Assembly (1991) was a new statement on unity, *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: gift and calling*. The statement was prepared by the Faith and Order Commission but received some significant re-formulations during the course of the Assembly. The elements of visible expression of the unity of the church are described as:

the common confession of the apostolic faith;

a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship;

a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled;

a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole creation.

The goal of the search for full communion is realised when all the churches are able to recognise in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness. This full communion will be expressed on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. (*The Report of the Canberra Assembly*, p. 173)

It gradually became clear after the Assembly that there is an ambiguity in this statement. Is reference to 'all the churches' here a reference to local churches/congregations of a united church or to churches in the sense of all the denominations? The answer to this has a significant bearing on the interpretation of 'full communion' as used in this text. Two further emphases are worth drawing out. The notion of *koinonia* is fundamental to this statement. The *koinonia* of God's own life is the underlying reality of the church in which all the baptised share. A 'certain degree of *koinonia*' already exists between the churches. The churches are called to take steps towards manifesting 'full communion'. A second important emphasis which came from the struggles in the Assembly is the emphasis on diversity as integral to communion, together with an explicit reference to the 'limits to diversity'.

6.10 The Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (1993) expressed in its own conference theme a statement about unity: *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*. The working document emphasised the theme of *koinonia* developing the short paragraphs in the *Canberra Statement*. The visible characteristics of *koinonia* laid before the conference were those

- i. of a communion in faith, a faith grounded in scripture and focused in the Nicene Creed;
- ii. a communion in life focused in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, nurtured by an ordained ministry within the ministry of the whole people of God; and
- iii. a communion in witness entailing the renewal of the church as prophetic sign of the kingdom.

The conference added a fourth characteristic of *koinonia* by asking for work on the structures of mutual accountability, authority and decision-making that would hold together the *koinonia*. There was reference here to the synodical and primatial structures to serve unity. And the conference emphasised the characteristics of ethical living, what has sometimes been called 'moral community', as an element of the portrait. This latter was there only indirectly in the second part of the *Canberra Statement* when churches were invited to re-commit themselves to work for 'justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking more closely the search for sacramental communion of the church with the struggles for justice and peace'.

‘Models’ Of Unity –

- Uniformity

6.11 At the time of the Reformation in England the government tried to impose unity in the church by Acts of Uniformity. By requiring everyone to worship in their parish church, by requiring the services in all churches to have an identical liturgical form, by allowing only those licensed by the bishop to lead worship and to preach, and by requiring ministers to wear identical garments, an attempt was made to impose uniformity. Successive Acts of Toleration gradually eroded this way of imposing unity, until by the twentieth century it was rejected as a false way of unity. Nevertheless, as has been noted earlier in this book, the fear of uniformity still makes many in the Free Churches suspicious even of the concept of visible unity.

- Federal unity

6.12 During the twentieth ‘ecumenical’ century many different phrases were used in an attempt to describe or even define the unity that churches seek. Some phrases have been used so often that they have come to be regarded by some as ‘models’ of unity. Perhaps the earliest was federal unity. The concept of federal unity was favoured by churches, particularly those of an independent polity, within the Free Churches. Thus there is the Free Church Federal Council, founded in 1940 after various forerunners. The concept implies covenant relationships between denominations within the same country or locality. These denominations will agree to co-operate with one another, but will remain distinct and autonomous. This concept makes sense within an understanding of church as an association of independent covenanted communities of believers. It makes less sense within an understanding of church-in-relation-to neighbourhood, since it would be likely to mean several distinct churches within the same neighbourhood. (In 2001 the Free Church Federal Council moved into a close collaborative partnership with Churches Together in England, as the “Free Churches Group”.)

- Organic unity or union

6.13 The Anglican bishops who met at Lambeth in 1920 rejected both uniformity and ‘some vague federation’. They preferred a term which had been used by Anglicans as early as 1888, ‘organic unity’ – a term based upon St. Paul’s image of the church as a *body*. This unity would retain many of the gifts and traditions at present distinctive of different denominations, but the separate denominations would die to be reborn within the unity of a living and integrated fellowship. This concept received a certain pre-eminence in the Faith & Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. It has often been resisted by some in the Free Churches as implying too much of an emphasis on organisational unity, although its protagonists would make a distinction between ‘organisational’ and ‘organic’.

- United, not absorbed

6.14 Another early concept was ‘united, not absorbed’. The phrase was coined in the 1920s by Dom Lambert Beauduin in the context of the Malines Conversations between representatives of the Belgian Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. The idea was that the Church of England would be re-united within the Roman Catholic Church, but able to retain its distinctive ways of worship, canon law etc. The idea was based upon the precedent of the Uniate Churches of the East, which retained their distinctive liturgy and canon laws, but who had entered into communion with the Roman Catholic Church rather than with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. The idea was to allow an element of diversity in unity; but as uniate status provoked much antagonism among the Orthodox Churches, so the concept of ‘united, not absorbed’ provoked hostility in the Roman Catholic Church in England. What kind of unity would there be between a continuing Church of England and a continuing Roman Catholic Church in England?

- Communion of communions

6.15 In 1970 Cardinal Willebrands developed the concept of *united not absorbed* by envisaging all communions (denominations) being in communion with the Bishop of Rome, sharing the same dogma, sacraments and ministry, but with a diversity of theological interpretation, canon law, liturgy and spirituality.

- Conciliar fellowship

6.16 The concept of conciliar fellowship, defined at the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975 (see para. 6.7 above), intended to describe how local churches in each place could maintain unity with local churches in every other place, as stated at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961. Unfortunately the word *conciliar* proved ambiguous, at least in the English language. In English the words *council* and *conciliar* are used both for meetings at which binding decisions are made, and for meetings which are purely consultative. The phrase *conciliar fellowship* therefore could be interpreted by Roman Catholics, for example, to describe the Vatican Council, at which the bishops made decisions which were binding on dioceses throughout the world. It could also be interpreted by independent churches, for example, to describe one of their federal assemblies through which their local churches consulted one another, but which made no definitive decisions binding on local churches.

- Unity in reconciled diversity

6.17 Partly as a reaction to the concept of organic unity, the Lutheran World Federation at its sixth assembly in 1977 developed the concept of unity in reconciled diversity. Fearing that some of the distinctive gifts or doctrines developed in separate denominations or confessions might be lost in schemes of organic union, it looked for the preservation of these distinctive gifts within continuing denominations. These continuing denominations would, however, no be longer separate, but reconciled to one another and working together in councils. In developing this concept, Lutherans no doubt had in mind particularly Luther's teaching on justification, and they could not foresee a time when this distinctive witness would no longer be required of them.

- Unity in solidarity

6.18 The concept of solidarity has origins both in Roman Catholic social theology and in left-wing politics, and these have recently come together in liberation theology. It has therefore entered the ecumenical scene in terms of solidarity with the poor and marginalised around the world. It reminds the churches that unity is to be sought not only in matters of faith, but also in the face of the social and moral challenges of the day. Its influence was felt most obviously in the support given by churches around the world to the churches in South Africa in their struggle against apartheid. Its universal character is in keeping with the word 'ecumenical', which means 'the whole inhabited world', and it is a reminder that Christian unity is not an internal matter for the churches, but for the sake of the whole human race.

6.19 Each of these models has its valuable insights, but each also has its limitations. That is why many people today have ceased to think of them as models. Models tend to harden into slogans or battle cries and to be set over against one another as rivals, whereas many would now claim that these are not mutually exclusive models, but are in fact different and complementary aspects of the one vision of unity, and even perhaps may be appropriate to different stages on the way.

Koinonia

6.20 The word now most widely used as a description of the unity of the church is the Greek word, '*koinonia*'. The word is now usually used in its Greek form because none of the English words used to translate it is able to carry the breadth of its meaning. One of its meanings is 'fellowship' and this word has been very widely used in England in ecumenical circles for many years. It is a word beloved of many in the Free Churches and was the central theme of the Anglican Bishops' *Appeal to all Christian people* for unity in 1920. The word 'fellowship' is often understood to describe the relationship between human beings, whereas the word '*koinonia*' focuses primarily on the gift of participation in the life of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and only derivatively on the relationship between Christians in the church (see para. 3.13 above).

6.21 *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission claims that *koinonia* is fundamental to understanding the mystery of the church (Introduction, para. 4). It is not so much a definition of the visible unity of the church, as a description of an experienced reality. It is certainly not a model. Perhaps for this reason several of the responses from member churches of Churches Together in England referred positively to it.

Is there a common vision of the visible unity of the Church?

6.22 It has been a matter of faith in the ecumenical movement that Christian unity is the will of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. Abbé Paul Couturier taught Christians in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity to pray for the unity Christ wills to

come in the way he chooses. That fundamental faith is not at issue. The questions that need to be asked following a century of ecumenism are:

- i. Are the theological dialogues between different churches now pointing towards a common understanding of the visible unity of the church?
- ii. Has the experience of living and working more closely together in ecumenical partnerships and churches together at local, intermediate and national level pointed us towards a common vision?

6.23 It would be unrealistic to expect divided churches to have identical understandings of the church and its unity. If they had there would be only practical obstacles to their union. The fourth report of the Methodist-Roman Catholic conversations (Nairobi, 1985) made the further point that, while division persists in the Christian community, no understanding of the unity of the church will be entirely satisfactory. The question at the end of para. 6.22 should perhaps be rephrased:

Is there sufficient convergence on the understanding of the church and its visible unity to justify further steps towards unity? A consideration of the very wide range of member churches of Churches Together in England suggests a further question: where agreement does not exist between all these churches is there sufficient convergence between some to justify them in taking certain steps towards unity in which other churches are unwilling or not yet willing to share?

Different approaches to the visible unity of the church

6.24 Each church or denomination differs in its approach because of its history, context and teaching. Some are so distinctive that they need to be considered on their own. The Religious Society of Friends and The Salvation Army come in this category. However it is possible to some extent to group together other churches according to their understanding of the visible unity of the church. Thus there are several churches in membership of Churches Together in England which have an independent polity, that is which lay considerable stress on the autonomy of the local congregation. These include the Congregational Federation, the Independent Methodist churches, several smaller churches belonging to the Free Churches Group and several Black Majority churches. Churches of the Baptist Union also stand closer to this independency than to other polities, but they have always balanced the liberty of the local congregation with a strong sense of inter-dependency in association together. The Methodist and Moravian Churches have certain characteristics in common with one another, and also with two churches in the Reformed tradition, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland. (The latter belongs to Churches Together in England insofar as it has a presbytery and several congregations inside England.) The Church of England has formally acknowledged commonality with other churches in the Meissen Common Statement 1991 (with the Evangelical Church in Germany), in the Fetter Lane Common Statement 1996 (with the Moravian Church), in the Reuilly Common Statement 1999 (with the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches), and with many of the Lutheran Churches from the Nordic and Baltic countries, in the Porvoo Agreement (1995). Finally Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches have many characteristics in common.

6.25 To group churches in this way may seem arbitrary. This grouping is not intended to suggest that a church placed in one grouping is nearer in every respect to another church in the same grouping than it is to a church in another grouping. Both the Church of England, for example, and the Church of Scotland are national churches, and they have many characteristics in common for that reason. The Church of England and the Methodist Church have a common history and retain a particular closeness. The Moravian Church and the Church of England have bishops and other characteristics shared with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. Nor are the groupings necessarily intended to suggest that the churches in the same grouping are likely to be the first to unite with one another. It is sometimes assumed by Christians in the West that the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches feel much closer to one another than the Orthodox and the Protestant Churches. This is not how many Orthodox see their history. They tend to attribute more responsibility for Christians divisions to the Roman Catholic Church. Their quarrel has been with Western Christendom as a whole, both Catholic and Protestant, for departing from what they believe to be the original orthodox faith. The churches of the Congregational Federation and of the United Reformed Church have much in common, but their separation is so recent that any speedy reconciliation would be difficult.

Organic union or unity in reconciled diversity?

6.26 It has become popular in some circles to polarise the goal of the visible unity of the church into two apparently incompatible visions; *organic union* or *unity in reconciled diversity*:

- i. The first looks forward to the end of existing denominations and their separate structures in favour of a union of them within one church (compare paras. 5.16-5.20). An example of such a union occurred when the Churches of Christ and the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches of England were subsumed into the United Reformed Church.
- ii. The second looks forward to the continuation of existing denominations and churches with their distinctive characteristics, but with a mutual acceptance of one another's members, ministers and sacraments, and a much closer working together than is common at present (compare paras. 5.21 & 5.22 above).

6.27 Although these emphases certainly exist, and although in many churches one view has greater support than the other, the evidence gathered from the responses of member churches and from the experience of those working for unity suggest that the two visions are not so sharply polarised. It might be assumed that the Anglican, Methodist, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and the United Reformed Churches would associate themselves with the former view, and the independent churches, the Moravian Church, The Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends with the latter view. However the emphasis, for example, of the Roman Catholic response on legitimate diversity, together with its current acceptance of Uniate churches and the proposal by no lesser person than Cardinal Willebrands that there might be a *Communion of Communions* show at least flexibility in that church's adherence to the former view. The response of the Baptist Union also reveals that Baptists have no single view on the nature of the unity of the church. To this needs to be added the observation that Christian unity is as much a process as an event, and that even those committed to *organic union* no longer see it as something which will happen overnight. There are bound to be stages on the way to visible unity, and no church will be coerced into any particular pattern of unity. Therefore, even if something like *organic union* prove in the end to be the goal for many churches, even those churches may find that something like *unity in reconciled diversity* will be a stage on the way to that goal.

Towards a common vision

6.28 What common vision of the visible unity of the church can be set before the churches now in the light of the **Called To Be One** process and the other evidence we have considered? It can be summarised in the following points; the first five of which are likely to meet with the agreement of all member churches. The last five concern the visible bonds which bind Christians together in the church. Most of these will be accepted by most member churches, but not in their entirety by all.

- i. The church has been entrusted with Christ's message and ministry of reconciliation. To be credible, the church itself should be seen to be reconciled; the unity of the church is to be visible to the world. The ministry of reconciliation includes the proclamation of the gospel by common witness and service in a world beset by injustice, oppression and pollution.
- ii. The reality of the church is to be found both in the local congregation of the faithful, and also in the universal body of all Christians past, present and to come.
- iii. Christian unity comes from the one God, revealed in Jesus Christ, and is made present by the gift of the Spirit. It is therefore fundamentally a spiritual unity. It is not based primarily on human organisation or on ecclesiastical institutions.
- iv. The word '*koinonia*' (participation, fellowship, sharing, solidarity, communion - see para. 3.13 above) provides an excellent description of this unity, which is experienced by Christians, of the same and of different traditions, as they live and work together.
- v. This unity is not uniformity, but includes legitimate diversity, so that all God's gifts may be exercised in harmony. (Much more exploration of the meaning of the word 'legitimate' in this context is needed.)
- vi. This unity is found in the common confession of the apostolic faith, revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and summarised in the creeds of the early church. (It is recognised that no human words can adequately and unambiguously express the truth as it exists in God and in the Word of God. The Religious Society of Friends is unwilling to subscribe to any credal statement that may be used to impose uniformity of belief.)

vii. God unites all Christians in baptism by grace through faith, and thus brings them into membership of the one church of Jesus Christ. (The Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends do not have a rite of baptism, but they do have procedures for receiving people into membership of their communities. While Baptists do not generally regard the baptism of infants performed by other churches as a proper and complete baptism, most Baptist churches in England do not *require* someone, already baptised as an infant, to be baptised as a believer before being admitted into membership. See Appendix B.)

viii. In the eucharist God gives communion with Christ himself, and thus renews the communicant's union with him and with his body, the church. (The Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends do not have a eucharistic rite. The Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church do not normally admit Christians of other communions than their own to communion. See Appendix C.)

ix. God gave gifts of ministry to each member of the church. Among these gifts are the ministry of the word and the sacraments. The church sets aside and ordains ministers for this particular ministry. This ministry is exercised in the church in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be personal, as the minister's role in the congregation is often exercised by one minister acting alone. It should be collegial, since ordained ministers should consult one another and share their common task. It should be communal since the ordained minister's task cannot be exercised apart from the participation of the community of the faithful. (*Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry: The Ministry*; para. 26). (The Religious Society of Friends and some smaller Free Churches do not ordain ministers. The Salvation Army commission/ordain their officers. The personal, collegial and communal character of the ordained ministry is widely accepted in other churches as appropriate to the work of *local* congregations. It is accepted as appropriate on a *wider* basis by churches which have bishops, area superintendents and similar ministers. It is accepted as appropriate on the *universal* level by the Roman Catholic Church and The Salvation Army. See Appendix D.)

x. The church is bound together under the authority of Christ, its head, and reaches decisions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in particular ways. These ways vary considerably from church to church, but they are not purely functional. They express the mutual accountability of the members of the body and are designed to maintain and encourage the growth of the fellowship (*koinonia*). (The issue of authority and decision-making requires much more ecumenical discussion than it has so far received. Profound differences between churches remain on this issue, but there are also signs of convergence. The Roman Catholic Church has been emphasising subsidiarity. Some Free Churches have been developing wider forms of personal oversight. See Appendix E.)

7. THE WAY FORWARD TOGETHER

7.1 In the light of the evidence gathered from the responses of the churches and other insights gleaned from the English and world scene, what are the challenges facing the theology, actions and structures of the churches as they approach the second millennium? In what specific ways can and should the churches in England now respond to the call to be one? The earlier part of this book has shown a considerable convergence between at least the majority of member churches on the understanding of the church and its unity. There is also a need to discuss further the substantial differences that remain on the visible expression of that unity. This presents the churches with three challenges: to renewal, to unity and to mission together.

Renewal

i. The first is to renew together their understanding and living out of what it means to be the local, national and universal church;

Unity

ii. The second is to examine in a more concerted and consistent way the bonds that hold churches, individually and severally, together, and to strengthen those bonds where in conscience the churches feel able to do so, and where they do not inhibit legitimate diversity;

Mission

iii. The third is to care for the needs of the world, to renew the churches' understanding of evangelisation, and to learn to engage in it together.

7.2 These three challenges call for both action and reflection at every level of the churches' life. There are those who are primarily concerned with right teaching. The Faith & Order Movement has been the work of theologians. It has encouraged the churches to re-examine their own traditions and teaching in the light of Scripture and the faith of the church through the ages, and in this process the churches have found deeper levels of consensus and convergence, particularly in the work on *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*. That document asked the churches to *receive* its convergence and consensus not only in their teaching, but also in their living and action. This *reception* challenged the churches to what might be called *re-traditioning* or continuous reform in the light of the apostolic tradition. Where a church had reflected on an aspect of its life and teaching and saw that it had deviated from what it now recognised as the faith of the church through the ages, then it was not sufficient to recognise the fact in its teaching only. It had also to implement it in its life and action. Reflection should issue in action.

7.3 There are many others, particularly those faced with daily decisions in local churches, whose primary concern is with right action. English people tend to be pragmatic, and some local ecumenical work has developed on a pragmatic rather than a theological basis. Action needs reflection to correct and re-direct it. But there is more to the relationship of action and reflection than this. Christians believe in a living Christ and in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and therefore need also to reflect upon their living experience and the effect of their actions. Theologians need to reflect upon the experience particularly of local and intermediate ecumenical work, so as to discern in the light of tradition where God is directing the church today. Thus action and reflection should interact continually as the churches take further steps on their ecumenical pilgrimage.

The Challenge to Renewal

7.4 If the churches are to understand one another they have to look back at their respective histories and explain them to one another. Each church has different interpretations of the past. Catholics and Orthodox see the Crusades differently, and Catholics and Protestants see the Reformation differently. The Church of England and the Free Churches see the Pilgrim Fathers differently. Each church keeps alive the memories of its saints and martyrs in different ways and so the past becomes part of the present as well. The repeating and rehearsing of particular and one-sided interpretations of history deepen divisions and hinder reconciliation. Other divisions and differences are more recent. The creation of the United Reformed Church is seen differently by its members and by the members of the Congregational Federation. Many members of the House of New Churches and of the Black Majority Churches came out of the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Churches because they were not made to feel at home, or felt that they could not fulfil their ministry there. The

churches need to talk to one another about these things, enter into one another's feelings, confess to one another what was wrong in their past and is hurtful in the present; and, perhaps, as the Millennium approaches make public confession and reparation not only to one another, but to others they have wronged (the Jews and the Muslims?), and corporately commit themselves to better relationships in the future.

7.5 This *re-traditioning* is important not only as an act of repentance and reparation, but also to show that tradition is not static, but dynamic. Tradition is *handing on* and handing on involves development. Some observers believe that the ecumenical movement has ceased to move. Some Christians say of those in other churches: 'they will never change'. It is important to see that all have changed and are continuously changing. The Church of England no longer requires uniformity. The Roman Catholic Church celebrates mass in the vernacular. Lutherans and Roman Catholics have reached agreement on justification by faith.... Even if new differences are appearing as, for example, on the ordination of women, the churches need to help one another to see that they have travelled considerable distances on their pilgrimage together. Without this witness to movement in the past, their situation will appear static rather than dynamic, and they will be tempted to lose heart, for ecumenism is nothing if it is not a movement.

7.6 Chapter Two noted the remarkable agreement, that exists in virtually all churches, that the two basic meanings of the word 'church' are the local and the universal. If the churches are to draw together in order to experience and express 'a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church' they need

- i.** to examine their respective traditions to rediscover what it means to be the local and universal church, to examine how these traditions are actually embodied their own churches today and to renew them if necessary;
- ii.** to examine one another's traditions, to discuss them together, and to be prepared to be enriched by one another's understandings and ways of being church;
- iii.** to be honest with one another and to explain what it is in other traditions that they find it difficult to accept, and to be prepared to change things that offend others and can be changed.

There have been remarkable signs that this questioning, *re-traditioning* and renewal of our churches has already begun. It was noted that those churches, such as the Roman Catholic, which are widely understood to lay much stress on the universal and world-wide church nevertheless have a very extensive, fundamental theology of the reality of the local church. 'The local church (that is the diocese) has all that is ordinarily required to be the church'. The Roman Catholic Church is also putting increasing stress on the principle of subsidiarity. It is therefore invited to develop these principles, where appropriate to decentralise its structures of authority and control, upholding the traditional responsibility of local dioceses for their own life, and developing the legitimate responsibility of national bishops' conferences.

7.7 By contrast those churches which are generally described as *independent* are by no means isolationist. Despite their refusal to use the word 'church' of any assembly or structure of Christians wider than the local, they have in their tradition a very strong conviction of the interdependence of local churches. The Russian Orthodox, Bishop Basil of Sergievo, who visited the churches in Albania together with an interdenominational party from the British Isles, observed that the Baptist member of the party had a virtually identical experience of fellowship (*koinonia*) with Albanian Baptists to his own experience in visiting his fellow Orthodox. The Baptist Union has begun to consider whether the wider assemblies in which it brings together local church representatives have a certain churchly reality, at least in terms of the covenant relationship being wider than the local church. Some of the Black Majority churches have recognised the crucial importance of mutual accountability within and between local churches if they are not to become divided at the whims of individual leaders, and if they are to play their full and active part ecumenically with other churches. These churches are invited to explore their interdependence, and to consider whether wider councils of the church which express the truly apostolic and catholic character of the Christian community should not be seen as part of God's purpose. In *Ut Unum Sint* Pope John Paul II has invited the leaders and theologians of other churches to discuss with him his role in serving the unity of the world-wide church. It is very important that other churches accept this invitation, especially since the responses of the Baptist Union, Congregational Federation, Methodist and United Reformed Churches all mentioned the difficulty they had in accepting the papacy and centralised control of the church.

7.8 There have been many developments and much reflection in recent years on the ministry of the whole people of God and the role of the ordained ministry within that. The word 'hierarchy' has disappeared from Anglican usage. In the

Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II's stress on authority as service, and the development of the understanding of church as *communion* are enabling a broader understanding of hierarchy with emphasis placed on its role of ordering and uniting the whole church in the apostolic faith. The Church of England and, to a certain extent, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches have begun to accept and use the competence of lay men and women. The Roman Catholic Church is invited to give lay people a deliberative, and not merely a consultative, role in appropriate spheres of church life.

It is important that those churches, Baptist and Congregationalist in particular, who are unhappy about episcopacy and hierarchy, should discuss with the Church of England its understanding of itself as 'synodically governed and episcopally led'. The whole issue of ministry and 'leadership' in the church is important. Are the three considerations put forward in the Ministry section of *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, page 26, helpful here - that all ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way?

7.9 In the *Porvoo Common Statement (Together in Mission and Ministry, GS 2083, CHP 1993)* the Anglican Churches of the British Isles and Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches have found BEM's description of this threefold exercise of ministry helpful. They have reached agreement on the ministry of the church, emphasising its relational role within the apostolic continuity of the faith and life of the whole church.

'Thus the primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole. The succession is an expression of the permanence and, therefore, of the continuity of Christ's own mission in which the Church participates. Within the apostolicity of the whole Church is an apostolic succession of the ministry which serves and is a focus of the continuity of the Church in its life in Christ and its faithfulness to the words and acts of Jesus transmitted by the apostles.... In the consecration of a bishop the sign [of ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands] bears witness to the Church's trust in God's faithfulness to his people.... to the end of time; secondly, it expresses the Church's intention to be faithful to God's initiative and gift, by living in the continuity of the apostolic faith and tradition.... The use of the sign of the historic episcopal succession does not by itself guarantee the fidelity of a church to every aspect of the apostolic faith, life and mission.' (*Porvoo Common Statement* paras. 39-51)

Some Free Churches, which had mistrusted what they saw as too narrow a pre-occupation with a linear concept of episcopal ministry in some parts of the Church of England, are beginning to explore whether this renewed understanding of apostolicity and ministry may be helpful in relations with other churches. The Church of England and the Free Churches are invited to pursue this further.

7.10 The Roman Catholic response has emphasised the essentially spiritual character of the church, but has admitted that its church's concern for unity is commonly thought of in institutional, organisational and canonical terms. All churches are invited to give spiritual, pastoral and experiential criteria their due importance, and not to allow canonical, organisational and legal criteria to usurp their place. Although the questioning of the establishment of the Church of England is less vociferous than it has sometimes been in the past, it is clear that there are at least elements in the complex network of laws, customs, privileges and responsibilities which make up what is called 'the establishment' of the Church of England that are of serious ecumenical concern. Already the Church of England has begun to share some of these privileges with other churches. The discussion of these issues by different churches together may not be as central and urgent as the issues already mentioned, but they will need discussion on the route to closer unity, and could well be discussed sooner rather than later in the context of the wider question: what is the appropriate role of the churches as together they relate to the English nation and the Government of the United Kingdom? This challenge raises issues of mission as well as issues of the nature of the church.

THE CHALLENGE TO UNITY

7.11 The member churches of Churches Together in England have already committed themselves 'to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the church, which is his body'. Some member churches have affirmed that there is no going back on this commitment. How can the churches go forward? Early in this book the fundamental basis of unity between the churches has been recorded (see paras. 3.12 and 3.13). However the word 'visible' creates problems for some churches, and there are obstacles on the way to agreement on what some churches regard as important visible bonds of unity.

The exchange of gifts

7.12 Archbishop Robert Runcie and Pope John Paul II declared together in 1989 that the way forward to unity was not only about the removal of obstacles, but also about the exchange of gifts. This requires Christians of different churches to get to know one another, and to be willing to enter sympathetically, but not uncritically, into one another's history, traditions and ongoing life and to forge deeper and stronger bonds of love. This happens most deeply in four instances: in interchurch families, in which the marriage partners are members of two different churches and participate in the life and worship of both churches, and therefore experience a sense of belonging to both; in ecumenical house bible study and prayer groups; in ecumenical communities, such as joint church schools, where the members of more than one church live much of their life together; and in local ecumenical partnerships, in which local churches of different traditions agree to share resources and live, work and witness very closely together. Others need to support these ecumenical communities and to learn from them. But ecumenical dialogue, life and work, including the exchange of gifts and the entering into one another's histories, need not be confined to four examples. It can happen in any local group of churches together, or wherever Christians of different churches meet, and particularly as they are willing to learn to worship in one another's traditions.

7.13 The need to give and receive spiritual gifts is of the most profound significance. One of the dangers of church 'mergers' is that the gifts and traditions of smaller churches are liable to be lost. Churches that believe in unity in diversity must prize one another's gifts. This requires more than making casual and unannounced visits to one another's churches, or the holding of inoffensive united services. It requires them to take the trouble to explain what their tradition values and why, and to help others to enter into their spirituality and way of worship, and to take the trouble to enter into the tradition of others. Years ago Olive Wyon told the story of an Anglo-Catholic who confessed that he used to be very 'spiky; but when I heard a Free Churchman pray, all my spikes fell off'. Much more recently a Pentecostal minister testified that, during a united service in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, she suddenly realised that the Anglican bowing to the altar and the Roman Catholic genuflecting to the reserved sacrament were reminding themselves and the whole congregation of the presence of God in the church, just as she did when she began by greeting her brothers and sisters with the words 'Give honour to the Holy Spirit'. Others can be helped by learning what the class meeting and connexionalism mean to Methodists, what the church meeting means to Baptists, Congregationalists and the United Reformed, what ikons and the liturgy mean to the Orthodox, what the veneration of Mary and the saints means to Catholics ... by being helped to experience a Quaker meeting, a Moravian love-feast, the foot-washing and other aspects of the great variety and energy of the many different Black-majority churches ... Not everything will be attractive to everyone and there may be things that are unacceptable to some, but, if we are to deepen our communion, we have to get to know one another more deeply. This is particularly important for ministers and church leaders. Because they are so deeply involved in responsibility for the life and worship of their own churches, they are less likely to have the opportunity of entering into the traditions of others.

Joint education

7.14 Almost every ecumenical gathering in this country since the Nottingham Faith & Order Conference in 1964 has pointed to the need for churches to join together in their educational work. The Nottingham Conference appealed in particular for ecumenical education for ministry, and the two most recent meetings of the Forum of Churches Together in England have emphasised the need both for joint theological education for ordinands and for the continuing education of those already ordained to be ecumenical. One of the reasons for this continuing emphasis is the influence that ordained ministers have on the furthering or hindering of ecumenical work. For this reason it is important that the opportunity to do this is given to ministers and leaders in their period of training, and that special arrangements for their continuing ecumenical education is provided. While recognising that those preparing for ordination need a period of formation in their own particular tradition, this should not be to the exclusion of other traditions. Those working in local ecumenism are constantly calling for ministers to have more ecumenical training in this way.

7.15 Much is already happening in some theological colleges and courses and in seminaries, but much more is needed in others. One of the obstacles to progress is the lack of a common ecumenical strategy (and, in some cases, of a coherent denominational policy). Responsibility for pre-ordination training rests awkwardly between independent colleges, national denominational advisory and accrediting councils, and local church authorities. It points to the difficulty of common policy making (see para. 7.21 - 7.23 below).

7.16 It is not only the ecumenical education of ordained ministers that could be developed further. The whole educational work of the churches could be further developed ecumenically - in both church and state schools, in Christian adult learning, in baptism preparation, in the nurture of children and young people, in marriage preparation and in parenting

education and support ... Much is already being done in the training of trainers ecumenically, and in the provision of ecumenical study courses. In a few places, usually in local ecumenical partnerships, there have been (often very successful) experiments in joint confirmation preparation, joint marriage preparation, joint parenting courses. Greater sharing of resources in these educational fields would be likely both to improve the quality of the education and training, and also help enormously in the mutual understanding of members of different churches.

Continuing theological dialogue and practical co-operation between all member churches

7.17 Theological dialogue on the six issues enumerated in chapter 6 (confessing the one faith, authority and common decision-making, a mutually accepted ministry, one baptism, a shared eucharist, and a common mission - for more details on these issues see Appendices A-E) and on the visible unity of the church in a concerted, consistent and continuing way is essential. The Faith & Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has worked persistently on some of these issues for fifty years, and there is a need in England to find ways of sharing the fruits of that and of bilateral dialogues more widely with the churches. Because there is more local ecumenical experience in England than almost anywhere else in the world, there is a unique opportunity of relating the necessarily generalised character of a world-wide or a national theological dialogue to the practical experience of local churches working together and vice-versa. What can a local ecumenical partnership or local churches together learn from theological dialogues, and what can theological dialogues learn from local ecumenical experience?

7.18 Although member churches are committed to this dialogue if they are to deepen 'their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church', it is vital to realise that none of the member churches is committed by its membership to a particular understanding of the visible unity of the church. This book has shown that different denominations have different understandings of the visible unity of the church, and that many denominations contain members who themselves have differing visions of a united church. All accept that it is God's will that there be one universal church of Christ, and for that reason they are committed to this dialogue and to one another. For that reason also member churches look forward to the time when other churches will come to share the same commitment by becoming members of Churches Together in England.

7.19 This commitment to one another is not only a commitment to theological dialogue, but also to practical co-operation, to sharing resources and to common action when differences of conviction do not compel the churches to act separately. At national level this might mean one church acting for others in a particular field where it has expertise and resources which it can share (as the Church of England's national officer for inter-faith relations by agreement with other churches devotes half his time to working ecumenically). At intermediate level it might mean church leaders consulting together on the deployment of the ministers in their area (see para. 5.30). At local level it might mean the sharing of a building or the dividing up of pastoral responsibility for a neighbourhood between different churches. Many hope that the theological dialogue will gradually lead to increasing convergence, and the practical co-operation will lead to increasing sharing of resources and common action - but all this must be freely agreed and entered into without coercion.

Closer visible unity between some churches than others

7.20 For this reason it is likely that some churches, which are closer together in their understanding and which share more visible bonds of unity, will seek to enter into closer union with one or two other churches ahead of the rest (see paras. 6.24 & 6.25). The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church are already in close liaison with one another. The Church of England has been in formal conversation with the Moravian Church, and has begun informal conversations, for example, with the Methodist Church. Such progress towards closer forms of visible unity is to be encouraged, provided that these groupings of churches see their union as a spur and a stage on the way to a wider unity, and provided that other churches are kept fully informed and are not excluded from such progress if they agree and desire it.

Rules of Good Practice and Common Policy-Making

7.21 Experience has shown how difficult it is for churches, when considering their ordinary day to day business and denominational plans, to remember always to take the ecumenical implications of what they are doing into account. The 1995 Forum of Churches Together in England commended this maxim to church leaders at intermediate and local level: 'before we appoint [a new minister] we talk [with the leaders of other churches], before we build, we talk, before we close buildings, we talk'.

7.22 In 1991 Churches Together in England produced six *Suggested Rules of Good Practice* for the churches at national level in their commitment to working together. Copies were also sent to those working at intermediate level, with the suggestion that they might re-write them to apply to the churches at local level. It is easy to blame the people who make policy and decisions in the churches for failure in implementing these. But it is becoming clear that there are complicated structural and theological reasons why it is difficult to take full account of ecumenical considerations when churches make denominational decisions. Unless this issue is tackled, however, ecumenism will remain peripheral to the main business and every day life of our churches, except in some local ecumenical partnerships where churches have brought together their responsible committees and councils to make decisions together.

7.23 In some local areas joint meetings of decision-making bodies like this may be possible, but it is not so easy at intermediate and national level. What can, however, be done is to enable those who set the agenda of churches to consult one another at an early stage of planning, so that in their agenda-setting and policy-proposing the ecumenical implications of actions can be fully considered. In some areas it may also be possible for those whose task it is to propose policy in their respective churches to meet together before decisions are taken by the churches separately.

THE CHALLENGE TO ENGAGE IN MISSION TOGETHER

7.24 The questions asked of the Churches in the Called To Be One process were not specifically about mission, service to the community, evangelism, evangelisation. However the responses from the churches to the question about the visible unity of the church emphasised that its unity should be visible to the world for the sake of its mission. Indeed the ecumenical movement began at the beginning of the twentieth century out of the realisation by missionaries that the non-Christian world would not be converted to a gospel of the reconciliation of all things in Christ while the churches persisted in preaching that gospel in competition with one another.

7.25 It has been in the sub-continent of India, where Christian mission has been exceptionally difficult, that this motivation has led to the best-known unions of churches. It has been in the new towns and new housing areas in England, where the churches faced a clear mission challenge, that many of the best ecumenical partnerships have been developed (see previous chapter). It is, for example, in Milton Keynes that the churches have jointly appointed an ecumenical moderator, to which the area church leaders have delegated many of their pastoral and missionary responsibilities, so that one church leader may exercise pastoral leadership and relate to the secular powers on behalf of all the churches. Why cannot other large towns and small cities follow this example?

7.26 What many churches are discovering is that, just as quarrelling and mutual competition of the churches in the past hindered the Christian mission, so the combining and working together of the churches in mission provides what is perhaps the strongest incentive to closer unity. All the member bodies of Churches together in England have committed themselves 'to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world'. What has become crystal clear in England is that the churches today exist in a missionary situation. The churches are by no means agreed on the nature of their missionary calling, but there is a convergence that evangelisation includes the following aspects: proclaiming the good news, baptising and nurturing new Christians in the worshipping community of the church, serving those in need, and seeking to transform unjust structures of society and conserving the environment. These must be a priority for the churches, and therefore a priority for joint or co-ordinated work wherever that is possible in conscience. Are the ecumenical structures of the churches orientated towards society's needs, and towards evangelisation? The World Faith & Order Conference held in Lund in 1952 challenged the churches 'to act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately'. The British Faith & Order Conference held at Nottingham in 1964 reaffirmed that challenge to the British Churches, while adding that 'there is no virtue in doing things together which we ought not be doing anyway' (*Unity Begins at Home*, SCM, 1964, page 73). The churches cannot do everything at once. They have to establish priorities in mission and these priorities must be decided by the churches working together in any particular place. What follows are simply examples.

7.27 Nationally the churches together have a particular responsibility for seeking to transform unjust structures in society by themselves embodying just structures, and by testifying against all forms of injustice and discrimination. They have a responsibility together to provide the structures and support for those who serve those in need locally. Those churches who proclaim their unity in baptism and who recognise the validity of one another's baptisms have a responsibility to help local churches to go as far as in conscience they can to celebrate baptism together, and jointly to prepare candidates for it and to

nurture them in the faith. Those churches which proclaim the importance of Christian family life have a responsibility jointly to testify to this, and also to provide resources to enable churches to work together to prepare people for marriage and parenting, and to support families through the life cycle. They also have a responsibility to help theologians and leaders to come to a common mind on the meaning and practice of mission and evangelisation, to provide joint resources to enable local churches to engage in it together.

7.28 At the intermediate level church leaders have a particular responsibility to consult one another on the use of their respective resources of people and buildings, so as to encourage joint pastoral care and evangelisation wherever possible. This will include the provision of joint training and support for those who proclaim the gospel, those who prepare candidates for baptism and nurture them in the faith and who minister to people throughout the life cycle (preparing them for and supporting them in marriage and parenting, caring for them in sickness and bereavement and preparing them for death). There may be a case for establishing ecumenical centres in each intermediate area which could be a focus for the provision of resources for all the churches.

7.29 Locally there have been many examples of churches joining together in festivals of faith and in a great variety of joint evangelistic work. Large numbers of people bring their children to church for baptism or dedication, probably more come to church for weddings, and certainly more are brought to church for funerals. Many of these are on the fringe of the church. Many couples who bring their children for baptism or dedication, or who come for a wedding are members or nominal members of different denominations. All of these need individual pastoral care, but most need preparation and education which will often be done better by local churches sharing resources and working jointly. This is beginning to happen in some areas. The Christian mission would be greatly strengthened if it happened more widely. Very many places now have 'Good Neighbour' or 'Community Care' schemes (Croydon, Sheffield), by which local churches provide volunteers to meet the simple needs of people (often passed on by professional social workers) which would have been met in a former age by good neighbours. Where there are local churches of many different traditions it will be important that they face together their different understandings of mission, and the different structures they have inherited for engaging in mission (see Appendix A). This should provide an opportunity for the sharing of gifts and for learning from one another.

Conclusion

7.30 God's call to the churches for unity is therefore at the same time a call to renewal and a call to engage together in the evangelisation of the world. The second millennium has seen the division of the Christian community. As they approach the end of that millennium the churches are challenged to put themselves more faithfully in the hands of God, that the third millennium may become the millennium of reconciliation and unity.

APPENDIX A

CHURCH & MISSION

A.1 The twentieth century ecumenical movement sprang out of the missionary movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Missionaries, such as those who met in conference at Edinburgh in 1910, became convinced that one of the fundamental reasons that the Christian gospel was not making more headway in countries such as India was because of Christian divisions. How could people be convinced that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself if the competitive Christian churches would not even be reconciled among themselves? William Temple and other leaders of the ecumenical movement recalled particularly the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel in which Jesus prays that his disciples may be one as he is one with the Father, so that the world may believe. In his enthronement sermon as Archbishop of Canterbury on 23rd April 1942 he spoke of the ecumenical movement as 'the great new fact of our era'. 'As though in preparation for such a time as this, God has been building up a Christian fellowship which now extends into every nation, and binds citizens of them all together in true unity and mutual love ... almost incidentally the great world fellowship has arisen...'. On 23rd September in the same year the British Council of Churches was formed without Roman Catholic participation.

A.2 From its beginning the British Council of Churches placed great emphasis on the encouragement of co-operation in evangelism among its member churches; but despite hard and continuing efforts, this came to very little. Why has it proved so difficult for the churches to engage together in mission in England, especially when the ecumenical movement sprang out of the churches' engagement together in mission overseas?

A.3 There are four reasons. Different churches, or different strands within churches, have

- i. focussed on different central aims in mission, based on differing theologies;
- ii. used different words to describe mission; and
- iii. had different structures for mission;
- iv. as if these reasons were not enough, whatever they might or might not have admitted, in fact local congregations have often been in competition with one another.

Different central aims and theologies

A.4 Many evangelical churches have tended to focus on personal evangelism and have seen it as the task of individual Christians to testify to others that Jesus Christ is their personal Saviour and Lord. The church, the company of believers, is a help in the central aim of bringing individuals to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and to sharing that knowledge with others. The church on this view tends to be seen in functional terms as a human institution and instrument designed to serve God's mission.

A.5 In the Catholic and Orthodox traditions the church is seen as an essential part of the gospel itself. Belief in the church has its place in the Apostles' and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds. In Catholic teaching the church itself is the primary sacrament of salvation. Orthodox tend to see the church as the aim of God's mission, rather than mission as a function of the church. Mission is calling people to become part of the body of Christ, so that they may come to worship God truly (*Martyria/Mission*, WCC, 1980, p8).

A.6 Other strands within the Christian community, and the Religious Society of Friends in particular, see their primary mission as that of witness to the values of the Kingdom of God in the world. Their role is that of service in the community and the building of justice and peace in the world.

Different words to describe mission

A.7 The different strands within churches not only developed different theologies of mission; they inevitably tended to focus upon different words. The most obvious example today is that Anglicans and Free Church people are observing a Decade of Evangelism, while Roman Catholics are engaged in a Decade of Evangelisation. Are they engaged in contradictory things, complementary things, or in the same thing? The overwhelming evidence of the official statements of member churches is that their understandings of mission have been converging in the last thirty years, even if their emphases vary, and even if individuals and particular groups within the churches have tended to focus on one or other element. There is a remarkable convergence in three documents, the Roman Catholic *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), the evangelical *Lausanne Covenant* (1974) and *Mission and Evangelism* (WCC 1982).

A.8 All agree that the mission is God's. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 850, quotes *Ad Gentes*: 'The Church on earth is by nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit'. The Orthodox also see Christ's sending of the apostles to be rooted in the fact that Christ himself is sent by the Father in the Holy Spirit'. The Baptist *Theology of Mission*, p5 states that 'mission arises primarily out of the nature of God and only secondarily from the nature of the church'. The Methodist Church has adopted *Sharing in God's Mission* as a major slogan in recent years.

A.9 Before the Lambeth Conference of Bishops in 1988 called Anglicans around the world to a *Decade of Evangelism*, they summarised what they understood the mission of the church to be:

- i. to proclaim the good news of the kingdom;
- ii. to teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
- iii. to respond to human need by loving service;
- iv. to seek to transform unjust structures of society.

In 1990 the Anglican Consultative Council added

- v. to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.
In singling out proclamation and evangelism as a special charge for this decade, they made it clear that the other aspects of mission were just as important.

A.10 The Baptist Union's *10 Year Plan* defines mission as encompassing evangelistic, social and political dimensions. In *Reflections* (BCC, 1986) the Methodist Church defined mission as evangelism, care and justice, and the United Reformed Church defined it as sharing the good news, challenging evil and serving the community. All these churches, in supporting a Decade of *Evangelism*, are not downgrading other and complementary aspects of mission.

A.11 Pope John Paul II in declaring a Decade of Evangelisation was calling Roman Catholics to engage in the whole sweep of God's mission. Since the Second Vatican Council popular Roman Catholic thinking about mission has been transformed. Fifty years ago 'the missions' were a specialist occupation performed by priests, monks and nuns overseas. In Europe the task of the Church was usually described as 'pastoral care'. In 1975 in *Evangelisation in the Modern World* Pope Paul VI called for evangelisers everywhere to speak to the world of a God they themselves knew. He asked Catholics 'Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live?' Evangelisation is seen to be the whole task of the whole church in every land and includes the four elements listed in A.9 above. It is to this holistic task of mission that the present Pope has called Roman Catholics in this decade.

A.12 Despite these differing emphases this decade has been very different from the decade fifty years ago when the British Council of Churches was born. In very many parts of England Anglican, Free Church, Roman Catholic and some Pentecostal churches have jointed together in a great variety of missionary efforts. Often these have been particularly valued where different churches and different groupings of Christians have been encouraged to express their faith in whatever ways they have found most familiar. This was true, for example, of *Festival '92: A Christian Celebration for*

Leeds. Such events suggest that the varying understandings and activities of mission are complementary and not contradictory.

A.13 However although churches that belong to Churches Together in England are usually ready to participate in such widely supported events, some other churches are more hesitant. Some independent evangelical churches are prepared to join in such events only where all are committed to the inerrancy of Scripture, and to a particular doctrine of the atonement.

A.14 This attitude raises two questions. What is the limit to legitimate diversity in faith beyond which it would be wrong to co-operate in mission? Although the early church defined what it understood to be the limits of orthodoxy on the person of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity, the church generally has not so far set similar limits to its understanding of the atonement. The second question is: Do we always recognise our church's teaching when it is expounded by a member of another church? Both questions are vital, and can be answered satisfactorily only after considerable dialogue and co-operation.

Different structures for mission

A.15 Different churches have inherited different structures for mission. The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church are based on the parochial system, and, in theory at least, the parish church ministers to those within the parish, and the people there expect to be served by their parish church.

A.16 Being the established Church, the Church of England regards all the people within the parish boundaries as having a right to call on its services. This has the advantage that the church is turned outwards in concern for the whole community and not simply for those who are already regular worshippers. On the other hand the responses on this from some of the Free Churches show that the attitude of superiority that this can breed in Church of England clergy is often resented by other churches.

A.17 Baptist and Congregational churches by contrast have gathered congregations that have covenanted together. They do not serve a precise geographical area, and tend to attract new members through personal contacts made by existing members. Methodism has in recent years been partly assimilated to the gathered church ethos, but its origin was very different. Created as an agency of revival and scriptural holiness within the Church of England, it had a missionary structure with an itinerant ministry, lay preachers and class meeting gathered into a tightly organised connexion.

A.18 The parish system served the church and community well while the population was relatively stable and lived in small, tightly-knit communities. This remains the case in many country districts. For this reason, and because of its greater inherited resources, the Church of England has tended to survive in country areas where the Free Churches have become weak or closed down, and where there are no Roman Catholic buildings. In suburban areas and in the commuter belts of our cities where the sense of community is relatively weak, the parochially-based church may have no particular advantages by comparison with the gathered congregation. Indeed many Anglican churches in such situations have tended to become gathered congregations.

A.19 At periods of large-scale immigration, as with the Irish in the last century, and with Caribbean and African peoples since the Second World War, a third type of church missionary structure has occurred - congregations gathered from a very wide geographical area drawn together partly for cultural, ethnic or linguistic reasons. Many Christians arriving from Africa and the Caribbean were Anglican or Free Church in their countries of origin, but often found themselves unwelcome in Anglican and other mainline churches in England. They therefore tended to join Pentecostal, Holiness, Evangelical or Independent churches led by black pastors. These churches have had a very strong missionary outreach in inner city areas largely among particular ethnic groups, but not exclusively so. Without them many of the children of African and Caribbean origin would have been lost to the Christian faith.

A.20 The Roman Catholic Church in England has been strengthened and substantially extended by successive groups of immigrants. Among these the Irish immigrants who came in the last century are the most numerous; but during this century considerable numbers of Roman Catholics from Poland, Italy and other countries have also come. These immigrants have led to the establishment, for example, of largely Irish and Polish parishes with Irish and Polish priests.

A.21 A fourth type of missionary structure has been created in the last three decades by the charismatic house churches, many of which now prefer to be called 'New Churches'. These have had certain things in common with early Methodism and with some of the Black majority churches. They have tended to see the word 'church' more as a verb ('calling people out') than a noun ('assembly'), active rather than passive, more about relations between people than about meetings in buildings. Indeed the words 'apostle' and 'apostolic' are probably used as much as the word 'church', and members of these bodies point out that Jesus did not plant local churches but built up an apostolic team. In their early days many of these house churches experienced a new pentecost which they believed would be the key to the future of Christianity, as the old institutional churches withered away. Today, with their growth in size, they too are having to establish institutional structures, and some of them have looked to the experience of older churches. However they are seeking to establish strong but light structures of authority directed particularly to mission.

A.22 Each of these four different structures has both advantages and disadvantages for mission. The parochial church has shown itself able to maintain links with the secular community and to survive in circumstances where the gathered church has remained in-turned or has died. However it has tended to be clergy dominated, giving lay people a largely passive role in maintenance rather than mission.

A.23 The gathered church has often managed to retain a role in mission for its lay people, but has run the risk of becoming a club, appealing only to like-minded people, and not ministering to the whole community in which it is set.

A.24 The Black Majority churches have been remarkably successful in maintaining a strong missionary outreach among the various black communities. More than that, because of the tradition of strong community-linking of churches, for example, in the Caribbean, they have also remained very open to the social needs of the community as a whole, and not just to their own members. However they have found it difficult to avoid splits and divisions, and have been struggling to maintain mutual accountability.

A.25 Ethnic groups within the Roman Catholic Church have avoided this problem because of their strong international structures, but they have not always been more successful in building bridges between different ethnic groups.

A.26 The New Churches began largely among disaffected members of the traditional Free Churches, but soon began to attract members not previously attached to any church. They have sometimes suffered from authoritarian leadership and consequent splits and divisions.

A.27 Where churches of different traditions have come together in close local ecumenical partnerships in new towns and new housing areas, they have usually adopted parochial structures, working within defined geographical boundaries, and seeking to build good relationships with the whole community. Where there has been a strong Free Church component, there has usually been a strong lay role in mission. In some towns such as Telford and Milton Keynes they have also built established resource centres and a team of specialists able to resource the whole area ecumenically. Such ecumenical resource centres and people are badly needed elsewhere too.

A.28 Where an Anglican parish has shared a building with a Black Majority church there has sometimes been a conflict resulting from their different understandings and structures of mission. Where the Anglicans have been increasingly successful in ministering to the local community, they have wanted to use their building and resources more for the service of the immediate community. Where the Black Majority church has drawn more and more people from further afield they have needed more time and space to serve them. Where these different needs and aims have been mutually understood, such as in St. Bartholomew's church in Sheffield, both communities have gained new insights into mission, and begun to work more closely together to their mutual benefit. Where these different needs and aims have not been understood there has often been conflict and separation.

A.29 The churches have an opportunity today to continue to deepen their co-operation in mission, and so to give the world a vision of reconciliation in the place of past competition and conflict.

A.30 The churches have been coming much closer together in their fundamental thinking about the nature of God's mission, and its various strands, but there are still substantial differences of emphasis. Are these differences a hindrance to working closely together, or should they be seen as a strength and mutual enrichment?

A.31 The churches have different structures and strategies of mission. In addition to those already mentioned there is the programme of church planting adopted by several churches. Will this be handled unilaterally and competitively or ecumenically? Can we take what is good from all our structures and strategies, and work together, or will our revived concern for mission drive us back into competition and even into proselytism?

A.32 Experience has shown that one local church working on its own with a clear conviction and strategy of mission can be successful in its particular aim and object; whereas a great deal of energy can be dissipated and little success achieved when different churches come together to try to settle on a common objective and strategy.

A.33 The fundamental challenge to all the churches is whether they will continue to work independently for independent goals; or whether they recognise that God's mission is greater than any individual church can grasp, and therefore will seek to learn from one another and co-operate where they can in the service of Christ's mission of redemption and reconciliation. Experience has shown that bringing Christians of different traditions together to agree on a theology, language and structure for mission is a very long-term task indeed. Their whole history and approach is so diverse. On the other hand it is much easier practically to co-operate in mission and to appreciate one another's gifts. Both action and reflection together is needed. Joint action helps to increase mutual understanding. Mutual understanding makes joint action easier.

APPENDIX B

CHRISTIAN INITIATION AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

B.1 ‘The inability of the churches mutually to recognise their various practices of baptism as sharing in the one baptism, and their actual dividedness in spite of mutual baptismal recognition, have given dramatic visibility to the broken witness of the church... The need to recover baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realisation of genuine partnership within the Christian communities’ (*Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, WCC, 1982, Baptism, Commentary 6). The last 30 years have seen a growing recognition of one another’s baptism by a wide variety of churches. In 1972 a Common Certificate of Baptism was produced by the British Council of Churches in response to the need for evidence in one church that baptism with water in the name of the Holy Trinity had taken place in another church. This certificate was formally accepted by most churches in England (including the Roman Catholic Church which was not a member of the British Council of Churches), but not by the churches of the Baptist Union, nor by the Orthodox Churches, and, of course, not by The Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends, who do not practise water baptism.

B.2 But what does mutual recognition of baptism mean? At its highest it means that the person baptised is recognised as a member of Christ and of his body, the church. At its lowest it means that a person baptised in one of the churches which formally accepted the certificate would not be re-baptised if he or she sought to become a member of another church that accepted the certificate. In itself it does not necessarily mean that that person’s membership of the church will be legally or canonically recognised in the other church. Mutual recognition of baptism is therefore only a first step towards mutual recognition of church membership.

B.3 As churches work more closely together in local ecumenical partnerships the incomplete nature of their agreement on baptism has become clear in two particular ways.

B.4 There are places where a Baptist church is working very closely with churches that baptise infants. In this situation it will sometimes happen that someone baptised as an infant will ask the Baptist church for baptism as a believer. Both Baptists and other Christians agree that baptism is a once-for-all sign of entry into the Christian church, but Baptists would see infant baptism as at least incomplete, since it did not include a personal profession of faith by the person baptised. Many Baptists do not regard infant baptism as baptism at all, and to follow it with believer’s baptism by immersion would not be a re-baptism, but true baptism for the first time. Nevertheless, many Baptists (including some who hold the view expressed above) are also prepared to regard infant baptism as part of a process of salvation, which needs to be completed by a personal profession of faith but not *necessarily* by baptismal immersion in water. In this whole matter churches of the Baptist Union are very conscious of what they would regard as the rights of conscience of the candidate for baptism. If a candidate for believer’s baptism, who had already been baptised as an infant, felt strongly that God was calling him or her to be baptised by immersion upon profession of faith, the Baptist minister would feel obliged to take this into account.

B.5 A second obstacle to full unity sought in many local ecumenical partnerships has been their inability to persuade their churches or denominations formally to allow every member of all the participating churches in the local partnership to be entered on a common membership roll. In some local ecumenical partnerships there is a joint service of confirmation/reception into membership including Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed and in some cases Baptist and other churches, and those candidates so confirmed are recognised as members of all the participating churches, but this mutual recognition does not include the Orthodox or Roman Catholic Churches; nor does it apply yet to those who have not been jointly confirmed. This points to two limitations to the present agreement on baptism. The first is that different churches who may recognise one another’s baptisms, do not yet necessarily recognise one another’s whole process of Christian initiation. The second is that the very concept of joint church membership (or, more properly, that a person’s membership of the one Church of Christ may be recognised by two churches that are not yet united) challenges the understanding of church held, for example, by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches that see the one church of Christ as subsisting in their own church. It also challenges other churches that may be tempted to accept too easily that membership of two churches does not contradict their belief that ultimately there can only be one church,

B.6 There are at least four different patterns of entry into the church, the Body of Christ, and at least one of these patterns has alternative orders of procedure:

i. Baptism of candidates upon a personal profession of faith. This is the Baptist pattern, and it is also normal in many other churches, particularly in Pentecostal churches. (Some Pentecostal churches also look for evidence of a baptism in the spirit.) Amongst Baptists, baptism is followed by reception into church membership which may include a ceremony of laying on of hands and certainly would include the right hand of fellowship. Baptists also have a dedication ceremony for infants which is only somewhat loosely connected at present with the whole pattern of Christian initiation. (In addition to the practice of believer-baptism, Churches which baptise infants will also baptise older people who have not been baptised as infants, upon a personal profession of faith. In these circumstances the baptism is followed by confirmation or reception into church membership and admission to communion.)

ii. Baptism and Chrismation, usually of infants, followed immediately by communion - the Eastern Orthodox pattern. When the infant is grown up he or she would join in the corporate profession of faith in the liturgy, but there is no special rite in which such an individual would make a personal profession of faith.

iii. Baptism of candidates, usually infants, accompanied by a profession of faith made by godparents/parents. Confirmation/reception into membership is then delayed until the candidate is prepared to make a personal profession of faith. This is the position of the Church of England, most Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. There are alternative orders of procedure here:

- Some churches admit to communion before confirmation.

- Others normally give communion only after confirmation (these alternative orders of procedure sometimes exist within churches of the same communion eg in Anglican and Roman Catholic churches).

iv. The experience of transformation by the Spirit is not marked by an outward rite of water baptism in the Religious Society of Friends or The Salvation Army.

B.7 Baptism signifies the rebirth of a person as a Christian by the grace of God. It is therefore a once-for-all event. But salvation is a process, and so is Christian initiation. It begins and ends in the activity of God, to which the candidate responds in faith. Christian initiation is also a process. All these patterns listed above involve a process of initiation which includes different elements (God's call to faith, preparation, nurture, prayer for the gift of the Spirit, profession of faith, baptism, reception into membership of the church, admission to communion). Each process has its own sequence and coherence. The elements in the different patterns are not simply interchangeable. What is required is for the churches to discuss one another's patterns of initiation, and to consider whether they can be mutually recognised. If they cannot, then what changes would be necessary for the different patterns to be recognised?

Challenges

B.8 It is important to recognise that the Baptist Union did not accept all that *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* proposed for agreement by the churches, and is not happy to speak of infant and believer's baptism as a *common baptism*. However there are signs that the churches in England are beginning to respond to the challenge of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (para. 16 of the Baptism section) that '... believer baptists and those who practise infant baptism should reconsider certain aspects of their practices. The first may seek to express more visibly the fact that children are placed under the protection of God's grace. The latter must guard themselves against the practice of apparently indiscriminate baptism and take more seriously their responsibility for the nurture of baptised children to mature commitment to Christ. ...'. The Baptist Union is once again considering the place of children in the church, and the sense in which they belong to the universal Body of Christ. Many Baptist churches have always been willing to receive those who have already been baptised as infants into membership of the local church on profession of faith alone; but all churches are now being asked also to consider carefully the way in which they respond pastorally to such candidates who themselves request believer's baptism. At the same time the Church of England, which as the established church in this country is called upon to baptise many more infants than any other church, is also reconsidering its practice. It has produced and discussed several reports which have proposed that it should adopt a general policy of careful preparation of those who bring infants for baptism and careful nurture of those so baptised (*On the Way*, GS Misc 444, CHP, 1995).

B.9 The concept of church and the consequent practice of church membership is also different in different churches. For those churches which have a basic congregational structure, the church is the gathered and covenanted congregation of believers. Those who are not personally covenanted believers cannot be full members. This means that for Baptists, young children cannot be members of the church, at least in the technical sense. For some Baptist churches there is such an emphasis on a personal profession of faith, that it is possible (though not usual) to be a church member without being baptised in any form. Most Free Churches have a recognised procedure for membership of the local church or congregation, and a membership roll. For Anglicans, Orthodox and Roman Catholics there is no local church membership roll. Baptism alone signifies church membership. Anglicans have an electoral roll, but this is technically a roll of members entitled to vote in certain church elections.

B.10 The words ‘baptism’ and ‘membership’ therefore clearly do not mean precisely the same thing in all our churches. The situation presents the churches with at least four challenges, if they are to make their baptismal unity more visible.

B.11 *First challenge - The meaning of the word ‘baptism’ and the nature of sacrament and symbol*

Can the churches listen more carefully to one another in order to lessen the polarisation between those who so reject or reduce the significance of the water rite of baptism, that it becomes for them an empty symbol which can be dispensed with, and those who so emphasise the grace-carrying nature of the sacramental rite that its connection with personal faith and the expectation of gifts of the Spirit tend to become secondary? (See *BEM 1982-1990*, F & O paper 149, WCC, 1990 pp 143ff)

B.12 *Second challenge - The process of initiation*

There are at least four different patterns of Christian initiation (see para. B.6 above), each with its own inner coherence. The elements in one pattern cannot necessarily be removed into another pattern without damaging the whole process. Moreover in many Western churches confirmation has an ambiguous place, carrying different emphases according to the age of the person being confirmed. At seven years old the emphasis may be on the strengthening of the child by the Spirit. At fourteen years old and over it may be on the adolescent’s personal profession of faith. In some Free Churches it may also mark the young adult’s taking on the privileges and responsibilities of local church membership. The place of admission to communion in this process creates further problems for local ecumenical partnerships where churches with different patterns of initiation try to work closely together. Can the churches find ways not only to understand one another’s patterns, but to accept an agreed variety? Often churches of the same tradition/denomination manage to live together using a variety of patterns?

B.13 *Third challenge - The understanding of church and church membership*

In chapter 2 it has been noted that, although there is an agreement between the churches that the basic meanings of the word ‘church’ are ‘local’ and ‘universal’, nevertheless some churches (eg Roman Catholic) have tended to stress the universal, whereas others have tended to stress the local. This difference in stress has led to differing concepts of church membership. The churches should discuss these differing concepts in order to discover if they are mutually exclusive or complementary.

B.14 *Fourth challenge - The possibility of belonging to more than one church*

Many people in local ecumenical partnerships wish the participating churches to hold a common membership roll; and some children of interchurch families wish to be recognised as belonging to the two churches to which their parents belong. Because of their differing understandings of belonging to the church it is unlikely that they can all agree on a particular understanding of membership. However it should be possible for some churches to find appropriate ways to permit those who belong to other churches also to belong to their own. The Church of England has recently changed its rules to make this possible, as far as its electoral roll is concerned.

B.15 However these steps are not in themselves enough to assure the churches that there is a *common baptism*.

It is suggested that the churches who practise infant baptism should:

i. Recognise that the first people who were baptised in New Testament times were baptised as believers upon a profession of faith, and that, when infants were also baptised, this was a practice derived from believer’s baptism. Therefore believer’s baptism is the norm theologically, even though infant baptism, carefully prepared and followed up in the whole

process of Christian initiation is also a proper sign of God's grace working through faith, and may be more common within a Christian society.

ii. Take care that those who bring young children for baptism have a serious intention to bring them up in the Christian faith; and that the church has in place an adequate system of nurture for them.

iii. Permit parents, who wish to do so for good reasons, to delay baptism until their children are old enough to make a personal profession of faith. In these circumstances, the church should provide a careful sequence of preparation, including perhaps public rites comparable to those used in the Roman Catholic Church for the initiation of adults. Such rites might include a reception of the child as belonging to the community of the church.

iv. Make provision in their churches for baptism by immersion 'which is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ', while also continuing to permit the pouring of water on the head of the candidate. (*Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults*, study edition, Chicago, 1988)

B.16 It is suggested that baptist churches should:

i. Cease to admit into church membership people who have not received baptism in any Christian church.

ii. Consider refraining from baptising by immersion people who have already been baptised as infants, who have been brought up in the Christian faith, and who have already made a profession of faith either in confirmation or in some other way.

iii. Re-consider the role of children in the church, and adopting the procedure and rites proposed in para. B.12 above.

B.17 It is suggested that all churches provide suitable rites that allow those who have been baptised, either as infants or as believers, to re-affirm their baptismal vows.

B.18 The mutual acceptance of baptism, and possibly membership is not a purely internal concern for the churches. Such acceptance potentially has implications far beyond ecclesiastical practice. As para. 15 in the Section iii report from the 5th World Conference of Faith and Order says 'A common baptism also expresses the paradigmatic nature of the Church in the world as an inclusive community where men, women and children of different cultures and races can participate freely on an equal basis, where social and economic inequality can be surmounted, and where there is respect for different traditions and capacities, confirmed by the bonds of love for brothers and sisters and in fidelity to the Triune God.'

APPENDIX C

EUCCHARISTIC COMMUNION

C.1 One of the most sensitive issues in relationships between different Christian churches today is that of eucharistic communion. There is not even agreement on the use of terms. The word 'intercommunion' has been widely used, particularly by the Church of England, to describe a relationship between distinct denominations or churches whereby all the members in good standing of one church may receive holy communion in another church. Intercommunion was, for example, the word used to describe the relationship between the Church of England and the Old Catholic Church in continental Europe following the Bonn Agreement of 1931. It was also included in the title of a report to the Church Assembly published in 1968, *Intercommunion Today*. However in 1972 the Church of England agreed a new rule or canon, Canon B 15A, which allowed baptised and communicant members in good standing of Trinitarian churches to receive communion in the Church of England. If such a person were to receive communion over a long period the minister should set before him or her the normal requirement for communicant status in the Church of England (episcopal confirmation). (In 1995 a change in the Church of England's Church Representation Rules has enabled a communicant member of another church also to be a member of the Church of England). Canon B 15A was not a formal agreement between the Church of England and other specific churches. It was rather a pastoral ruling setting out the terms under which baptised non-Anglican Christians might receive communion in the Church of England.

C.2 Today virtually all Free Churches practise *open communion*. They usually invite Christian believers of any other local church or denomination to receive communion with them. Sometimes the words of invitation follow a recognised formula to describe those who are invited, such as 'all who love the Lord Jesus'. The Baptist Union has a few churches that do not practise open communion; but insist that only those baptised as believers can receive the sacrament. The Baptists also stress that the open invitation is intended for members of other Trinitarian churches. The Congregational Federation points out that communion discipline is a matter for decision by each local church, though the norm is open communion. Methodists and the Churches of Christ report that their practice has moved away from an originally more restrictive stance to one of open communion. The Free Church of England stresses that it expects its own folk to be confirmed, but that, nevertheless, it issues an open invitation to all 'who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity' to receive communion. The reason given by many of the Free Churches for their practice of open communion would be that the holy table belongs to the Lord and not to the church, and that it is the Lord who issues the invitation. For John Wesley the Holy Communion was a 'converting ordinance', and therefore the Methodist Church has not wished to 'fence the table' too securely, but, like the Church of England and the United Reformed Church would normally expect only those who were baptised to receive communion. If someone unbaptised received communion he or she would not be refused, but would normally be encouraged to seek baptism.

C.3 Sometimes today this willingness of Anglican and Free Churches to admit other Christians to communion is loosely referred to as *intercommunion*, but it would more accurately be described as *admission to communion* or *eucharistic hospitality*.

C.4 The word *intercommunion* is not a word in normal use in the Roman Catholic Church; and it is specifically rejected by the Orthodox: 'There can be "communion" only between local churches which have a unity of faith, ministry, and sacraments. For this reason the concept of 'inter-communion' has no place in Orthodox ecclesiology'. (*The Dublin Agreed Statement* SPCK 1984 p 15)

C.5 The same point is made in the *Roman Catholic Ecumenical Directory* (Do 615, CTS, 1993) para. 129:

'As well as being signs, sacraments - most especially the eucharist - are sources of the unity of the Christian community and of spiritual life, and are means for building them up. Thus eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression. At the same time, the Catholic Church teaches that by baptism members of other churches ... are brought into a real, even if imperfect communion, with the Catholic Church... The eucharist is, for the baptised, a spiritual food which enables them to overcome sin and to live the very life of Christ, to be incorporated more profoundly in him, and share more intensely in the whole economy of the Mystery of Christ. It is in the light of these two basic principles, which must always be taken into account together, that in general the Catholic Church

permits access to its eucharistic communion ... only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial (church) life. For the same reasons, it also recognises that in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches ...'.

C.6 Both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches are prepared to admit baptised Christians of other churches to communion in cases of grave and pressing spiritual need under certain conditions. Such admission is very rare in Orthodox Churches but is sometimes offered to other Christians, especially to Oriental Orthodox, out of touch with their own church. This is done under the principle of economy, by which the competent authority allows a departure from conformity for reasons of humanity and compassion.

C.7 The Roman Catholic Church has set out its conditions for eucharistic hospitality in its code of Canon Law: the person must be cut off from the possibility of receiving communion in his or her own church, must spontaneously ask for communion, must show catholic faith in the eucharist, and must be 'properly disposed' (ie must be living a life in conformity with catholic teaching). (*Code of Canon Law* 844)

C.8 Admitting other Christians to holy communion is not an issue for The Salvation Army or the Religious Society of Friends since they do not have a specific eucharist or holy communion service.

C.9 Questions of intercommunion or admission to communion do not stand alone. They are inextricably linked to the ways in which different members of Churches Together in England see the place of the eucharist in relation to the sacraments, the ministry, and the overall understanding of the mission and unity of the church.

The Sacraments

C.10 Virtually all churches recognise life as sacramental. The everyday activities of men and women can be used by God to reveal deep truths. A common meal is more than a collection of individuals filling their mouths with food. Nevertheless churches are not all agreed on the place they give to particular sacraments. The Religious Society of Friends (*Churches Respond to BEM*, WCC, Vol IV p. 218f) assert 'The whole of our everyday experience is the stuff of our religious awareness: it is here that God is best known to us. However valid and vital outward sacraments are for others, they are not, in our experience, necessary for the operation of God's grace'. The Salvation Army would take a similar view of particular sacraments. On the other hand the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1407 states: 'The Eucharist is the heart and summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all upon the cross to his Father'. For the Orthodox the eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, and the faithful are, as it were, caught up into heaven through the action of the eucharist. It is therefore essential that communicants come duly prepared and in union with Christ and his church.

C.11 The liturgical movement in western churches has restored the corporate nature of the eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church, and with it the desire of the faithful for frequent communion. It has also restored the holy communion to a more central place in the worship of the Church of England and of many Free Churches. Documents such as *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* have helped many Christians to see that their understanding of the eucharist is much closer to that of most other Christians than they had realised. Both these factors have added to the pressure felt by Christians in widely separated churches to receive communion together. A response from the Congregational Federation stressed that at no time in Christian worship is oneness with the saints of all ages more strongly felt.

The Ministry

C.12 Some churches do not recognise the ordained ministry of other churches, and do not allow ministers of such churches to preside at the eucharist in their own churches. This factor has played a significant part in limiting the extent of intercommunion and eucharistic hospitality between churches. Thus, for example the Roman Catholic Church recognises the validity of the ordained ministers of the Greek Orthodox Church, and therefore in exceptional cases would allow a Roman Catholic to receive communion from an Orthodox priest. On the other hand the Roman Catholic Church does not recognise the validity of the ordained ministers of the Church of England or the Free Churches and therefore would not give permission for Roman Catholics to receive communion in their churches.

C.13 The issue of lay celebration of the eucharist has also been a point of difference, for example, between the Church of England and some Free Churches. A lay person is permitted to preside at the communion service in exceptional circumstances in the Methodist and United Reformed churches, but only when an ordained minister is not available and when special authority has been granted. In most other Free Churches lay presidency of the eucharist does not require any special permission to be given outside the local church, although the president will normally be an ordained minister or pastor. The Church of England (as is the case in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches) allows only an episcopally ordained minister to preside at its own celebrations of the eucharist. Moreover, when it drew up its Ecumenical Canons (B43 and B44) allowing a measure of joint worship, it permitted only ordained ministers of other churches to preside at eucharistic services in Church of England buildings.

The mission & unity of the church

C.14 The Roman Catholic response includes these words:

‘... the problem of eucharistic sharing has an ecclesial dimension and cannot be resolved in isolation from an understanding of the mystery of the church as well as the ministry. In this regard, for Catholics, it is unity in the profession of faith that constitutes the core of ecclesial communion. Because the eucharistic celebration is by its very nature a profession of the faith of the church, it is impossible for the Catholic church presently to engage in general eucharistic sharing. For in our view we cannot share in the eucharist unless we share fully in that faith.’ (*Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. VI p.25). At the heart of this question lies another: ‘In what way does unity at the eucharist locate and visibly present the church in the world as sacrament of salvation?’ It is more forcefully posed in the negative form: ‘In what way does disunity at the eucharist dislocate and conceal the church in the world as sacrament of salvation?’

C.15 As with many others, the Church of England also emphasises the value of the eucharist in relation to mission, but locates the eucharist as ‘the centre from which Christians go out renewed by the power of the Spirit to act as servants of reconciliation in a broken and divided world’. There is an obvious contrast here with the concerns of The Salvation Army who obviously fear that excessive interest in the celebration of the eucharist distracts from the missionary life of the church. The Church of England puts the eucharist at the heart of the missionary life of the church. ‘The awareness of Christ which lies at the heart of the eucharist entails a new ethical stance for all who participate. The remembering (*anamnesis*) of Christ’s mission in the reconciliation of all things determines the life and conduct of the church and of the individual believer’. (*Churches Respond to BEM* Vol. III p. 47)

C.16 This is a value particularly noted also by the Moravian Church, and is in line with the Orthodox saying that everyday Christian witness is ‘the liturgy after the Liturgy’.

C.17 The Methodist Church is concerned that those churches who give the eucharist the central place might, in doing so, thereby exclude others.

C.18 The Baptist Union has a similar concern. Noting that BEM emphasises aspects of the eucharist such as celebration of creation, the offering of the world’s life, and the participation in mission, the Baptist response says ‘It is not that the eucharist is seen by Baptists as wholly unrelated to these emphases. Certainly corporate worship *in its totality* will comprehend them. But those for whom the celebration of the Supper is less than a weekly act will particularly demur at the apparent implication that they are thereby impoverished strangers, removed from such eucharistically-tied imperatives, promptings and understandings.’ (*Churches Respond to BEM*. Vol I p.76)

C.19 Behind these differing emphases on the place of the eucharist in relation to mission lie differing emphases on the understanding of the Church as a divine-human reality. At one end of the spectrum, the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches emphasise the unity between Christ and his Body, the church, to whom he has given authority on earth. At the other end of the spectrum Protestant churches focus on the transcendence of Christ over the human and fallible community of the church, over which he always acts as head.

C.20 For the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, the eucharist belongs to Christ, head and members, and therefore, it is for the Body to set rules. For many Free Churches it belongs to Christ in such a way that, though his church celebrates it, it should not make any excluding rules. He is seen as ‘inviting whosoever will’, and it is not for his church then to

exclude any who wish to respond. This obviously represents a different emphasis in the understanding of the church and also differing emphases in eucharistic theology. It is necessary to reflect theologically on the extent to which the eucharist is seen to express the already established *koinonia* of the church, and the extent to which it is seen as commemorating the practice of Christ in calling sinners to his table in his lifetime in advance of any commitment by them to his particular fellowship.

Challenges

C.21 The first challenge that this situation issues to all our churches is that all Christians should be helped to understand sympathetically the actual position of their own and other churches on intercommunion and admission to communion. Perhaps in the interest of simplicity churches have tended to explain their own position in too one-sided a way. This has added to the element of polarisation which already exists. The publication by ACTS (Action for Churches Together in Scotland) of a booklet *Intercommunion* in 1994 has helped in this mutual explanation.

C.22 The second challenge is that there should be continuing consultation between churches on this issue, taking into account the varying ways in which local churches working together attempt to face this question. The experience of local ecumenical partnerships is very significant here. If there is a very close relationship between the unity of the church and eucharistic communion, should there be a greater openness to eucharistic communion between as yet separated churches, as they progress towards what they see as closer unity?

C.23 This consultation between the churches is likely to constitute a challenge (by those churches whose self-understanding tends to restrict admission to communion) to those churches which practise an open table to re-think their concept of the unity of the church. It is likely to constitute a challenge (by those churches who practise an open table) to those who have more restrictive rules to discuss those rules and to apply them always in a pastorally sensitive way and in a manner that encourages growth into closer unity and does not hinder it.

C.24 In all this there will also need to be a common exploration of how eucharistic services can so be celebrated on ecumenical occasions that they encourage and do not discourage unity. There should also be a search for other appropriate forms of common worship.

APPENDIX D

ORDAINED MINISTRY

The Ministry of the Whole People of God

D.1 All the responses of the Churches affirmed a belief in the corporate ministry of the whole people of God. The word *laity* comes from a Greek word meaning *people*, and in its original sense includes both those now called *ordained* and those now called *lay*. I Peter 2 refers to the whole Christian community as a holy and royal priesthood. Prior attention to the ministry of the whole people of God might well reveal a convergence that would facilitate consequent discussion of the vexed questions relating to the ordained ministry. This was the method of the ministry section of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (WCC, 1982). The tendency to identify the church with its ordained ministry is divisive and unhelpful. There is a general recognition that the Holy Spirit bestows different and complementary gifts upon all God's people, the members of Christ's body, the church, and that all members are called to use their particular gifts in God's service in the world and in the church. Different churches tend to use different phrases to describe this calling. Many Free Churches like to refer to the *priesthood of all believers*. The Roman Catholic Church refers to the *lay apostolate*. All churches could benefit from explaining to one another how they understand and experience the ministry of the whole people of God, before they discuss the role of the ordained ministry.

D.2 Every church also recognises that God gives special gifts of ministry within the church - gifts of proclaiming and expounding the gospel, of pastoral care and administrative responsibility in the Christian community. Several churches, including the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church, are reconsidering aspects of the exercise of ordained ministry in their church.

The Ordained Ministry

D.3 The Religious Society of Friends believe that their Society can be so ordered that the guidance of the Holy Spirit can be known and followed without an ordained ministry. 'To be without an ordained clergy is not to be without either leadership or ministry'. Friends appoint for limited periods officers with particular responsibility for their meetings for worship, for pastoral care and for business.

D.4 Although they do not observe the sacraments of baptism and eucharist The Salvation Army ordains officers for full-time ministry in the framework of its Orders and Regulations.

D.5 Virtually all the other member churches of Churches Together in England ordain ministers of the word and sacraments, and most of these are ordained for life. However in a few of the smaller churches ministers are ordained by and for ministry in particular local congregations, and therefore cease to be regarded as ordained ministers when they leave that particular ministerial charge. This is true, for example, of the Cherubim and Seraphim Council of Churches and of the Independent Methodist Churches, whose ministers are non-stipendiary. It is the local church, gathered in church meeting, which calls an individual to ordained ministry in churches of the Baptist Union and Congregational Federation. In the Baptist Union the wider fellowship of churches as represented at Association and Union level must recognise a person's call to the ordained ministry, and approve his or her training, before that person may be placed on the list of accredited ministers of the Union. Area Superintendents or other representatives of the Union normally share in the ordination of a minister who is to be accredited. Most Baptist and Congregational churches who call ministers will call already accredited ministers or seek to ensure that they become accredited. However in churches such as these which have a congregational form of government the ultimate decision on who exercises ministry rests with the local church meeting. Lay people will often be authorised to preside at the eucharist. Some of the Black Majority Churches, as, for example, those of the International Ministerial Council of Great Britain, have also been establishing a list of trained and accredited ministers. In the Methodist Church ministers are ordained on the authority of Conference. In circumstances where congregations would otherwise be deprived of the eucharist, the Conference may authorise a lay person to preside. Such a dispensation from normal practice will be limited to a specific circuit for one year. Probationer ministers in circuit appointments are normally given such a dispensation.

D.6 The United Reformed Church is conciliar. Provincial Synods recognise candidates for ministry. The standards and scope of training are decided by the General Assembly. Ministers are called to a particular ministry by a local

congregation, but the District Council has to approve the call. Ministers are normally ordained to their first ministry of Word and Sacrament by the District Council, with the Provincial Moderator presiding, within the congregation to be served. Provincial Moderators are appointed by the General Assembly. In the Anglican, Moravian, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches ministers are ordained by bishops as deacons, presbyters/priests and bishops to particular pastoral charges, and are not re-ordained when they move to other charges. Only bishops and presbyter/priests may preside at the eucharist (except in the Moravian Church where a deacon may also preside). The Bishop of Rome has the ultimate responsibility for appointing Roman Catholic bishops in England (although this is generally the case in other countries also, there are varied arrangements, some of which give to the diocese a considerable role in the decision). The Patriarch of Moscow has a similar responsibility for the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople for the Greek Orthodox Church. In the Church of England a commission representative of the Church as a whole and also of the particular diocese puts forward two names to the Queen in Parliament, and effectively it is the Prime Minister who makes the final choice of a diocesan bishop.

D.7 All the member Churches of Churches Together in England ordain women to the ministry except the Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. The Church of England ordains women as deacons and priests, but not as bishops, and it safeguards the rights of its members, who do not believe in the ordination of women, not to receive the ministry of women.

Bishops and Oversight

D.8 All churches recognise the need for pastoral oversight, but it is exercised in different ways in different churches. Anglican, Moravian, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and some of the Black Majority Churches have laid emphasis on the personal and, at least the Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, on the collegial oversight of bishops in the church. In these churches bishops have the particular responsibility for the preaching and teaching of the faith, the celebration of the sacraments and the pastoral care of the faithful in the areas of which they have oversight. In the Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches these areas are dioceses. Moravian bishops exercise a general pastoral oversight of congregations in the Church, which is not divided into dioceses, but have no role in the government of the church. Bishops are also seen as leaders of mission.

D.9 In the Methodist Connexion pastoral oversight and administrative responsibility finally rests with Conference, but circuit superintendents and other ordained ministers, district chairpersons and various connexional committees all exercise a delegated pastoral oversight.

D.10 In the United Reformed Church ordinary pastoral oversight is exercised by the ordained minister and the ordained elders, but major decisions are taken by the local church meeting. However Provincial Moderators also have a role of pastoral oversight in their Provinces.

D.11 The Baptist Union is currently working on its understanding of the ordained ministry. It has in practice developed a similar, though not identical, pattern of oversight to that of the United Reformed Church with Area Superintendents fulfilling a comparable role to that of Provincial Moderators. However in the Baptist Union the pastoral authority of Superintendents does not mean that any decisions can be imposed upon the local church meeting, which has liberty to find the mind of Christ for itself.

D.12 Methodist Chairmen of Districts, United Reformed Provincial Moderators and Baptist Union Area Superintendents all exercise not only a personal oversight in their particular districts/areas, but also a collegial ministry of oversight in that they meet their colleagues regularly to discuss matters of mutual pastoral concern. In this they can be compared to Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic bishops. However the personal and collegial oversight of bishops has been an integral part of the self-understanding of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches and to a lesser extent of the Anglican Communion, the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches and the Moravian Church for centuries, witnessing to the fact that their dioceses share the same faith and apostolic tradition across time and space (apostolicity and catholicity), and are therefore in communion with one another in their respective churches.

D.13 In the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 the worldwide meeting of Anglican bishops included 'the Historic Episcopate' (alongside the Holy Scriptures, the two traditional Creeds, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord) as one of the four elements which Anglicans looked for in a united Christian church. Since that time discussions about unity

between Anglican and Protestant churches worldwide have devoted much, sometimes most, of their time to this issue. Sometimes in the past the discussions have appeared to focus almost exclusively on the importance of episcopal ordination, and in particular upon bishops laying hands on each new bishop, in order to preserve a sign of the continuity of the church across time with the early apostles and across space with the rest of the world-wide church.

D.14 In recent conversations with Protestant churches (cf. Meissen & Porvoo) Anglicans have emphasised the continuity of the church as a whole, the importance of holding the understanding of ordained ministry within the fundamental understanding of the nature of the whole church, and that agreement on the *nature* of the ordained ministry within the life and structure of the whole church is prior to the recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries.

D.15 The Orthodox Churches have emphasised that agreement on the whole of faith and tradition is prior to the recognition of ministries, and although one or two Orthodox Churches gave a provisional recognition of Anglican ministries in the past, this was dependent upon all Orthodox Churches agreeing and this they have not done. Moreover the ordination of women to the priesthood has created a new obstacle for Orthodox in recognising Anglican ministry. The Orthodox also are not prepared to be reconciled to the ordained ministry of the Roman Catholic Church whilst they believe that the Bishop of Rome maintains claims to supremacy.

D.16 The Roman Catholic Church recognises the validity of Orthodox ministries, and is prepared to allow Roman Catholics to receive the ministrations of Orthodox priests and bishops when they are in serious spiritual need and are cut off from the ministrations of the Roman Catholic Church. At present the Roman Catholic Church does not accept the validity of the ministries of other Churches. For the Roman Catholic Church the Bishop of Rome plays a crucial role in maintaining the unity of the Catholic Church, and no permanent reconciliation of the ordained ministries of other churches will be possible unless there is prior agreement on the role of his role as a centre of unity.

Personal, collegial and communal ordained ministry

D.17 *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, WCC 1982, affirms that 'ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way' (Ministry section, para. 26, page 26). This affirmation has received a warm welcome in many member churches. It has already been noted that ordained ministers work in a personal way - one minister ministering to other persons in his or her congregation, parish, district, diocese etc. It has already been noted that ordained ministers work collegially - in Free Churches local ministers working with their elders or deacons; District Chairmen, Moderators, Superintendents regularly consulting together; in Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches bishops forming a distinct House or Conference to take counsel together.

D.18 How does this personal and collegial ministry of the ordained relate to the communal ministry of the whole Christian community? In most Free Churches this is clear locally where the church meeting has the ultimate responsibility for the life and ministry of the whole congregation. It is clear in the Methodist Connexion in that Conference has ultimate responsibility for the life and ministry of the whole Church (although questions of ordained ministry are dealt with by the ministerial session of Conference). During this century the Church of England has evolved a form of synodical government whereby lay people, priests and deacons, and bishops form three distinct 'Houses', and important matters concerning the life and ministry of the church have to be agreed in all three houses. It is sometimes described as a church which is 'synodically governed and episcopally led'. The Moravian Church appears to be unique in drawing a sharp distinction between pastoral care and leadership on the one hand (which is the role of their bishops) and formal decision-making (in which their bishops play no part).

D.19 In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches there is an increasing consultation of the laity on various matters, particularly at local level. However the bishops are seen as representing their dioceses, laity and clergy alike, and it is the bishops who make major decisions. It is in the communion of all the faithful (which includes the bishops) that the apostolic faith is handed on. The reception of the teaching of the bishops and their decisions is the critical process which actively involves both the ordained and the lay. The tensions inherent in this process are instrumental in the development of doctrine in the Roman Catholic Church.

APPENDIX E

AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING

E.1 The responses of churches showed that all are in process of change and development, and in nothing is this more evident than in their understandings of authority and practices of decision-making.

E.2 The churches have a great deal in common. For all of them the only absolute authority is that of God, and in the expression of that authority God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and it is through his life, death and resurrection that God is revealed and the world redeemed. This revelation is definitively recorded in Scripture and particularly in the New Testament. However no response suggested that the Scriptures were written or could now be read without interpretation. It is the Holy Spirit that guides the church into the truth in each generation.

E.3 Although all churches would agree the thrust of the last para, the Friends would wish to qualify it by emphasising that absolute truth cannot be expressed in words at all adequately, and therefore they would probably sit more lightly to the text of Holy Scripture than other churches. They would also wish to affirm that there are other sources of truth about God. Nevertheless their heritage is rooted in Scripture, and the language of their early leaders and many later ones is full of biblical language.

E.4 At the time of the Reformation many Protestants claimed that the Roman Catholic Church was teaching that there were two distinct sources of authority for Christian doctrine, Scripture and Tradition. Protestants repudiated any idea of two separate sources, claiming that Scripture alone contained everything necessary for salvation.

E.5 Roman Catholic and Orthodox teaching on this matter has been clarified in recent years. It does not see two distinct sources of truth. It sees Holy Scripture as part of the Tradition of the Church. Scripture is the unique written record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, recognised as such by the early church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and as such is normative and irreplaceable. It is the unique authoritative written source of Christian teaching.

E.6 Meanwhile Protestants have increasingly acknowledged with Roman Catholics that Scripture cannot interpret itself. Everyone who reads Scripture approaches it with many acknowledged or unrecognised presuppositions in mind, and therefore the living church through the ages has the continuing task of interpreting Scripture. In the early centuries the church several times summoned a universal or Ecumenical Council of bishops to clarify the church's teaching. The decisions of these Councils are regarded as authoritative for Christian teaching, and the Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches regularly use the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, a product of these Councils, in their worship. That and the Apostles' Creed are also recognised as authoritative statements of faith by virtually all other churches (except Friends who reject the use of all credal statements), but are not so frequently used in worship.

E.7 Two questions still divide the churches: who in the churches have authority to interpret Christian teaching; and what is the level of authority to be attributed to such interpretation? Before tackling these questions, it is necessary to examine how the various churches make decisions.

E.8 For the Roman Catholic Church all major decisions are taken by the bishops - in a diocese by the diocesan bishop, in a nation by the bishops in conference, world-wide by the bishops in Council, or by the Bishop of Rome himself. The Bishop of Rome's jurisdiction also extends to national conferences of bishops or to a particular diocese. However there is increasing consultation of the clergy and laity. Christ's faithful people 'have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church' (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Bk II; cf. Canon 212 para. 3).

E.9 For the Orthodox local pastoral decisions are taken by the bishop, but in this he is assisted by a college of elders, the presbytery, by his other clergy, and indeed by the whole people of God. Decisions involving more than one diocese are taken by the bishops in council.

E.10 In the Church of England decisions are taken by councils and synods in which clergy and laity (at diocesan and national level by bishops, other clergy and laity) share. No major decision can be implemented nationally unless the House

of Bishops, the House of Clergy and the House of Laity each agree. Leadership remains with the Bishops in forms of doctrine and worship, since any proposals for change on these matters have to be introduced into the General Synod by the House of Bishops.

E.11 The Salvation Army, as its name implies, has a centralised chain of command which gives the General, elected internationally for a set term of years, and advised by a number of expert and powerful committees, the final role in decision-making.

E.12 Major decisions are taken in the Methodist Connexion nationally by Conference, at intermediate level by the District Synod, and locally by various Circuit and church meetings representative of both ministers and laity.

E.13 The United Reformed Church is a union of members of the former Congregational Church, the Presbyterian Church of England and the Churches of Christ. As such it has a conciliar constitution bringing together elements of congregationalism and presbyterianism. All major decisions are made by ministers and elders together at councils at national, provincial and district levels, and by all the members in church meeting at the local level. Each council has a defined area of authority. Appeals may be made to wider councils, and the decision of the General Assembly on any matter is final. The United Reformed Church has consciously decided to work 'personally, collegially and communally' (see para. D.17 above) in implementing *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*.

E.14 All the churches so far mentioned in this section are churches which make some major decisions internationally or nationally. There remain congregational churches which are so described because they make most, if not all, their major decisions in each congregation. These churches include the Congregational Federation, the Baptist Union, a number of the Black Majority Councils of Churches, and the Independent Methodist Church. However, although this remains true in constitutional principle, it needs qualifying in four ways:

i. It should not be understood as meaning that these churches are isolationist. From the very beginning of the history of congregational churches at the time of the Reformation, their leaders have emphasised the need for interdependency. While these churches assert the autonomy under Christ of each local congregation, they also assert the duty of each congregation to seek the mutual support, correction and fellowship of other congregations.

ii. To a greater or lesser degree, these congregations have created and supported structures which help them to consult and come to a common mind at intermediate and/or national level. Baptists have had a strong associational life from the beginning of their history.

iii. They also accept that God gives particular gifts to particular people that enable them to exercise a personal ministry of oversight and administration, and this is often recognised in giving these people considerable freedom in implementing the decisions of the whole congregation.

iv. Although the local church meeting may appear to have the trappings of a modern democratic system making decisions by majorities, in fact it has a different theological basis. It is rooted in the belief that God will reveal his will to his covenanted people whenever they meet together in prayer.

E.15 The Religious Society of Friends does not fit neatly into any category. In origin it was a gathered church, and has a lot in common with other congregational churches. However in the world family of Friends it has intermediate, national and international meetings and committees. National groups, or 'Yearly Meetings' as they are called, are independent but are invited to affiliate themselves to the Friends World Committee for Consultation which serves as a channel of communication between Friends. Friends have one distinctive characteristic which many other Christians covet: they take decisions not by majority votes, but in waiting on the guidance of the Spirit until there is unity. Unity does not necessarily mean unanimity and a minority view may well continue to exist but should not prevent the acceptance of a decision which the general body of those present feels to be right.

Remaining differences and convergences

E.16 Three particular issues stand out among the growing convergences and remaining differences.

i. At what level should decisions be made in the church?

To take two ends of the spectrum, the Congregational Federation, for example, has insisted that decisions can be taken only by the local church meeting, whereas in the Roman Catholic Church important decisions which affect the faith and life of the whole community are taken, after consultation, in Rome (see para. 2.23 above). This fundamental difference of approach is modified on the one side Roman Catholic Church's appeal to the principle of subsidiarity (see para. 2.29 above), and on the other side the readiness of many independent churches to see in practice the need for some structures of decision-making and mutual accountability to exist at a wider level than the purely local.

ii. Who make the decisions, and how are they made?

To take the two ends of the spectrum again, congregational-type churches have insisted that every covenanted member of the church is entitled to take a part in making decisions, whereas for the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches major decisions are made by the bishops (and in the Roman Catholic Church sometimes by the Bishop of Rome). Again this fundamental difference is not as great as it first appears. On the one hand Orthodox and Roman Catholic bishops make decisions as leaders representing their whole dioceses, and are expected to consult both their clergy and laity. Also the Bishop of Rome and the Vatican departments which advise him regularly consult all the dioceses. Also there is a widely accepted understanding in Orthodox teaching that the decisions of bishops, though binding on the faithful, nevertheless have to be received by them; and if a decision were not so received eventually by the whole church, then its authority would be questioned. Though such a teaching has not been so clearly enunciated in the Roman Catholic Church, the important role of the laity has been increasingly recognised since Cardinal Newman published *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* in 1859. On the other hand sociologists have pointed out that knowledge is power when decisions are to be made, and simply to put a matter to the decision of a meeting gives great power in the hands of those who are well informed and able to argue their case most effectively. Therefore many Free Churches have a *representative* system by which church members elect representatives who can become better informed and make decisions for the whole body. In this way the principle of allowing the whole people of God to share in decision-making is implemented in practice if not according to the purest principle.

Nevertheless the issue of control and power remains an extremely sensitive issue especially among congregational churches, and needs to be addressed urgently. And within this issue the particular teaching and practice of the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome is of growing significance. Many Christians are conscious of the need for personal leadership of the world-wide church, and are prepared to accept some kind of primatial role, but are not ready to accept the immediate jurisdiction the Pope can presently exercise in every Roman Catholic diocese, without having to act through the diocesan bishop.

iii. How decisive and permanent are church decisions?

The doctrine of Papal Infallibility, promulgated by the First Vatican Council in 1870, remains a matter of contention between the churches in two ways. Orthodox (as many other Christians who are prepared to accept the infallibility of the church as a whole) are not prepared to acknowledge the terms in which, as they see it, the doctrine recognised the infallibility of one man. Most other Christian churches, including those who accept the inerrancy of Scripture, are unprepared to use the word 'infallible' of any organ of the living church. One of the principles of the Reformation was that the church should be subject to continual reformation. Roman Catholics, who recognise that the historical church is subject to reform, point out that the First Vatican Council limited narrowly the circumstances in which the Bishop of Rome can teach infallibly. They ask the question of other Christians how they understand Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit will lead the disciples into all truth, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. They also point out that *infallible* does not mean *perfect*. Even infallible teaching has to be interpreted afresh in each generation.

Behind this continuing particular disagreement between the churches may lie hidden a different emphasis which needs exploring. Roman Catholics and Orthodox emphasise the presence of the divine Christ within the living institutional church. Many Protestants emphasise Christ as head of the church, and distinguishable from the church as a human institution.

APPENDIX F

SUGGESTED RULES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Working Together in the New Ecumenical Instruments : Suggested Rules of Good Practice

As a general principle, work is no longer to be done by the ecumenical instruments on behalf of the churches, but by the member churches with and for one another. A major role of the ecumenical instruments is to enable the churches to act together - by bringing together people in the churches with common interests acting as a channel for the exchange of information, etc.

If the member churches are to work together effectively in this way, certain ground rules need to be agreed among them and followed within the individual member churches. Following ecumenical discussion, this note offers some draft ground rules of good practice.

1. Member churches should be ready to share their own vision of the issues which are important and their own programmes of work with the officers of the ecumenical instruments and with one another.

This is not an invitation to member churches to deluge one another with paper. They should, however, inform the relevant co-ordinating secretary in the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland or officer in Churches Together in England of work projected or underway and share information about it with the relevant network, commission, co-ordinating group or agency.

Work at intermediate (county or metropolitan area) level may be as interesting as work at national level in this context. The Field Officers of Churches Together in England have a role in this as well as the officers of the churches.

Among the key tasks of the officers of the new instruments are:

- to ensure that networks' groups, commissions and agencies are established bringing together people in the churches with shared interests;

- to map out the work underway in the different member churches. Member churches can themselves help by mapping out the work, including ecumenical work, in which they are engaged;

- to act as a repository of information on work done or in progress within member churches.

2. When considering embarking on new items of work, or reviewing existing areas of work, member churches should ask themselves whether the principles of working set out in *Churches Together in Pilgrimage* and described above are adequately embodied in the way they propose to proceed.

At the Faith and Order Conference at Lund in Sweden in 1952 the participants asked the member churches "whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately". This question should be constantly before our churches as they consider all their activities. Of course there may be circumstances in which it makes sense to establish a working party or other group on a denominational basis. But many issues are of common interest to the churches, and can be addressed more efficiently and comprehensively if the work is done ecumenically.

When member churches are reviewing existing work or considering new work they should therefore share their proposals for action with other member churches through the relevant ecumenical body. In this way ecumenical considerations should become not an additional factor to be considered at the end of a project, but part of the very thinking about it from its inception, and also a regular factor in any review of existing work.

3. Member churches should take into account priorities established ecumenically when considering their own internal priorities for work.

All member churches and the new ecumenical instruments have limited resources. Choices have to be made about how those resources are to be used.

Priorities for the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland are decided by member churches through the Church Representatives Meeting, noting advice from the Steering Committee. Priorities for Churches Together in England are decided by the member churches through the Enabling Group, which includes representation both of the intermediate bodies (county or metropolitan area ecumenical councils) and of the member churches.

Each member church has its own different structure of authority through which decisions about priorities are taken.

There is no neat way in which the processes of establishing priorities within individual member churches and collectively within the new ecumenical instruments can be brought together. Denominational responsibilities and structures vary, and cannot easily be aligned. The important thing is that there should be a confining process of dialogue - through representative bodies groups, commissions, agencies, networks, etc. - so that decisions about priorities in each context are informed by thinking and views expressed in the other. It is also important that churches should be sensitive to the possibility of the gradual alignment of structures where that would pose no substantial threat to their particular structure of authority.

The principles laid down in the report *Churches Together in Pilgrimage*, and charity itself, demand that where one church or group of churches has a priority which requires action from other churches, the other churches take this very seriously.

4. Member churches should be on the look-out for opportunities to share resources with one another by offering to undertake particular pieces of work.

The Church Representatives Meeting or Enabling Group may ask member churches to undertake particular pieces of work on behalf of others. But individual churches also need to be on the look-out for opportunities to offer their work in the service of all.

On the whole, given the limited resources of member churches, it makes sense to co-operate/share resources wherever possible. In that way, small contributions can together add up to a useful sum, and the smaller churches can be helped by the larger. Proposals for ecumenical sharing need to be cleared through the new instruments. They should:

- be agreed within the member church making the proposal;
- be agreed by the other member churches;
- include a clear understanding about how the shared arrangement is to work, what contributions are expected from each participating church, and how accountability to the member churches is to be ensured.

5. Member churches should consider carefully the development of methods of working which further ecumenical co-operation.

Methods of working which are normal in some churches may not help in achieving the involvement of other churches in a piece of work which is to be taken forward ecumenically. For example, it is difficult for those churches which lack large central staffs to participate in meetings during normal working hours, since they often have to rely on volunteers to represent them.

There may also be a need to think imaginatively about how reports developed ecumenically are processed within the member churches. For example, an ecumenical working group may prepare a draft of conclusions and recommendations resulting from a piece of work, but it may help the handling and acceptance of a particular report if its conclusions and recommendations are put in final form by the board or committee which has direct responsibility for the subject within each member church.

There may also be ways for the churches to satisfy the needs of their own denominational networks as well as the need for ecumenical co-operation without adding extra meetings. For example it may be possible for the networks of all the churches in a particular field to meet at the same time, and to devote some of the meeting to separate denominational concerns in denominational groups, and some of the meeting to shared concerns in a plenary gathering.

The sixth rule is about the relationship of Churches Together in England and The Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland.

APPENDIX G

REPORT FROM THE 1997 FORUM TO THE ENABLING GROUP

Jesus prayed to God the Father that all his followers might be one as he and the Father are one so that the world might believe and trust in him. Over the centuries his followers have become divided. These divisions have damaged our witness to the loving purposes of God and have hindered our participation in Christ's mission to heal and transform the world.

At Swanwick in 1987 representatives of Churches in Britain and Ireland declared their readiness to commit themselves to each other under God in their earnest desire to become more fully, in his own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission. In 1990 Churches Together in England was inaugurated, and 20 Churches and Associations of Churches in England committed themselves:

- to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ, and with one another, in the Church which is his body, and
- to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world

to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In 1993 Churches Together in England inaugurated the *Called to be One* process, to examine the nature of our call to visible unity, and the results of this process formed the main agenda of the 1997 Forum. This Forum, more widely representative than on previous occasions and assembled for a longer period, gathered at Swanwick with a sense of hope and expectation in view of the progress apparent in recent decades, but also with some uncertainty about how far present relationships could be maintained and consolidated, and further progress encouraged.

The responses to the *Called to be One* process suggested four questions which face us in our pilgrimage together as we go forward into a new millennium:

- 1 a common sense of direction for the ecumenical pilgrimage;
- 2 how mutual commitment is made visible;
- 3 the next steps to be taken together on the road;
- 4 issues requiring further reflection and discussion.

The present report summarises the Forum's answers to those questions, and offers the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England a challenging programme for the next two years.

1

Our '*Call to be One*' is a call to reflect the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Scriptures, and to participate in God's mission to serve and to reconcile the world to himself through the incarnation. The unity of the church is not an end in itself, but is concerned with a broken and divided world.

We therefore believe that the direction we should now take requires us both to deepen our communion with Christ and with one another, and to fulfil our mission by common witness and service in the world.

To deepen our communion with Christ we are called to a greater engagement in prayer and worship together. To deepen our communion with one another we need to listen more attentively to one another's concerns and values.

This communion (*koinonia*) is a relationship of love and trust between the followers of Christ. Its source is the love that flows between the three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This love binds all the followers of Christ together in the Holy Spirit, moves us to worship and leads us to action in obedience to the call to share in the mission of God. Many have found the following formulation helpful in describing the characteristics of that mission in:

- proclaiming the good news of the kingdom;

- teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers;
- responding to human need by loving service;
- seeking to transform unjust structures of society; and
- safeguarding the integrity of creation, sustaining and renewing the life of the earth

So far as is possible we must do these things together.

In discerning a common sense of direction for the ecumenical pilgrimage, we move forward in three ways which are bound together: our deep relationships with one another, our practical experience of working together, and our joint theological reflection. These are worked out and made visible through our commitment to ecumenical living at local, intermediate and national levels. To share together in the mission of God requires the churches to be open to transformation in order to be a credible sign and instrument of God's Kingdom.

Our unity in mission demands a common life. For very many of us this would find visible expression through:

- the profession, in word and deed, of the one apostolic faith, which is revealed in the Holy Scripture and witnessed to in the historic creeds;
- the sharing of one baptism and the celebrating of one Eucharist;
- a common ministry of word and sacrament;
- a common ministry of oversight; and
- a means of consulting one another and reaching decisions together.

There are others of us who do not share this understanding of visible unity. All of us, however, are committed to travelling together as closely as we can, rejoicing in our diversity without imposing uniformity. The search for visible unity cannot be divorced from, or set in opposition to, obedience to the call to share in the mission of God to all humanity.

2 How mutual commitment is made visible

- We have experienced in this Forum a new quality in our relationships, and we see this as a sign of growing maturity; and we seek appropriate ways to express our growing relationship with one another:
- To continue our commitment to work with Bodies in Association and through Co-ordinating Groups as valuable and essential instruments of the ecumenical process, and to channel recommendations from the Forum to specific Agencies, where appropriate.
- To renew the Theology and Unity Group, enabling the churches to have a permanent forum for doing theology together and to encourage the developing network of bi-lateral and multi-lateral relationships which express the complexities of English ecumenical living. The agenda of this forum would link theology and experience in reflecting on Faith and Order and Mission issues.
- To ensure much more deliberate planning for the deployment of resources/ buildings.
- To promote the Ecumenical Declaration of Welcome and Commitment, whereby a church which is the only worshipping congregation in a community may, as far as possible, incorporate in its life those of all Christian traditions who live in that community.
- To invite the Enabling Group to arrange and publicise regular meetings of church leaders and appropriate church representatives at national level, and to encourage church leaders to develop the public expression of their shared ministry.
- To commend the Churches Information for Mission data-base.

3 The next steps to be taken together on the road

- We seek to identify next steps to be taken on the journey, to discover their potential. We recommend that progress should be reported within a timeframe specified by the Enabling Group. We have put the steps listed below in a suggested order of priority:
- Recognise and affirm together, by what we say and do, the common faith our churches share.
- Arrange some public expression of reconciliation, repentance and renewal between the churches in the year 2000.
- Campaign for the remission of the debt of the poorest countries by the year 2000.

- Support collaboration in denominational and ecumenical youth work through the English Churches Youth Service and the Joint Churches Youth Service Initiative, and encourage consultation with young people on the establishment of a national ecumenical Youth Forum for England, as an integral part of Churches Together in England.
- Value the breadth of Christians' experience and relationship in their daily lives across church boundaries, not least in Interchurch Families.
- Value and learn from the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Black Majority churches.
- Include in Sunday worship regular intercessions for neighbouring churches and pray for their leaders by name.
- Encourage regular mutual prayer for common concerns, and shared prayer for specific occasions.
- Share our rich traditions of spirituality in vigils, small groups for study and prayer etc.
- Use the Common Lectionary and develop a common Calendar of our saints and martyrs.
- Encourage churches, at appropriate levels, to provide adult education and joint theological education for lay, ordained and ordinands.
- Develop relationships with New Churches currently beyond main-stream ecumenism.
- Encourage local churches that are committed to working together to have an appropriate logo displayed prominently on their notice boards.
- Encourage Intermediate Bodies to explore the possibility of Local Ecumenical Partnerships at deanery/circuit level.
- Stimulate the development of Church Leaders' meetings at Intermediate level.
- Encourage strategic planning concerning ministry and mission, and the acceptance of representative working at Church Leaders' meetings.
- Take initiatives together on Regional Policy.
- Encourage cathedrals to be ecumenical resources.
- Work together in considering the Diaconate.
- Help denominational schools to become ecumenical.
- Establish a Churches Together in England website.

4 Issues requiring further reflection and discussion

We identify areas where we believe ecumenical reflection will help and enrich our pilgrimage, and their priority will need to be established by the Enabling Group:

- Establishment: an ecumenical discussion about the future of establishment, its opportunities and difficulties.
- Identity and belonging: integrating denominational heritage with the discovery of our common Christian identity.
- How can we all receive the treasures safe-guarded during our divisions?
- Renewed understanding of church structures: how do they serve the gospel?
- Authority and decision-making: principles and procedures for mutual consultation, decision-making and accountability.
- The wider church: our different forms of communion with the wider/ world-wide church.
- Local Ecumenical Partnerships: the theology of their future.
- Ecclesiastical boundaries: can they be harmonised?
- Recognition/reconciliation of ministries: what progress can there be without the reconciliation of churches?
- Eucharistic sharing: can the various positions be explored, explained, resolved?
- Baggage and treasures: finding a common way of telling the past.
- Dialogues: reception of their results.

5. Conclusion

We rejoice that in our lifetime God has led us into new relationships. Unity is the gift of God: we celebrate the unity we have experienced as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We recognise that it is only as we bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self control that we will come to the unity for which Christ prayed.

We are called to be the renewed and united body of Christ in the world - in what we do, what we say, and primarily in what we are. Our apostolic calling is to the sacrificial service of all people: to those on the periphery of society as well as those of the mainstream.

This calling requires radical renewal of the Church and of every Christian. We therefore commit ourselves to one another, and pray that we may be enabled to acknowledge our fears, to remove the barriers that divide us, and to

discover our common identity as Christians whilst appreciating the denominations which have formed us and supported us in our spiritual journey.

In the pilgrimage towards being one body, we recognise that Churches, regions and people are at different stages and have different perspectives: this means that a single blue-print is not appropriate. We celebrate the colourful diversity of experiences: we long to overcome our continuing divisions. In the past decade we have increasingly discovered the riches of many traditions and have also become much more conscious of our common calling to mission.

At the same time to hold together our common calling and to rejoice in our diversity requires us to move to a new discovery of reconciliation with one another - reconciling past memories and present hurts, confessing to one another, repenting of our attitudes which have lacked the generosity which should be a hallmark of a Christian. Reconciliation may be painful, may require giving up some human traditions and customs we have held dear, and taking up what we might find strange or difficult.

God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation in a divided world. Our integrity as ambassadors of Christ requires us rigorously to struggle to be reconciled with one another as Christians. Living with diversity as Christians is not an easy option, and requires a quality and depth of relationship which itself is a powerful expression of unity. For unity is both the journey's end and the way of journeying now.

APPENDIX H

DOCUMENTS AND DIALOGUES 1996 -2002

1. International bilateral dialogues

- a. Anglican-Methodist. *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* (1996) the report of the international Anglican-Methodist dialogue.
- b. Lutheran-Roman Catholic. The *Joint Declaration on Justification* - consensus on the previously controverted subject of justification, now accepted by both churches.
- c. Anglican-Roman Catholic. *The Gift of Authority* deals with the overall question of authority in the Church
- d. Methodist-Roman Catholic. *Speaking the Truth in Love* deals with the specific question of teaching authority within the two churches.

2. Multilateral dialogue in process

The document *Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998) was issued by the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC as 'a stage on the way to a common statement'.

3. Accords establishing closer ecclesial relationships

The *Reuilly Agreement* (2000) involving mutual recognition of each other's apostolicity between Anglican and the French Reformed and Lutheran churches.

An Anglican-Methodist Covenant was published in December 2001, aimed at mutual recognition of apostolicity and development of increasing joint oversight and co-operation. This has yet to be accepted by the governing bodies of the two churches.

4. Other documents

- a. *May They All be One* (1997) the response of the bishops of the Church of England to *Ut Unum Sint*.
- b. *Called To Love and Praise* (1999) The statement of the British Methodist Conference on ecclesiology.
- c. *One Bread, One Body* (1999) a teaching document of the British and Irish Roman catholic bishops on the eucharist, particularly linking ecclesiology and eucharistic communion.
- d. *The Eucharist, Sacrament of Unity* (2000) a teaching document of the bishops of the Church of England, responding to the issues in *One Bread, One Body* and explaining relevant Anglican practice and discipline.
- e. *Dominus Iesus* (2001) A Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith document on the uniqueness of Christ.
- f. *The letter on 'sister churches'* (2001) from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, defining the correct use, in Roman Catholic theology, of this term.
- g. The papal encyclical *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2000) dealing with the Church as 'the school of communion' and some ecumenical issues.