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REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (1977-1981)

PREFACE

Only by the power of God and the guidance of the Spirit can Christians grow together toward unity. In a spirit of thankfulness, the theologians and pastors who have taken part in the RC/Disciples of Christ dialogue for the past five years now bring a report of their meetings.

Some bilateral theological dialogues have matured to the point of publishing reports of new convergences and agreements in the understanding of the Christian faith. The publication, dissemination and study of such reports is a necessary element in the process toward union. Thus the participating churches can grasp the significance of what is emerging and, with discernment, reach some decisions.

Along the way toward such maturation, the publication of accounts of significant progress can be enlightening. The present 1982 paper from the Disciples of Christ/Roman Catholic dialogue is of this kind. It contains not an agreed statement on points of doctrine, but an agreed account, written by those commissioned for the dialogue, to record promising developments. The paper describes some convergence in understanding as well as some of the problems which have yet to be faced.

Thus the paper will inform our churches and evoke from them interest and reactions. We desire that what has begun in good faith may end in a unity of faith given visible expression. May the Lord bring to completion the work of his grace.

Dr Paul A. Crow, Jr
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Co-Chairmen

June 1, 1982

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In September, 1977 a five year international dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church was launched on the theme: "Apostolicity and Catholicity in the Visible Unity of the Church." The eighteen-member Commission had been appointed jointly by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in collaboration with the U.S. Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, and the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council and the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada. Its membership included Roman Catholic theologians and pastors from Canada, France, Ireland, the United States, and the Vatican, and Disciples theologians and pastors from Canada, England, Puerto Rico, the United States, and Zaire. Dr. Paul A. Crow, jr. and the Most Reverend Stanley J. Ott were named as co-chairmen for the Commission.
2. In developing the main theme of its work, the Commission selected four sub-themes to focus discussion at each annual meeting: "The Nature of the Church and Elements of its Unity" (Indianapolis, 1977); "Baptism: Gift and Call in the Search for Unity" (Rome, 1978); "Faith and Tradition in the Life of the Church" (Annapolis, 1979); "The Dynamics of Unity and of Division" (New Orleans, 1980). At its fifth session (Ardfert, Ireland, 1981), the Commission prepared a final report to be submitted to its authorizing bodies.

3. Each annual meeting lasted five days and followed a regular pattern of work, of sharing in worship and prayer, and of worshipping with Disciples and Roman Catholics in local congregations and parishes. Four papers, two from each team, were presented and discussed with the tasks of identifying present agreements, convergences, new insights and continuing tensions or problems for further consideration. An "agreed account" of each meeting was prepared to serve as a common memory for the Commission's work. The papers and agreed accounts were published in *Mid-Stream: An Ecumenical Journal* (Vol. XVIII, No. 4, October, 1979; Vol. XX, No. 3, July, 1981).
4. This final report does not summarize the papers the agreed accounts from our previous meetings. Rather, it is a statement of shared insights and findings which the Commission identified out of its work, its discussion and debate, and its life together in fellowship and prayer during these five years.

II. OUR LIFE TOGETHER

5. These five years of the dialogue between Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholics have been the occasion of joy as we have grown together in theological understanding, in fellowship, and in the way we approach the problems of doctrine. We have been led to a better understanding of the nature of the one Church of God, the situation of our divided traditions, and also of the pressure of our common calling to visible unity in Christ.
6. We are aware that we come from two very different Christian backgrounds. Our histories, our cultural journeys, our theological traditions and methods have, in some often important respects, been different. Some of the problems between us spring from these differences. Yet, the very diversity of our histories and Christian experiences frees us for a new kind of ecumenical dialogue. The Disciples movement was born out of the churches of the Reformation but has developed its own unique position among them. In particular, there was no deliberate, formal break in communion between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church, although our histories have included the general bias which in the past reflected uncharitable attitudes between Protestants and Roman Catholics. This fact has allowed us to move beyond any initial apprehensions or presumed distance into cordial relationships and to discover that we have more in common than we expected.
7. A significant amount of what we thought initially to be division cannot be so defined. We have begun to discover that when we go beneath the current theological descriptions of our traditions, a convergence becomes evident. As we understand our traditions and our ecclesiologies more clearly, we discover a common source has fed them. The customary vocabulary of division does not exactly describe our situation, even though there are still some important things we cannot do together or on which we cannot yet be at one.
8. This dialogue has been liberating because both Disciples and Roman Catholics set the fullness of communion at the heart of their understanding of the Church. Barton Warren Stone claimed for Disciples: "Let Christian unity be our polar star." Alexander Campbell proclaimed that "The union of Christians is essential to the conversion of the world." The same vocation, inherent in the Catholic tradition, was also claimed for Roman Catholics by the Second Vatican Council: "The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council ... The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike" (*Decree on Ecumenism*, nn. 1,5).
9. Paradoxically, some of our differences spring from the ways we have understood and pursued Christian unity. For example, the Disciples of Christ, called into being as an instrument of unity among divided Christians; have refused to make creeds the definitive faith in order to promote unity and communion among Christians. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, holds to the creeds and the Petrine ministry for the same purpose. Our dialogue has helped us see this and other contrasts in the context of the fundamental commitment of Disciples and Roman Catholics to serve the visible unity of the whole People of God. In this perspective, some issues that seem to divide us can be traced to the same roots and certain of our differences appear complementary.
10. The nature of our ecumenical dialogue requires us to listen to each other's theological words while searching for the language of convergence, always in faithfulness to the truth of the Gospel. Our report gives substantial commentary on the issues which have been at the heart of the first phase of our dialogue and gives our churches hope for the future.

III. SPIRITUAL ECUMENISM

11. In Christ God has shown his supreme love for the world (*Jn 3 :16*), destroying the power of sin, reconciling us to himself (*2 Cor 5 :18-19*) and breaking down the barriers of division in the human family. The Spirit of God is in the Church to bring this reconciling work of Christ to completion and continues to gather into it all who are ready to accept the saving Gospel. As human history unfolds, the Spirit of God prepares the coming of the final Kingdom. Already in the Church, the future unity of the Kingdom is anticipated as the Spirit brings together in faith and love those who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.
12. The Spirit of God draws the Church towards full unity. God's Spirit also works in the world for a new humanity through the liberation of human beings from the oppression and alienation that comes from sin. Both realms of the work of the Spirit are integral parts of one plan of salvation.
13. The unity God has given and continues to give the Church has its origins in God's own life. The Spirit of God is the author of the Church's unity. Through the Spirit, all who are one in the Church are drawn into the loving communion of the Father and Son and in that communion are united to one another. Thus, they are being made one in mind and understanding, since through faith they adhere to the one eternal Word in whom the wisdom of God is fully expressed. In this unity, the divine plan of salvation accomplished in Christ is expressed in the world and is being ever more fully revealed.
14. This theological awareness permits us to affirm that visible unity will come from the one Spirit of God dynamically present among Christians even in their divided condition. The Spirit calls all Christians to assume responsibility for giving authentic expression to their unity in life, in worship and in mission. The Spirit enables them to overcome obstacles and empowers them to grow together towards full visible unity.
15. The work of Christian unity, then, is profoundly and radically a spiritual one, i.e., it comes from and is a response to the Holy Spirit. We are encouraged that both our churches share a will for unity but acknowledge that, for this unity to be made fully manifest, our will and our commitments must be sustained by what has been called "*spiritual ecumenism*" (*Decree on Ecumenism*, paragraph 8).
16. Spiritual ecumenism does not permit us to avoid the pain of our separated existence, being content to remain as we are. Indeed, the Spirit gives us the courage to confront our divided state.
17. Spiritual ecumenism does not allow us to leave aside the need to deal with the visible manifestation of the unity of the Church. Indeed, we understand that just as the Word of God became flesh in Jesus, so in a similar way, the power of the Spirit of God is manifested in the Church as a visible communion.
18. Nor does spiritual ecumenism relieve us of the Gospel concern for the poor, the alienated and the oppressed. Indeed, Christians often become truly aware of the bonds that unite them and hear the call to conversion of heart as they meet the challenge to promote a society of justice, freedom and charity serving the dignity of every human being.
19. Spiritual ecumenism arises from the realization that the one Spirit of God has already brought us into Christ and continues to move us towards full visible unity. Spiritual ecumenism gives us hope that the Spirit will lead us from the imperfect unity we know painfully in our divided condition to a wholeness we shall experience in joy.
20. Spiritual ecumenism implies a clear consciousness of the sinfulness of division among Christians. Through spiritual ecumenism we are set free as communities and as individuals from seeking to justify our divisions and we are moved to seek a shared life in a reconciled community. Spiritual ecumenism impels us to a quality of evangelical life marked by the will to be faithful to Christ and open to one another. It also implies repentance and renunciation of egoism, as well as newness of mind, humility and gentleness in the service of others, that is conversion of heart. This *metanoia* thus provides what might be called an "*evangelical space*" – an arena for the operation of the Gospel – in which we find God's grace newly available to bind us together in praising, blessing, beseeching the God who makes us one. In this evangelical space, we discover new possibilities for genuine exchange and sharing and for seeing in a new light these affirmations that find historical expression in our still separated communities.

21. Thus, spiritual ecumenism allows us to be open to the grace of God. The Holy Spirit is freeing us to experience together his unifying power in the many ways open to us in the ongoing life of the Church, that is, accepting and proclaiming together the Word of God in the Scriptures, confessing together the same Lord, praying together, attending one another's celebration of the Lord's Supper and having a common mission as the priestly people of God in the whole human community. Although we do not yet fully share these experiences owing to our desire to be authentic and faithful to the Church as we have known it heretofore in our communions, we nevertheless realize that God makes the power of his unifying love felt even now. He speaks to us about the contradictions of our divisions when together we open ourselves to Him in prayer and worship, in our joint efforts at articulating a common theological language in ecumenical dialogue, and in the common struggle for justice and peace in the world.
22. In this evangelical space we are empowered both to grow together and at the same time to pay the price of suffering caused by our present divisions and by the efforts to overcome them. Here we discern a reflection of the present growth in painful struggle that marks the whole ecumenical movement. But we take hope, knowing that "the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly as we await ... redemption." So "we wait for it with patience," confident that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness" and trusting that "the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (cf. *Rom 8:22-27*).

IV. BAPTISM

23. By its very nature, baptism impels Christians toward oneness. In baptism a person is incorporated into Christ Jesus and into his Body, the Church. The fundamental unity which God has given us is rooted in the sacrament and cannot be destroyed. We are called to the one baptism by the Gospel that is the way of salvation for all humanity. Baptism is, therefore, the fundamental source of our oneness in Christ's life, death and resurrection.
24. Yet, we came to the subject of baptism with an awareness of differences in baptismal practice which could not be treated lightly. At first sight, these differences might seem to represent divergent understandings which could threaten our fundamental unity through baptism.
25. In fact, we have discovered important areas in which our understanding and practice of baptism encourage us to speak truly of one baptism. These areas were found to have varying degrees of significance.
26. a) We share a common attribution of the origins of baptismal observance to the example of Jesus, the command of the risen Christ, and the practice of the primitive Church.
27. b) For both Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholics baptism is with water and "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
28. c) In both our traditions, baptism is ordinarily administered by a duly authorized minister.
29. d) In both our traditions, it is affirmed that we enter into a new relationship with God as his children and as brothers and sisters, one of another in Christ, for in baptism our sins are forgiven and we become a new creation.
30. e) Since God never revokes the new relationship brought about in baptism, rebaptism is contrary to the Gospel and should never be practiced. Nevertheless, we are aware of the need for continued repentance after baptism and we experience forgiveness in the ongoing life of the Church.
31. f) Both our traditions maintain the necessity for the role of faith in baptism. For both Roman Catholics and Disciples, incorporation into the Body of Christ and forgiveness of sins are primarily acts of God that presuppose faith and call for a continuing active response of faith for their full development and fruitfulness.
32. This fundamental agreement must be kept in mind as we seek to interpret anew certain differences in regard to baptism. These differences fall under two headings:
33. *The Relation of Personal Faith to Baptism*
 Since believers' baptism is the form of baptism explicitly attested in the New Testament, the conviction of Disciples is that the rite of baptism should be preceded by a personal confession of faith and repentance.

For historical, theological and pastoral reasons, Roman Catholics baptize infants, They see this as the first sacrament in the process of Christian initiation, followed by Christian nurture and instruction, and culminating in the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist, accompanied by a life of continual repentance and conversion.

However, Catholics see the fundamental belief of their church regarding baptism as expressed with new clarity in the revised rite for adult baptism, which includes personal confession of faith.

At the same time, Disciples have an increasing appreciation for the place of infant baptism in the history of the Church. In part, this involves understanding infant baptism in relation to Christian nurture in both the family and the Christian community. Also, Disciples have seen that infant baptism has been a pastoral response, in a situation where members are no longer predominantly first-generation Christians.

34. *The Mode of Baptism*

Disciples practice immersion, believing it to be the practice of New Testament times and the clearest symbolic representation of our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Roman Catholics, on the basis of early Christian tradition, regard pouring as an acceptable mode while acknowledging the symbolic value of descent into the baptismal waters. They have always recognized and sometimes practice baptism by immersion. Disciples are coming to recognize the other modes, while retaining a preference for immersion.

35. Although God's saving power in the world is unlimited, baptism is fundamental in Christian life. By it, we become members of Christ's Body and participate in the life he gives. Participation in Christ's life calls us to enter his ministry, suffering, death and resurrection, as is prefigured in our baptism, for the salvation of the whole world.
36. Because both baptism and the eucharist involve participation in the Body of Christ and since the grace of God received in baptism is nurtured and strengthened by participation in the eucharistic meal, the oneness achieved by grace in baptism should find manifestation and completion in the *anamneses* (memorial/remembrance) of the sacrifice of Christ for all humanity at the table of the one Lord.
37. Baptism is, paradoxically, a sign of unity and a reminder of disunity. It is a sign of unity inasmuch as it incorporates all Christians into Christ. It is a reminder of disunity in that, as administered, it also initiates Christians into separated ecclesial communities with their special traditions and doctrines.
38. We have been helped in our further consideration of this paradox by distinguishing two affirmations of faith. The one is the fundamental assent of the person to God's gift of grace in Jesus Christ, a gift that is, in itself, life-transforming and that is signified in baptism. This affirmation brings our lives under the determination of God's grace, thereby turning us outward from ourselves and making us one in Christ. The other is the acceptance of the elaboration of the faith as that has come to expression in our separated ecclesial communities. Baptism is also the induction into a particular ecclesial community with its own explication of the one faith. Making this distinction, therefore, has helped us to understand our fundamental unity and to locate the source of our separation.
39. However, in conclusion, we affirm the mutual recognition of baptism administered by Roman Catholics and Disciples, convinced that the oneness we receive by the grace of presuppose faith and call for a continuing active response of faith for their full development and fruitfulness. God in baptism must find its completion in visible ecclesial unity, so that the world may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, as we together confess him to be. We are determined, therefore, by the same grace to discover more fully the truth that shall set us all free.

V. FAITH AND TRADITION

40. Our two traditions are called to proclaim to the world the fundamental truth of God's reconciliation in Christ, to which both have given assent. This common assent is sealed through baptism in separated ecclesial bodies; nevertheless, in our baptism we are given radical unity. This realization impels us as the Church, the Body of Christ, to witness to the Apostolic faith in our life, teaching, liturgy, and service.
41. The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has developed the means for proclaiming the Apostolic faith from age to age, as it has sought to defend the faith and communicate it faithfully in different times and circumstances. Scripture and Tradition embody these responses to the faith that God gives.

42. Faith is God's gift, both to the individual and to the community. In both cases, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we believe, grow in faith and live by faith. Our faith is that Christ is the Risen Lord who is the reason for the existence of the Church. This faith begets a new relationship among all who believe. The faith which commits a person to Christ commits that person to the Church which is his Body; because faith is given by the one Spirit of Christ, it is the one basic faith that binds Roman Catholics, Disciples and other Christians in one fellowship in that Spirit. However, in spite of this radical unity in the Body of Christ, we recognize that we have not yet fully achieved the visible ecclesial unity which he willed. While gratefully recognizing the measure of agreement reached on this topic, we also became acutely aware, at this point, of some serious unresolved issues that need further discussion in our dialogue; these, we believe, should be a major part of our future agenda.
43. The conversion process by which one commits oneself in faith to Christ and to Discipleship is a gradual, continuous and difficult one. Christ promised that his Spirit would be present to the individual in and through the community of believers. The Christian community, therefore, calls forth, nurtures, illumines, and sustains the faith of the individual in its liturgy and prayer, and its example of Christ-like love and service.
44. Christian life is life in community, a community which recognizes the dignity and freedom of human conscience, while also acknowledging the need for the individual conscience to develop in greater obedience to the Gospel. The Church is called to guide and enable this process.
45. Each Christian's faith is inseparable from the faith of the community. Personal faith is an appropriation of the Church's faith and depends on it for authenticity as well as for nurture. At the same time, bearing witness to personal faith builds up the life of the Church and quickens and strengthens the faith of all.
46. Insofar as the Church as a community of faith and love is the sign of Christ in the world, believers are called to offer a common witness of faith, so that the world might believe that Jesus is Lord. Thus the life of faith, both of the individual and of the community, is expected to manifest a certain quality by which it becomes a "light in the world," "salt of the earth." Both the individual believer and the pilgrim Church are ever called to a deeper conversion to Christ, a more authentic faith. Scripture, mediating the Word of God, has a central, normative, and irreplaceable role in this process of personal and ecclesial conversion.
47. Together, the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church acknowledge the important role of Tradition in the life of the Church. The relationship between faith and Tradition has to do with the question of how Christians from age to age come to the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Lord of life and the way of salvation for the whole world.
48. The Apostles were called by Christ and commissioned to a unique position in the life of the Church. They attest the presence of the risen Lord and hold a special place in the communication of faith to subsequent generations. In that communication, the Holy Spirit is always present in the life of the Church, guaranteeing that the Church shall not fail to bring about the fulfillment of the divine plan.
49. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, the New Testament expresses the response in faith of the Apostolic Church to the risen Lord. This response was itself conditioned by God's revelation and promises to Israel.
50. The New Testament Scriptures, resting on the authority of the Apostles and interpreted with the aid of the Holy Spirit, constitute the inspired record of the Tradition which stems from the Apostolic Era. This Tradition reflects the *sensus fidelium* (the shared awareness of the faithful) of the primitive church as a whole. However, the *sensus fidelium* is not fixed in the past, but is ever dynamic and living through the dialectical interaction of Scripture and Tradition in the ongoing life of the Church from age to age.
51. Each generation must come to faith anew through the hand on this power of the Holy Spirit and faith to succeeding generations. At the same time, the Church in every age inherits the successes and failures of the past.
52. In the process of making explicit the implications of revelation, various traditions arise. This resultant diversity is to be expected and is frequently itself an expression of the catholicity of the Church. Problems arise when the ecclesial context in which a baptismal assent is made exercises an influence of such a kind that the communion in faith is compromised. Roman Catholics and Disciples both recognize that they move beyond the fundamental reality of faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ to understandings that have grown out of a diversity of Christian traditions.

53. Roman Catholics hold that the living transmission of the Gospel in and by the Church is necessary for a more complete articulation, manifestation and application of the truths that are in Scripture than Scripture alone affords. They look to the affirmations of faith and interpretations expressed in the Church's official liturgical texts, creedal statements, teachings of the episcopal college, especially in councils, and papal teachings which they believe to be formulated with the guidance of the Spirit. While the Scriptures are normative and the soul of all subsequent theological investigation, their adequate understanding is possible only within the life of the believing community.
54. Disciples believe that the New Testament is a sufficient expression of the essential faith, doctrine, and practice of the individual Christian and the Christian community. Thus while being conscious of standing in the Tradition of the Church, they have not given a normative position to later expressions of the faith of the Church, and in particular have not used creeds and confessions as tests of eucharistic fellowship. Disciples believe their history shows that a church can develop and sustain its own distinctive character without a formal creed, and that the exercise of freedom and diversity in expressions of belief and worship need not threaten its unity. However, where affirmation of faith, both ancient and modern, have been used as a basis for the expression of the essential unity of the whole Church (for example, in united churches), Disciples have gladly accepted them.
55. Both Disciples and Roman Catholics are committed to the appropriation in their own lives of all that is good from the traditions of others, both in the past and today.

VI. AFFIRMATIONS ABOUT THE UNITY WE SEEK

56. Through a convergence of doctrinal understanding and in the experience of the reality of our oneness in the fundamental assent to God, we are able to accept as a basic principle of ecumenism that there can be only one Church of God (*unica Ecclesia*) and that this Church already exists. It is the accomplishment of salvation, both individually and corporately, for all humanity. This salvation to which Scripture bears witness expresses God's purpose for the entire creation.
57. The new humanity in Jesus Christ which God wills comes to exist in the one Church of God. The coming definitive form of the Church as God's eschatological people can be fully known only to God. Both Roman Catholics and Disciples believe that the Church takes visible shape in history and that one sign of this visibility is the common profession of the Gospel with reception of baptism. This visible community belongs to the very esse of the Church.
58. Through their common life and fellowship (*koinonia*) the members of this community which is the Church witness to salvation as they pray and worship together, forgive, accept, and love one another, and stand together in time of trial. Such communion is made possible by a deeper communion, a communion in the good things that come from God who makes the people of the Church his own as a new creation in Christ.
59. We become this new creation through the means of grace which God has given to his Church. Thus the Church is the visible form of God's grace. It opens the way to salvation through preaching, sacraments, and other institutions derived from apostolic authority. Participation in these means of grace constitutes the deeper communion that unites us together in true fellowship in the Spirit.
60. To this one Church belong all those who are baptized in water and the Spirit with the authentic confession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God. These persons become members of the Body of Christ and receive the seal of the Holy Spirit, which cannot be removed even by schism. Divisions among Christians cannot destroy the one Church of God.
61. As we look at differences between Roman Catholics and Disciples we often discover in them elements of complementarity. We see ourselves as having a communion *in via*. The unique unity of the one Church of God is the goal. We are already on the way; we have taken the first step in faith through baptism which is also the call to that final unity. Now we have the task of giving external expression to the communion *in via*. In the very process of our mutual discovery of certain ecclesial elements in each other, we are called in a renewed fidelity to actions that will make our relationship more intense and more profound.

VII. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

62. Our situation as Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholics, discovering each other in this dialogue, is a reflection of what is happening everywhere among Christians as they yield themselves in obedience to what God is doing through the ecumenical movement. We are not yet at the point where we can ask the churches to which we belong to make a definitive judgment on our work or to commit themselves to some decision which could have structural consequences.
63. Yet our experience tells us and we must declare, that the relation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Disciples of Christ is in the process of a growth which is deeply important for both partners. This process calls for loyalty and courage as we pursue it towards maturity and, here and now, it challenges and makes demands on us both in a practical and costly way. The Lord is confronting us with these demands. We believe several of them especially require us to give a faithful response and to draw certain conclusions in practice:
64. a) Catholics and Disciples along with many other Christians are discovering that, in essence, their commitment to Christ and their fellowship in the Gospel are the same. There is already a unity of grace which in some measure is present, bearing fruit, and which is disposing us for visible unity and surging us to move ahead to it. One of the most striking insights we have received in our dialogue is the awareness that the interior communion between Christians across divisions is an essential element of unity and a necessary part of achieving the goal of full visible unity. This is something we have experienced as we have learned to take each other seriously in our theological awareness and in our commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ. Above all, we have experienced it together in our prayer, our reading of the Scriptures, and the meditation which has seasoned, all our work and given a special flavor and substance to this dialogue. We have come to appreciate more deeply also the importance in our two traditions of the renewal of the liturgy and the centrality of the Eucharist.
65. b) Spiritual ecumenism leads to more than the sum of doctrinal agreements. It requires us to “do the truth” of unity by acting together in the name of the Gospel. Our obedience to Christ, the Lord of history, has to be made incarnate as we carry our own responsibility of enabling the Kingdom to penetrate the world, its life, and its institutions. In its own way, it can be as full an expression of the common faith as doctrinal agreement, for action in harmony with the demands of the Gospel makes known Christian truth and reveals its riches. Communion expressed through practice is an important element of the emerging *koinonia* among churches. joint action, both of individuals and of separated churches, is a factor in unity which reaches to the roots of the ecumenical task. This, too, has implications now for Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholics in each place.
66. c) Preparation for visible unity is taking place already through discussion of important doctrinal issues. This is clear from the work which has been done in our dialogue commission over the past five years. That is a significant beginning. We have now the framework in which it becomes possible and necessary to do further work on unresolved issues, particularly the nature and mission of the Church, the Eucharist, and the ministry.
67. The dialogue commission gives thanks to God that certain doctrinal convergences on some key issues begin to be discernible in our work already. This encourages us to work for no less than visible unity – not a limping compromise achieved by paring away divergences, but nothing less than common witness to the one apostolic faith.
68. The dialogue between Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church has begun and already we must live in the logic of what is happening. It demands that we begin now, as far as possible, to proclaim together the same Lord Jesus Christ, giving common witness to “the hope that is in us” (1 Pet 2:13). It demands, even now, that we enter to the fullest extent possible into that process of mutual recognition which is ultimately a worshipful acknowledgment of the one Lord in whom we are baptized, whose gifts we enjoy, to whose service we are called.

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