

A Comment on

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EUCHARIST

FOURTH AGREED STATEMENT OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST-ROMAN CATHOLIC  
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE  
2003-2009

This fourth report of this international dialogue which began in 1977, and has published three previous reports, focuses on some important questions in ecumenical dialogue. This report builds on insights of previous phases of the dialogue. The discussion is approached in a careful and nuanced way. Areas of agreement are clearly set out, as are differences and questions in need of further dialogue. This report represents a welcome contribution to ecumenical literature.

The report is offered with a clear statement of its *status* at the beginning, namely that "it is a joint statement of the Commission, not an authoritative declaration by the Roman Catholic Church or by the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, which will study the document in due course." At the same time, the "authorities who appointed the Commission, have now allowed the statement to be published so that it may be widely discussed."

A sense of the continuity of this dialogue from phase to phase can be seen in the fact that the need to focus on the theme of this report was already stated by the second report, *The Church as Communion in Christ* (CCIC, 1992). Outlining its future work, the latter spoke of the need "to discuss our teachings on the presence of the Lord in the celebration of the supper, its sacrificial nature, the role of the ordained minister and the role of the community" (CCIC, no. 53a). Here, in phase four, these themes are taken up. The conclusion of this fourth phase says that "this is the first time in thirty years of dialogue that they have engaged in a detailed discussion of the Eucharist," and modestly indicates that their treatment of it in this statement "is not an exhaustive account of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Rather it is a promising beginning - a 'communion in via'" (no. 79).

This and other aspects of this report point to the organic nature of the work of this international dialogue since it began in 1977. This document consists of an Introduction, four sections, and a conclusion, together presenting a logical process in which to focus on the main themes.

In this commentary I will point to some significant aspects of each section of the report, and then present some reflections on it.

### *Introduction*

The brief Introduction (ns. 1-4) recalls several important affirmations about the context in which dialogue on the main theme takes place, affirmations seen also in their previous reports. The first is that the goal of this dialogue is "the achievement of full visible unity between our two communions" (no.1). This shared commitment of Disciples and Catholics to full visible unity is stated elsewhere in the text (e.g. no 5, cf. 73). The theological reason for this goal is based on the fact that "Our lack of full communion contradicts the will of Christ and impels us to listen to God's Word and follow God's leading towards overcoming our divisions" (no.2).

Related to this goal is another important "shared affirmation," namely, "the significance of spiritual ecumenism, of setting all our work within the context of prayer for God's guidance" (no.2). This affirmation of the importance of spiritual ecumenism, has been there from the first phase of dialogue, whose report *Apostolicity and Catholicity* (A&C 1981) provides a whole section on spiritual ecumenism. acknowledges that it is God's grace which will bring about visible unity. Visible unity will come "from the one grace of the Spirit of God dynamically present among Christians even in their divided condition" (A&C no. 14), so that the work of Christian unity "is profoundly and radically a spiritual one ... it comes from and is a response to the Holy Spirit" (A&C no.15). It is for this reason, as the present report states, that "each meeting was set within a context of daily worship, both morning and evening, and included bible study, as well as reflection on theological papers" (no. 3).

In relation to spiritual ecumenism, the Commission recalls that the report of the first phase spoke of the 'evangelical space' found by those who 'are set free as communities and as individuals from seeking to justify our divisions and ... are moved to seek a shared life in a reconciled community'. When this happens, 'new possibilities for genuine exchange and sharing' are discovered' (A&C No. 19) (no. 2). In short it is through the *metanoia* fostered by spiritual ecumenism, that creates the conditions-the evangelical space- that allows them to engage in the authentic dialogue required to seek the unity of Christians. And to this end, the report says, "we spent considerable time building relationships and presenting our ecclesiological self-understandings" (no.2). In this light, they could say, at the beginning of this report that, in this period of dialogue, "the Commission has discovered significant agreement in faith in relation to common understandings on aspects of our theme, which are now presented in this Statement" (no. 4). They were also able to conclude, at the end of the dialogue "that by careful mutual explanation and listening to each other misunderstandings have been overcome. The extent of agreement is significant and offers hope to Disciples and Catholics for our greater unity" (no.80). Spiritual ecumenism characterized by prayer, promotes changes of mind and heart allowing one to create the readiness to move in the direction of reconciliation.

### **Reflection on the Introduction**

This goal of unity at which the dialogue aims also reveals the deep level of commitment motivating the partners in this dialogue. Some ecumenical observers believe that one finds today less sense of commitment to this goal of visible unity by Christians than in previous decades. If so, this is not the case in this dialogue. In the view of the Catholic Church full visible unity is the primary goal of ecumenism in general. Many other bilateral dialogues involving the Catholic Church articulate this same goal, as does the multilateral dialogue of Faith and Order.

The recognition that spiritual ecumenism is fundamental, and creates the "evangelical space" which allows the dialogue partners to break through the walls of hostility, and to help lead their constituencies to do the same, is an important realization with which to confront the powerful forces of division that have prevailed for centuries. It is an acknowledgment that, although dialogue, cooperation and other important ecumenical activities are very important in the quest for Christian unity, the achievement of unity depends on the grace of God. Prayer for unity is primary, and must always accompany dialogue. From a Catholic point of view, these perspectives correspond very much to what is stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (ns. 820- 822).

### **Section 1: Oneness in Christ in the Church**

(ns 5-13)

As Sub-section 1.1 (A Shared Commitment to the Unity of the Church) begins, Catholics and Disciples start by making an important confession of faith: "both confess the oneness of the church and recognize it as the gift of God." They state too, that "for Disciples and Catholics, the visible unity of the Church is at the heart of the Gospel", it is "essential to the conversion of the world," and it is "linked with the salvation of the world" (CCIC, no. 8) (no. 5).

They express together further important aspects of the relation of Christ to the Church, and other basic aspects of shared faith. They do not attempt a full ecclesiology here, and have said more about the Church in previous reports. But they present some important areas of agreement, adding to what is said above. Both agree "that the Church is communion in Christ," "the covenant people of God, founded by and in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit," "the Body of Christ." They speak also of the divinely constituted nature of the Church, and its trinitarian basis (no. 6). The importance of this conviction is that "Without an understanding of the union of the church with Christ, the church would be reduced to a solely human organization and its mission undermined" (no. 7). Together they say that "At Pentecost the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit became the mission of the Church". They had previously agreed and recall here, that 'the Holy Spirit guides the Church, which because of this guidance will not finally fail in its task of proclaiming the Gospel' (*Receiving and Handing on the Faith*, RHF, no. 2.4) (no. 7). The basis of the goal of the dialogue, the visible unity of our two communions, "is our unity in Christ" (no. 6).

Having just spoken of the union of the Church with Christ, this subsection comes to an end with the Commission dealing with the problem of sin in the Church. While "The Church lives from Christ, in Christ, and for Christ", the Commission recognizes the importance of distinguishing between Jesus Christ and his Church, so as to avoid the risk of failing to recognize the sins of the members of the Church, or of blaming these sins on Christ. Wanting to avoid the latter, It cites *Lumen gentium*, which states that 'While Christ, "holy, blameless, unstained" (*Heb. 7:26*) knew no sin (see *2 Cor. 5:21*), and came only to expiate the sins of the people, the Church, containing sinners in its own bosom, is at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification and it pursues unceasingly penance and renewal' (*LG 8*)" (no. 8).

Subsection 1.2 (One Faith, One Baptism, One Body) points to two important areas of agreement in faith, already affirmed in the Commission's first agreed statement (A&C, ns.36-37), and thus helps prepare the reader for discussion of the Eucharist which soon follows. The first is Trinitarian faith. "Catholics and Disciples share the apostolic faith of the church in one God, revealed in three persons" (no. 9). The second gets directly into sacramental life: "unity of faith

is also expressed in the one baptism, which we share...." A&C no. 24" (no.9).

Such basic affirmations lead to the question: "in what sense can we speak of being part of One Body?" (No. 10). The answer is an honest recognition that they share degrees of communion, as in agreed areas of faith just mentioned, and at the same time acknowledge limits to the communion they share: "our communion at present is imperfect .... There is an apparent lack of agreement on substantial questions of faith (and) we need to identify and explore these questions more precisely than we have done so far." (no. 11). The first agreed account had described this situation as "a communion in *via*". "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" (A&C no. 57). For Catholics the *Decree on Ecumenism* 3 confirms this: "Those who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church". Disciples confirm this, with their conviction, "less-formally-stated", "that persons baptized in other churches (whether as infants or at later age) are sisters and brothers in Christ, in no need of rebaptism by immersion."

The dialogue comes back to the question of how to build up this "communion in *via*", how to make use of the "evangelical space" resulting from *metanoia* "in which we find God's grace newly available to bind us together in praising, blessing, beseeching the God who makes us one" (A&C, no. 19) (no. 11). This unity which we already share should be put to work through various kinds of encounter and joint action. It expresses gratitude for the many ways in which, on the local level such cooperation is already taking place: common prayer, common witness, common social action. Such activities, in contrast to the divisions of the past, "make room" for one another as those who are commonly incorporated into the body of Christ. They "express our communion *in via*" (no.12).

This section ends with this important statement. "This understanding of the Church as communion (explored particularly in the second agreed statement) obliges us to regard the church's existence as part of the revealed will of God, and not a matter of human construction. Equally it underlines the seriousness of our separation from anyone who shares the common apostolic faith in the triune God" (no. 13).

### Reflection on Section 1

Particularly notable in Section 1 is the strong way in which the report speaks of the necessity of unity as "essential for the conversion of the world", "linked to the salvation of the world." (no.5), and the common conviction that the understanding of the Church as communion obliges us to regard the Church's existence as "part of the revealed will of God and not a matter of human construction (no. 13)." Disciples and Catholics here speak of agreements on a number of important aspects of the Church, and of the apostolic faith.

Significant too for this dialogue, and for the wider ecumenical movement is the "less formally stated," Disciples' conviction stated above, which also relates to infant and adult baptism. Disciples have understood themselves "as a believers' church after the pattern of the New Testament church and have practiced baptism upon confession of faith in Christ." They generally did not recognize the validity of infant baptism until the twentieth century (CCIC, no. 13). The position, that baptism requires a personal profession of faith (to the exclusion of infant baptism), is held today by other Christian families, indeed some of the fastest growing communities. It is therefore an important ecumenical problem, and has been discussed in this dialogue. Already in the first phase of this dialogue significant convergences were reached. Catholics described historical, theological and pastoral reasons for the practice of infant baptism, but also that they 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", and that it has been "a pastoral response to a situation where members are no longer predominately first generation Christians" (A&C no. 30). Convergence was found also on the mode of baptism. (A&C no.25). The "less formally stated" Disciples conviction continues to contribute to Disciples-Catholic rapprochement on the issue of infant and adult baptism, and might give important witness to other bilateral relationships and dialogues seeking to resolve this ecumenical problem.

### Section 2 *The Risen Christ and the Living Word: Word and Sacrament in the Church* (Nos. 14-25)

The dialogue prepares for its reflection on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist in Section 3, by situating it, first, in Section 1, within some reflections on the church and on aspects of faith held in common, and then, in Section 2, in the broader context of the presence of the risen Christ in the world, and in the Church. In the Church the risen Christ is present in Word and Sacrament.

Section 2 focuses specifically on the resurrection of Christ. "The significance of the resurrection of Christ is that he is dynamically present in both Church and world. The final promise of Christ - 'I am with you always' (Mt. 28:20) ... has been the basis of a wider belief in the presence of Christ in the world and of the specific belief in the presence of Christ in the Church" (no. 14). And therefore, the Commission could agree "that in the mission of the Church Christ is present in prayer, in the reading of the Bible, in the liturgy, in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist [Catholics would say in five other sacraments as well] in the preached Word, in the care of the poor and the sick, and in self-sacrificing love" (no.14). The broad expansiveness of the presence of the risen Christ becomes the context in which to appreciate later (in

Section 3) the intensity of his presence in the Eucharist.

The importance of this reflection on the Risen Christ is that it is reflection on the heart of the redemption. Sub-section 2.1's discussion of "the presence of the risen Christ in the World" gives them the opportunity to confess together that "Catholics and Disciples believe that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, was sent into the world by God to reveal God's redemptive will and that by his death and resurrection this redemption was achieved". The impact of this: "No longer confined to a particular place and time, the risen Christ is present in the world God created", even if in a hidden way, which they illustrate with several examples (no. 15).

In subsection 2.2, (The Presence of the Risen Christ in the Church), Disciples and Catholics together "speak of the gift of Christ's presence, experienced in the Church" (no. 16). They affirm that he is the source of holiness in the Church. "The holiness of the Church is the gift of God. The Son of God has given himself for her to sanctify her and make (her) a source of sanctification (*Jn. 17:19, 1 Cor. 3:17, Eph. 5:25b-27*). The holiness of the Church is a perpetual resource for her members who recognize their need of conversion and sanctification." At the same time, there must be an active response by the Christian to this gift: "we both also insist that spiritual life involves a constant struggle and a humility that resists any claims to our own 'achievement' of holiness. The focus is always on the work God has done and is doing in us" (no. 17). At the same time, "Divisions among Christians contradict the holiness to which the Christian community is called" by the presence of the Risen Christ (cf. *1 Cor. 11: 17- 34*) (no. 18).

The biblical reflection in this subsection comes to a close by recalling the identification, in John's Gospel, "of Christ with the Word who 'was in the beginning with God' (*Jn. 1:2*) ... and 'the living bread that came down from heaven' (*Jn. 6:51*)" enabling us "to understand the ways in which Word and sacrament are integrally related in the life of the Church." This leads to a discussion on "The Dynamism of God's Word" (subsection 2.3) and then on the Unity of Word and Sacrament (subsection 2.4). In the scriptures, God's Word calls for a response. In the new Testament, the Word of God becomes flesh "is the central mystery of the new Testament: God's hidden purpose now revealed. The Word of God and mystery are two ways of speaking about one reality, Christ, who died and rose again..." (no. 19).

This brief reflection on the dynamism of Christ's word leads to a reflection (2.4) on "The Unity of Word and Sacrament" (ns. 20-25). "In early Christian thought Word and Sacrament were not understood as two different realities but as two ways of referring to the same reality" (no. 20). "Because of the biblical sense of God's Word, the early Church understood that the words of Jesus spoken in a sacrament were by divine power, efficacious," a teaching continued by Medieval theologians. "Belief in the power of baptism to remit sins was a basic belief of the early Disciples movement." "Underlying all sacramental belief is a conviction of the power and readiness of God through the Holy Spirit to respond to the prayers of those who ask in faith" (no. 21).

Two paragraphs (ns. 22-23) reflect on ways in which, in both communities, the Word of God is heard in the ecclesial community. For both, celebrations of Baptism and Eucharist normally include readings from the Old and New Testaments. In Baptism Jesus' command to baptize is repeated, and In the Eucharist Jesus words of institution in relation to the bread and wine (either as recorded in the Gospels or by St. Paul) will be invariably repeated (no.22). Preaching in sacramental worship is also understood as an extension of God's efficacious word, words about the Word Incarnate. Christ is also present through the preached word. "Both Catholics and Disciples emphasize the power of preaching." "Our agreement about the power of God's word proclaimed clarifies the role of the ordained minister as the witness to the Word transmitted through the Church" (no. 23).

"Because Christ is the living Word, the celebration of word and sacrament is an effective action, not simply a recollection of the past or a reading of written words. Both Disciples and Catholics believe that in the Church Christ himself acts in the sacraments" (no.24).

The brief summary at the end of Section 2 pulls its main integrally related themes together (no. 25), setting the stage for Section 3 and the discussion of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

## Reflection on Section 2

Both Sections 1 and 2 illustrate that the discussion of these issues bring us into the heart of the Church, by touching on traditional marks of the church, its unity and its holiness. Disciples and Catholics together say that "The visible unity of the Church is at the heart of the Gospel" (Section 1, no. 5). "The holiness of the Church is the gift of God. The Son of God has given himself for her to sanctify her and make a source of sanctification" (Section 2, no. 17). Together they speak of the divine nature of the church, its existence as part of the revealed will of God, and not a matter of human construction.

In Section 2 the dialogue provides further Christological and ecclesiological reflection to prepare for the treatment of the Eucharist in Section 3. Discussing the presence of the risen Christ in the world and in the Church provides a powerful witness to Christ's promised presence, his being "with us always", as a background for exploring the more specific questions of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the Eucharist as sacrifice, and for exploring those important themes with an eye toward resolving the long-held differences on them.

The insistence on the unity of word and sacrament spoken of in Section 2, also has wider ecclesiological implications. The Reformation heritage in which Disciples share, has often described the church primarily in terms of the Word, as *creatura verbi*, creature of the word. In contrast the Catholic Church has emphasized the sacramental



aspect of the Church (cf. LG 1). Some dialogues between the Catholic Church and Churches of the Reformation have begun to discover convergences between these two concepts of the Church. While this report does not reflect at length on Word and sacrament in terms of the church, the balance between Word and Sacrament in this report also has ecclesiological implications which are not spelled out here, but could be important for further reflection by Disciples and Catholics in seeking more convergence on the Church.

### **Section 3: The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (ns. 26-62)**

The longest part of the study is found in Section 3. Three subsections cover three important areas: "The Eucharist, Sacrament of Communion in Christ", "The Eucharist, Sacrament of the Real Presence of Christ", and "The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Sacrifice of Christ."

Several characteristics of this section can be noted. First, each sub-section continues the strong Christological framework found from the beginning of the report. Second, prominent, too, are further references to the urgency of seeking visible unity in Christ. Third, a helpful methodology is used in two parts of Section 3 and continued in Section 4 of first putting the question in historical perspective, including attention of the conflicts on the issue during the Reformation period, and then, against this background, describing contemporary Disciples and Catholic teaching on the subject which have tended to overcome misunderstandings of the past. Fourth, the presentations, concerning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the Eucharist as sacrifice, illustrate also the convergence and consensus on these issues developing in the larger ecumenical world as a result of bilateral and multilateral dialogue involving many Churches and Christian World Communions. Both Disciples and Catholics have contributed to this broader consensus/convergence in their other dialogues as well.

Sub-section 3.1, (The Eucharist, Sacrament of Communion in Christ) begins by stating shared convictions. "Disciples and Catholics share the conviction that the Eucharist is at the centre of the Church's life, where we are one in the risen Christ and hear his word together" (no. 26). Both "teach that the Church is communion in Christ and is characterized by visible unity, within which we receive the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Church's unity" (no. 27). They repeat that "the Church's visible unity is so central for both Catholics and Disciples (that) the divisions which keep us from sharing the Eucharist together are especially painful" (no. 28). They point also to important differences between them which require further dialogue, "different ways of understanding the Church and its unity lead us to different practices in offering Eucharistic participation" (no. 28).

Subsection 3.2 (The Eucharist, Sacrament of the Real Presence of Christ) sets the tone of the discussion with further important common statements. "Disciples and Catholics regard the sacrament of the Eucharist as a privileged, unique place of Christ's presence, where his words are spoken in obedience to his command and are made powerful by the Holy Spirit, making effective for those gathered what Christ first promised to his followers at the Last Supper." For both, the Eucharist is "the central and most important prayer of the Church. It is communion in the body and blood of Christ" (no. 29).

A brief review is presented of key historical developments concerning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (ns. 30-37) which the dialogue had to take into account. In the first millennium "the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist was affirmed without significant dissent". By the fourth century Eucharistic doctrine on the conversion (*conversio*) of the bread and wine was sufficiently developed and was reflected in some patristic language (no. 31). Controversies developed in the Western Church at the end of the first millennium concerning the nature of the change which took place in the Eucharist, and theologians, synods and popes began to use the term "transubstantiation" to describe the conversion of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This concept entered into official church teaching in 1215 when the Fourth Lateran Council used it in defining the Eucharist. Its meaning was brought to maturity by Aquinas in the thirteenth century, using Aristotelian categories of substance and accident, to affirm the real change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ which takes place, while countering materialistic views of the Eucharist (no.33). Sixteenth century Reformers differed from the established Catholic Church in explaining the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. While Luther "held to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist 'under the bread and wine', and Calvin emphasized that "the truth of this mystery accordingly perishes for us unless the true bread represents the true body of Christ", both repudiated the term transubstantiation (no. 34). The Council of Trent "defended the 'true, real, and substantial' presence of Christ against attempts to understand it 'as a sign or figure' or to combine Christ's presence with a remaining presence of bread and wine....and used the term and concept of 'transubstantiation' in order to affirm that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ ..." (no.35).

Disciples separated from Presbyterian churches in the nineteenth century. They "have continued to resist attempts to explain the mystery of Christ's presence in the Eucharist too fully, not because they do not believe it, but because they have wished to avoid divisive controversies over a mystery where a variety of understandings had coexisted in the history of the Church"(no. 36). Disciples always saw the Lord's Supper as being more than a recollection of the Last Supper. They criticized use of the term transubstantiation as invoking an unnecessary metaphysical explanation. In light of the philosophical atmosphere of Scottish common sense realism in which they understood categories of accident and substance used by Aquinas very differently, transubstantiation was taken to mean almost the opposite of

what Aquinas intended (no.37).

In light of this history, "Contemporary Catholic and Disciples teaching on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist" (nos. 38-45) begins by paying tribute to the ecumenical era which has offered the opportunity for greater mutual understanding of different approaches to the question of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist", but also recognizing that this is a great mystery of our faith with an inexhaustible depth of meaning (no. 38). Furthermore, the Commission acknowledges the importance of bible studies at the sessions which helped them discover the many ways that the presence of God is expressed in the Bible and to relate this to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, texts such as that, in the gospel of John, in which Jesus reveals himself as the bread of life (cf. n. 39).

In this context, each side illustrates some factors which they bring toward seeking common views with the partner on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Contemporary Catholic teaching "broadened its focus when, in discussing the principles of liturgical renewal at Vatican II, it emphasized the many ways that Christ is present in the church's liturgical celebrations (no.40). At the same time "The meaning of the term 'transubstantiation' continues to be normative for Catholic teaching today." Trent used the term to defend the mystery of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist by opposing two extreme positions: one in which Christ is present 'as in a sign or figure' or along with the bread and wine which remain, the other, to counteract any materialistic interpretations of Christ's presence. "This meaning intended by Trent is highlighted when Catholics teach that the bread and wine become the body and blood of the risen, glorified Christ" (no.41).

Early Disciples did not use the language of transubstantiation to describe their belief in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, and Disciples today "still find the conceptual framework from which it emerged unfamiliar and therefore would not readily use the term." But they acknowledge that "later twentieth century work on Aristotle's understanding of the term 'substance' and its use in Aquinas and other scholars of that period has exposed the way in which this terminology has been misunderstood in the past. Furthermore Disciples readily acknowledge that the ultimate significance of the bread and wine is not to be explained by their physical characteristics alone." Thus "they affirm the mystery of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, which makes receiving the bread and wine a true communion in his body and blood" (No. 42). Besides this, Disciples characteristically "affirm that Christ is the host at the Eucharistic feast, and that his presence is experienced in the communion of the faithful. They also affirm that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become for us, through faith, the Body and Blood of Christ" (no.43). The Disciples make their own the words of the Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM, 1982) to emphasize three things: "to confess 'Christ's real, living and active presence in the Eucharist' which is 'unique' and 'does not depend on the faith of the individual' (E 13), to indicate that in the celebration of the Eucharist, 'the Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ really present to us in the Eucharistic meal' (E14) so that it becomes a 'foretaste' of the 'final renewal of creation' (E 22)". While these points are made by the Disciples, they represent a certain convergence with Catholic teaching as well.

To complete this subsection, the Commission reflects on the question of the reservation of consecrated elements. Catholics explained its origin in the early church, and clarified its basic meaning, and indicated that Catholic liturgical instructions after Vatican II make clear that even adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament should be understood as an extension of the sacramental action of the Eucharistic celebration and they have the purpose of sacramental and spiritual communion. Disciples welcomed this clarification of a practice which is unfamiliar to them. Though they find this practice open to misunderstanding they do not express rejection of it here. They respect the contemplative and communal traditions of prayer to which it has given rise (no. 44).

This discussion of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist comes to a close with a nuanced and important statement of convergence. "Disciples and Catholics have used different language to describe the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and they have emphasized different moments of this mystery. Yet we both affirm the mystery of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, especially in the bread and wine; we both oppose reductionist understandings that see Christ's presence as simply materialist or figurative. The Commission reached some real convergence on this topic through the elimination of mutual misunderstandings, though we also recognize many remaining differences" (no. 45).

The sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist is discussed in sub-section, 3.3, (The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Sacrifice of Christ). A common statement sets a positive tone for discussion on this topic, so controversial among divided Christians. "Both Disciples and Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the sacrament which makes real in a special way the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the entire life, ministry and passion that led to the cross." Furthermore this theme is at the heart of the Church: "The Eucharistic prayer typically recalls not only the passion of Christ, but the whole story of creation and redemption, and it also looks forward to the consummation of the work of Christ in his coming again. In this way the Church fulfils the Pauline injunction 'to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Cor. 11:26)" (no.46).

The brief discussion of some historical aspects of the sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist (nos. 47- 51), begins with some New Testament perspectives. Christ's death on the cross "is called an offering, made by Christ the high priest, who instead of offering sacrifices daily, instead 'once for all ... offered himself' for sins (Heb. 7:27). The sacrificial understanding of Christ's death is prefigured in the Last Supper where, according to Paul and the gospel writers, Jesus linked the bread and wine to his body, 'given for you' and, and his 'blood, shed for you' - the 'new covenant in his

blood' (*Mt* 22:26-28, *Mk* 14: 22-25, *1 Cor.* 11:23-27). Important early Church theologians continued the tradition of sacrificial interpretations of the Eucharist (no. 47), but in medieval Western thought the sacrificial interpretation of the Eucharist received less theological reflection than did the understanding of the real presence of Christ (no. 48).

Patristic teaching which developed on Eucharistic sacrifice during this period included positions that became points of contention and division on Eucharistic theology during the Reformation. These included the view that the mass was a satisfaction for sin, which could be offered daily on behalf of the living and the dead, that Lay participation in the sacrifice was understood primarily in terms of spiritual identification with Christ in his passion. The propitiatory character of the sacrifice also encouraged the belief that particular masses could be directed to specific votive intentions, which led to the endowment of masses for the benefit of the souls of the donors and their family and friends (no. 48). Luther and other sixteenth century reformers rejected these theological interpretations and practices. Viewing the mass as a sacrifice made it into a 'work' rejected by their theology of God's grace. They emphasized that the Eucharist was a memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the cross which was made once-for-all and sufficient to atone for the sins of humanity. The Reformers differed among themselves about the meaning of 'memorial' (no. 49). The Council of Trent, citing teaching from the early centuries of the church, taught that the mass is a sacrifice in a true and proper sense and not just a 'bare commemoration'. Trent taught that while Christ offered himself once-for-all in a bloody way on the cross, the same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody way in the mass (no.50). In the nineteenth century, the Disciples received and made their own, without much debate, the reformers' rejection of sacrificial interpretations of the Eucharist. They emphasized the character of the Eucharist as a meal where the sacrifice offered is the praise and thanksgiving of the believers.

Against this background, the report presents (3.3.2) (Contemporary Catholic and Disciples Teaching on the Sacrificial Understanding of the Eucharist) (ns.52-57). Contemporary ecumenical developments, including convergences found in other dialogues, contribute significantly as Catholics and Disciples illustrate their convergence on this issue which has divided them in the past. They start immediately by saying that they have both "benefited from the twentieth century recovery of the biblical understanding of memorial (*anamnesis*) whereby what is remembered is re-presented or re-enacted by the worshipping community". In fact, this recovery of the biblical understanding of memorial has also been a key factor in ecumenical dialogue. In this dialogue, the report states that for Catholics this concept of *anamnesis* was the conceptual tool to explain, in faithfulness to Trent, how the once - for -all oblation of the cross could be held together with its perpetual presence in sacramental form. It helps to correct some theological misinterpretations of the teaching of Trent. For Disciples, the recovery of the biblical meaning of memorial helps to prevent the misunderstanding of memorial as simply mental recall (no. 52).

As already suggested, a significant characteristic of this report is that it engages the emerging consensus on the Eucharist found in the wider ecumenical movement. For here again the report makes reference to BEM (ns 53-54), in the drafting of which both Catholics and Disciples (and many other traditions) participated, and finds it particularly helpful in the discussion on memorial (*anamnesis*). The report refers also to the Roman Catholic Church's formal response to BEM (1987), one of almost 200 formal responses of various churches and communions.

At one point, illustrating the convergence taking place, the Disciples make affirmations which suggest more convergence with the formal Roman Catholic response to BEM, when that response is offering a critique of BEM, than to the BEM text itself. This happens in the following way. BEM (*Eucharist* 8) says, "The Eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, whoever lives to make intercession for us", and the accompanying commentary to *Eucharist* 8 continues: "it is in the light of the significance of the Eucharist as intercession that references to the Eucharist in Catholic theology as 'propitiatory sacrifice' may be understood. The understanding is that there is only one expiation, that of the unique sacrifice of the cross, made actual in the Eucharist and presented before the Father in the intercession of Christ and of the church for all humanity." The Commission continues: "The Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered by the worshippers in union with Christ; and by being joined to Christ they are also drawn into the self-offering which constitutes Christ's sacrifice to the Father. The Eucharist hence re-presents to those sharing in it the sacrifice of the cross; and communion in the body and blood of Christ is both based upon and results in a call to discipleship" (no.53). This was helpful in bringing some understanding to a Catholic perspective on the Eucharist as sacrifice (propitiatory sacrifice) which was unfamiliar to others and even rejected by the sixteenth century Reformers.

On the other hand, while "the Commission has found the perspective of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* helpful to understand sacrificial interpretations of the Eucharist" (no.54), it notes that the formal Catholic response to BEM (1987), which offers, in general, a positive evaluation of BEM, on this particular point offered a criticism "that the notion of intercession does not seem sufficient for explaining the Catholic sense of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist. The response noted that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice is not repeated, but since the high priest is the crucified and risen Lord, this sacrifice can be said to be 'made eternal', an idea not fully captured by the simple term 'intercession.' The response says that Catholic faith 'links the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist to the body and blood [of Christ] more closely than is done in the text' (no.54).

Having made this point, the report goes on to say that "the Commission discovered more convergence than it had earlier recognized on the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. Both of our traditions teach that the sacrifice of Christ has occurred once for all and can never be repeated. Yet in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church remembers by re-presenting the sacrifice of Christ in a sacramental way." The Commission illustrates the convergence by citing texts



from Disciples literature from 1937 and 1998, which have striking similarities to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is also said that the Disciples affirmations on the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist “may suggest more convergence with the Roman Catholic Response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* than the text of BEM itself” (no. 55).

Furthermore, Disciples and Catholics agree that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the sacrifice of Christ. Although the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross cannot be repeated, Christians in the celebration of the Eucharist are drawn into the movement of Christ’s self-offering. Here again authoritative sources of Disciples (*The Church for Disciples of Christ*, 145) and Catholics (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1368) are cited to verify this agreement. (no. 56)

The report completes this treatment of the Eucharist as sacrifice with this brief summary, “Disciples and Catholics both understand the Eucharist as the sacrament which makes present the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The Commission has been surprised by the amount of convergence that it discovered, even though we recognize that we have different emphases and different doctrinal understandings (no. 57).

### **Reflection on Section 3**

The exploration in Section 3 of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist, is important, first of all, because of the many significant convergences and agreements found, as well as remaining differences stated on these important questions. On some issues, such as the reservation of the sacrament, the clarifications given help to put aside misunderstandings, even if the position taken by one side would not be shared by the other.

The presentation has shown the complexity of the divisions that have to be dealt with. While there are theological issues to be treated, and various historical factors in the background, this treatment has also highlighted the way philosophical differences have made their impact and were a factor leading to long held misunderstandings which needed to be clarified. A clear example is given in Section 3. “The earliest Disciples were reared in the philosophical atmosphere of Scottish common sense realism in which what Aquinas described as “accidents” were understood to constitute the real, and what he described as “substance” was seen as an unnecessary abstraction. In this different philosophical framework ... transubstantiation was taken to mean almost the opposite of what Aquinas had intended” (no. 37). The complexity involved in the divisions we face show the challenge of dialogue, and the patience required to clarify the issues that need to be faced, and resolved.

Important, too, is the fact that the treatment of the Eucharist by this dialogue has obviously benefited from the results of the broader achievements of ecumenical dialogue on these same issues, and in some way has contributed to growing common understanding of them in the Christian world. For example, Section 3 has explicitly benefitted from the Faith and Order text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM, 1982), which has been cited in other dialogues as well. In many ways what has been achieved in BEM is representative, if not completely, of the advances of ecumenical movement on the questions of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the Eucharist as sacrifice. Their treatment in this dialogue also affirms the advances made in other dialogues, which are important, even though it is clear that much more has to be done to find more consensus on some points. In that sense, the achievements in this dialogue also underscore the importance of the ecumenical movement, and the role of dialogue in that movement.

While Faith and Order and BEM illustrate the importance of the multilateral dialogue on these questions, this and other bilateral dialogues show the importance of a bilateral approach. International Dialogue must take into account the views of specific Churches and Christian World Communions in order to heal the wounds that exist, or the misunderstandings, or the strong differences between specific groups. This is something multilateral dialogue may not be able to do. In this dialogue one sees how two world communions are dealing with specific differences between them, and discovering, in this case, significant areas of agreement between them. This is not only a contribution to their specific reconciliation, but a contribution to the wider ecumenical movement as well.

### **Section 4: The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers**

The report then turns in Section 4, (The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers) to the different ways that sacrificial language has been applied to those who preside at the Eucharist.

Some historical perspectives on this topic (ns. 58-62) begin with the New Testament which does not use any one word to describe those presiding over the communal Eucharist. But as parallels between the Last Supper and the Eucharist developed during the patristic period, using the language of Hebrews 10:10 and the Old Testament, in the liturgical and theological imagery during the patristic period, the presider at the Eucharist was seen to stand in a sacramental relation to the sacrificial self-giving of Christ the high Priest and came to be called a ‘priest’” (No. 58). In the early patristic period, in both East and West, theology and practice affirmed the sacramental nature of ordination to the priesthood in its various orders: bishop , priest, deacon (no. 59).

In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent, “in line with that long standing tradition, reaffirmed this doctrinal teaching about ordination, centering its attention more specifically on ordination to the priesthood. At the Last Supper, Christ had made the apostles priests and entrusted to them the memorial of the sacrifice of his body and blood”(no. 59). Trent emphasized these elements to counter those points which the Reformers had denied, in particular the



sacrificial interpretation of the Eucharist, the priestly understanding of the ordained ministry, and the sacramental character of ordination. The Reformers emphasized the importance of ordained ministry for the church, but underlined its tasks of preaching, teaching and pastoral care. In addition, Lutheran, Reformed and Anabaptist reformers of Europe felt forced to choose between continuity in episcopal office and continuity in teaching. They discontinued or de-emphasized the office of bishop and taught that apostolic succession came primarily through continuity in teaching. They also ceased to refer to ordained presbyters as 'priests' and spoke of the 'priesthood of the faithful'. Disciples inherited this Reformation legacy. (no. 60)

Clarifications of Catholic teaching in Vatican II in some ways also had the effect of helping to promoting important convergences with Disciples' views, but in other ways accentuate important differences. On the one hand, The Council spoke of the 'common priesthood' of all the faithful, who 'by virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist' as well exercising their priesthood through the reception of the sacraments, prayers and thanksgiving, and lives of holiness, self-denial and charity (no.61). Disciples and Catholics can both appreciate this (no. 64). On the other hand Vatican II explained that the ministerial priesthood of the ordained ministry differs 'in essence and not simply in degree' because it 'forms and governs the priestly people' and brings about the Eucharistic sacrifice' (LG 10) (no. 61). Such difference, however, is "a conception foreign to the Disciples tradition which rather speaks of the ordained calling the whole community to its identity in Christ, or representing Christ to the community" (no. 71). Furthermore Vatican II, following ancient tradition affirmed the episcopate rather than the presbyterate as the fundamental category for understanding ordained ministry, and emphasized the sacramentality of the episcopal ministry and the collegiality of the bishops acting together as successors of the apostles, while the bishop's ministry continues to be understood as a participation in Christ's priesthood (no. 62). This constitutes an important difference from the Disciples who have inherited the Reformation legacy which discontinued or de-emphasized the office of bishop (no.60). Vatican II, however, emphasized the importance of preaching in the ministry of bishops and clergy (no. 62) which is also primary for ministers standing in the Reformation heritage (no. 60).

Treatment of "Contemporary Catholic and Disciples teaching concerning the priestly understanding of the ordained ministry" (Sub-section 4.2, ns. 63-72) offers other important agreements, and differences, discovered in dialogue. To mention briefly some agreements: "Both Disciples and Catholics agree that the measure and norm of all priesthood is Christ's unique priesthood ... Through his death and resurrection, constituting his unique and abiding high priestly role, he established a new relationship between God and humankind (*Jn. 17:21*)" (no. 63). They agree "that Christ has made of the baptized a priestly people, bound to Christ and hence to each other as his body' ... and to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (*Heb. 13:15, Ps. 116*), to present their bodies 'as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God ... (*Rom. 12:1*)" (no. 64); "that the ordained ministry is to be seen in the context of the apostolicity of the church" (no. 65); "that the Holy Spirit gives a variety of gifts or charisms which enable the church as a whole to receive and hand on the Apostolic Tradition. At the heart of these are gifts appropriate to worship, particularly in the celebration of the Lord's Supper" (CCIC no. 41). But within the multiplicity of gifts given to the Church, there is a particular charisma given to the ordained ministry to maintain the community in the memory of the Apostolic Tradition. Both Disciples and Roman Catholics affirm that the Christian ministry exists to actualize, transmit, and, interpret with fidelity the Apostolic Tradition which has its origin in the first generation (CCIC, no. 45) (no. 66).

They speak also of differences. "While agreeing about the relationship between the ordained ministry and continuity with the apostolic tradition, Disciples and Catholics understand and articulate this relationship differently." As already seen, a basic difference concerns episcopacy. Disciples come from Reformation traditions "which rejected episcopacy as they knew it in the sixteenth century." Furthermore Disciples focus more on the local Church having always recognised "that the work of the ministry, shared in the local congregation by ordained ministers and ordained elders, is essential to the being of the Church and is a sign of continuity with the Apostolic Tradition" (CCIC 45). Catholics focus more clearly on the relationship of the universal church with the local church in saying that, "the bishop in collaboration with presbyters, deacons and the whole community in the local church, and in communion with the whole college of bishops throughout the world united with the Bishop of Rome as its head, keeps alive the apostolic faith in the local church so that it may remain faithful to the Gospel" (CCIC 45) (no. 67).

Despite such differences, the Commission has agreed that, for both communions the "ordained ministers have a unique role in maintaining the whole community in the apostolic tradition," claiming that the reasons they give to support this, found already in a previous phase (CCIC no. 45) "represents a significant agreement on the apostolic nature of our ordained ministries and on the issue of apostolic succession, although with different understandings and expressions contained within it" (no. 67).

The Commission judges that on the issue of the *representation of Christ by the ordained*, they agree and disagree. Disciples and Catholics *agree* that ordained ministers represent Christ, the head of the Church.

They *disagree* about the nature and source in apostolic succession of this representation of Christ, and secondly about the relationship between the ordained ministry and the priesthood of the faithful (no. 68). The description of these differences in some cases also suggests areas of convergence.

They disagree, first, about the representation of Christ by the ordained. Catholics hold that "the priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood are two connected but distinct participations in the priesthood and person of Christ, differing 'in kind and not only degree' (LG 10). On the one hand, all the faithful participate in the priesthood of

Christ through baptism, and their participation in Christ's priesthood finds its consummation in the Eucharist. On the other hand, by the intention and command of the Lord, sacramental life requires a ministerial priesthood, ordained in a sacrament distinct from baptism, and so configured to Christ the priest that they can act in the person of Christ the Head. Catholics believe that ordained ministers exercise this function in a special way at the Eucharist (no. 69). Disciples, however, understand ordination to be not a sacrament distinct from baptism, but sacramental in the wider sense. The foundation of the ordained ministry is Jesus Christ the high Priest, the head of the Church which is his body. The whole community (the priesthood of all believers) shares in the continuing ministry of Christ as members of his body. But the ordained have a distinctive role. "An ordained minister, as representative of Christ presiding at the Lord's Supper, serves in Christ's place as host at the Table." "The ordained serve in the priestly role by leading the offering of sacrifices of praise and worship" (no. 70).

Second, since they understand the relationship of the ordained to Christ's priesthood differently, they therefore differ in the way they see and articulate the relationship of the ordained to the whole Church. Catholics describe the participation in Christ's priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood as differing in kind and not only in degree, a conception foreign to the Disciples tradition which rather "speaks of the ordained calling the whole community to its identity in Christ or representing Christ to the community." Catholics also teach that the two, although differing in essence, are also interrelated, and that the ordained ministry exists for the sake of the Church and not apart from the Church. Disciples find such clarifications helpful, but also want to emphasize the values of gifts given to all the baptized, and fear any description of the ordained ministry that seems to undermine those gifts (no.71). In a concluding paragraph to Section 4, they present a brief and helpful summary of the agreements and disagreements discovered on the issues therein (no. 72).

#### **Reflection on Section 4**

Questions related to ministry are some of the most difficult areas of ecumenical dialogue. At the root of the differences on ministry between different families of Christians, are different views of the nature of the Church. This is one of the reasons why the convergences on the church seen earlier, and building toward a common understanding of the Church, are important for the other significant topics discussed in this report.

Despite the difficult challenge this question of ministry presents, this dialogue has achieved a surprising and extensive amount of convergence on this question in *Section 4*, which has already been outlined. This forms a good basis for continuing the dialogue, and facing the difficult issues still needing resolution. Though there are differences, for example, on the question of priesthood as sacrament, there are also convergences between Disciples and Catholics on many related questions of ministry that provide hope that the dialogue can build on what has been done here, as it continues to face the ongoing differences on this question.

An important difference is that Catholics understand ordination to ministerial priesthood as a sacrament distinct from baptism (no. 69) whereas Disciples understand ordination to be, not a sacrament distinct from baptism, but sacramental in a wider sense (no.70). One can also perceive a difference when Disciples say that "an ordained minister or elder is the *normal presider* (emphasis added) at the sacraments of both Eucharist and Baptism" (no. 60). For Catholics an ordained priest (or bishop) would be the *required presider* at the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Another key difference concerns episcopacy. Disciples inherited the reformation legacy in which major Reformers in Europe felt themselves forced to choose between continuity in episcopal office and continuity in teaching. They therefore discontinued or de-emphasized the office of the bishop and taught that apostolic succession came primarily through continuity in teaching" (no. 60). The origin of the Disciples in the nineteenth century, removed them from the direct bitter clashes over episcopacy of the sixteenth century, and this is important for future dialogue. The commission may not have considered a more detailed discussion of episcopacy within its scope during this phase. Nonetheless, since the report refers to BEM in regard to the Eucharist, this observer would have liked to see how this dialogue might have considered the convergences on episcopacy and apostolic succession found in BEM's treatment on Ministry (Ministry, ns. 19- 25, 34-38) and whether this could have been useful for discussion on similar issues here. While respecting various forms of ministry, BEM suggests that, although "other forms of ordained ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit," the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, which became established during the second and third centuries throughout the Church, "may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it" (BEM, Ministry, no.22, cf. no. 19). This proposal is controversial, but is still valid as a starting point for discussion on this question. Not only in this dialogue, but in the USA the Disciples have also participated in the *Consultation on Church Unity* and its successor body *Churches Uniting in Christ* in which resolving this issue of episcopacy, though of great difficulty, is required for full success, and has not yet been achieved. BEM Ministry's proposal mentioned above is still valid as a starting point for discussion in this dialogue and in others.

These two issues, ordination as sacrament, and episcopacy are also issues between Catholics and other communions which share the legacy of the Reformation. The convergences found together by Catholics and Disciples in Section 4 offer a contribution also to the wider ecumenical movement.

## *Section 5, Conclusion (73-80)*

The report ends with an excellent conclusion which summarizes the work of this phase in a very concise way. It indicates the goal of the dialogue, the method of work undertaken, the main areas treated. It shows the interrelation of the various major themes discussed. The conclusion points to misunderstandings which have been overcome. It recalls some of the major agreements expressed, and as well as to continuing differences which must be treated in continuing dialogue.

The report states that this statement is not an exhaustive account of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Rather it is a promising beginning - a 'communion in via', and points to specific areas where further work needs to be done to attain full communion. It ends by saying "we have discovered that by careful mutual explanation and listening to each other misunderstandings have been overcome. The extent of agreement is significant and offers hope to Disciples and Catholics for our greater unity. We present it as a contribution to the one ecumenical movement".

### *Some Final Reflections*

Catholics and Disciples continue to seek mutual reconciliation. This report reflects the careful work Disciples and Catholics are doing to reach the goal of visible unity. I believe that the convergences and agreements discovered in this phase of dialogue are very significant and contribute to its goal of seeking visible unity between Catholics and Disciples.

One can see, that they have achieved much, and recognize that there is still much to achieve. In the discussion of each major topic in this report, Disciples and Catholics point to areas of agreement, and also acknowledge limits to agreement and continuing areas of disagreement which need to be resolved. In the Introduction they speak of "areas of convergence and agreement" that have emerged, but also that "We are not in full communion and therefore cannot share the Eucharist together" (no. 2). In Section I, while speaking of areas of agreement concerning the union of Christ with the church (ns. 5-8), and areas of agreement on the apostolic faith and of one baptism (ns. 9-10), they make clear that "our communion at present is imperfect ... While there is an apparent lack of agreement on substantial questions of faith, we need to identify and explore these questions more precisely than we have done so far" (no. 11). In Section 3 they note that divisions keep them from sharing the Eucharist, and "different ways of understanding the church and its unity lead us to different practices in offering Eucharistic participation." (no. 28). Concluding their discussion of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, they say that the "Commission reached some real convergence on this topic ... though we also recognize many remaining differences (no. 45). They finish discussion of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist stating that "The Commission has been surprised by the amount of convergence that it discovered, even though we recognize that we have different emphases and different doctrinal understandings (no. 57). In their discussion of the priesthood of Christ and his ministers, many significant agreements were stated, as in ns. 63-67 and elsewhere, as well as important differences on significant issues, as seen in ns. 68-72. As with many other bi-laterals, the partners in this dialogue have taken important steps forward toward unity and reconciliation. The dialogue shows that this relationship of Disciples and Catholics has reached what has been called an intermediate period on the way to unity. A good relationship has developed. And the dialogue must continue.

### *A need for a common history*

A major factor in the background of many of the differences on the Eucharist described here and in other dialogues involving churches of the West, is the fact that, since the breakdown of unity in the West in the sixteenth century, separated Christians have separate histories which reflect theological conflicts which have existed over centuries. This is reflected especially in the historical parts of Sections 3 and 4. The partners had conflicting views, or were often "unfamiliar" with the thought or practice of the other. All the more impressive is that Disciples and Catholics have found significant degrees of convergence in dialogue on issues long considered divisive between them. This underscores the challenge, within the ecumenical movement, of continuing to seek a common understanding of history to replace the divided shreds of history which is the legacy of centuries of division, and which we bring to the dialogue. At the same time, discovering the convergences documented here by Disciples and Catholics, on issues over which there has been great disagreement for centuries, contributes a step toward creating a common narrative of Christian history with which all Christians can identify.

The impact of the broader ecumenical movement was felt in this dialogue, as illustrated by the use of BEM. The results of this dialogue illustrate that the ecumenical movement goes on, and in many ways continues to flourish.

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