

A Synthesis of the Responses of Orthodox Churches to the Lima Document on »Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry«

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Introductory remarks

It is a general Orthodox understanding that the Lima document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM), is so far the most serious WCC contribution to the ecumenical movement and probably the most inclusive ecumenical theological statement ever produced by the Faith and Order Commission.

As the inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Chambésy, 15–23 February 1986) recognized »the Document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry is a significant ecumenical document of major theological convergence, which expresses an experience opening a new stage in the history of the Ecumenical Movement«¹.

The Orthodox Church has every reason to rejoice with BEM, for it is the fruit of ecumenical dialogue in which she actively participated right from the beginning and brought her positive contribution in the realm of ecclesiology². As William Lazareth rightly stated, »the Lima text is likely the most Orthodox-inspired document ever produced by the World Council's Faith and Order Commission«³, and as such fulfilled the Orthodox claim that faith and order, doctrine and worship are at the very heart of ecclesiastical life and ecumenical activity⁴.

It goes without saying that BEM does not pretend to be a new ecumenical confession of faith on three basic sacraments of the Church. Nor should anyone assume it is a credal statement. BEM is not even a »consensus« document, as it is often considered, for, as the text itself points out, »full consensus can only be proclaimed after the Churches reach the

¹ Document on »The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement«, in: *Episkepsis*, N°354, 1 April 1986, p. 9.

² *N. Nissiotis*. The meaning of Reception in Relation to the results of Ecumenical Dialogue on the basis of the Faith and Order Document »Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry«, in *G. Limouris — N. M. Vaporis* (ed), *Orthodox Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order paper N°128, Holy Cross Orthodox Press (1985), p. 62.

³ *W. Lazareth*. Holy Trinity and Holy Tradition: Orthodox contribution to »Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry«, in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 27 (1983), p. 291.

⁴ *T. Hopko*. The Lima Statement and the Orthodox, in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 27 (1983), p. 281.

point of living and acting together in Unity⁵. BEM is simply a document, in which divided Christians after centuries of estrangement, hostility and mutual ignorance, are seeking to speak together on essential aspects of ecclesial life, namely on baptism, eucharist and ministry⁶. It is the outcome of over half a century of theological debate within the Ecumenical Movement, in which many Churches and among them most of the Orthodox Churches, from 1927 onwards, inaugurated discussions on the nature of the Church, the ministry and the sacraments. As Alexandros Papaderos puts it, »BEM has grown up with the ecumenical movement, came to maturity with it, and seeks only to serve the common witness, the common service to human beings and to humanity, and to promote visible unity«⁷.

It is within this context of promoting the unity of the Church that all the Orthodox member Churches of the WCC, through many of their distinguished theologians, participated in the elaboration of this text. And it is under this particular angle that many of them are now evaluating the Lima text, considering it as an indispensable instrument of dialogue, helping the recovery by the divided Christendom of the fullness of the Apostolic Faith and Tradition.

The Inter-Orthodox Symposium on BEM (Holy Cross Orthodox School of Theology, Boston, 11–18 June 1985), after having thoroughly debated on the Lima text, urged the Orthodox Churches to respond responsibly to the invitation of the Faith and Order Commission, mainly for the following reasons:

»a. — Because here we are concerned with a matter of faith and it has been the insistence of the Orthodox Churches for some time that the World Council of Churches should focus its attention especially on questions of faith and unity;

b. — Because the Orthodox have fully participated in the preparation of the text from the beginning and made a substantial contribution to it;

c. — Because it is important to have the response of all the Orthodox Churches and not just some of them«⁸.

To date several Orthodox Churches⁹ reacted to the Lima text by sending to the Faith and Order Secretariat their official responses. No doubt that the Churches were free to

⁵ Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order document N°III, WCC, Geneva (1982), p. IX.

⁶ Report of the Interorthodox Symposium on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, in *Limouris — Vapouris* (ed) op. cit. p. 160.

⁷ A. Papaderos. Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry: Some thoughts on reception, in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 36 (1984), p. 197.

⁸ *Limouris — Vapouris* (ed), op. cit. p. 161.

⁹ The Orthodox Churches which at this present moment sent their official responses to the Faith and Order Secretariat are the following: The Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchates of Alexandria, of Moscow, of Bucharest, and of Sofia, and the Church of Finland. The Church of Greece notified the WCC that, on the recommendation of a special theological Committee which studied the BEM text, decided not to reply, considering that the WCC does not have the constitutional right to confer with the Churches, by essentially becoming itself a »Super-Church« (*Pleroforia*, N°3, June 1986, p. 18). Without passing a judgement on this decision, one has to remark, however, that BEM related studies made by distinguished members of the above mentioned theological committee (*V. Feidas*, Baptism, H. Eucharist, Ministry — an Orthodox evaluation of the WCC texts, in *Koinonia*, October — December 1985, pp. 452–462 [in Greek]; *G. Konidaris*, The Ministry = Amt, Athens, 1986 [in Greek]; *I. Kalogirou*, Introductory report on the Chapter on Baptism of the Lima text, in *Theologia*, vol. 56 (1985), pp. 779–799 [in Greek]), contained a rather exhaustive presentation of Orthodox positions which, included in a reply, would greatly help the ongoing BEM debate.

accept the text, to alter it, to voice specific wishes or even to reject it. However, as Alexandros Papaderos pertinently remarked, »they would display inconsistency only if they decided to ignore the Lima text completely!«¹⁰. Therefore, after a genuine ecumenical effort of many decades and a full involvement in the elaboration of the Lima text, it was more than normal for the Orthodox Churches to react to the document, giving, in this way, evidence of their determination to continue the ecumenical debate within the WCC and to promote Christian unity.

In its response to the WCC, the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not enter into a detailed analysis of the three chapters of BEM, but on the basis of the dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church, and particularly in the light of ecclesiology, made a general survey and evaluation of it. Taking a constructively critical position, Constantinople highlighted the document, considering it as one of the most significant achievements of the WCC in the promotion of the ecumenical dialogue on fundamental issues with regard to the Christian faith and the unity of the Church. The Patriarchates of Alexandria, Moscow, Bucharest and Sofia, as well as the Orthodox Church of Finland on the other hand, after a general preamble, recognizing the importance of BEM in the ecumenical debate, proceeded with the evaluation of each of the chapters separately.

The following lines are an attempt to summarize these responses.

a. — General considerations

In almost all the responses received, the document is generally considered to be an important text of converging theological views for which the Faith and Order Commission should be particularly praised. For the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the very fact that BEM »emerges« from the work of Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians is a positive and encouraging sign, proving that despite the existing divergences, Churches and their theologians are in a position to confer with each other and to act together on a common goal, such as the unity of the Church. Satiated by discussions which have lasted for many years without any concrete results, the Ecumenical Movement is searching today for the means by which divided Christendom will overcome its inner crisis in order to face the secularized world, itself torn by social, economic, political and racial disturbances. It is precisely at this very critical moment of world history that the Lima document tries to bring a new dynamic breath into the concerns of the Church and of the world. It comes at a moment when the Ecumenical Movement tries to discover a living theology in order to serve the unity of the Church¹¹. In this respect, BEM, according to the Patriarchate of Alexandria, constitutes a great diaconal service of the WCC to its member Churches, for it reveals that their getting closer together and their agreement on many points concerning the three sacraments can be possible¹².

¹⁰ A. Papaderos. op. cit. p. 197.

¹¹ Ecumenical Patriarchate.

¹² Patriarchate of Alexandria.

The Patriarchate of Bucharest considers that the Lima text constitutes a working document containing certain theological convergences and opening ways for new possibilities for dialogue and hopefully for a consensus. The theological basis of BEM compared to previous WCC documents is much richer and more nuanced. Therefore, it facilitates and stimulates the theological dialogue at all levels. The document is a useful basis for discussion on the three sacraments, for it is clear that Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, together with the other sacraments are the basic elements of the teaching of the Church and of her charismatic life¹³. However, as the Patriarchate of Sofia remarks, one has to bear in mind that the Lima document is a favourable prerequisite only for further theological work on the three sacraments¹⁴.

The key position of the sacramental theology in the document, which recognizes Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry as central elements of the Apostolic Faith and Tradition, is appreciated by the Finnish Orthodox Church, for all three constitute fundamental expressions of the life and witness of the Church. Appreciation is also expressed about the fact that within the Ecumenical Movement BEM in certain respects means a return to the apostolic and patristic thinking of the Church¹⁵, for it is on this ground of the teaching of the one undivided Church that Church unity should be realized¹⁶. However, the Ecumenical Patriarchate remarks, the text as it stands now cannot possibly express the fullness of the faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church with which the Orthodox Church identifies herself¹⁷.

The Patriarchate of Moscow is of the opinion that the Lima document includes everything that theologians representing major confessions and theological traditions of divided Christendom have succeeded in finding a mutually acceptable »theological agreement« on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. However the text should not be considered as a »consensus«; it does not represent a full agreement in faith, experience of life and liturgical practice. BEM is only a statement of opinions shared by a group of theologians, whose theological convergence on the three sacraments, does not constitute sufficient basis for posing now the question of restoration of the eucharistic communion and fellowship between the Churches¹⁸. Indeed, as the Ecumenical Patriarchate underlines, any attempt to proceed, on the basis of BEM, towards an intercommunion or even a eucharistic hospitality, without fulfilling all the prerequisites for such communion, would be premature¹⁹.

Given the nature of the World Council of Churches as a *koinonia* of Churches called to work towards »the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ«²⁰, one might ask to what extent a

¹³ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

¹⁴ Patriarchate of Sofia.

¹⁵ Church of Finland.

¹⁶ Ecumenical Patriarchate.

¹⁷ *idem*.

¹⁸ Patriarchate of Moscow.

¹⁹ Ecumenical Patriarchate.

²⁰ Constitution of the WCC (Article III) in *D. Gill* (ed) *Gathered for Life*. Official report of the VIth Assembly of the WCC, Geneva 1983, p. 324.

document such as BEM emanating from this fellowship, managed to achieve the goals for which the WCC was founded 39 years ago.

In answering this question one has to keep in mind that the WCC is not a homogeneous ecclesial body, but is made up of Churches and denominations belonging to ecclesiological, theological and liturgical traditions diametrically opposed to each other.

This being the case, one has to consider BEM only as an important link in the polymorphic process of the Churches, living apart, towards the unity. Its task is to be an ecumenical document promoting unity among the Churches. Therefore, it would be erroneous to consider BEM as a document having an ecclesiological status, because only the Churches themselves, acting either together or separately, could give to it such a status²¹.

This last point is very much in conformity with the general understanding of the Orthodox, based on the Toronto Statement according to which »the purpose of the WCC is not to negotiate unions between Churches which can only be done by the Churches themselves acting on their own initiative, but to bring the Churches into living contact with each other and to promote the study and discussion of the issues of Church unity«.²²

So far absorbed by the unprecedented and well justified success of the BEM document, neither the Churches nor the WCC have adequately examined the repercussions of the BEM debate on the Toronto Statement, which, at least for the Orthodox, constitutes the minimum of an ecclesiological prerequisite for their participation in the WCC. Therefore, as the Ecumenical Patriarchate underlines, Faith and Order should clearly spell out the inter-relation between BEM and the Toronto Statement, in order to prevent any annihilation of the Toronto »guarantees« by the theological positions contained in the Lima document. Because if we consider BEM as a document of »converging views« without, however, any concrete ecclesiological presuppositions, then BEM's contrast to the Toronto Statement becomes clear and self-evident²³.

b. — Comments on Baptism

From the Orthodox view point, the section on Baptism of the Lima document is probably the less controversial one. Baptism being obviously a common liturgical praxis of all Churches, the authors of the text could easily act on a common theological ground, at least insofar as its institution, its meaning and its salvific power are concerned. Moreover, the shortness of this text gives enough evidence about the relative consensus reached on the sacrament of Baptism.

Generally this section expresses the faith of the Apostolic Church in a deep and, in many cases, precise way. This becomes clear when it is question of the christological

²¹ Church of Finland.

²² The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches, in WCC Central Committee Minutes. Toronto 1950, p. 85.

²³ Ecumenical Patriarchate.

realism in connection with Baptism. The text correctly emphasizes that Baptism means participation in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, remission of sins and should lead to a new ethical direction of life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit²⁴. The definition of Baptism as incorporation into Christ, as participation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as gift of God, as life-long growth into Christ obtained in the name of the Holy Trinity, are in convergence with the main lines of the faith and the teaching of the Church, based on the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition²⁵.

Notwithstanding the above positive considerations, however, the chapter on Baptism contains a series of affirmations which, from the Orthodox perspective, do not precisely correspond to the doctrine of the Church. The use, for example, of the term »sign« to define Baptism, does not express the sacramental character of it²⁶. This very term, as well as the term »symbol« which is also frequently used in the text, does not express the effective participation of the specific grace of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism. The term »sign«, from the semantic point of view, indicates only a direction towards a reality, but it does not itself contain the reality²⁷.

On the other hand the relation between the sacrament of Baptism and the sacrament of Chrismation is not obvious in the text. It is an Orthodox belief that God's salvific work is accomplished in the sacrament of Chrismation, wherein the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to the believer for his/her growing and strengthening in spiritual life²⁸. The Orthodox Church has always maintained that Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist are deeply connected both in doctrine and in practice, and together form the initiation into the membership of the Church²⁹. Therefore, Christian unity, based on »baptismal unity« alone, as the text implies, cannot be accepted, for the fullness of Christian life is realized through Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist³⁰.

Finally, another problematic area in the text from the Orthodox view-point, is the one concerning the Baptismal practice and particularly infant Baptism³¹. Baptism is a gift from God in which He renews His creature through water and Spirit, regardless of whether the baptised is adult or child. By speaking therefore of »believers' baptism«, as the text does, instead of »adult baptism«, we run the danger of not seeing the christological nature of Baptism and to move to the area of anthropology, speaking of man's intellectual or spiritual abilities to confess the faith³².

In spite of the above shortcomings, however, the general approach of the document should be welcomed, for it sees Baptism as more than just the forgiveness of sins, but also as a sign of greater riches and promises³³.

²⁴ Church of Finland.

²⁵ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

²⁶ Patriarchate of Sofia.

²⁷ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

²⁸ Patriarchate of Moscow.

²⁹ Church of Finland.

³⁰ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

³¹ Patriarchate of Bucharest, Patriarchate of Sofia.

³² Church of Finland.

³³ A. Calivas. The Lima Statement on Baptism, in St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, vol. 27 (1983), p. 258.

c. — *Comments on the Eucharist*

Even if the Eucharist section of the Lima document does not refer to any patristic text, which would undoubtedly enrich it from an Orthodox perspective, it can be considered as a serious attempt to formulate a common understanding of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and to arrive at an agreement on a fundamental problem of major importance for the whole Church and the Ecumenical Movement³⁴. One can find in it many converging views in which the Orthodox Church recognizes the teaching and witness of the Early Church, particularly when the Eucharist is described as a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ, as memorial of the Crucified and Risen Lord, as a real, living and active presence of Christ in it, as sacrament of unity³⁵.

The fact that the document correctly emphasizes the central position of the Eucharist in the life of the Church and even the eucharistic nature of the whole Church should be highlighted³⁶. This reality, however, ought to be expressed much more clearly, for the Eucharist is »ecclesiological« and can be celebrated only in the Church, while the Church is »eucharistic« and can be realized only through the eucharistic communion with her invisible Head³⁷.

Most of the responses regret again the use of the term »sign«, to define the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The use of such a term is not only a linguistic question, but a theological one³⁸. Neither this term, nor any other definition, such as »meal«, »Holy Communion«, »breaking of the bread«, »the Lord's Supper«, etc., can express the sacramental character of the »mystical supper«, namely the very moment when the Holy Communion was instituted by our Lord³⁹. Moreover, the use of the term »sign« is in contradiction not only with the institutional words (»This is my body«; »This is my blood«), but also with the Lima text itself (par. 13), in which the Holy Eucharist is described to be »the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ . . ., in which the Church confesses Christ's real, living and active presence in it«⁴⁰. The bread and wine are not only the sacramental signs of Christ's body and blood, as the text affirms, but the bread is really and truly and essentially itself the body of the Lord and the wine is itself the blood of the Lord⁴¹.

In this respect the emphasis put by the Lima text in the »anamnesis« as being the very content of the eucharistic meal⁴², in a way moves the focal point from the »real presence« of Christ towards a »memorial presence«, thus ignoring the fundamental unity which exists between anamnesis and epiklesis, namely the interconnection between the action of the Son and the action of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist⁴³.

³⁴ Patriarchate of Sofia.

³⁵ Patriarchate of Bucharest, Church of Finland.

³⁶ Church of Finland.

³⁷ Patriarchate of Sofia.

³⁸ Church of Finland.

³⁹ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

⁴⁰ Patriarchate of Sofia.

⁴¹ Patriarchate of Moscow.

⁴² BEM, E, II, 12.

⁴³ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

○ An important point missing in the text is the one concerning the celebrant. The recognition of the validity of the sacrament is possible only if the right answer is given to this question⁴⁴. The Lima text rightly affirms that »in the celebration of the Eucharist Christ gathers, teaches, nourishes the Church ... He is the priest who celebrates the mystery of God ..., the one who presides at the eucharistic celebration«⁴⁵. When speaking, however, about the »visible« celebrant of the Eucharist, the text is ambiguous and equivocal, for the minister of the Eucharist is described as »ambassador« representing the divine initiative, while the Scriptures clearly demonstrate that the Eucharistic celebration belongs to the charismatic and sacramental condition of the celebrant⁴⁶. According to the understanding of the Orthodox Church the Holy Eucharist can be celebrated only by a priest or a bishop having the apostolic succession through the sacrament of Priesthood. This is a matter that ought to be subject of further and profound studies⁴⁷.

The growing unanimity concerning the eucharistic theology and practice is not a sufficient reason for establishing inter-communion between the Churches⁴⁸. Most certainly the increased mutual understanding as described in the Lima text might allow some Churches to attain a greater measure of eucharistic communion among themselves⁴⁹, however, it is a strong belief of the Orthodox that this eucharistic communion will be achieved only on a basis of the unity of faith. This eucharistic communion with the believers of other Christian confessions will be the climax and the crown, the conclusion and fullness of the unity of all Churches and of all Christians⁵⁰.

d. — Comments on the Ministry

The section on Ministry of the BEM document is the longest of the three sections and no doubt the most problematic and controversial one.

Although the text uses a terminology not quite unfamiliar to the Orthodox, it does not succeed in overcoming basic ecclesiological difficulties. Most certainly the recognition of a sacramental ministry in the Church and the description of the ordination as an invocation to God to invest the minister with the power of the Holy Spirit, by the laying of hands, are positive elements which should be welcomed⁵¹. But what the Orthodox are impressed by is the fact that in this entire chapter there is not a single word about the Priesthood as a God-established sacrament⁵².

On the other hand, the document places the ministry of the Church side by side with the common priesthood of all Christians, but it neither deals with the differences between

⁴⁴ Patriarchate of Moscow.

⁴⁵ BEM, E, III, 29.

⁴⁶ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

⁴⁷ Patriarchate of Sofia.

⁴⁸ Church of Finland.

⁴⁹ BEM, E, III, 33.

⁵⁰ Patriarchate of Sofia.

⁵¹ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

⁵² Patriarchate of Sofia.

the priesthood of all baptised and the ministry of the Church, nor with their relation to the priesthood of Christ⁵³. The First Epistle of Peter⁵⁴ provides no foundation for identifying the priesthood of the baptised with the ministry received through ordination as an uninterrupted succession from the Apostles. The ministry of the priests originates in Jesus Christ through the Apostles⁵⁵, who by passing on to their successors the gift of the Holy Spirit and the authority received from Christ himself, they have preserved and handed down in the Church the charism of the Priesthood in an uninterrupted succession⁵⁶.

The ministry is not only a permanent and constitutive element of the life of the Church, but at the same time a central part of the Apostolic Tradition⁵⁷. However, Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Ministry are inextricably bound up with each other⁵⁸.

It is true that the question of the nature of the ministry has been formulated in a diplomatic way in the document. As Robert Stephanopoulos remarks, the Lima Statement reveals the state of the art of ecumenical methodology! Although it does not give a complete theological treatment of the ministry, nothing essential in the discussion is missing from the main text⁵⁹. What is disturbing is the ambiguity with which the ministry is analyzed. The ministry cannot be based on functional arguments. It is directly based on the will of Christ himself and is founded by Him. Therefore, the bishop or the priest are the icon of Christ himself and not only His representatives as the text implies⁶⁰.

Considerable uneasiness is expressed so far as paragraphs 37 and 38 of the text are concerned. It is difficult to understand why on the one hand it is admitted that »Apostolic Tradition in the Church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the Apostles including the transmission of ministerial responsibilities«⁶¹, while on the other hand the text asks for the recognition of the apostolic succession of Churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate, without specifying, at the same time, by which ecclesial structure such apostolic succession could be maintained⁶². The fundamental ecclesiological problem of unity does not lie in an »ecumenical« mutual recognition of »ministry«, but in the recognition of the Church, in which this ministry is exercised, as being the »true Church« confessing the faith of the Apostles. This is the essential sign and the prerequisite for the visible unity or the restoration of the unity of the Churches. Such was the understanding of unity in the Early Church and it remains as such in the Orthodox Church today⁶³.

⁵³ Church of Finland.

⁵⁴ »You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own«. (I Peter, 2, 9).

⁵⁵ Acts 14, 23; I Tim. 4, 14.

⁵⁶ Patriarchate of Sofia.

⁵⁷ Church of Finland.

⁵⁸ Patriarchate of Sofia.

⁵⁹ R. Stephanopoulos. The Lima Statement on Ministry, in St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, vol. 27 (1983), p. 274.

⁶⁰ Church of Finland.

⁶¹ BEM, M, IV, 34.

⁶² Patriarchate of Bucharest.

⁶³ Patriarchate of Moscow.

The continuity of the apostolic faith and unity in the Church is guaranteed in the episcopacy. The Lima document, however, does not express clearly enough the unanimity concerning episcopacy and its nature which was prevailing in the patristic period and in the undivided Church and which still prevails in the major part of Christendom today⁶⁴. In this respect episcopal succession is not, as the Lima text implies⁶⁵, a sign of continuity, but a guarantee of the continuity and the Unity of the Church⁶⁶. The claim therefore that Churches which have preserved episcopal succession should recognize both the apostolic content and the existence of a ministry of episcopé in various forms in Churches which did not maintain such a succession⁶⁷, is unfortunate, for it confuses Priesthood or the ordained ministry with »service«. Episcopal succession is the guarantee of true apostolic succession and points toward the validity of ministry in and by the Church. It is required to regularize an errant ministry. Not by episcopal succession alone, but certainly not without episcopal succession, can there be any discussion of the recovery of true unity in the One Church⁶⁸. Therefore, any reformulation of the Lima text should take into consideration, from the theological, historical and canonical point of view, the relation between sacramental ministry, the ministry of the Apostles and the apostolic succession through episcopacy⁶⁹.

From the Orthodox view-point another problematic area in the text is the issue concerning the ministry of women. Although there is no direct proposal for introducing female priesthood, there is a clear tendency in favour of it, especially when it is stated that there are »no biblical or theological reasons against ordaining women«⁷⁰. The question of opening the ministry to women is not peripheral, but specially central⁷¹. If the consecration of women can be understood in a way in the praxis of the Protestant Churches where the ministry is regarded only as »symbol« or »sign«, this is not possible in the Orthodox Church where the ministry, in the sense of priesthood, is a sacrament. In the Church there is no other ministry except the one instituted by the Lord and transmitted by the Apostles through a successive ordination. Therefore, the affirmation of paragraph 18 that »the Church must discover the ministry which can be provided by women as well as that which can be provided by men« is perplexing⁷².

⁶⁴ Church of Finland.

⁶⁵ BEM, M, IV, 38.

⁶⁶ Patriarchate of Moscow.

⁶⁷ BEM, M, VI, 53a.

⁶⁸ R. Stephanopoulos. op. cit. p. 278.

⁶⁹ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

⁷⁰ BEM, M, II, 18; Patriarchate of Moscow.

⁷¹ Church of Finland.

⁷² Patriarchate of Sofia.

Concluding remarks

It should be underlined that the Orthodox responses to the Lima text recognize its particular value in the ecumenical debate. BEM constitutes not only a good beginning in order to enable Churches engaged in the Ecumenical Movement to undertake further steps towards visible unity⁷³, but also a source of inspiration and hope for the new strivings of the Ecumenical Movement for the Unity of the Church in the years to come⁷⁴. It is a step towards greater proximity to the Apostolic Tradition, to the faith and practice of the Early Church⁷⁵. It should be recorded, however, that the Lima text is only one stage in the ecumenical relation necessitating a deeper study and analogous confrontation⁷⁶. Therefore, the responses of the Churches do not mean a reception of the contents of the BEM document, but only a constructive critical position vis-à-vis this text⁷⁷. As the Inter-orthodox Symposium of Boston clearly indicated, not only the notion of reception of the BEM document is different from the classical Orthodox understanding of the reception of the decrees and decisions of the Holy Councils, but also reception of BEM as such does not necessarily imply an ecclesiological or practical recognition of the ministry and sacraments of non Orthodox Churches⁷⁸.

In the Orthodox understanding faith is the path which leads us towards salvation and deification. Therefore, one cannot possibly seek a »consensus« on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, before reaching an agreement on the ecclesiological presuppositions creating this consensus. A common ecclesiology is the basis for any discussion regarding BEM. The lack of this ecclesiological basis is regreted. Therefore, it is imperative that ecclesiology become one of the immediate programme priorities of the Faith and Order Commission⁷⁹.

As was stated earlier, the Lima document is not a consensus, for the scholars who took part in its elaboration were not decision-making authorities on behalf of the Churches. But it is a fact that BEM is an exceptional achievement, the effect of which cannot be measured today.

Gennadios Limouris rightly remarks that »BEM has not been concluded . . . for it marked not the goal but the beginning of a long and even more difficult road«⁸⁰. There is no doubt that the Orthodox Church, faithful to her ecumenical commitment, together with other sister Churches, will continue this common march, inaugurated with BEM, until unity is reached in the Faith and Tradition of the One Undivided Church.

⁷³ Patriarchate of Bucharest.

⁷⁴ Church of Finland.

⁷⁵ Patriarchate of Moscow.

⁷⁶ Patriarchate of Alexandria.

⁷⁷ Ecumenical Patriarchate.

⁷⁸ *Limouris — Vapouris* (ed), op. cit. p. 161.

⁷⁹ Ecumenical Patriarchate.

⁸⁰ *Gennadios Limouris*. The Physiognomy of BEM after Lima, in *Limouris-Vapouris* (ed) op. cit. p. 44.