

Joint Commission on Doctrine

The Church: Towards a Common Vision

A response prepared by the Joint Commission on Doctrine

Church of Scotland – Roman Catholic Church

Introduction:

The Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland - Roman Catholic Church wishes to express its deep gratitude to the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches for presenting this text to the churches as a means of assisting them in their reflections on difficult questions concerning the nature and mission of the Church, in the hope that they might move towards a more common vision of the gift and mystery of the Church. Early on in a new century and a new millennium it is a timely document, setting a marker on the distance the churches have travelled in the past century and anticipating further movement from those churches that are sincerely engaged in the ecumenical goal of Christian unity, in response to the Lord's own prayer that we be One.

The Joint Commission on Doctrine (The Joint Commission) was set up in 1977 to look at doctrinal issues that had a bearing on inter-church marriage. In the course of its work over the years the Joint Commission studied the doctrine of the Church, taking into account *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. After a short break in the latter part of the 1990s, the Joint Commission was reconstituted in 2002 around the focus of Baptism. A joint study document, *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed* was published in 2007 to be followed by a *Joint Liturgy for the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows* which has been widely commended for use on ecumenical occasions. Other issues have been discussed without leading to reports: The Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith (RC-Lutheran) which led to an extended discussion on sanctification and grace; healing of memories; the Church of Scotland's 2009 report *Being Single in Church and Society*; ecumenical training of clergy; and the ecumenical significance of the new English translation of the Missal. Since 2009 the Joint Commission has run a series of conferences: The Calvin Quincentenary (2009), The Reformation in Scotland (2010), The Year of Faith/50th Anniversary of Vatican II and the 30th anniversary of *BEM* (2013). A further Conference is now planned for December 2015 around *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

The Joint Commission studied the text of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* closely. Both churches felt there was much to welcome in the text that was good, helpful and challenging. Clearly, as a joint response, the questions cannot be used as set but we have used them as guidelines in the shaping of our response. This we have done under five broad headings:

- The Ecclesiological Understanding of the Church
- A basis for Growth in Unity
- Challenge to the Joint Commission for further work
- Ability to form closer relationships in life and mission
- Aspects requiring further discussion

The document as a whole was valued as a synthesis of study and reflection. We felt we were being asked to consider the mystery of the Church at a much deeper ecumenical level. The words that introduce the document, 'Thy will be done', suggested to us that a journey needed to be made into the will of God, something none of us finds easy to do. In receiving the text we are invited to

journey into the mystery of the Church. Throughout the document there is repeated use of the word 'challenge' which pushes us back again and again to reflect upon this mystery.

While the nature of a document which is a synthesis of years of sincere theological reflection is a considerable strength, it does not cover all aspects.

For example, in par 1 the mystery of evil is dealt with in one sentence and in the past tense. (*God's purpose was thwarted...*) In a time when the mystery of evil and wickedness is such an obstacle to belief for so many people, this may be regarded as a weakness.. We make similar points in relation to imperialistic colonisation (6) and the 'grievous impact' of sin (36) in sections 5.6 and 5.1 below respectively.

1. The Ecclesiological Understanding of the Church

1.1. God's Mission and the Unity of the Church (1-10)

The opening section of the document introduces immediately the dynamic of eternity breaking into time and the concept of 'gift' which brings with it a responsibility to seek reconciliation. The significance of 'the very life of the Holy Trinity' (1) was warmly welcomed, developing our ecclesiological understanding beyond the Christological emphasis of previous times and thus providing theological space for a new shared ecumenical reflection on the nature and mission of the Church.

The theology of the Spirit, which pervades this section, gives a dynamic understanding of the Church, emphasising its 'giftedness' and the fact that it is the collective experience that is important. It is on the disciples that the Spirit came and from there the 'indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the *reality* of the Church'. (3) This opening section reflects well our common understanding of the Church.

It also raises some hopeful questions: Could it be that contemplation of the Trinitarian mystery of God will make possible a new common vision of the Church? Can this shared contemplation lead us to pray more fervently together to this God 'for whom nothing is impossible', even the healing of a broken church?

1.2 The Unity of the Church

The reference in par 8 to reliving the experience of the first council of Jerusalem resonated in our Scottish context where efforts are being made to hold together two positions that appear to be mutually exclusive. This tension is experienced denominationally and ecumenically. Already the relationship built up between our two churches in the Joint Commission has allowed us to listen carefully, respectfully and sensitively to one another.

Neither of our churches identifies the Church of Christ exclusively with our own communities, yet each of our churches will have within them those who would hold to that view. (10)

1.3 Fundamental issues on the way to unity

The Joint Commission welcomed this italicised section. It sets the agenda for further discussion.

1.4 The Church of the Triune God: Discerning God's Will for the Church (11-12)

That the New Testament does not provide a systematic ecclesiology was noted as being of great importance. (11) The Church is so profound a mystery of God's love that many images and metaphors had to be used. The Joint Commission felt that this opens windows to the wealth of insights that are provided from our history and enables us to perceive and understand our history in a different way. This raised the questions: What insights does our age bring? And how are they assessed? In answering these questions it was felt that in our age it is ecumenical insights that are offered. Ecumenical commitment is now part of the tradition of the Church. It should, correspondingly, shape the life and authoritative documents of the churches, as it does, for example,

in *Ut Unum Sint* and the *Charta Oecumenica*. We felt there was an openness to feel something different about what we say about the Church today and also about what we choose to emphasise.

The Joint Commission welcomed the link made several times in the document between the unity of the Church as a sign that unity is possible for humanity and creation. It was also positive about the recognition of legitimate diversity (12) which extends the understanding of catholicity, with further implications for church unity, holiness and apostolicity. (12)

1.5 The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*: The Initiative of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (13-16)

Once again the effect of rooting the Church and the sense of community and communion in the mystery of the Triune God's divine dialogue of love with the whole of creation and with humanity in particular was welcomed as giving a dynamic understanding of the Christian faith. (13) In the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the eternal Father initiates a personal and dynamic dialogue which seeks to restore a broken *koinonia*, caused by human sin and disobedience (Gen. 3-4; Rom 1:18 – 3:20). If God's restoring *koinonia* finds its irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, then the Church as the Body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participate in God's work of healing a broken world.

Koinonia, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.

From this perspective, whilst the concept of *koinonia* in Scripture and the Fathers should be seen as one among several helpful for understanding something of the mystery of the Church, we considered that the concept could be helpful in establishing a consensus about the nature of the Church and how the Church should be ordered within the world.

Par 15 was warmly welcomed as an area where previously there were tensions but which now represents an aspect of mutual enrichment. Mary, as a woman of faith, has been the focus of ecumenical dialogue, encouraging reflection on the deeper implications of discipleship. The Joint Commission noted the work of the Groupe des Dombes on Mary as largely Reformed-Roman Catholic work. This is a good example of what takes place when we listen sensitively to one another.

1.6 The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God (17-20)

This section opened up discussion on 'covenant'. The chronological presentation in the text is open to a supercessionist interpretation. We understood that this was not what was intended but rather the affirmation of the continuing covenant with the people of Israel while emphasising the covenant in Jesus Christ. (17)

The giving of gifts for the common good and placing obligations of responsibility and mutual accountability on every individual, local community and the Church as a whole was warmly welcomed. This affirmed a Conference run by the Joint Commission in March 2013 which focused on the Year of Faith and drew on the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 30th anniversary of the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*. The universality of the gifts given to all people for service was happily acknowledged. Discussion opened up around whether the *triplex munus*, (prophetic, priestly and kingly) gifts are given to every individual or to the Church as a whole in which individuals have a particular part to play. The gifting to each individual is explicit in the Roman Catholic baptismal rite:

The God of power and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you for sin and brought you to new life through water and the Holy Spirit. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain for ever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet and King.

Either way, the vital role played by each person was noted with appreciation as an important emphasis in the document and one which relates to our understanding of the Church.

The mutuality of the relationship between the ordained minister and the people was, we thought, well expressed in par 19. The description of the minister or priest as one who 'reminds the community of its dependence on Jesus Christ' gave us some pause for thought. The prevailing understanding of the minister or priest is as a vicar or representative of Christ. Within the Reformed Churches the emphasis is on the ministerial function as pastor and teacher (teaching elder). In the Catholic Church this is sacramentally established and the priest is said to act 'in persona Christi, literally taking on the persona of Christ as teacher and also as priest; he being the one who presides in his name at the Eucharist. In Catholic and Reformed theology the threefold mission of Christ is expressed in terms of his priestly, prophetic and kingly 'character' in which by baptism each Christian participates. We recognise that in both our Churches there is an understanding of the role of minister and priest in calling people to share in Christ's mission: 'As the Father sent me, so I send you.' This is an exercise of the kingly or leadership role of ministry which is shared also by the people. Whereas the priestly and prophetic aspects of their calling are clearly spelt out in this section (19), only five sentences are devoted to the kingly role. Given the emphases on the 'People of God' in Vatican II, the Synod of Bishops in 1980 and the Faith and Order document 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' we would have welcomed a fuller exposition of the kingly role of the 'Laos Theou' in their shared participation with minister and priest in Christ's kingly character. It is clear in the document that the Church is always the whole Church in which every member is seen as vital to the life and mission of the Church.

1.7 How continuity and change in the Church relate to God's will

We acknowledge that there is a dialogue for change within *Ut Unum Sint*. Pope John Paul II called for the 'the purification of memories', which is referred to in other documents as the 'healing of memories' and the 'reconciliation of memories', and asked forgiveness for historical hurts on behalf of the Catholic Church. In our own Joint Commission we have run a series of conferences marking significant anniversaries (Calvin, the Scottish Reformation, *BEM* and Vatican II with the Year of Faith) which have had as their broad purpose the healing of memories as they have affected the relationship between the churches in our own, Scottish context.

1.8 The Church as Sign and Servant of God's Design for the World. (25-27)

This whole section gives a picture of the Church as a privileged instrument of God, outward-looking and missionary rather than inward-looking had to admit that this grand design, with the Church playing an instrumental role, is a challenge to both our churches. We noted the footnote on the Church as 'sign and instrument'. We agreed that different formulations are understandable as people struggle to find the language to describe the depth of understanding in which everyone is sent, except God, the Father, who sends everyone for the sake of communion.

1.9 Communion in Unity and Diversity (28-30)

We recognised that paras 28-30 are increasingly important in our context. Diversity as a gift from God, part of God's design, demonstrates a consistency. The statement is anti-imperialistic and welcome. There is much here still to talk about.

1.10 Communion of Local Churches (31-32)

The sense of interdependence in this section is enriching. A local church that is isolated is diminished. The spirituality of the fullness of life has to be about relating within the context of a Trinitarian theology.

1.11 The Church Growing in Communion: Sacraments (40-44)

The relationship between baptism and eucharist highlights the *epiclesis* – a moment which is not just about the water, bread and wine but also the people being filled with the Holy Spirit and, in the Reformed tradition, refers also to the prayer at the Word before the sermon or the readings.

The language of the transformation of the bread and the wine, if understood to embrace the alteration of the substance i.e. the underlying reality of the elements, to their becoming that of the Body and Blood of Christ, would satisfy Catholic teaching. While the language of transformation is problematic to a Reformed understanding, it nevertheless opened an area of fruitful discussion for us, particularly in relation to the transformation of the people.

Liturgical renewal emerging from ecumenical dialogue about the sacraments (43) resonated with us. Following a report on Baptism, the Joint Commission published a Liturgy for the Renewal of Baptismal Vows which has been widely received.

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3116/baptism_liturgy.pdf.

1.12 The Gift of authority in the Ministry of the Church (48-51)

Both churches recognise authority as understood in the context of service (49) but we acknowledged that remembering this is a challenge. We understand the role of authority as discerning the truth which can also be read in the practice (*orthopraxis*) of the faithful as pointed out by John Henry Newman, often alluded to as the *sensus fidelium*. The Westminster Confession of Faith, when reflecting on the Church, declares that the Church is “more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced” (Chapter XXV, IV). We recognise the relationship between those who exercise authority and those who are under authority and the influence Christians have upon the wider community. We affirm that those in authority need to be obedient to Christ.

1.13 The Church: In and For the World – God’s plan for Creation: The Kingdom (58-60)

The Joint Commission welcomed par 59 which underlines the point made about authority and makes clear that mission is about proclamation to the whole world, not just in word but also in deed. The broad definition of ‘evangelisation’ which is given more by implication than a tight definition is welcomed. The section links to papal documents and gives a concise summary of the WCC programme for the next eight years.

2. A Basis for growth in Unity

This document provides a helpful tool for further exploration between the churches of their understanding of the Church and its unity. As stated later in this response, we do, however, regret that the document did not give more encouragement to the churches to move beyond a comparative consideration of our understandings towards greater consensus. For there to be growth in unity, there needs to be movement beyond our current positions to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the other. The document could have helpfully pointed the way beyond convergence to consensus (e.g. pars 25- 27, 41-44). It is also important that any understanding of the Church and its unity includes an exploration of legitimate diversity e.g. the concerns noted at the end of this response in relation to pars 68 and 69.

3. Challenge to the Joint Commission for further work

We mention a number of challenges for on-going ecumenical study in the Faith & Order agenda in section 5 of our response. Taking all these challenges together and others that may arise in particular contexts, and acknowledging the calling of the Church to share in the mission of God through word and action, this document presents a challenge of its own, namely, that we are called to face them together as sisters and brothers in Christ. This has clear implications for the work of the Joint Commission in our particular Scottish context.

4. Ability to form closer relationships in life and mission

Insofar as the document gives us a useful summary of common ground there is room to hope that closer relationships in life and mission will follow. However, insofar as the document does not push us to look beyond our own ecclesiologies to our understanding of the Church throughout the ages, it does not go far enough. Close relationships in life and mission still rely on church leaders giving encouragement to seek ever more ways of doing more together and themselves being seen to demonstrate the degree of co-operation that is possible, given the degree of convergence there is in our understanding of the Church.

5. Aspects requiring further discussion

5.1 Sin and the Church

The document opens up a discussion on sin and the Church. As in the first paragraph where 'human sin and disobedience' (1) relates to individuals, so in this section reference is made to the 'sinfulness of the messengers' (5). The relationship between sin and the institution of the Church would require further discussion. This issue comes again in par 35 following an honest articulation of difference (a reduction from the 3 pages in *The Nature and Mission of the Church*). It is acknowledged that the final victory of Christ brings a great sense of hope for those living in terrible situations. However, the section does not say enough about how awful structures can be, before the victory is won. 'Grievous impact' (36) does not say enough about the misery. It does not bring home the brutality involved in really serious human sin.

5.2 Discerning God's Will for the Church

This section opened up for us a lively discussion on Tradition/tradition and the 'living Tradition'. The terminology may have been seen as quite challenging, particularly for some in the Church of Scotland, yet we acknowledged that it does offer scope here for further reflection and discussion. (11)

5.3 The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God

It was felt that the condensing of four pages under the heading of 'The History of the Church' in the two previous documents (N&PC and N&MC) into one page (19-20) was unhelpful. This section could have been more provocative, encouraging exploration of some of our positions. Some believed that expressing ministry in terms of sacrifice was perhaps not the most helpful approach for today and it would have been better to use the terminology of the costliness of discipleship, picking up on the work of Faith & Order in this area. This would provide a counter-balance to any danger that the document sound triumphalist at this point. Opening up a discussion on the giving up of power would have been beneficial.

5.4 The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church (22)

The Joint Commission welcomed the broadening out of division and unity, diversity and catholicity. Our discussions helped us to identify that understanding apostolicity as the lived Tradition requires

further reflection, including around the different ways in which apostolicity relates historically to the exercise of oversight within the Church.

We noted the poignant note at the end of this section (24) and appreciate the serious way in which this is handled. It is not necessarily the case that one church is right and another wrong. It opens up the question which needs to be explored further: What structures does the Church need today?

5.5 The Church as Sign and Servant of God's Design for the World

The last sentence of par 25 opens up the theme of mission that is not developed further in the document.

The following paragraph (26) again opens up the possibility of further exploration and discussion. There is a question that arises here concerning spiritual transcendence and its relationship to the Church as it is seen. The document seems at pains to avoid using the word 'invisible'.

The italicised section that ends this section opened up for us the question of the role of the Church in the economy of salvation, especially in relation to the sacraments. Are the sacraments grace for the journey or a symbol of and a response to grace received? Is the Church a response to God's grace or a space to appropriate it? While the answer may be 'both', there are differing starting points involving different ecclesiologies. This is reflected in the many images and metaphors of the New Testament.

It was felt that underlying agreement can be found within different formulations. Such differences may also enrich the Church in the undertaking of its mission in that they can challenge Churches to think more deeply about the Church. '*Sacramentum gratiae*' may challenge a Reformed Church as '*creatura verbi*' may be a challenge to some members of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not enough just to accept such designations as how the other understands it; it may be helpful to move towards acceptance of complementarity as in the WARC-RC Dialogue: *The Church: Towards a Common Understanding*.

5.6 Communion in Unity and Diversity (28-30)

Who decides the limits of diversity? If the limits are where unity is destroyed, this could equally apply to trivial matters that are non-doctrinal but are nonetheless toxic and difficult to overcome.

There is a danger in the document of pushing towards reconciled diversity but there has to be some form of legitimising of diversity. Common criteria are required for the discernment of what is necessary for unity. The Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogue has raised the question of finding what is involved in authentic discernment. We don't emphasise enough how difficult we find diversity. It has always been problematic – from the New Testament on – especially when the Church is asked to take a new step. Sometimes there is need to sit with an unanswered question for a long time, receiving new insight which leads to new understanding and to changes in perception.

Lacking from the document is anything about the '*sensus fidelium*' or, indeed, '*consensus fidelium*' (which can take us into contested ecclesiological waters). Nor is there any mention of the distinction between the 'hierarchy of truths', as referred to in the Decree on Ecumenism (11) and expanded in the General Catechetical Directory (43) and later in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and *adiaphora*. In our discussions the Roman Catholic members highlighted the hierarchy of truths as taught in the Second Vatican Council, while the Church of Scotland members spoke of Article 1 of its Constitution which refers to the Trinity, a particular way of handling Scripture and tradition, and foci of discernment.

There have been enough mistakes in relation to diversity to make us pause before saying something is not legitimate diversity. We are growing in understanding of human nature and need to listen to what a person or group of people are saying. The document is not explicit enough about the harm that is done when we get it wrong. E.g. par 6 – ‘Notwithstanding such tragic events...’ is too weak. The proclamation of the Good News has been hindered by the sinfulness of the messengers, especially in the all too frequent failure to give respect and appreciation to the cultural and religious heritage of those to whom the Gospel was proclaimed. Complicity over centuries in imperialistic colonisation, which pillaged and even exterminated peoples unable to defend themselves from more powerful invading nations, gives us some insight into the enormous effort required by the Churches to build a genuine culture of peace, one that celebrates the different contexts, languages and cultures of the people of the earth. It can take centuries for communities to recover from Church intervention in a way that is far from mercy and understanding. When people tell us something about who they are, we need to listen and be hesitant to say that what they are saying is illegitimate. They too are part of the creation God loves. Diversity challenges the church to develop at all levels, including new levels of pastoral care.

In relation to the italicised section, the Joint Commission felt it would be beneficial to revisit the New Delhi Statement and the WCC Nairobi Assembly vision of unity.

5.7 Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments and Ministry (37-39)

Here we recognised the challenge of living with the reality of our broken ecclesiastical relationships while continuing to push for change.

Both our Churches acknowledge that ‘ecclesial interpretation of the contemporary meaning of the Word of God involves the faith experience of the whole people, the insights of theologians, and the discernment of the ordained ministry.’ (39) We also acknowledge that ‘it is for Churches to agree on how these factors work together’. Here there is room for further reflection and discussion.

5.8 Sacraments (40-44) - The number and purpose of the sacraments is a matter of ongoing theological reflection.

With reference to sections 68 & 69 more discussion is needed. It is recognised from our own Scottish context that (while the sacramental language sits comfortably with the members of the Roman Catholic community) many (from other traditions) struggle with it. For the Reformed tradition unity is located in the Word of God which is ‘sealed’ in the Sacrament. ‘Proclamation’ from an evangelical point of view is quite hidden in the document. This is more a question of language since the document does locate the presence of Christ in calling, healing, teaching etc. and without that presence there is nothing.

5.9 Ordained Ministry (45-47) – Discussion on the nature of *episkope* and ‘episcopacy’ was opened up in relation to this section. It was clear that there is more reflection to be done.

In relation to apostolicity, again, there is need for further discussion. (46) It was acknowledged that because of the Reformation, the ministry of the Pope had not been spoken about in a positive way within the Reformed tradition until the twentieth century. It was noted how Pope Francis refers to himself as ‘the Bishop of Rome’ and that this is very helpful to those who are still reflecting on the ecclesiology of the Petrine ministry.

5.10 The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church (48-51)

The service aspect of authority is expressed well (50) and has a strong resonance with the Groupe des Dombes and *Ut Unum Sint*, but, unlike the latter, has no reference to the “authority” of the

martyrs. There is a strong tradition of martyrology across all denominations and confessional groups. In Scotland we need to do more work on the *Calendar of Commemoration* which is produced by Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and which acknowledges the contribution of Scottish women and men who have contributed to the shaping of our society over the centuries. We also suggest a revisiting of the work done by the WCC with the Community of Bose in *A Cloud of Witnesses*.

The relationship between the local and the universal and the dimension and role of primacy are areas where we are open to further discussion. (54-56). As mentioned above, a different style of papacy has fired people's imagination with the emphasis on poverty and service.

5.11 The Church: In and for the World – God's Plan for Creation: The Kingdom (58-60)

We welcome what is expressed about the essential missionary character of the Church in paragraphs 58 and 59 with respect to this heading "The Church in and for the World". 'Transformation of the world' (58) does not go far enough. It does not do justice to the eschatological dimension and the whole creation. 'Transfiguration' might convey better the divine-human encounter and would make a better connection between theology and life.

It is clear that, for this document, any genuinely Christian *Contemplatio Dei* needs to be in dialogue with the whole of creation. This dialogue is not an option for us, but rather belongs to the essential nature of the Church as participating in God's divine dialogue of love with the whole of creation. Indeed, rooted in the mission of the Word and Spirit, the Church itself is missioned to reach out to the peoples of every land in order to build the culture of peace and unity. The point is well made in par 60 and we affirm the need for further work to be done in this area, building on the document *Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding* which sets out issues of pilgrimage, hospitality and holiness.

5.12 The Moral Challenge of the Gospel (61-63)

It was noted that there is no attempt to define the moral values that we all share (61ff). They seem to be assumed, though the footnote to ARCIC (italicised section) is noted for further work. A distinction is made between individual moral values and social moral values in the Anglican theological tradition, a distinction that is not made in TC:TCV despite references to justice, peace and the environment.

'Authentic' in the phrase 'authentic...person' is problematic. There is need of a *kyrie eleison* – which was there in the earlier documents. There is a tentativeness in our moral judgements and actions. This was acknowledged in the 'Costly' documents. The note of repentance was sounded earlier in TC:TCV and should continue with ethics. The shadow of the cross and what it means for human flourishing is sketched over. Pope Francis mentions how it is under the cross that we get true authenticity in our human journeying. The need for the Churches to be accountable to each another with respect to their ethical reflections and decisions despite the current state of division (62) is an aspirational statement which is very difficult when applied to polity.

The Joint Commission was pleased to see the question of anthropology brought out (63). It was felt that this contained parallels to Pope Francis' Exhortation which referred to the relationship of specifics to culture. 'In the world of today' suggests this is a new thing, which is certainly not the case! Moral issues are being rethought all the time. The argument about the divisiveness of moral issues is not the question. At question is the authority behind the moral decisions. This relates to the area of primary and secondary issues. Some will agree that an issue is secondary but it may be founded on the authority of scripture which is primary. While much work has been done on moral discernment in Protestant churches e.g. work in relation to the Barmen Confession and documents from the PC(USA) in the 1990s and the Disciples of Christ in 2009, little work has been done by the

Protestant churches on issues of personal ethics. In ecumenical dialogues, Protestant Churches on the whole have focussed on issues of social ethics (see Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogues – 3rd and 4th phases) By contrast, *Evangelii Gaudium* calls for moral discernment on both personal and social issues.

It was noted that, in the Church of Scotland, the Barrier Act procedure is not required for ethical issues. It is required only for doctrinal issues, even though, as a Reformed Church, the two should be held together. The implication is that ethics are secondary and derivative. This has provoked a big debate in recent years over the issue of homosexuality.

It is more common to discuss matters of faith than morals in ecumenical conversation. Bilateral dialogues have not taken up moral issues, though it was an implicit aspect of the Reformed-Roman Catholic statements. The taking up of this issue in the italicised section is welcomed. It was noted that such ecumenical dialogue would deal with matters of principles rather than of application. It could be that there would be distinctions in relation to principles.

5.13 Church & Society (64-66)

Here again there is room for further discussion. The Joint Commission appreciated this section, particularly the emphasis in the Church on needing to help those without power in society to be heard, to stand with the voiceless in order to help them find a voice (Paulo Friere).

Members of the Commission were divided as to what the document was intending by its sketching of the complexities to be found when addressing the subject of the role of the Church in society. They recognised the distinctions which arose dependent on whether the Church, as in some countries, was a State Church, part of the established order, or simply within a country whether formally recognised or not.

All of this heightens the necessity for Churches to seek to address together situations affecting the common good and finding a way of responding to them in harmony.

Conclusion

The Joint Commission wishes to reiterate its profound appreciation to the Faith & Order Commission for the production of this text. It has both challenged and encouraged our Commission in its work, helpfully flagging up areas in which we can do further thinking. We have heard the challenge that came from the Ecumenical Conversation on this document in Busan which encouraged Churches to go beyond reflecting on how far it reflects their thinking to the question asked in *BEM* - to what extent the faith of the Church through the ages is reflected in the text. This challenge we would endorse as we look forward to further discussion and reflection.

Overall this document increases our ecumenical sensitivity and encourages us to enter more deeply into the faith perceptions and even the cultural influences of those with whom we dialogue towards unity.