

It is good to see that the Catholic bishops have finally repudiated the rather grudging attitude we used to have towards baptism in other Churches. It is now, for example, clear that baptismal certificates issued by any of the fifteen Churches whose baptismal practice, on the showing of the British Council of Churches report, accords with ours will be recognized as ordinary evidence of baptism. A sensible move in the right direction, but why not take it a little further in practice? Ecumenism has for too long been circling cautiously around the eucharist. There is a good deal of disagreement or simple uncertainty about the extent to which Christians can honestly participate in each other's eucharists—where there is no such disagreement and caution we are right to suspect a failure of eucharistic consciousness. There is, however, no disagreement at all about each other's baptism; should we not then put our theoretical agreement into the most obvious kind of practice, should we not have a common baptistery?

We should set up at least a pilot scheme in some area large enough to contain a number of Christian churches and small enough to make communication fairly easy. Here there should be a single centre devoted to the celebration of baptism. The ministers of the sacrament would be drawn on some kind of rota basis from the various Christian churches and it would be important in the early stages that people who wanted to should be able to opt for their own minister; but soon, we might hope, there would grow up a real consciousness of the commonness of baptism. There would, of course, be a lot of difficulties, some practical, some theoretical, connected, for example, with differences of rite and with different traditions as to the place of baptism in the Christian life. Learning to deal with these difficulties would be a more valuable ecumenical work than many thousands of lectures and discussions.

Various ancillary activities would, no doubt, group themselves around this centre—ecumenical studies, bookshops, marriage advisory services, and so on—but essentially it would provide a sacramental ecumenical celebration which would have all the advantages of being systematic and even routine, instead of being merely a get-together of like-minded liberal Christians. It is surely from such centres that we may expect an authentic and popular growth of unity at the eucharistic level, where the common eucharist and common ministry would develop not by way of maverick experiment but as the gradual unfolding of the common baptismal life of the Church.

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