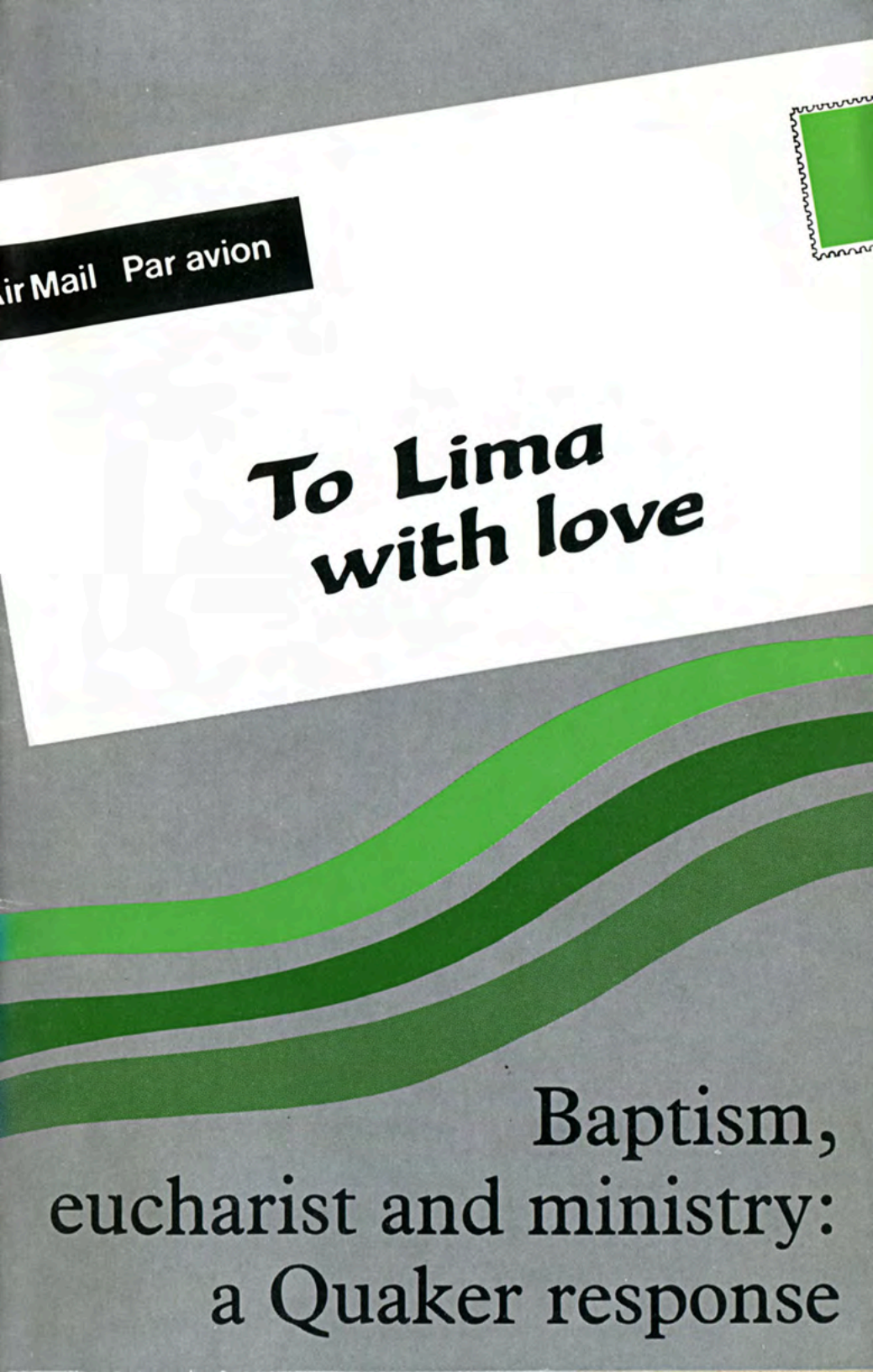

Baptism, eucharist and ministry: a Quaker response

TO LIMA WITH LOVE

The response from
the Religious Society of Friends
in Great Britain
to the
World Council of Churches
document
Baptism, eucharist and ministry

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

In 1982 the Faith & Order Commission of the World Council of Churches published the report *Baptism, eucharist and ministry*,* known as 'the Lima text', and invited responses from churches throughout the world. The report aroused great interest and has been widely discussed.

Encouraged by the British Council of Churches, the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Great Britain (London Yearly Meeting) felt that it would be right to make a response showing a Quaker understanding of the issues and practices discussed in the text. The making of this response became an exercise of the whole Society. Friends and Meetings throughout Great Britain were involved in considering the questions raised and applying them to our own practice. The response printed here was based on this exercise. It was formulated by the Yearly Meeting's Committee on Christian Relationships and approved both by Meeting for Sufferings (the representative meeting acting between sessions of the Yearly Meeting) in February 1986 and by London Yearly Meeting in full session in August 1986. In order that the process may be fully understood, the report which was prepared for the Yearly Meeting is also printed here.

It is hoped that the printing of this response will make it widely available both to Friends here and throughout the world and to our friends in other churches.

The Committee on Christian Relationships has found its work on this matter to be an enriching experience. It has not been without difficulties, but in facing differences and seeking for the unity which transcends them, we have been reminded of our responsibilities as part of the people of God and of our need to remain true as we seek to follow the Spirit.

This is but one stage in the process of drawing the churches into closer understanding of each other. In sharing the response more widely we hope and pray that it will help and nourish the continuing movement towards true unity.

COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS
January 1987

* *Baptism, eucharist and ministry.* Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982.

RESPONSE TO THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Baptism, eucharist and ministry (Faith & Order Paper 111): Response of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Great Britain

In preparing our response to the Lima text we have been mindful of the question which, as Friends, we are enjoined regularly to ask of ourselves: "Is your distinctive Quaker witness characterised by humility and a willingness to learn from others?"

We offer our response, not as travellers who have arrived at the end of a spiritual journey but as seekers still on a path. Throughout the exercise, we have been glad to learn from other churches. Yet we joyfully re-affirm, from the depths of our experience, insights which the Religious Society of Friends has found and tested over three centuries.

We hope that we may share these insights; we pray that we may build on them, growing spiritually, as humble learners in the school of Christ.

Introduction

1 This response is made by London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). London Yearly Meeting is defined as "the final constitutional authority of the Religious Society of Friends in Great Britain" (*Church government* §789*). It comprises some 18,000 members, a very small body in relation to many of the other bodies making responses to the World Council of Churches. There are some 200,000 Quakers worldwide and upwards of 50 Yearly Meetings. In the Religious Society of Friends these Yearly Meetings are autonomous bodies. This is relevant to some of our convictions on the nature of the church, to be considered later.

2 London Yearly Meeting is not a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), having in 1939 and 1940 declined an invitation from the provisional committee. London Yearly Meeting is, however, an associate member of the British Council of Churches (BCC) and has been, nationally and locally, associated with the ecumenical movement over the last 75 years.

3 In preparing this response (which has been approved by London

* *Christian faith & practice* (last revised 1959) and *Church government* (last revised 1967; reprinted with amendments 1980) together form the "Book of Christian discipline of London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends".

Yearly Meeting in session) we have relied on background work by our Committee on Christian Relationships. That committee prepared a short guide to help Friends to get to grips with the Lima text (for its language is not that of our everyday use); and in preparing the first drafts of this response the committee had the benefit of the reports of some meetings for church affairs, many study groups held in local Meetings, and the observations of a number of individual Friends.

4 While, therefore, the issues raised have not been officially referred to our Monthly Meetings, we have in London Yearly Meeting attempted to "feel the Society's pulse". Insofar as this response comes from Yearly Meeting in session it is official and represents "the highest appropriate level of authority". Insofar as the text is based on comments from a wide variety of groups within the Yearly Meeting's membership we believe that we are "speaking with authority". But the use of words like "authority" and even "response" and "reception" raise questions to which we must now turn.

Authority and decision making in Quaker experience

5 Early Friends as a whole shared the vision of George Fox (1624–1691) of a "gospel order" in which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the insights of individual Friends could be tested by the gathered group. It is true that some early Friends were affected by Ranterism, but it was the general Quaker experience, re-echoed throughout our history, that the "bold personal adventure [must be] tempered by humility in the face of individual fallibility and by the necessity for sharing experience with others" (*Christian faith and practice*, §146).

6 We see our meetings for church affairs not as business meetings preceded by a period of worship, but as "meetings for worship for business". Ideally, the sacred and the secular are interwoven into one piece. Believing that all our business is brought before God for guidance we deprecate all that may foster a party spirit or confrontation. We therefore seek for a spirit of unity in all our decision making.

7 In our experience a discipline of expectant waiting under the directing Spirit of God is necessary in the search for this unity. This process may on occasion be a protracted one. We wish to make clear that when we speak of unity we do not necessarily mean unanimity, but a clearly recognised "sense of the meeting". Nor do we mean consensus, which, however humanly desirable, is but a measure of human agreement. The will of God may (uncomfortably) be what nobody in the meeting wants. However far short we may fall at times

in practice, it is our considered experience that the discipline of open-minded seeking makes the practice of voting an irrelevance. We therefore welcome the Lima text's emphasis on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

8 The precise order of meetings for church affairs, and the functions of such meetings, have varied from time to time. In Great Britain there were traditionally local congregational meetings (Preparative Meetings), area Monthly Meetings, county Quarterly Meetings, and a national Yearly Meeting. Though the county Quarterly Meetings were modified in area and from 1967 gave way to regional General Meetings, the structure of widening groups both geographically and experientially has meant not only that individual insights can be tested by the group but that the different insights of different groups can be tested against one another.

9 The Quaker experience has always been that as insights are shared with geographically widening groups they tend to gather in weight and momentum. Our concept of the nature of the church is, therefore, neither a congregational one, nor one of authoritarian government from above. So that all things may be done decently and in order it may be necessary to entrust a particular administrative responsibility to this body or to that. London Yearly Meeting alone may revise the "Book of Christian discipline", and it seeks the Holy Spirit's guidance in so doing. But this does not mean that it pretends to greater access to the Holy Spirit's guidance than its 370 Preparative Meetings.

10 Early Friends, conscious of the headship of Christ, did not rest authority in an individual. At every level of our meetings for church affairs, however, there is appointed a Clerk whose task it is to present business to the meeting, to listen attentively to the exercise and frame a minute which will then be read to the meeting, amended as necessary, and adopted. The Clerk will properly remind Friends of precedents, but it is not her or his task to guide the meeting (save as it may feel the need of a guiding hand). The Clerk serves for a limited time and is the servant of the meeting. "The power of God is the authority of all your men's and women's meetings" wrote George Fox. This authority becomes a real one, and commands allegiance, as the power of God in individual disciples recognises and answers to the power of God in the gathered meeting.

11 *Church government* contains such advices and regulations as experience has shown to be helpful to meetings for church affairs. As an appendix to this response to *BEM* we include §711–722 of chapter 17, "General counsel on church affairs".

12 In 1945 London Yearly Meeting forwarded to the continuation committee of the World Conference on Faith & Order a document on *The nature of the church according to the witness of the Society of Friends.* We conclude this section by quoting a few sentences from it. "Our characteristic stress, being both mystical and practical, is concerned with the spiritual conditions of the actual moment. We do not lay special stress upon the authority of tradition, though we with others have regard to our past. We look rather to the living presence of the Spirit of God. This presence is known both as the individual is illumined by the light of Christ, and as the community is made aware of the same ever-present Holy Spirit." (**LYM Proc* 1946 pp 82–3).

Our understanding of Christian unity

13 There remains another subject which needs to be touched upon before we turn to the three texts in the Lima document. Some of the comments we have received have expressed anxiety lest *BEM* should be but one more step to equate "visible unity" with "organic unity". We see (and welcome) *BEM* as a further step by which Christian communions may come to know and understand one another better and to appreciate the richness in the variety of insights which are thus brought to our common life in God. Lest there be any misunderstanding, however, we think it right to place upon record our Yearly Meeting's views on the nature of Christian unity.

14 London Yearly Meeting was represented at the 1910 World Missionary Conference. From 1914 it has been active in the Faith & Order movement, and was represented at Lausanne (1927) and Edinburgh (1937); and, after the formation of the WCC, Lund (1952) and Montreal (1963). Friends have been involved, though perhaps less actively, in the Life & Work movement. A substantial number of Friends promoted the first meeting of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches (1914).

15 In February 1916 a joint sub-committee of the Archbishops of Canterbury & York's Committee and a Free Churches' commission issued a statement entitled *Towards Christian unity.* Our Yearly Meeting's Commission on Faith & Order found that statement unsatisfactory "since it implied that unity was to be sought along the lines of agreement in doctrine and practice, while the essential basis of Christian experience and the Christian spirit and way of life were insufficiently emphasised". It therefore submitted to Yearly Meeting 1917 a document expressing Friends' views, entitled *The true basis of Christian unity* (*LYM Proc* 1917 pp 151–9 for report and text). This docu-

* Proceedings of London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

ment states a position which this Yearly Meeting has consistently maintained ever since.

16 We quote one extract from this document: "It is not in the life itself, but in the attempt to formulate its implications and to fix it by uniform religious practices, that divisions arise. We do not in the least deprecate the attempt, which must be made since man is a rational being, to formulate intellectually the ideas which are implicit in religious experience . . . But it should always be recognised that all such attempts are provisional, and can never be assumed to possess the finality of ultimate truth. There must always be room for development and progress, and Christian thought and enquiry should never be fettered by theory. Statements of doctrine, therefore, however venerable, can never in themselves be regarded as a satisfactory basis of union" (*LYM Proc* 1917 p 158).

17 The 1917 statement had been revised and reissued in 1927 and 1937 in connection with the Faith & Order conferences in those years. In August 1964 London Yearly Meeting drew up a briefer statement, *The basis of Christian unity* (*LYM Proc* 1964 pp 213–4). Arising from discussion following the statement *Visible unity: ten propositions*, issued by the Churches Unity Commission in 1976, our Committee on Christian Relationships concluded that it would be timely to set forth once more Friends' beliefs on the nature of Christian unity, doing so in the context of a succinct but substantial statement of Friends' involvement in the ecumenical movement. It therefore published in 1979 *Unity in the spirit: Quakers and the ecumenical pilgrimage.* Drawing on a variety of expressions of experience from the 17th century onwards, the committee thus expressed Yearly Meeting's position: "It is only natural that within the great household of God there should be different families doing things differently, developing different family traditions, each perhaps enriching the life of the whole by their particular insights and emphases. There is neither scandal nor sin in this."

The text: preliminary considerations

18 In the corporate life of our Religious Society, as in our worship and our own lives, we try to work under the guidance of God. We have to discern the promptings of love and truth in our hearts, and to recognise and respond to God's leadings.

19 Our worship, our practical work and our social lives express the paradox of the homeliness of grace. We worship in total dependence on God's Spirit for inspiration, and with a full awareness of the many

ways in which our inadequacy, our self-centredness, and our habits of mind can hinder the movement of the Spirit.

20 We may seem at times to take God for granted. But we know the beyond in our midst; we rely on grace, on God's free, sustaining, creative and lively action as we rely on the air we breathe and the ground we walk on.

21 In our experience, God works with those who are true to their deepest nature. Those whom Jesus called friends cooperate with him knowing how he works, and we know the depths of the pattern of love, truth, faithfulness, death and resurrection which he exemplified. We are aware of the life and power of the Spirit of God, maintaining us as a Society and as local worshipping communities. We welcome the stress in the Lima text on the work of the Spirit, and know in our meetings the Spirit's less spectacular fruits and gifts.

22 Alongside Friends' stress on the primacy of God's action, we set great store by the centrality of ordinary experience. We agree with the witness of the universal church that mystical experiences are attested by the moral quality of people's lives. The whole of our everyday experience is the stuff of our religious awareness: it is here that God is best known to us.

23 However valid and vital outward sacraments are for others, they are not, in our experience, necessary for the operation of God's grace. We believe we hold this witness in trust for the whole church.

24 We are not generally drawn to speculative theology. We try as individuals and as a body to be faithful to the truth we have discovered. We prefer not to crystallise our understanding of the truth; our corporate experience is a growing and living tradition.

25 We understand the Bible as a record arising from similar struggles to comprehend God's ways with people. The same Spirit which inspired the writers of the Bible is the Spirit which gives us understanding of it: it is this which is important to us rather than the literal words of scripture. Hence, while quotations from the Bible may illuminate a truth for us, we would not use them to prove a truth. We welcome the work of scholars in deepening our understanding of the Bible. May we offer the comment that occasionally the Lima text shows too little critical discrimination in the evidential use of scripture?

26 We respond to the Lima text in Christian language, but many

Quakers would prefer less specifically Christian terminology. We worship, live and work together in unity, however, valuing the variety of expressions of truth which each individual brings.

The text: Baptism

27 We know the power of God's Spirit at work in the lives of people within the community of our meetings. These people may have been drawn into the community by a sudden convincement, a long period of seeking, or have grown up within it from childhood. We also know that we are engaged in a life-long growth into faith, and experience a continuing irruption of grace into our lives which demands and sustains a commitment to a life of discipleship. We recognise this power at work in people of all ages, races and creeds: a transforming power which can issue in lives of joy, humility and service. Where these experiences are reflected in the statements of *BEM* we rejoice at this measure of our unity and are challenged to search for more.

28 The Quaker conviction is that the operation of the Spirit outruns all our expectations. We acknowledge that the grace of God is experienced by many through the outward rite of baptism, but no ritual, however carefully prepared for, can be guaranteed to lead to growth in the Spirit. A true spiritual experience must be accompanied by the visible transformation of the outward life. Our understanding of baptism is that it is not a single act of initiation but a continuing growth in the Holy Spirit and a commitment which must continually be renewed. It is this process which draws us into a fellowship with those who acknowledge the same power at work in their lives, those whom Christ is calling to be his body on earth.

29 It is out of this understanding that we have historically rejected water-baptism, seeing no necessary connection between this single event in a person's life and the experience of transformation by the Spirit. We cannot see that this rite should be used as the only way of becoming a member of the body of Christ. Nor do we find the use of water-baptism to be an inescapable inference from the New Testament's account of Jesus' life and practice. On the contrary, scripture does not persuade us that baptism as initiation is any more important than circumcision as initiation, since either clouds the issue that neither the correctness of opinion nor religious observance, but only the undeserved grace of God enables us to walk in faith and be active in love.

30 Part of the meaning of baptism is a proclamation of becoming a member of the church. Entry into membership of the Religious

Society of Friends is a public acknowledgement of a growing unity with a community of people whose worship and service reflect, however imperfectly, their perception of discipleship and their recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. This unity is grounded in the experience of being "gathered" in the love of God in the silent expectancy of our meetings for worship and in a willingness to surrender ourselves to a corporate seeking for the will of God in such measure as we can comprehend it.

31 We too feel the tensions which divide the wider church over the place of infants and young children within the congregation. We know also that there are those whose membership of the Society may be little more than a formality, while many of the most faithful participants in our meetings do not seek formal membership.

32 Our witness to the unfettered operation of the Spirit must involve a humble confession of our own failings; yet we must testify to the fact that lives which display the fruits of the Spirit have been nurtured within the Society of Friends.

The text: Eucharist

33 We are impressed by the breadth of insight shown in this section into the nature of corporate worship. Many of the aspects noted here are in accord with our own aspirations and experience of Quaker worship. We welcome the interpretation of the eucharist as the gift of God, granting communion between the human and the divine, renewing the members of the worshipping body and binding them together. We too see our worship as a thanksgiving and celebration of the work of God in all creation and for all people, and a recognition of the cost of love and commitment. Particularly also, we welcome the forthright statement of the implications of worship, its implicit call to reconciliation and service in our daily lives and its challenge to us to work for justice in all areas of life; our worship focuses our hope for the fulfilment of God's purpose. Thus although our practice appears very different, we recognise many of the spiritual aspirations expressed in the symbolism of the eucharist.

34 In Quaker worship neither the elements of bread and wine nor any eucharistic liturgy is used. Our liturgy is one of silence and waiting on God for the words that may come, to any one of us, from the depths of that waiting together. We recognise that the words and symbolic actions of the eucharist are experienced by very many Christians as a most powerful means of grace, a grace which shines forth clearly in their lives. Nevertheless, it is our experience that the grace of God is

not restricted to any particular form of eucharistic liturgy; the reality of God's presence may be known in worship that retains none of the traditional elements that are central to the life of many churches.

35 In 1928, at a time when parliament and the religious life of our nation were rent with strife on the nature of the Real Presence, London Yearly Meeting wrestled to understand its own experience and expressed it in these words: "In silence, without rite or symbol, we have known the Spirit of Christ so convincingly present in our quiet meetings that his grace dispels our faithlessness, our unwillingness, our fears, and sets our hearts aflame with the joy of adoration. We have thus felt the power of the Spirit renewing and recreating our love and friendship for all our fellows. This is our eucharist and our communion." (*Christian faith and practice*, §241)

36 We would assert that the validity of worship lies not in its form but in its power, and a form of worship sincerely dependent on God, but not necessarily including the words and actions usually recognised as eucharistic, may equally serve as a channel for this power and grace. We interpret the words and actions of Jesus near the end of his life as an invitation to recall and re-enact the self-giving nature of God's love at every meal and every meeting with others, and to allow our own lives to be broken open and poured out for the life of the world.

37 We realise that others will have reservations about our open and unstructured form of worship. Absence of form and of structure no more guarantee depth and spirituality of worship than do their presence. Our bold experiment in worship is not always the embodiment of the claims we make for it; nor does it always embody those realities of which eucharistic worship can be a profound symbolic expression, realities which should provide sharpness of focus and nourishment. When we are faithful it does.

38 We fear that separating a particular sacrament and making it a focal point in worship can obscure the sacramental validity of the rest of creation and human life. We fear too the dangers of over-familiarity, of perfunctory or passive repetition of the act and of imagining the act to have power of itself. Admission to the eucharist only of those whose status is considered satisfactory by the church can exclude many sincere seekers after God and for this reason we find it difficult to see conformity to this practice as the true basis of unity in the life and spirit of Christ. The Lima text offers no reassurance on this point. Further, through its failure to acknowledge the experience of those Christian groups which express their commitment in ways

other than through a eucharistic form of worship, the Lima text makes us profoundly uneasy.

39 We would wish to unite with all Christians and also with those of other faiths who work for reconciliation and healing in a broken world. Our membership includes those who, whilst ill at ease with orthodox formulations of Christian belief and doctrine, are nevertheless counted among those who do the will of God. As Friends we wish to recognise the divine gifts in those who call God by other names or see their commitment to truth in very different ways from those expressed in the Lima document.

The text: Ministry

40 We respond with warmth and delight to the opening paragraphs which describe the calling of the whole people of God. We know "the liberating and renewing power of the Holy Spirit" and the call, as members of the body of Christ, to faithful mission and service. The priesthood of all believers is a foundation of our understanding of the church.

41 We turn, then, to the question in M 6, "How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the church to be understood and ordered, so that the gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?" We note that the text seeks a "common answer" to this question. We doubt, not only whether a common answer is possible, but whether it is desirable in the many situations and cultures in which churches find themselves.

42 The text (E 29) speaks of Christ as the one who gathers, teaches and nourishes. He is the shepherd, the prophet and the priest. The task of exercising these functions in the world belongs to the whole community of God. We cannot accept those aspects of M 11 and M 13 which claim these tasks for the ordained ministry. Our own experience leads us to affirm that the church can be so ordered that the guidance of the Holy Spirit can be known and followed without the need for a separated clergy.

43 M 9, 10 and 11 make the assumptions that the Twelve are the apostles and that the apostles are the authority for ordained leadership. We cannot make these simple equations. Beside the apostles there were many other witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, including the faithful women who witnessed all these events. We see in the New Testament churches a variety of structures and leadership roles as the church grew and changed. This gives scriptural support for many present day patterns and for continuing experi-

mentation and flexibility. Our own founders claimed that our church order was "gospel-order" and "primitive Christianity revived". However, apostolicity for the church is not the restoration of ancient systems, even if these could be discovered. It is, rather, to live in the Spirit in which the apostles lived. This Spirit, which was poured out at Pentecost on all the church, young and old, women and men, continues in our experience to call and empower all members of the church in a variety of ministries.

44 The Spirit has led us from our foundation to recognise the equality of women and men in the people of God. Early Friends taught that the redemptive activity of Christ restored men and women to their position before the fall, as equal help-meets both made in the image of God. Though we have not been immune from influences in our surrounding culture, we have sought to practise this equality in our structures. We know that the Spirit gives as wide and diverse gifts to women as to men and acts as effectively through women as through men. In our mind, a church which does not fully recognise and encourage the gifts and ministries of all its people is imperfectly realising the body of Christ.

45 To be without an ordained clergy is not to be without either leadership or ministry. The gifts of the Spirit to us include both. For us, calls to particular ministries are usually for a limited period of time, and these gifts pertain to the task rather than the person. In one lifetime a person may be called to a number of ministries, each with its own charism.

46 We identify in our structure *Elders* with a responsibility for the spiritual life of the Meetings; *Overseers* with a responsibility for pastoral care within Meetings; and *Clerks* who serve administrative needs. At one time we recorded as *Ministers* those whose vocal contribution to worship was particularly acceptable. This practice, however, was abandoned after a decision of the Yearly Meeting in 1924.

47 We now recognise a variety of ministries. In our worship these include those who speak under the guidance of the Spirit, and those who receive and uphold the work of the Spirit in silence and prayer. We also recognise as ministry service on our many committees, hospitality and childcare, the care of finance and premises, and many other tasks. We value those whose ministry is not in an appointed task but is in teaching, counselling, listening, prayer, enabling the service of others, or other service in the meeting or the world.

48 The purpose of all our ministry is to lead us and other people into closer communion with God and to enable us to carry out those tasks which the Spirit lays upon us.

49 Throughout our history we have rejoiced in the ministry we have received through "concerns" formed by the Spirit in the hearts of individual Friends. These concerns may have been for personal service or for the furtherance of some particular insight. Such concerns need to be brought before a meeting for church affairs so that they may be tested by the meeting as a whole. This may ultimately be seen as a leading of the Spirit to which the meeting must be corporately obedient. The discerning of such leading and the subordination to it of individual opinion is a ministry to which we are all called.

50 Like all the church, we have a high calling—to be the body of Christ, to live empowered by the Spirit, to do the will of God. We admit our weaknesses in carrying this out. With our structure, we risk failures in understanding and transmitting our tradition, and failures in pastoral care. We do not always adequately support one another. When we appoint people to carry out tasks for us, there is a danger in approaching this in too secular a way, failing to see its significance as an "ordination"—an occasion when we can and must pray for them to receive the necessary gifts and strength from the Spirit. M 40 is a help to us on this.

51 We recognise that the different circumstances and traditions of parts of the church have led to different forms of organisation. We respect those who have forms different from our own for we acknowledge that what is important in the formal structure is whether it allows people to know and respond to the call of God. However, when we see the emphasis in the text on an ordained, three-fold ministry, it arouses in us a number of fears.

Firstly, we believe that without an adequate development of the ministry of the laity there will continue to be an unbalanced relationship between clergy and community which will encourage the people to depend too much on ordained leadership.

Secondly, we are disturbed at the linking of ordination with authority, for this can legitimise authoritarian leadership and limit the exercise of spiritual authority. We agree with the statement in M 16 that authority in the church can only be authentic as it conforms to the model of Christ.

Thirdly, we fear the emphasis on a three-fold ordained ministry as an "expression of the unity we seek and also as a means of

achieving it". Such a ministry manifestly is not a focus of unity and has not achieved unity. We regret that the text does not take more seriously the first three clauses of M 22 which recognise New Testament diversity, the Spirit-led adaptation of ministries to context, and the gifts of the Spirit with which many forms of ministry have been blessed.

52 What, then, is the focus for Christian unity? It must be Jesus, who calls us not into structures but into discipleship and to follow him in his way. Can we not know that we are one in him when we are faithful to his calling and when we exercise towards one another that greatest gift of love? Can we not rejoice in our diversity, welcoming the opportunities to learn from each other? Can we not seek a recognition of each other's ministries as the work of the same Spirit? That Spirit can, if we are ready to adventure, lead us into ways we have not known before.

The four World Council of Churches questions

53 We now turn to the four specific issues in the preface to the Lima text. It will be appreciated from all that has been said that the words in which the questions are couched and, indeed, some of the assumptions behind them are foreign to Friends' usage, and our response in consequence may seem, though it is not intended, to be negative.

The extent to which we recognise in the text the faith of the church through the ages

54 We recognise the witness to the grace of God in Jesus, to "the liberating and renewing power of the Holy Spirit" (M 3), and to the new life experienced in the church as it seeks to follow Jesus in the power of that Spirit. But we also find that witness obscured by an emphasis throughout the text on the sacramental *form* in which the faith is expressed and nurtured. There has never been one form of faith or one form of church at any time "through the ages", even in apostolic times. Nor do we believe that it is necessary or desirable to seek unity at that level, since, as the text itself says (M 1), "the Holy Spirit unites in a single body those who follow Jesus Christ", and keeps them "in the truth" (M 3).

The Society of Friends and "its relations and dialogues with other churches"

55 We greatly value relations and dialogue with other churches, and want to remain open to whatever we can learn from them. But we acknowledge that churches which accept the Lima text's presentation of baptism, eucharist and ministry as essential elements of a truly

Christian faith must find it difficult to recognise the Religious Society of Friends as a genuinely Christian body. Indeed, the text's use of the expression "the eucharistic community" as a designation of the local Christian church implies that Quakers, along with members of the Salvation Army, are not a part of the local Christian community. This saddens us. The designation carries the further suggestion that the most efficacious aspect of the churches' witness in the world is their sacramental belief and practice. We do not see any justification for this view in the New Testament or in the history of the church.

56 We have been thankful in the past for the recognition by other churches of our particular insights. At the 1927 Lausanne Faith & Order conference the second draft of the statement on sacraments was amended to take account of Quaker views, including the now memorable words, commended by Bishop Gore: ". . . in the gifts of his grace God is not limited by his own sacraments". The final statement included also the words: "Others again, while attaching high value to the sacramental principle, do not make use of the outward signs of the sacraments, but hold that all spiritual benefits are given through immediate contact with God through his Spirit" (*Proceedings*, pp 430, 472–3). The Montreal Conference (1963) recorded that "we gladly acknowledge that some who do not observe these rites share in the spiritual experience of life in Christ" (*Report* p 72). We hope that Lima will not prove a backward step from Montreal and Lausanne.

57 What then can we contribute to ongoing ecumenical dialogues about valid sacraments and authentic orders of ministry? Perhaps little more than our testimony to such fruits of the Spirit as may still be evident among us. Over more than 300 years we have witnessed to a redemptive religious experience. Though this has been without baptism, eucharist or ministry in the traditional senses, it has been a consequence of personal and repentant response and corporate worship in the context of silent, receptive waiting upon God.

The Society's "worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness"

58 We are in full accord with the Lima text's emphasis on worship as a source of spiritual vitality, practical Christian living and convincing Christian witness. We also accept the value of scripture in Christian education, although we have to admit that all too often we do not make enough use of it. And we recognise that discipleship of Jesus carries ethical implications not only in personal life but "in all realms of life" (B 10), which indeed is why, throughout our history, we have

been concerned with peace, justice and social questions. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves again, with other Christians, whether we still pay attention to "the will of God in all realms of life". We have strong reservations about the language in which this is expressed in the text: it seems to be too academic to be of great use in religious education, and too inward looking to stimulate concern for the wider world.

"Towards the common expression of the apostolic faith today"

59 In our discussion of the text throughout the Society there was a strong feeling that we should reaffirm those convictions which we have tried to make clear throughout the document. We believe we have been entrusted with these insights as our offering to the common life of the whole church.

We recognise the central place which baptism, eucharist and ordained ministry continue to have in most historical forms of Christianity, and also their efficacy as means of spiritual grace for most Christians. We can see that other churches may find greater unity if they can draw more closely together in their understanding of their sacraments and sacerdotal orders. But for us this could never be the *basis* of Christian unity. Our emphasis will always be on unity as a fellowship of the Spirit in which diversity becomes creative, and, in which, with the Holy Spirit's help, we learn to love one another.

Approved by London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at Exeter 1–8 August 1986

ROGER B. STURGE, *Clerk*

Appendix: *Church government* (1967), §711–722*

One of the most impressive things about the initial establishment of the monthly meetings in 1667–9 was the spirit of divine exhilaration in which Fox travelled the country—despite the fact that after nearly three years' imprisonment in Lancaster and Scarborough he was so stiff and swollen-jointed that he could scarce mount a horse. He saw no administrative set-up, no series of business meetings, but an "order of the gospel, which is not of man, nor by man, but sent from Christ the heavenly man, above all the orders of men in the fall, and it will be when they are all gone, for the power of God the everlasting gospel lasts for ever". There have been sombre periods in the Society's

* See footnote to paragraph 1 and also paragraph 11.

history since then as well as joyous ones: there have been periods when the organisation has seemed to cramp new life instead of fostering it. A Christian community needs organisation if it is to maintain an effective life, but it must be free from authoritarian domination. Jesus said: "In the world, kings lord it over their subjects; and those in authority are called their country's 'benefactors'. No so with you: on the contrary, the highest among you must bear himself like the youngest, the chief of you like a servant." Only as we have learned this in experience will our decisions reflect the vision and compassion of Christ.

Our meetings for church affairs are held in the spirit of worship. This does not mean that laughter and a sense of humour should be absent from them. It does mean that at all times there should be an inward recollection: out of this will spring a right dignity, flexible and free from pomp and formality. We meet together for common worship, for the pastoral care of our membership, for needful administration, for unhurried deliberation on matters of common concern, for testing personal concerns that are brought before us, and to get to know one another better in things that are eternal as in things that are temporal.

If we sometimes think things are wrong with our meetings for church affairs, it would help us to look at the situation in perspective if we could realise how many troubles arise not from the system, but from our human imperfections and the variety of our temperaments and viewpoints. These meetings are in fact occasions not merely for transacting with proper efficiency the affairs of the church but also opportunities when we can learn to bear and forbear, to practise to one another that love which suffereth long and is kind. Christianity is not only a faith but a community and in our meetings for church affairs we learn what membership of that community involves.

Our method of conducting our meetings for church affairs is an experience which has been tested over three hundred years. In days of hot contest and bitter controversy, the early Friends, knit together by the glorious experience of the Holy Spirit's guidance in all their affairs, came into the simple understanding of how their corporate decisions should be made. Decisions arrived at after subtle lobbying and clever debate were not for them. They had discovered that there were deeper satisfactions and greater certainties in finding their way ahead in love and understanding and in the conscious presence of God.

The purpose of our meetings for church affairs is to seek together the way of truth—the will of God in the matters before us, holding that every activity of life is subject to his will. It is necessary for the proper conduct of our business meetings that we should assemble in a worshipping spirit, asking that we may be used by God in our day. The

time of worship which precedes our consideration of the business in hand should be no mere formality but a time for collectedness of spirit. The silence which concludes our assembly may be used to give thanks for the divine leading.

The right conduct of our meetings for church affairs depends upon all coming to them in an active, seeking spirit, not with minds already made up on a particular course of action, determined to push this through at all costs. But open minds are not empty minds, nor uncritically receptive: the service of the meeting calls for knowledge of facts, often painstakingly acquired, and the ability to estimate their relevance and importance. This demands that we shall be ready to listen to others carefully, without antagonism if they express opinions which are unpleasing to us, but trying always to discern the truth in what they have to offer. It calls, above all, for spiritual sensitivity. If our meetings fail, the failure may well be in those who are ill-prepared to use the method rather than in the inadequacy of the method itself.

It is always to be recognised that, coming together with a variety of temperaments, of background, education and experience, we shall have differing contributions to make to any deliberation. It is no part of Friends' concern for truth that any should be expected to water down a strong conviction or be silent merely for the sake of easy agreement. Nevertheless, we are called to honour our testimony that to every one is given a measure of the light, and that it is in the sharing of knowledge, experience and concern that the way towards unity will be found. There is need for understanding loyalty by the meeting as a whole when, after all sides of a subject have been considered, a minute is accepted as representing the judgment of the meeting.

Not all who attend a meeting for church affairs will necessarily speak: those who are silent can help to develop the sense of the meeting if they listen in a spirit of worship.

It is sometimes assumed that unity can be found only by the submission of a minority to the decision of a majority. This is not so but neither should it be assumed that positive steps cannot be taken without unanimity. A minority should not seek to dominate by imposing a veto on action which the general body of Friends feels to be right. Throughout our history as a Society we have found that through the continuing search to know the will of God, a different and a deeper unity is opened to us.

Out of this deeper unity a new way is often discovered which none present had alone perceived and which transcends the differences of the opinions expressed. This is an experience of creative insight, leading to a sense of the meeting which a clerk is often led in a remarkable way to record. Those who have shared this experience will not doubt its reality and the certainty it brings of the immediate rightness of the way for the meeting to take.

The meeting places upon its clerk a responsibility for spiritual discernment so that he may watch the growth of the meeting towards unity and judge the right time to submit the minute, which in its first form may serve to clear the mind of the meeting about the issues which really need its decision. In a gathering held "in the life" there comes to the clerk a clear and unmistakable certainty about the moment to submit the minute. This may be a high peak of experience in a meeting for church affairs and for the most part we have to wrestle with far more humdrum down-to-earth business. It must always be remembered that the final decision as to whether the minute represents the sense of the meeting is the responsibility of the meeting itself, not of the clerk.

Friends should realise that a decision which is the only one for a particular meeting at a particular time may not be the one which is ultimately seen to be right. There have been many occasions in our Society when a Friend, though maintaining his personal convictions, has seen clearly that they were not in harmony with the sense of the meeting and has with loyal grace expressed his deference to it. Out of just such a situation, after time for further reflection, an understanding of the Friend's insight has been reached at a later date and has been ultimately accepted by the Society.

BACKGROUND PAPER

This paper was prepared by the Committee on Christian Relationships for Yearly Meeting 1986 as an introductory paper to the draft response prepared for Yearly Meeting's consideration. It is reprinted in full since there is continuing relevance not only in the implications for Friends but also in the way in which the exercise was undertaken.

Background to the Lima text

1 The Lima report is the result of 50 years of study and discussion among the member churches of the World Council of Churches. Non-member churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have taken a full part in the work.

2 This represents only one side of the work and thinking of the World Council of Churches: it takes no account of the discussion and work which relates to world problems, those of food, injustice, race and peace. This goes on all the time, through different departments, as does dialogue with people of other faiths.

3 In the studies reported and shared through the Lima report, the questions asked relate to the underlying worship of the church world-wide, the understanding of its members about the receiving of the grace of God which enables witness and service to follow, and the extent to which the churches have been faithful in their practices to the teaching of Jesus and of his first followers, who set patterns that have been handed down through the centuries.

4 From such a study come other questions: do we see our church and ourselves as part of the world body which seeks to follow Christ, and can we see in the members of other branches of the church fellow pilgrims, who, imperfectly like ourselves, but nevertheless sincerely, strive to be disciples in the differing and difficult circumstances of our world and our days?

5 The text of the Lima report was sent out to all churches, whether members of the World Council of Churches or not, and each was asked to find the best ways of "receiving" the material, which means allowing its thought to permeate and influence thinking at all levels of the church; and also of "responding" to it, by which is meant an official reply "at the highest appropriate level of authority" to the four specific issues in the Lima report:

the extent to which your church can recognise in this text the faith

of the church through the ages;

the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogue with other churches, particularly with those churches which also recognise the text as an expression of the apostolic faith;

the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness;

the suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text on Baptism, eucharist and ministry to its long-range research project "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today".

6 It may have seemed right in the light of the practice of some churches for the "response" to precede the "reception", and for this to come from theologians and church leaders, perhaps later serving as a guide to the thinking of the rest of the church members. In London Yearly Meeting we wished first to invite our members to give careful consideration to the text and its implications, and only then, after studying the letters, minutes and reports from each group and meeting, to formulate our corporate response.

7 It was in December 1983 that Meeting for Sufferings formally received *Baptism, eucharist and ministry (BEM)*, that it "accepted in principle that London Yearly Meeting should respond to the World Council of Churches", and that it accepted the offer of the Committee on Christian Relationships to prepare notes and a letter for each clerk and correspondent, and to offer study materials to help suitable consideration at every level (*YM Proc* 1984 pp 35, 65–6). Yearly Meeting 1984 (minute 27a) noted that the Committee on Christian Relationships was shortly to "circulate a memorandum to local meetings" and encouraged Friends "to give the paper their prayerful consideration, examining our own experience of membership, worship and service, and responding to what others have to say to us" (*YM Proc* 1984 p 263). The letter and memorandum (entitled *Membership, worship and service*) were sent to all local meetings in June 1984 "so that we may 'feel the pulse' of the Society", responses being asked for by June 1985 (*YM Proc* 1985 p 58). Such materials were supplemented by visits and addresses, where requested, by members of the Committee on Christian Relationships and others.

8 It has been encouraging to learn that 3,000 copies of the memorandum, prepared by the Committee on Christian Relationships, have

been distributed. We know that in a number of cases further copies of these pages have been reproduced locally, and that the Friends Book Centre alone has sold 150 copies of the full text of the Lima report, and also some 800 of the study guide by John Matthews, published by the British Council of Churches.

9 It is important to remember that London Yearly Meeting is only one of the yearly meetings of the Religious Society of Friends round the world, and that some half of the yearly meetings are (largely through Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting) in membership of the World Council of Churches, which London Yearly Meeting has felt unable to join. Each yearly meeting has been invited to formulate its own responses to the Lima report in its own way: London Yearly Meeting can speak only for itself.

The preparation of the response to WCC

10 A group of members of the Committee on Christian Relationships has received and studied carefully the responses from Meetings and individual Friends in this country. In the light of this CCR now offers to London Yearly Meeting a review of the reactions and opinions received from Friends, and a draft response to the Lima report based on these reactions. In our draft response we have made the point that the language of the Lima text is not that of everyday use. Equally, our everyday language may be unfamiliar to the Faith & Order Department of the World Council of Churches. In drafting the response we have used for the most part language familiar to London Yearly Meeting. Occasionally, however, we have felt that a point could be made more forcefully by using language which will be more familiar to the recipients than, perhaps, to Friends generally.

11 In all, 117 replies have been received. Seventy-five of these came from Preparative or Recognised Meetings, 10 from Monthly Meetings, 3 from General Meetings and 16 from individual Friends. Their form and length varied tremendously. Some were brief and factual minutes recording discussions at one session of the gathering, or summarised a presentation by a visiting speaker, and referred to several questions that followed. Others gave careful reports of a series of meetings called to consider the matters raised by the papers. A number of these involved members of other Christian churches who had been invited to share their thinking with Friends. The essays by individual Friends were in some cases additional to a group report, but in others came from people who had been unable to meet with a group.

12 It was not uncommon for Friends to report that they had embar-

ked on their discussions with some trepidation, seeing the language as difficult and the concepts as foreign to much of their thinking. But many reported that their discussions had been rewarding, both in helping them to know and understand each other better, and also in fostering deeper understanding and knowledge of other churches and their beliefs and practices. A good number said that their understanding of our own Quaker position and practices had been enhanced by the studies. Some responses indicated that Friends did not feel they needed to learn from other churches.

13 In presenting this report, we are well aware of the Friends who for one reason or another did not take part in this exercise, and whose views we are not able to take into consideration. Only guesswork or hearsay can give any idea of what these Friends might have added to our thinking, but the silent ones continue to influence those whose voices have been heard, though they have chosen not to respond directly. We are very grateful for the care and trouble which the groups and individuals have taken in preparing their replies, and on these the following section of this report and the draft response to the World Council of Churches are based.

Implications of Friends' replies

14 It is clear that this study has led some Friends to reflect critically on aspects of Quaker attitudes and practices. For instance:

a) Many Friends emphasised our Christian position and regarded themselves as part of the Christian church, though a few queried this position as too exclusive.

b) In considering the Quaker response to *BEM*, some spoke of the difficulty of living up to our beliefs and several groups called on Friends to deepen their spiritual life.

c) There was general concern about the quality of our worship: have we lost the sense of "mysterium tremendum" (the numinous)?
our worship is often shallow:
we need a teaching ministry;
there are dangers in unthinking assumptions about "our simple practice".

d) The single most discussed point was membership. Special concerns were:
to make membership joyful;
to ensure adequate preparation of attenders thinking of membership;

to try to ensure that the commitment once entered into does not lose fervour;
to find better ways of helping and learning from our young people;
to consider why so many who attend our meetings do not become members;
to search, as believers in the unity of all life (a unity which does not separate the sacred and the secular), for ways of building a more just and peaceful world.

e) Among the most striking of isolated concerns were:
how do elders and overseers see themselves?
is vocal ministry declining?
should we re-consider the recording of ministers?
why is Jesus rarely mentioned in our meetings for worship?
what about disruptive or unworshipful ministry?
have Friends replaced grace by will?
should Friends join the British Council of Churches as full members, accepting the basis?

15 In spite of these uncertainties, there was a strong general feeling that:
God is within and accessible to everyone;
God is not to be limited by creeds and exclusive practices;
religion embraces the whole of life;
intellectual concepts are not of over-riding importance.

16 On the evidence of the written replies, Friends see themselves as followers of Jesus, though not in any exclusive spirit. Rather, we welcome the truths of other faiths whose insights we would share, as well as those of other branches of the Christian church.

17 Some Friends have re-examined and been led to reaffirm their basic beliefs, though some have become more aware of individual and corporate weaknesses. At any time "walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one" is a model of discipleship perhaps too demanding for us. Further, in a world very different from that of George Fox we need to "witness to the truth" in new ways.

18 It would appear from the replies that our role is to try continually to live up to the corporate insights of the Society of Friends. We know that in doing without creed and liturgy, in allowing anyone to speak in our meetings for worship, and in conducting our business meetings as meetings for worship, we encourage a freedom which involves great risks. But God, it seems, took the risk of creating, and leaving free,

men and women of infinite variety. In response we try, alas with only partial success, to contain our differences within the love shown by Jesus. This continual and continuing endeavour brings us both tensions and rewards.

Signed in and on behalf of the Committee on Christian Relationships held 14 December 1985

CHRISTINE A. M. DAVIS, *Clerk*

Members of the Committee on Christian Relationships as on 1 January 1987:

Beth Allen, Rex Ambler, Melanie Barber, Geoffrey Bowes, Tony Brown, S. Jocelyn Burnell, Christine A. M. Davis, Elizabeth Eddington, Jo Farrow, Val Ferguson, Margaret E. Jervis, Rowena Loverance, Edward H. Milligan, Neville H. Newhouse, Joyce Pickard, Eva I. Pinthus, Muriel Poulter, Hugh S. Pyper, Giles H. Robertson, David W. Robson, Janet Scott, John Southern, Thelma Stewart, E. Oscar Wallis; Donald H. D. Southall (Recording Clerk).

Former members of the Committee on Christian Relationships who served on the committee while the subject of this response was under consideration:

Stella Alexander, Karen Coffin, Jennifer A. Hodgkin, David Moll, John Punshon, Ted Randall, Ann P. Warren, Arthur J. White

FURTHER READING

Baptism, eucharist and ministry (Faith & Order paper 111). Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982. (Contains the full text and the official Lima commentary.)

Matthews (John) ed. *Baptism, eucharist and ministry: seven studies.* London: British Council of Churches, new edn. 1983. (Contains the full Lima text, limited Lima commentary, and much additional material. This version is particularly helpful for discussion groups.)

Lazareth (William H.) *Growing together in baptism, eucharist and ministry.* Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982

Thurian (Max) ed. *Churches respond to BEM: official responses to the "Baptism, eucharist and ministry" text (Faith & Order paper 129).* Vol. 1 Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986. (Contains a substantial background introduction and 11 responses: further volumes will appear in due course.)

Committee on Christian Relationships: *Unity in the spirit: Quakers and the ecumenical pilgrimage.* London: Quaker Home Service, 1979

Sheeran (Michael) *Beyond majority rule: voteless decisions in the Religious Society of Friends.* Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1983

Wilsher (Barry) *Quaker organisation: a plain person's guide to structure and business meetings in London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.* London: Quaker Home Service, 1986

Sharman (Cecil) *Servant of the meeting: Quaker business meetings and their clerks.* London: Quaker Home Service, 1983

£1

Over one hundred theologians representing all the major church traditions met at Lima, Peru, in January 1982 and agreed a statement entitled 'Baptism, eucharist and ministry'. This statement, a major advance in the ecumenical journey, is the result of a fifty-year process of study and consultation. The statement has been sent to churches throughout the world for study and response.

This booklet prints the official response to the Lima text from the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Great Britain. This response, approved by the Yearly Meeting in August 1986, is based on material supplied by well over one hundred local Quaker meetings and study groups. The study 'has led some Friends to reflect critically on aspects of Quaker attitudes and practices' and a background paper sets out some of these which merit further study by Friends.

The response, while making clear how often Quaker practice falls short of conviction, offers to fellow-Christians some insights which 'we believe we hold in trust for the whole church'. Quakers in Great Britain have been associated with the Faith & Order movement for over seventy years and this response is made in the context of their understanding of the nature of Christian unity, consistently held throughout this period, and of their experience of the nature of authority and decision making.

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