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tribulation, millenium etc.); why not in this area too? The late Professor F. F. Bruce wrote to me in 1989 that ‘annihilation is certainly an acceptable interpretation of the relevant New Testament passages’. He added: ‘For myself I remain agnostic’. My position is similar.

6 September 1993 p. 35

Confessing the One Faith: An Evangelical Response by W.E.F. Theological Task Force on Ecumenical Issues

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The Confessing the One Faith document by the Commission of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches is an explication of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed. Churches are being asked whether they can recognize in it the faith of the apostles and on that basis can recognize one another as churches of Jesus Christ. The earlier study document by Faith and Order, ‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’ (1982), had a similar goal of manifesting the unity of the churches. In this evaluation and response the Theological Commission seeks to test this document against the normative testimony of the Apostolic writings—the Scriptures. The response was sent to the Faith and Order Commission for consideration at their international meeting in August 1993. It is also addressed to the W.E.F. Constituency for their responses. The Task Force will welcome responses from the readers of E.R.T. Write to The Convenor, Dr. Paul G. Shrotenboer, 1677 Gentian Dr. S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508, USA.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

In a world in which the central affirmations of the Christian faith are being assailed from all sides—even its core and foundation, namely, Christ Jesus as the truth—we welcome the attempt at clarifying key aspects of the Christian faith in the document *Confessing the One Faith*, (Faith and Order Paper No. 153, World Council of Churches).

Observing the World Council of Churches (WCC), Evangelicals have had concerns: that the quest for visible unity would be pursued at the expense of truth; that the scandal of disunity would propel ecumenists towards a lowest-common denominator p. 36 approach to Christian doctrine; that the urgency of the sociopolitical ills of our time would lead to impatience with truth, captured in the adage, ‘Doctrine divides, service unites’; and finally, that certain approaches to dialogue with people of other living faiths would lead to relativism and syncretism.

In that climate, we welcome the study project on the Apostolic Faith and specifically this explication of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, commonly known as the Nicene Creed (hereafter NC). It evidences a seriousness and insight concerning the core of the Christian faith. In the following response we will outline our positive appreciation, as well as areas of concern.

At this point, we wish to say that the success of this Apostolic Faith venture within the Commission on Faith and Order and the WCC as a whole could become an important step towards bridging the gap between Evangelicals and the WCC.

In preparing this response we wish to be loyal to the faith, the body of truth that was once for all time entrusted to the people of God ([Jude 3](#)). Our prayer is that of the apostle Paul, that God will give us all a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Jesus Christ so that with one mind and heart we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ([Rom. 15:5, 6](#)).

The Steps in the Apostolic Faith Project

Confessing the One Faith (hereafter COF) is a part of the search for visible unity undertaken by WCC. WCC has identified 'three essential conditions and elements of visible unity: the common confession of the apostolic faith; the mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry; common structures for witness and service as well as for decision-making and teaching authoritatively' (Intro 1).

The WCC has taken the NC as the means to express the apostolic teaching since it has been the most widely accepted statement of faith through the centuries (Intro 12–16). Nothing like that has been undertaken before in the history of the Christian church: to come to a common expression of the apostolic faith on the basis of a creed that is 1600 years old.

For this project, the WCC has adopted a three-stage process: *explication*, *recognition* and *confession*. Explication was chosen as the starting point because 'it is the presupposition for reaching the goal of a common recognition and confession of the apostolic faith in our time' (Intro 10; see also Intro 22). The document before us now represents the first stage, explication.

Before examining the significance of these stages, it may be helpful to give a summary of the Document's description of each.

Explication 'seeks to uncover the relevance of the Christian faith in the face of some practical challenges of our time and world' (Intro. 11).

The Document describes the second stage, recognition, in this way: 'The process of *recognition* implies that each church is called to recognize:

- the apostolic faith in its own life and practice;
- the need for repentance (*metanoia*) and renewal as a consequence of [p. 37](#) seeing where they are not faithful to the apostolic faith;
- other churches as churches where the apostolic faith is proclaimed and confessed' (Intro 18).

This threefold recognition is the path along which the churches can arrive at a common *confession* of the apostolic faith. It is directed first to the churches themselves, so that they may examine whether they are in the faith of the apostles and undergo renewal where they have not fully attained it, and then turn to the other churches as churches that are true to the apostolic faith.

Though the third stage, *confession*, is the goal of the previous two stages, it is not clearly described. The aim of the Apostolic Faith project 'is not to formulate a new ecumenical creed' (Intro 4). Rather, the confession it seeks to facilitate appears to be an *act* of confessing the apostolic faith. The precise nature and implications of this act need to be clarified.

COF is not to be seen as a consensus document or even a convergence statement (Intro 19); it is a study document. This means that it should not be put on a par with the earlier Faith and Order Document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. What status it may receive after the World Conference on Faith and Order in August 1993 remains to be seen. This

document is intended is an '*instrument of recognition*' (page 7, emphasis added): The purpose of the common explication of the NC is to increase mutual confidence so that all churches may be helped to recognize the apostolic faith in each other (Intro 20).

The COF study book is structured as follows: after introductory material, it deals with each of the three main articles of the NC (belief in God, belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, and belief in the Spirit, the Church and the life of the world to come). In each case, it sets out 'The Creed and its biblical witness' and then offers an 'Explication for today'.

REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS

We applaud this effort to put an end to the divisions in the church and to 'call the church to the goal of visible unity in one faith' (Intro 1). We affirm that unity cannot be found, as some in the past have thought possible, by ignoring the doctrinal issues that divide. We agree that the apostolic testimony is essential. We recognize that the NC is a useful place with which to begin to find agreement and arrive at a common expression of the apostolic faith.

But is it sufficient? The NC was written in a specific time and addresses specific problems of the church, but it leaves untouched the vast majority of problems that have vexed the church throughout its history. It does not treat in any direct way the issues that caused the greatest division of all, namely, the one that took place in the 16th century (involving such doctrines as *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*). Some issues which flow directly from the NC, such as the incarnation and resurrection, are not dealt with extensively in the Explications. Others, which are not mentioned and could not have entered the minds of the ancient church fathers, such as secularism and neo-paganism, are given p. 38 treatment. The selection seems to be somewhat arbitrary.

Evangelicals also have a problem with what might be called 'confessionalism': when a creed becomes the sole means through which the apostolic testimony is filtered, the creed tends to detract from the normative testimony of the apostles which, as all recognize, is much broader than what can be summarized in any single creed.

In the fervent hope that this Faith and Order study project will move us all closer to the apostolic faith and thereby closer to one another, we offer the following observations which we trust will be helpful in our common understanding of the one faith and will equip us to confront the ungodly forces in the world today.

In our response, we have sought to concentrate on the following general areas.

1. The Authority of Scripture
2. Universalism and Religious Pluralism
3. The Church
4. Secularism

EVALUATION

The Authority of Scripture

Any truly ecumenical explication of the apostolic faith for today must not only affirm the authority of Holy Scripture; it must also be clear, especially in the light of persisting errors and misconceptions, concerning the source and nature of that authority.

Analysis

Indications of the Bible as an authority are present throughout COF, most evidently in the format by which the effort is regularly made to show that the formulations of the NC

reflect the 'biblical witness'. The affirmations of the NC 'are rooted in the witness of the Holy Scripture and must be tested against them and explicated, in their light, within the context of the tradition of the Church (Intro 17). We appreciate this endeavour to root the Explication in the Scriptures and its success in doing that in many instances.

The NC has no explicit statement of biblical authority. Yet unmistakable indications are present in at least three places: in the second article, in the phrase 'in accordance with the scriptures; and in the third article, in the affirmations that the Holy Spirit 'has spoken through the prophets', and that the Church is 'apostolic'.

We observe that the Document does not explicate, or even mention, the phrase 'in accordance with the scriptures'. This is the only element in the NC completely passed over in this way.

In explicating the first of the two affirmations in the third article ('*The Spirit and the prophets*', 213–215), plainly the concern of COF is to stress *continuity*—continuity in the presence and speaking of the inspiring, prophesying Spirit, beginning with the Old Covenant and continuing on during the New Covenant until the present. The affirmation of the NC is not to be taken to deny that 'the *gifts of prophecy* are still bestowed today' (215); the accent is on proclaiming 'a specific word of God' today (215). In the crucial matter of finding criteria for distinguishing p. 39 genuine prophecy from what is not, 'the biblical witness and the tradition and confession of the Church' are apparently placed on the same level (215).

Similarly, COF declares that the apostolicity of the Church is 'manifested in its faithfulness to the Word of God, lived out and witnessed to in the apostolic Tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit throughout the centuries, and expressed in the ecumenical Creed' (241; cf. Intro 2: '... the apostolic faith as witnessed to by the Holy Scriptures and summarized in the creeds of the early Church'. (Intro 17): '... the apostolic faith as witnessed to by the Holy Scriptures, proclaimed in the Tradition of the Church, and expressed in the Creed, ...'). Earlier, in the Introduction (7), the apostolic faith is called a 'dynamic reality'. Further, this reality is not only said to be 'grounded ... in the normative testimony, reflected in the New Testament', of the apostles and those associated with them in proclaiming the gospel; it is 'grounded' more broadly as well, 'in the prophetic witness of the people of the Old Testament' and of the larger Christian community in the apostolic age.

Evaluation

Such statements are ambiguous and beg important questions about biblical authority. What makes Scripture normative? What gives the witness of the prophets and apostles its uniqueness, if any, in distinction from the testimony of the rest of God's people? Is Scripture God's word and, if so, in what sense? What authority does 'the Tradition of the Church' have in relation to that of Scripture? Most centrally and crucially for COF as a whole, what is the relationship of Scripture to the apostolic faith as a content to be believed (cf. [Jude 3](#))? COF does not face such questions directly and the answers implied are unsatisfactory.

There is a variety of positions among Evangelicals about the gift of prophecy. But, with few exceptions, they are agreed that such prophecy as may take place today does not function alongside of Scripture, on the same plane, but must be subject to its authority as final. Scripture and the subsequent witness of the church, including confessions like the NC, are not on the same continuum of the Spirit's activity. These embody the church's ongoing response to and appropriation of the former as God's inspired word. To employ an old but still useful formula, our creeds and confessions, at their best, are 'normed norms'; Scripture, seen in its totality as the Spirit speaking, is the 'norming norm'.

The lack of a clear articulation of the nature and role of Scripture severely hampers the Document. Only one statement suggests the unique authority of the Scriptures (Intro 17). They are never clearly affirmed as the word of God, nor are they recognized as standing above the church.

Such a view of Scripture and its authority we believe to be deficient. Certainly, we recognize, the Scriptures may be properly categorized as witness. But they are more; not just as witnesses to God's word, they are as well themselves God's word. The [p. 40](#) word of God is not a content or subject matter more or less adequately expressed or witnessed to by the biblical writers, so that what they have written and how they have expressed themselves are matters always open, subsequently, to question and even correction. Rather, Scripture is God's word because the words of the human authors are at the same time and as such his very own.

This view we believe to be faithful to the intention of the NC and, much more importantly, to the biblical witness itself (e.g., [Acts 1:16; 4:25](#); 2 Tim, [3; 16](#); [Heb. 3:7; 10:15-17](#); [2 Pet. 1:20-21](#)). in continuity with the church in all ages we find this conviction expressed in exemplary fashion in the words of another creed:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God (Westminster Confession of Faith, [1:4](#)).

This confession of biblical authority, which we find to be missing from COF, we consider essential to any explication of the apostolic faith today.

In addition to this basic reservation, the teaching authority of Scripture does not function decisively in several of the *Commentary* sections (according to Intro 34, these commentaries 'contain either additional historical background information or theological details or continuing controversial themes'): the impression is given that the virgin birth, as an historical event, may not be taught in Scripture and is not a necessary element of the apostolic faith (124); the bodily reality of Christ's resurrection is rendered uncertain (176), as is his return as a future, bodily event (187); matters like prayers for the dead and belief in purgatory and the intercession of the saints appear to be acceptable to COF (267).

The matter of biblical authority is a crucial one. In fact, because most, if not all, Evangelical churches will find CO to be unclear in this respect, they will be prevented from recognizing it as an adequate explication of their faith.

2. Universalism and Religious Pluralism

The question of Christianity's relation to other religions is a critical issue today in light of the resurgence of other world religions as well as the increasing tendency in many churches either to teach or to hold open the possibility of universal salvation.

COF addresses the issue of universal salvation explicitly (268, *Commentary*). It denies that 'the time for restoring all things' in [Acts 3:21](#) is to be understood in the sense of universal salvation and rejects the notion that [1 Timothy 2:4](#) provides 'a guarantee of universal salvation for those who reject the call to conversion'. The following paragraph underlines the fact that 'Christian doctrine has to do justice not only to the unlimited intention of God's saving love but also to the many New Testament warnings that eternal damnation is possible'.

Evangelicals agree that 'the saving [p. 41](#) will of God remains an ultimate mystery' (268). There is an insuperable difficulty in trying to harmonize passages in Scripture that speak of God's loving desire for the salvation of all humanity and those that clearly state

that according to his electing purpose only some will be saved. Since we do not want to reason away the one set of passages to make it conform to, or not appear to contradict, the other set, we willingly accept them both, awaiting further enlightenment as we are led by the Spirit in studying the Scripture.

In its references to salvation, the work of Christ, and the purposes of God as Father, COF itself tends to use language, which left unqualified, leaves a universalistic impression: for instance, ‘the providence of the Father extends to all creatures and aims at re-uniting them in the community of his kingdom’ (56); Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection are ‘the fulfillment of God’s saving purpose for all people’; he [God] ‘took away the guilt from humanity’ (143).

Such language, though in itself acceptable and defensible biblically, is used in a way that obscures the special, even exclusive way in which God is the Father of all who believe in Jesus Christ. Nor does it make clear that intrinsic to the gospel is the call that all people must repent and trust in Christ.

Evangelicals would also call attention to the many passages that state that eternal damnation is a dreadful fact for those who reject Christ, not just a possibility (e.g., [Dan. 12:2](#); [Matt. 18:8](#); [25:41](#), [46](#); [Mark 3:29](#); [John 5:28–29](#); [Heb. 6:2](#); [10:29–31](#); [Rev. 14:11](#); [20:10](#), [15](#)).

COF addresses the relationship of Christianity to the other world religions at some length (31–35). Throughout it shows sensitivity and even sympathy for them, at the same time warning against the ever-present tendency to idolatry in all religions (30). In the face of challenges from other religions, the Document affirms the concreteness of the revelation of the One, Triune God (34) and maintains that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ ‘is the only true way’ (35). (We note with regret that the statement in the previous edition of COF [Faith and Order Paper No. 140], ‘No creature can fulfil its being without communion with him [Jesus Christ]’, has been significantly weakened to read: ‘No creature can attain fulfillment without him’ [119]).

We fully agree that the relationship of Christianity to other religions naturally leads to the issue of religious dialogue. One reason is that other religions *may* contain ‘important elements of truth’ (35). Whether elements of truth can be found in a particular religion and what these elements are cannot be established in advance but only by comparing the truth claims of other religions with ‘the only true way’ of salvation (35), Jesus Christ. The Document unfortunately does not state this explicitly. There is another reason for dialogue. Because of our common, universal human need, as sinners, for salvation, we must be concerned genuinely to understand, and to represent fairly, the positions of other religions. We would suggest, [p. 42](#) then, that true respect for partners in interreligious dialogue requires the recognition of the uniqueness of their religion as well as that of Christianity. Only as we are open to recognize the central differences as well as whatever similarities there are, can the dialogue be truly fruitful.

Evangelicals affirm that God’s saving revelation in Jesus Christ is unique and authoritative. We also maintain that in Christ God has provided the only way of human salvation (e.g., [Acts 4:12](#)). This conviction determines how we view other religions and claims that God has also spoken through them, as well as what content and value we attribute to dialogue with people of other faiths.

Dialogue may never become a substitute for gospel proclamation or Christian witness but must rather be an authentic avenue to present Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world. Dialogue should therefore not conceal the singularity and supremacy of God’s revelation in Christ. Nor in dialogue should we merely compare one religious experience with another. On that basis, for one party to claim exclusive knowledge would be a display of arrogance. But dialogue should aim primarily at sharing the gospel with people of other

faiths; those who by God's grace are saved share with those who are still lost the good news of the redemptive events in salvation history centred in the person and work of Christ.

3. The Church

Both WCC and WEF have studied particular aspects of the church and produced important studies and documents (on the WCC side, see in particular, 'The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches' in *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927–1963*, Toronto 1950; *The New Delhi Report*, 1961, 'Unity', especially par 2; on the WEF side, see 'The Evangelical Response of BEM Document' in *AETEI Journal* Jan–Jun 1990; 'The World Evangelical Statement of Faith' especially par 5: [We believe] 'The united of the Spirit, of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ'). Further study of the nature of the church is needed by both bodies, in particular, study of the nature of the unity of the church (the relationship between local and universal church, visible and invisible church, and the role of ordained ministers with respect to the unity of the church). Here

The Nature of the Church

We appreciate the initial steps COF makes in explicating the nature of the church. Particularly significant is the persuasion which underlies the whole ecclesiological reflection in the document that 'the life and unity of the Church are grounded in the communion of the Trinity' (225).

Together with the framer of COF, Evangelicals hold to the attributes of the church as these are expressed in the NC: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church—though they tend to understand these attributes in a different way.

Both believe that this church is the people of God, the body of Christ, and the communion of the Spirit. The church of the NT 'is linked to the beginning and model of the p. 43 people of God in the *qahal* of the old. The Church is called to declare the "wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" ([1 Pet 2:9](#))' (223). The body of Christ describes 'the intimate, organic relationship which exists between the Risen Lord and all those who receive the new life through communion with him' (221). 'The Church is such a communion because all those who believe in Christ are in one true fellowship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, and by partaking of the same divine gift are united together in the Holy Spirit ([1 John 1:3](#))' (231).

The Mission of the Church

The mission of the church, according to COF, flows from the lordship of Christ (181). He has sent out his followers in missionary outreach to sow the good seed of the word and bring Christ's love to all people (236). 'The gospel it [the church] proclaims and the witness it renders invites all people to accept the Good News of the kingdom' (233).

Like most creeds, the NC lacks a statement reflecting Christ's mandate, 'As the Father has sent me, so send I you' ([John 21:20](#)). The Document does, however, speak about the apostolicity of the church in connection with mission and explicates this word extensively.

According to the NC, the church is apostolic. This designation indicates a two-fold relation to the apostles. 'The *apostolicity* of the Church is manifested in its faithfulness to the word of God, lived out and witnessed to in the apostolic tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit throughout the centuries, and expressed in the ecumenical Creed' (241). 'The apostolicity of the Church expresses its obligation and commitment to the norm of the apostolic gospel, of God's action in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (220).

The church is apostolic also in that it is sent by God to carry out his mission. Thus, ‘the church is apostolic by following the example of the apostles in continuing their mission to proclaim the gospel which is confirmed by the action and the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (241). This means that the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection ‘function as an invitation to the apostles to spread the good news of the resurrection’ (170). The confession of the lordship of Christ supports and strengthens our confidence in carrying out the missionary task of the church to announce the lordship of Christ to all the world (182). The gospel is the joyous message of the resurrection that enables Christians to cross all human frontiers and break the barriers that divide us—of class, caste, race, sex, religion and ideology (177).

Evangelicals can only rejoice in this clear affirmation of the evangelistic mission of the church. In our understanding, to evangelize is not only to proclaim the good news in Christ Jesus but also ‘to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’ ([Mic 6:8](#)). All the churches are challenged to more vigorous and innovative involvement in the mission of God in the world: they need to call people to repentance, faith and discipleship, and to promote peace and justice. [p. 44](#)

4. Secularism

COF’s treatment of secularism is highly commendable, especially in the delineation of the structural-societal embodiment of secularization (28). This systemic secularism indeed declares social, economic, and political life to be ‘self-sufficient’. Because religion is relegated to the private sphere, God becomes largely irrelevant to the shape and direction of life in the public arena. Secularism shapes this vast area of God’s world as if it is not God’s world, thus, as the Document puts it, denying ‘any accountability of the public realm to God’ (28).

The Document rightly points to the deepest cause, as well as the concomitant condition, of secularism, namely the idolatry of absolutizing the secular world (30). Accordingly, in searching for an antidote the Document affirms that finite things and societal life ‘lack ultimate meaning and purpose without a transcendent reality as their basis’ (29). Greater clarity regarding this confession and its practical consequences for the shape and direction of the socio-political order is badly needed and poses a challenge to us all.

The Document makes a beginning by affirming that God is the source of ‘moral values’ and of hope in face of the limitations of all human efforts (29). What is needed is a further articulation of the relationship between ‘moral values’ and the urgent task of shaping the sociopolitical order in such a way that human life and the life of the entire creation can flourish. ‘Moral values’ are usually construed as the realm of personal ethical behaviour. This understanding is re-enforced when in the Document these values are closely linked to God’s ‘voice ... in the human conscience’ (29). Morality and conscience are obviously indispensable. Yet, in a secularized society this ‘personal’ and ‘confessional-religious’ emphasis engenders an approach in which societal structures operate relatively ‘autonomously’ (i.e., literally as a law unto themselves), while ‘moral values’ and ‘religious conscience’ come into play to deal with the often deleterious *consequences* of systemic secularism. In other words, ‘moral values’ and religious ‘conscience’ are not equal to the task at hand, and, moreover, arrive too late to deal with the root problems.

Sorely needed is a deeper penetration into, and ‘mediating’ elaboration of, the ‘Lordship of Christ’ (183) in its significance for all of creaturely life—including the ‘secular world’. The Document contains seminal confessional statements that, with further tending, could germinate into a more comprehensive approach to secularism. We have in mind, in addition to the profound confession of Jesus Christ as ‘Lord and master of this

world' (183), the statements regarding the role of the Spirit in effecting the work of the Father and Son in the fulfillment of the destiny of the creation (78), the affirmation that 'the order of creation has its foundation in Jesus Christ' (73), and in the call for an 'ethics of creation' (88–89) in the context of God's summons to stewardly care for creation (84–87).

What is needed is deeper reflection [p. 45](#) both in Evangelical and WCC circles on how the confession of the triune God's redeeming and renewing rule over the cosmos provides norms for all of life. The doors are opened wide to such reflection when the unity of the work of the Father and the Son is pointedly described in terms of the kingdom: 'This precisely is his [the Son's] kingdom: to persuade and lead everyone and *everything into submission to the Father*' (191, emphasis added). Moving from, but going beyond, the confession of the ultimate meaning of created existence in God, we need to search for the directives that this confession and experience of God entail for the pervasive structural 'thing' called the socio-political-cultural order.

CONCLUSION

The first question the Commission of Faith and Order has submitted to the churches as they evaluate COF is; 'Would your church find the explication of the Nicene Creed contained in *Confessing the One Faith* in basic agreement with the "faith once for all delivered to the saints" as confessed and lived in your ecclesial community?'

Before responding to this question we want to make two comments about the way in which it is phrased. First, WEF is not an ecclesial community but a fellowship of ecclesial communities and parachurch organizations. WEF's answer to the above question will therefore by necessity be more general than are the answers of particular churches. Second, as evangelicals, we think that the most crucial question to ask is whether the Document is in basic agreement with the 'faith once for all delivered to the saints', *as contained in the Holy Scripture*. It is the Scripture itself, not the way our respective communities interpret the Scripture, that is the norm of what is the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The authority of the Scripture over the traditions of the churches is for us an important methodological principle on which the progress of the dialogue between Christian churches depends greatly.

We rejoice at how much COF expresses the faith as we see it taught by the Scripture. In particular, we are in *agreement* with the clear doctrine of the Trinity, the stress on the humanity and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the perspectives on creation and its relation to the future kingdom of God. We applaud both the importance attached to the doctrine of the church and stress on drawing practical implications from them for the life of the church in the world.

At the same time, we have to express our strong *reservations*: among other things, the lack of a clear statement about Scripture as the final basis for authority in matters of faith and practice; the lack of a clear commitment to some important doctrines of the Bible that the church throughout the ages has held dear (e.g., the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the bodily nature of the resurrection).

The Document *challenges* as to reflect on the nature of visible expressions of unity that as believers we have in Jesus Christ and to learn how to dialogue better with [p. 46](#) another as we strive to be true to the teaching of the Scripture and loving toward one another. We need further to reflect on the doctrinal basis for recognition of ecclesial communities as churches. What doctrines are so central that their denial renders the church that denies them apostate? COF speaks of the need to 'recognize in the other the fullness of the apostolic faith' but denies at the same time that this means 'complete

identity of interpretation of the apostolic faith' (Intro 6). We are challenged to explore, both within the WEF constituency and with other conciliar bodies, what precisely is the 'degree of unanimity ... required for the mutual recognition of the apostolic faith' and what is the 'measure of difference in the interpretation of that faith' (Intro 6).

The Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship adopted the following recommendations:

1. To adopt the response.
2. To request the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC to react to our response to *Confessing the One Faith*.
3. To convey to the Faith and Order Commission our willingness to participate further in the discussions as opportunity presents itself.
4. To suggest to the Faith and order Commission that it invite the WEF Theological Commission to send a participant to the fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Spain in August, 1993.
5. To urge WEF member fellowships and their churches to study the Document *Confessing the One faith* and the WEF response to it.

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A Credible Response to Secular Europe

Peter Kusmič.

Reprinted with permission from Themelios and Towards Century 21 in Christian Mission, eds. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids, Win. B. Eerdmans, 1993)

The author gives a disturbing but realistic appraisal of the spiritual crises in both Western and Eastern Europe and the old and new forms of the secular challenge. In the midst of new opportunities for the gospel he warns against the dangerous resurgence of new national-religious totalitarianisms with the shift to 'tribalism'. In the new complexities of Europe he calls the churches to reclaim the reliability, truthfulness and relevance of the gospel, to demonstrate a credible lifestyle and unity and to recover a mission-centred ecclesiology.

Our problem is, therefore, how to get in touch again with the masses of the 'unfaithful faithful'.