“This vital textbook helps us to rethink Christian theology, Christian mission and Christian life. Mission belongs to the very being of Christian identity; it is an ontological reality. As 'temples of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 7:19), Christians witness and share the experienced joy of their life in Christ since the Spirit which inhabits them is never silent but a witnessing Spirit (John 15:26; Matt. 10:20). Authentic witness is done and points always toward unity as a condition that the world may believe. It cannot have hidden agendas and is not concerned with the growth of one’s confession. We witness, but people remain free to choose, to decide. Conversion is not our responsibility and concern, nor is it a ‘success’ of our witness. Conversion remains entirely the work of God (Acts 4:47).

—Fr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, WCC Deputy General Secretary and Director of the Ecumenical Institute Bossey, World Council of Churches
TRANSLATING THE WORD,
TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

An Ecumenical Reader

Edited by Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué, Marion Grau, Atola Longkumer
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Introduction

Theological education remains a pivotal area of mission for the church. Christianity is experiencing significant global shifts in terms of its demographics, and within that context theological education provides a vital element of constructive responses to the challenges brought to Christian communities across the globe.

Theological education thus plays a dual role: first, articulating radical constructive interpretation and discourse, and, second, presenting the church’s missional task of upholding theological formation. In other words, theological education critically engages as well as produces prophetic imagination¹ for the church. Within this current milieu of challenges to the church, the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2018 engages in both of these roles, bringing together theological students from around the globe and representing diverse communities to study, engage as a learning community and, at its best, to build cross-cultural friendships² during the World Mission Conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2018. The theme for the World Mission Conference is “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship.”

GETI 2018 takes place within and in parallel to the mission conference, with its own theme “Translating the Word, Transforming the World,” and this volume is compiled primarily to serve as a textbook for the GETI 2018 participants. It brings together a collection of writings from ecumenical theologians and missiologists whose writings have offered insights, directions, challenges, and vibrant conversation to the ecumenical vision and evangelical mission of the global church. Apart from providing the GETI 2018 students an introduction to the foundational areas of mission and witness as expounded by ecumenical theologians, the present compilation also contributes to a much-needed theological resource for theological education beyond GETI 2018.

Translating the Word, Transforming the World will be made available in print and also in different media platforms, which will ensure the dissemination of the contents and conversation to diverse contexts that have access to the internet. Hence the textbook is meant to serve as a conduit to promote the study of ecumenism, missiology and world Christianity in theological institutions worldwide.

The central focus of the textbook is mission and ecumenism through a selection of ecumenical and missiological contributions that have provided foundational insights to the

ecumenical conversation and to intercultural missiology. Complementary texts in languages other than English are provided in the electronic version, made available at academy.globethics.net.

Key focus areas include the following:

- The History of the Ecumenical Movement
- Contemporary Issues in the Ecumenical Movement
- World Christianity: Intercultural and Interreligious Theology
- African Theologies and Realities of Mission Practice and
- God of Life, Creation, and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

These areas reflect the five study foci identified for GETI 2018. But they also constitute relevant fields for the study of ecumenism and missiology in other contexts of higher ecumenical theological education. Each section opens with an introduction to the theme to orient the students to the history, texts and context of the focus area. The essays aim to shed light on the issues, pose key questions, and engender further conversation about the ecumenical mission of the church.

The readings in this compilation are presented in separate sections and under key focus areas to facilitate their usage and integration into dedicated study modules. This structured presentation of contents should, however, not veil the interconnectedness of the themes introduced. The history of the ecumenical movement has progressively brought to the fore the need to read the ecumenical vision as embracing not only the unity of the churches, their fellowship, faith, witness and service, but also the unity of humankind in its diversity and in recognition of its manifold disparities. Therefore this compilation invites academic teachers and students of theology and neighbouring disciplines to create pedagogical contexts in which the compiled texts are read as pointing beyond the respective thematic areas, offering entry points for establishing links and interrogations vis-à-vis other fields of ecumenical study. Introductions to each chapter reflect this wider-ranging methodology, as they address not only the chapter topics or foci but also connections to the foci of the other chapters.

The structure of the textbook is at the same time a methodological proposal. It invites the readers to engage holistically with themes of ecumenical missiology. Following John S. Mbiti, for whom theology entails engagement with living issues and not a mere cognitive exercise, the textbook invites an attitude of increasing openness and deepening of the ecumenical vision through the lenses of selected scholarly contributions. This progressive immersion begins with the understanding of the double binding together of the *oikoumene* (the whole inhabited world) in the unity of the churches and the oneness of humans. It intends to relate the vision of being united – despite the division of churches and the brokenness of the world – to the articulation of a common witness to the gospel of Christ, which is one and has at the same time taken root in diverse cultural contexts. The liberating word of God, articulated in different languages and cultural expressions, nurtures the critical, prophetic and hopeful voices of churches and people in their struggle, amid injustice and violence, for and toward a peaceful world. Ultimately,

mission is not limited to ecclesial and societal realms. It unfolds in a transformational commitment to and interrelatedness within the whole of creation. Therefore it offers the opportunity to see justice and peace not only as results of human engagement, but more so of the dependence of humanity on the life-giving, indwelling Spirit of God, who renews all creation.

GETI 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania, is a historic occasion, and it intersects with the complex history and rich tradition of the vast continent of Africa with its diverse and autonomous Christian expressions after the encounter with Christian mission and other religions. *Translating the Word, Transforming the World* aptly captures the complexity of Africa in the history of Christianity. Christianity transformed Africa, and Africa continues to transform Christianity today as Africa presents one of the most vibrant expressions of contemporary Christian faith. Christianity has been rooted in Africa since antiquity, albeit the most dynamic and complex phase is linked with the modern missionary movement and Western imperialism. Today, Christianity thrives as a significant world religion in Africa, revealing the rich tapestry of Christianity in diverse contexts.

In *The Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, editors Isabel Phiri and Dietrich Werner identify nine major issues pertaining to theological education in Africa and situated within the global shift of Christianity. The following passage, exploring the second concern the editors identified and discussed in the handbook, is of special pertinence to GETI 2018:

The issue of the social, political and public relevance of Christian theology on the African continent [is highlighted]. Theological education in its varied forms is absolutely vital not only for the future of African Christianity and for future African church leaders, but also for the social and political witness of Christian churches in African nations and for informed political and prophetic witness in civil society. This is due to the fact that often Christian churches are a major, or the only, partner in civil society in the African continent. Therefore, support and promotion for theological education and relevant public theology and ethics is not only an issue related to inner affairs of churches. It is an overall concern for social and political development and a crucial factor in higher education policies in Africa which should not be neglected by church leadership and university policy makers as well as development agencies. As there is a new international discourse on the intersection of religion and development the churches and church related development agencies should be the first to support and articulate the need for strategic planning, ecumenical cooperation and quality improvement of theological education and ministerial formation on the African continent.

Theological education that is ecumenical, Christ-centred, contextually tuned and prophetic in its essence is critically important not only in African contexts but in the global Christian community. Ecumenical theological education frames the mission of the church in witnessing to the *evangelium* manifested in Jesus of Nazareth and engages the realities of each context. As a thriving and dynamic context in relation to Christian mission, Africa provides the resourceful locus for the exercise of ecumenical theological learning at GETI 2018.

While there is a long history of ecumenical theological education that has critically engaged issues facing the church, the journey toward the kingdom of God, wherein there is justice and the flourishing of all creation, continues. The realities of divisions, desperate situations of life
for the margins, those rendered vulnerable by a spectre of greed, the many who are excluded confront the church in its mission to the witness of the good news of liberation inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth. Indigenous peoples and cultures, women and LGBTQ persons, child labourers, victims of environmental degradation, war refugees and migrants forced by skewed economic policy, the need for theological diversity, etc., persist, inviting the church to critically engage the traditions and the foundational source that define the church. Innovative models and movements of theological education provide resources to engage the contexts: the Akrofi-Christaller Institute in Ghana, the laboratory for intercultural formation and encounter (Linfa) of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, or transformative leadership education offered at the United Theological College of the West Indies in Jamaica are illustrations of such new approaches to ecumenical theological education in various regions of the world and in resonance with societal developments and ecclesial needs in changed ecumenical landscapes.

Another example of transforming theological education comes from the life of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In such times as today, with raging challenges to the church in its witness to the gospel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer continues to inspire in many ways. To the English-speaking world, a recent introduction to another aspect of Bonhoeffer is made available in a book that documents Bonhoeffer's commitment to theological education at Finkenwalde, Germany, from 1935 to 1937, when the seminary was shut by the Gestapo. The idea of the illegal "underground" seminary was germinated during his time in the USA, and upon his return he became the director of the seminary at Finkenwalde. Until it was shut down in 1937, it was here in the community of learning that Bonhoeffer developed his books on the *Cost of Discipleship* and *Gemeinsames Leben* (1938) published in English as *Life Together.* In a turbulent time, Bonhoeffer led and directed the seminarians at Finkenwalde to be the leaders of the church. In study and personal commitment to a learning community, Bonhoeffer modelled the transformative leadership that was grounded in the Word, Jesus Christ, for radical witness that often came with high risk. In translating the Word into his lived context, Bonhoeffer participated in the transformation that the good news generates.

Theological education as a bridge between the church's mission and contextual challenges is further exemplified in the life and work of Bishop K.H. Ting (1915-2012). Bishop Ting was educated in mission institutes and acquired his theological education from Union Theological Seminary, New York City. An Anglican, Bishop Ting was the principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminar, and founder-president of the Amity Foundation, a Christian faith-based organization to engage the gospel with the contextual realities of a fast-changing China. His contribution to the ecumenical Christian community was summed up in the following tribute,

Bishop Ting's contribution to the re-emergence of church life and the opening of the church to the outside world in the 1980s and 1990s is widely recognized. He contributed immensely to raise the profile of the Chinese church to the horizon through the creation of the China Christian Council through which the Church in China re-entered into WCC fellowship after four decades of absence in the global ecumenical movement. He was a great visionary who demonstrated his commitment to address reconciliation between church and society, Christian and non-Christian, China and re-establishing Chinese Church's links with the worldwide

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churches. He made a unique contribution to create an indigenous Christian theology in China, sensitive to the Chinese context, through his efforts of “reconstruction of Chinese theology.”

The selection of texts in this volume for GETI 2018 serves as a sampling of the diverse and resourceful engagement of ecumenical Christianity by trailblazers for critically constructive articulation of the good news and witness to the gospel in different contexts. The collection bears witness to the deep commitment of ecumenical Christianity to transforming the world through translating the word, the Christ, who manifests the economy of the Triune God – which is merciful and just to all creation.

The editors of this volume express sincere appreciation to all who have partnered in various ways in the production of this textbook. To all: the authors, editors of journals, publishers for the prompt permission given for reprinting the selections, to those who made available generous funds for its printing, and the editorial assistance of WCC Publications, especially to J. Michael West, as well as Michelle Cook and Albin Hillert, we extend our thanks for all the timely help. May this collection inspire many, especially the next generation of theologians, and generate conversations on God’s mission that are translated into action for the transformation of the world.

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Chapter 1

The History of the Ecumenical Movement

Introduction: The Evolving Understanding of the Church and Its Mission

This first chapter of Translating the Word, Transforming the World opens up reflection and discussion of key dynamics—both energies and tensions—in the century-long movement to overcome division among Christian churches and address credible and effective witness to and in the world.

Concentrating on the period after 1968 and the decisive turn of the ecumenical movement toward social engagement at the WCC’s assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, this chapter begins with important and challenging presentations from key actors in the ecumenical movement over the last generation. Philip A. Potter, the Caribbean-born Methodist who became the WCC’s third general secretary, addressed its assembly in Vancouver in 1983. In a landmark address, he assayed the state of the ecumenical movement and the churches themselves in an age marked by globalization, nuclear build-up, racial tensions, social ferment, and geopolitical destabilization. What does it mean to be Christians in such a world? What does it mean to be church in that context?

Ten years later, still in the midst of dizzying changes during the dismantling of the apartheid system in South Africa, it was Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, who posed the underlying dilemma raised by the churches being so challenged and engaged by the social struggles of the day. What is the role of the ecumenical movement, and the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches, in the larger social struggles? What does deep engagement with issues of justice mean for the historic focus of ecumenism on Christian unity? Which is the priority? Of course, said Tutu, “it should never have been a question of either unity or justice.... It was God who indeed loved the world who set the agenda for the church....” And Christians divided can never be effective agents “for justice and peace against oppression and injustice.” Building on the notion of koinonia (communion or sharing), Tutu reframes the dynamics of ecumenical Christianity around solidarity, spirituality, and the larger human picture.

Likewise, it was Dame Mary Tanner who mined the rich insights of feminist theology to illumine the traditional quest for Christian unity and the meaning of church. Her 2001 article not only gleaned the learnings of two generations of women’s engagement in the ecumenical movement, it also demonstrated that addressing social inequities would pose deep, inescapable theological questions to the great Tradition that ecumenical Christianity is built upon. Yet struggling with the tradition in light of human experience makes theology more inductive, inclusive, engaged, and liberating.

The centrepiece of this chapter is the ecumenical convergence document, The Church: Towards a Common Vision. Approved and published in 2012, it is the result of more than 25 years of study, consultation, primarily centred in the Faith and Order Commission and its plenary group. Here, composed by Faith and Order director Odair Pedroso Mateus, is a brief introduction to that document, which seeks a genuine convergence around a vision of God, the Church, and the world:

Chapter 1. The first chapter, “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church” (10 paragraphs), intends to be the “horizon of meaning” against which the authors from different traditions and divided churches will speak together
about the nature of the Church and the manifestation of its unity. God the Father is transforming the world in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit; the Church has a vital role to play in God’s saving design and therefore should manifest to the world its oneness, which proclaims the ultimate reconciliation of all things in Christ. The Church is missionary, and the divided churches are called to make manifest ecumenically the Church’s given and promised Oneness as a requirement of the Church’s mission.

Chapter 2. Against this “horizon of meaning”, the authors from different traditions speak together in the second chapter about what we believe about “The Church of the Triune God” (22 paragraphs). They start by affirming the complementarity of Scripture and Tradition in the discernment of God’s will for the Church. In light of that, they speak about the nature of the Church using biblical images of the Church (people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit), and then they sum up the biblical teaching about the Church in the language of the Nice Creed by speaking of the four “marks” of the Church: Oneness, holiness, Catholicity, and Apostolicity. The Church in the world is to be seen as sign and servant of God’s design for the world; its unity is not uniformity, but unity in legitimate diversity; it lives, or is called to live, as a universal communion of local churches.

Chapters 3 and 4. Against the background of this vision of the nature of the One Church, the churches in via, divided but no longer isolated from each other, are called to grow in what the text calls “the essential elements of communion”, namely, apostolic faith, sacramental life, and ministry. Out of the 25 paragraphs that constitute this chapter entitled “The Church: Growing in Communion,” no less than 13 are dedicated to three issues related to Church ministry: ordained ministry, the ministry of oversight (especially personal episcopate) and, particularly, a universal ministry of Church unity comparable to the ministry of the Bishop of Rome in the Catholic Church. The last chapter, “The Church: In and for the World” (9 paragraphs), completes a circle by returning to the theme of the first chapter, but this time to call the churches to address together, despite growing difficulties, challenging issues related to moral issues (particularly human sexuality) and issues of Church and Society such as poverty, racism, and climate change, given that they are inseparable from faith in God’s reign.

The Rhetoric of the Architecture. In order to interpret an ecumenical text we need to understand first of all the rhetoric of its architecture, and this is what we have just attempted to do. The structure of The Church: Towards a Common Vision tells of the attempt to invite Christian communities from around the world to join in a converging Trinitarian understanding of the missional Church as rooted in Scriptures and Tradition, structured by a threefold form of ministry (deacons, presbyters, bishops) and served in its conciliar form of universal fellowship by a universal ministry of unity. These would be requirements of its optimal participation in what God is doing in and for the world today.

Reading an Ecumenical Text. But the rhetoric of the architecture of the text is not enough. We need to take into consideration two other elements. The first is the fact that an ecumenical text is rarely the work of an individual. An ecumenical text is often a fabric (think of the words “text” and “textile”…) produced with different, very different threads. Its row material is often fragments drafted in different circumstances by different people, using different theological languages (we always talk about our unity using vocabularies shaped by our divisions), and for different purposes. It does not often flow as the fabric (text) produced by a single author.

The second and last element is the fact that an ecumenical text is a theological text written with a view to overcome division. This means that as we read an ecumenical text, we have not only to understand its theological argument
in itself, as such, but to understand its theological argument in relation to past or present division and how this theological argument is trying to serve the move from division to communion.²

The final document in this chapter brings us specifically to the topic of mission and formulating an understanding of Christian mission that is authentic and responsive to the radically altered landscape of today. Very much in tune with The Church, the text of Together towards Life likewise begins with God’s mission in the world and on that basis radically reframes the meaning and purpose of mission, proposing a new model of “mission from the margins.” Remarkably attuned to a variety of social, political, and especially theological developments, the document embarks on a bold process of discernment. As its preamble states, “It is the aim of this new ecumenical discernment to seek vision, concepts and directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in changing landscapes. It seeks a broad appeal, even wider than WCC member churches and affiliated mission bodies, so that we can commit ourselves together to fullness of life for all, led by the God of Life!”

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1.1 A House of Living Stones

This is Potter’s last official report in his capacity as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, delivered at its Sixth General Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, in 1983. Throughout this report, he dwells on the image of the church as a house of living stones, quoting from 1 Peter. For Potter, this image contains the great vision of a church meant to be God’s house for the whole inhabited earth.

May I once again greet you warmly at this Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver. This is the second time in the thirty-five years of its existence that the Council’s Assembly has met in North America. The last time was the Second Assembly at Evanston, Illinois, in the USA, in 1954, with the theme, “Jesus Christ—The Hope of the World.” We gathered together then, at a time of fear and despair, in the midst of the confrontation between the East and West and the struggles of peoples for political, economic and racial justice around the world. The witch-hunt of McCarthyism was raging in the United States, and its effects were felt in the Assembly. And yet, we were able to say together in the Message: “Here where we stand (under the judgment of God and in the shadow of death), Jesus stood with us. He came to us, truly divine and truly human, to seek and to save. Though we were the enemies of God, Christ died for us. We crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. He is risen. He has overcome the powers of sin and death. A new life has begun. And in his risen and ascended power, he has sent forth into the world a new community, bound together by his spirit, sharing his divine life, and commissioned to make him known throughout the world.”

These words are still appropriate as we meet nearly thirty years later under the theme: “Jesus Christ—the Life of the World.” We come to Vancouver as those who share the divine life in Christ and desire to offer it in all its fullness to the peoples of the world. In contrast to the Evanston Assembly, we meet now as a much more representative gathering of people from all over the world. We meet, too, under an even darker cloud of fear and despair. The confrontation between East and West and between North and South, and the conflicts within countries between sexes, races, classes and religions, have become much fiercer and more complex. The very survival of the human race is daily threatened. At the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975, we had a feeling of being in the wilderness, as the children of Israel were after the Exodus, full of doubts and fears. Nevertheless, despite the pain and conflicts we experienced during that meeting, there was no retreat from the positions we had taken and the programmes we had launched after the Fourth Assembly at Uppsala in 1968. Indeed, we committed ourselves to go forward and undertake more specific, even controversial programmes in obedience to our calling.

When we examine the official report, “Nairobi to Vancouver,” we can see that in the wilderness of our time we have been able to receive and proclaim God’s word of life. We have had contact with a wider variety of people and more churches have been visited than ever before. We have labored for the unity of the Church and for the renewal of humankind. We have tried to meet human need in every part of the globe, and to be in solidarity with the oppressed and the deprived. We have spoken and acted in situations of conflict.

There is a profound sense in which the Church is by its very nature always in the wilderness on its pilgrim way to the City of God, or, as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, to the world (oikoumene) to come (2:5). The Church is the people of God, created and consecrated through the Exodus and the death and resurrection of Christ. It is called to participate in the sufferings of Christ for the salvation of our broken, divided world. At the beginning of the Church’s history it was seen as a community of people scattered all over the Roman Empire, having no legal or social status, and subject to harassment, persecution and death. It was to such diaspora churches that the First Letter of Peter was addressed.

We have been drawing from that Letter one of the “Images of Life” in our Bible studies in preparation for this Assembly—the image of “The House Made of Living Stones” which is intended to be an image of the Church. I invite you to meditate on what it means to be “the house of living stones” in a hostile world, which nevertheless yearns to be such a house, a living community of sharing in justice and peace. This biblical meditation should help us to reflect on what we have learned during these thirty-five years of the existence of the World Council of Churches about the nature and calling of the churches and about the Council as a fellowship of churches. Peter exhorts the diaspora churches: “Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by people, but in God’s sight chosen and precious: and like living stones be yourselves constantly built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:4-5). Christ is God’s delegated and precious living stone. The Psalmist declared, “the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (118:22); so Christ, rejected and crucified, is now the risen, life-giving Lord. That is the foundation of our faith and the basis of the World Council of Churches.

Actually, according to the Gospels, it was Jesus himself who drew attention to this Psalm, which is the last of a group of psalms called Hallel (Praise) and sung during and after the great feasts at Jerusalem (Ps. 111-118). Psalm 118 was sung after the Passover—the meal which served as the binding force of the people of Israel on the eve of the Exodus. Jesus quoted this verse of Ps. 118 in his controversy with the religious authorities who plotted his death (Mark 12:1-12), on the eve of what Luke called his exodus (Luke 9:31). He spoke to his disciples of being rejected and killed and of rising again after three days (Mark 8:31). In recalling his experience with Jesus and what he learned from it, Peter is saying to the diaspora churches in Asia Minor, as he says to us today, that confessing Christ means entering into his sufferings and sharing his risen life. He invites them and us to keep on coming day after day to Christ the living stone, so that we may ourselves become living stones, share his life and continue his ministry of suffering for humankind in joyful hope. But becoming living stones means that believers and communities of believers do not remain isolated, alone, petrified, dead. They are made alive and are being built into a house, an oikos which is enlivened by the Spirit. Christ is the cornerstone, and the Spirit enables those who come to Christ to be built into this house.

A Living House

The word “house” was rich in meaning for the peoples of the ancient Middle East. It signified community, nation, culture, way of life, structure as well as environment. Abraham was called by God out of his father’s bayith, or oikos—that is, out of his nation and culture to form a new oikos, a house based on faith in and obedience to God (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:12-13). This new house, this new people of God found themselves swallowed up into “the house of bondage” in Egypt. They were delivered from Pharaoh (a word which comes from the Egyptian per-aa, the Great House) through the Exodus and were made “the house of Israel.” That is to say, they were given a way of life based on their deliverance from Egypt and directed by the liberating word of the Covenant (Ex. 19-23). As a means of keeping the house of Israel fully and continuously conscious of the nature of their existence and task there was established the house of God, the place of worship, the temple, where people offered their life and their labor to God and received his renewing grace.

The drama of Israel was that again and again they lost their loyalty to the founder of the house and accommodated themselves to the ethical and spiritual attitudes of the surrounding cultures or oikoi. They also failed to live as a household according to the covenant, to share a common life in truth, justice and peace. Hence the prophets again and again challenged them, as for example, Jeremiah, when he told them: “Do not trust in these deceiving words: “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.” For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever…. Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord” (Jer. 7:4-7, 11).

For Jeremiah, the people of God—the house of Israel—are founded on certain qualities and obligations: justice and mercy, and utter loyalty to God, the Lord of the house. These are based on the Torah, the Law, the words of the Covenant. A house is truly built on those qualities which enable its inhabitants to live together in community and in common wellbeing, shalom. Where these qualities are lacking the house cannot stand. Institutions and structures acquire a demonic character when people lose that strength of being, that clear integrity and sense of purpose which enable them to discern, correct and change their situation. There comes a time, therefore, when existing structures have to be destroyed in order that new structures, a new oikos, can be built up based on a new covenant and enabling people to be responsible for themselves and for one another before God (Jer. 31:27-34). This is what Jesus meant when he said that the old temple would be destroyed in his crucifixion and that he would rebuild it in three days through his resurrection (John 2:19-21).

Peter affirms that in the crucified and risen Christ this new house has been built and that all who come to him are living stones forming an integral part of the house, sharing a common life and offering their whole life and that of all to God in the Spirit and through Jesus Christ. He goes on to adopt in a new way some of the other ancient images for Israel when he calls believers “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet. 2:9a). Believers, as living stones, overcome the separations of racism and become the true human race made in the image of God. Both women and men become the priests of the king and ruler of their lives, offering themselves and the world to God through their worship and their witness. Nationalism with all its exclusivist attitudes gives place to a community consecrated to God and his purpose to unite all nations in their diversity into one house. All are the people of God as a sign of God’s plan to unite all peoples into one human family in justice and peace. It is this house which is called to proclaim the wonderful deeds of God who called it out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).
This is Peter’s way of confessing the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” It is this image and understanding of the living house which has motivated the ecumenical movement. As is well known, the word ecumenical is derived from the Greek word oikoumene, meaning the whole inhabited earth. It is a word which came into common use when Alexander the Great was conquering the world of the Middle East and beyond. The intention was that peoples should give up their cultural isolation and participate in a cosmopolitan life through which they would discover their true humanity. That was the oikoumene. When the Romans conquered the Hellenists, their rulers were hailed as lords and saviors of the oikoumene.

Against this background we can understand how this word was appropriated by the Greek translators of the Old Testament and the writers of the New Testament. In Psalm 24:1 we read: “The earth is the Lord’s and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.” Not Caesar, but Yahweh, the one who has been and is present in the world, is the Lord and savior of the oikoumene, ruling it in truth, justice and peace, and manifesting God’s purpose through the covenant people, the house of Israel. God’s purpose is that the whole oikoumene will recognize God as the true Lord and savior. It is through God that true humanity becomes a promise and a reality. In the New Testament we are told, for example, of Paul and his companions preaching at Thessalonica and of their forming a house church. They are accused before the city authorities as “people who have turned the world, the oikoumene, upside down... and are acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7).

The ecumenical movement is, therefore, the means by which the churches which form the house, the oikos of God, are seeking so to live and witness before all peoples that the whole oikoumene may become the oikos of God through the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the life-giving Spirit.

The World Council of Churches was formed in 1948 precisely to be a means of enabling this process to take place in the totality of the life and witness of the churches in response to the totality of God’s claim on the life of the oikoumene. What then have we learned during this ecumenical journey of thirty-five years about the nature and calling of the churches which have committed themselves to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches? The reflections which follow are based on my experience and active involvement in the life of the Council from 1948. They should also be read alongside my introduction to the official report, “Nairobi to Vancouver.”

**A Fellowship of Confessing**

First, we have been learning to be a fellowship of confessing. In fact, according to its basis, the World Council is “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and savior according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” After centuries of separation the churches have been drawn together in a fellowship of confessing communities which live “according to the scriptures.” It is through the biblical renewal of the past fifty years that the churches themselves have been heeding the words of Peter: “The time has come for judgment to begin with the house of God” (1 Pet. 4:17). That was the revolutionary discovery of Martin Luther, the five-hundredth anniversary of whose birth we celebrate this year. He brought back to the center of the life of the Church the sovereignty of God’s judging and redeeming word, that it may constantly be reformed in order to become a true house of living stones. Through the World Council the churches have been constrained to share with one another the ways in which they confess their faith and have, through mutual correction, from time to time become conscious of their own failure to live up to the claims of the Gospel. The ecumenical movement is first of all a call to the churches to penitence, a change of heart and mind in the direction of the offer and demand of Christ, the living stone, and a greater openness to confess together their faith boldly and joyfully in the storm of the world’s life.

I want to give one illustration of the ways we have advanced as a fellowship of confessing. When the Orthodox churches and the churches of the Reformation got together to form the World Council, there was great difference between them. Apart from the fact that they did not accept each other as churches in the full sense, there was also a history of proselytism—churches confessing their faith in a competing way and seeking to win converts from other churches. At the Third Assembly at New Delhi, 1961, when the International Missionary Council was integrated into the World Council, there was an agreed statement on “Christian Witness, Proselytism, and Religious Liberty.” The churches were called upon to disavow all forms of proselytism so as to render their common witness to Christ more faithful and more convincing. In the same spirit the Second Vatican Council produced a “Declaration on Religious Liberty” in 1965. Then in 1970 the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches issued a study document on “Christian Witness and Proselytism” where the emphasis was already more on common witness. By 1980, the same Joint Working Group agreed to publish a statement on “Common Witness,” giving many stories of ways
A Fellowship of Learning

Secondly, we have gained a fresh understanding of the churches as a fellowship of learning. Of course, this has been a characteristic of the Church from the very beginning. Peter uses a very moving image to describe what happens to those who are baptized—who, as in the early church on the eve of Easter, put off their old clothes and descend into the waters of baptism and are crucified with Christ, and rise from the waters in the risen Christ and put on new clothes. Before he evokes the image of the house of living stones, he writes: “Put off all malice and deceit, and insincerity and jealousy and recrimination of every kind. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted that the Lord is good” (2:1-3). The Christian is like a newborn baby who eagerly sucks at its mother’s warm breast to receive the food which will enable it to grow and be a person in its own right. Learning is that intimate process of tasting the goodness of God, what God has done and wills to be done that the world may become truly a home (oikos). Learning in the Bible is a process by which people relate to God and God’s way of truth, righteousness and peace, that they may in obedience practise that way in relation to each other, and extending to the nations. Moses declares: “The Lord said to me: ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to reverence me all the days that they live upon the earth and that they may teach their children.’ . . . And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess” (Deut. 4:10,14). Learning does not mean simply acquiring knowledge or skills, or being intellectually equipped, or just memorizing some catechism of faith. Rather it means so entering with our whole being and with all the people into a relationship with God through God’s self-revelation, that our horizons are widened and our wills are strengthened to be right with God and with one another in word and deed.

Learning involves a global consciousness of God’s will and way. This concept is incredibly difficult to communicate through present mass media and educational structures and programmes. It is not surprising therefore that the World Council has put a lot of emphasis on ecumenical learning during these last years. All its programmes and meetings are means by which people allow themselves to be opened to the realities of God’s word in the context of the harsh realities of our world. They do so by being opened to each other and being opened to go beyond their local ways of thinking and acting. This Assembly is a living example of what we mean by ecumenical learning. So, too, are the many team visits between our churches which have helped to prepare us for this event. Such learning is a precondition for any effective action in the cause of truth, peace and justice, and the building of true community. However, it has to be admitted that this perception of learning has not been sufficiently built into the programmes of the World Council and that the churches themselves have not sufficiently appropriated the insights and perspectives received through this process of ecumenical learning. And insofar as we fail to take such learning seriously, we fail to become a house of living stones.

A Fellowship of Participation

Thirdly, we have become acutely aware that the churches should be a fellowship of participation. In fact, in New Testament Greek, koinonia was the word for “fellowship” and “participation”; it meant a community which is bound together in mutual support, service and sharing. Peter’s image of the house of living stones also points to this koinonia. He speaks of “a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5), and later of “a royal priesthood” (2:9). One of the great
merits of the Reformation was the discovery, based on this very word of Peter, that everyone—woman and man alike—is a priest before God, offering the life of the world to God and receiving his or her life through the eucharistic sacrifice of Christ for the life of the world. God willed that God’s people should act as priests of the king and ruler of the earth, sustaining and caring for the earth as God cares for them. Instead we have followed the ways of the rulers of the earth and created stratified and petrified structures of power in the churches, thus depriving us of our true priesthood to the world and of being living, dynamic stones fitted into a growing, habitable house for all. This has been a persistent concern of the ecumenical movement. We have reminded each other that the Church is, as Peter affirmed, the people, laos, of God, and not principally the ordained ministry which, though indispensable, constitutes less than 1% of the house of living stones. We have endeavored to encourage the churches to recognize that young people are not the church of tomorrow but of today. More insistently in recent years we have painfully tried to come to terms with the fact that the house of living stones is a community of women and men fulfilling a common ministry of witness and service to the world.

We recall that the first account we have of the Lord’s Supper, what we call holy communion, is given by Paul when he rebukes the rich, upper-class members of the church in Corinth for excluding the poorer and socially despised members (1 Cor. 11:17-34). We are also learning to recognize the right and privilege of the disabled to participate as living members of the body of Christ. Our communion in the body and blood of Christ, our spiritual sacrifices, the offering of the gift of the spirit we have received, demands that we exorcise the heresies of ministerial authority and power in the church and become a true priesthood of all believers among whom the gifts and functions are not imposed but mutually accepted, whether ordained or lay.

At the heart of our divisions as churches is this disparity and concentration of power in the life of the churches, which weakens our credibility in a world which is full of power-grabbing and individualism. The challenge to the churches and to the Council is, therefore, how far we are willing to be obedient to the convictions of our faith that we really become a priesthood of the whole house of living stones, dedicated to God and God’s kingly rule, sharing God’s gifts as we offer them to the world. That is what is involved in being a fellowship of participation, exercising—in love—our priestly task by being with and among the people.

A Fellowship of Sharing

Fourthly, we have experienced the blessing of the churches being a fellowship of sharing. Since the end of the Second World War, while the World Council of Churches was still in process of formation, churches have shown a clear will to share their resources as a demonstration of being a house of living stones, crossing the barriers of division caused by war and political conflicts, and meeting human need wherever it arose and with no other motive than caring love. We are now in a difficult process of developing, within the Council itself, means by which we can show the interrelated character of our sharing of material, technical and above all spiritual resources. Peter develops his image of the house of living stones by urging the diaspora churches: “Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet. 4:8-10). God’s grace, his self-giving love, has been manifest in Christ, he who gave his body and blood for us and for the world. We share his grace through his gifts, charismata, which are for the good functioning of the house. That is why we are called stewards, oikonomoi, “economists” whose basic understanding of policy is love. Peter also reminds us that Christ’s bearing of our sins in his body means that we might die to our selfish rebellion from God and become “alive to righteousness, justice” (2:24), a term which for Peter, who was brought up in the Hebrew tongue, meant right relations with God and therefore with one another—the relationship of sharing the life which God has given us.

It has become fashionable to accuse the World Council and some churches of being too involved in social and economic concerns. This very accusation raises the question of how the churches themselves relate to one another. There is far too little real sharing within and between the churches, not only of material and technical resources which so much dominates our thinking, but of all the gifts of grace which we have received. We have learned in the ecumenical movement that our disunity as churches is in large measure due to our incapacity to practise this genuine sharing of gifts. We tend too much to hang on to the inherited forms of power and prestige and to the petrifying habit of self-sufficiency or of obsequious begging.

There is another element in this fellowship of sharing. Within and around the churches are Christian groups or communities which are seeking to use the gifts of the Spirit in ways which are renewing and enriching for all, often to the point of suffering and even death. But the gifts of these groups are not well shared among themselves and with the churches in each country. The churches are sometimes very aloof from these groups, and the groups are equally aloof...
A Fellowship of Healing

Fifthly, we have been learning that the churches are called to be a fellowship of healing. The Council and the churches have been greatly helped to understand this through a series of consultations around the world on “Health, Healing, and Wholeness.” The operative understanding of health now emerging is that it is “a dynamic state of wellbeing of the individual and of society; of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social wellbeing; of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God.” It is this holistic approach to health which has caught our attention, and which is demonstrated in the healing ministry of Jesus. Scientists have discovered that the body, mind, and especially the body, is not a mechanistic phenomenon. Therefore, when any part of the mechanism is not functioning properly it cannot be treated in isolation. The body is indeed an organism in which both body and mind, our social and natural environment, play a decisive role. We have to be enabled to participate in the process of understanding the interconnectedness of the house of our bodies in terms of the house of our environment. We must be permitted to share in the process of healing, through mobilizing the stronger elements to support the weaker. Above all, our total state of being in living fellowship with God is essential for health, even if the body dies.

This view of health challenges the separations we have created by our present ways of looking at the world and of operating, whether in church or society. We divide the soul from the body, the mind from matter, rational thought from feeling. These dualisms have played havoc with our world, but even more in the churches which have developed these dualisms in systems of dogmas, ethical norms, and attitudes toward persons and society which are quite alien to our biblical and especially Christian heritage. Pursuing his image of the house of living stones, Peter refers to Isaiah 53, saying that it was by the wounds of Christ’s whole self-offering that we are healed (2:24). In this way he calls us to live for righteousness, justice, being in right relations with God and with one other and, we must add, with our environment. The image of the house of living stones is relevant here, because it calls for an understanding of our life as churches in which the house is made up of the living stones being fitted together and functioning as a whole beyond the separateness which marks our existence. The only separateness our faith entails is that separateness or holiness which means our total devotion and orientation to the triune God, whose inner being and manifestation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is that of mutual exchange, co-inherence within the divine life. It is this co-inherence in our life together which makes for wholeness and peace, that integrated wellbeing, when even death is swallowed up into victory.

There is a great need in this area for the churches and the Council to rethink their theological and ethical systems and their style of life, and to overcome their indifference to the natural environment. The image of the house of living stones includes the whole oikoumenē, the whole cosmos in which people and all living things have their being.

A Fellowship of Reconciliation

Sixthly, we have become deeply mindful of our calling as churches and as a Council to be a fellowship of reconciliation. We have, indeed, been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This is particularly urgent at a time of fierce confrontation, the hurling of anathemas between nations and peoples, especially the powerful ones, and the helpless drift to the apocalyptic annihilation of the oikoumenē. As Peter reminds us, the churches are diaspora communities, barely tolerated minorities, ignored, reviled or persecuted if they take a stand for the way of reconciliation. When, therefore, Peter calls these scattered communities to become a house of living stones, and to assume the sufferings of Christ for the world, he is calling for a courageous confrontation with the forces of evil and destruction in the world. Peter does not shirk the fact that reconciliation is not possible without bringing out, rather than pushing under the table, the things which are contrary to God’s purpose for his creation. In his image of the stone, he also quotes from Isaiah 8:14-15. It is instructive to quote the full passage: The Lord said: “Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken” (Isa. 8:11-15).
Isaiah warns the house of Israel that they should not be seduced by the power games that were going on in the surrounding nations, nor should they make alliances, or for fear be submissive to one side of the conflicts or another. They should expose the conflicts between the powers as denials of the covenant purpose of God, because the outcome of such conflicts is that all will be broken on the rock of offence to God’s will and purpose. It has been a continuing task of the World Council to analyze and expose the underlying causes of injustice and war and to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It was that great early ecumenical pioneer, John R. Mott, who used to say: “We must turn our stumbling blocks into stepping stones.”

The Chinese characters for “crisis” mean “danger”—“opportunity.” At this dangerous time in which we meet as an Assembly, I hope that we who represent the house of living stones, coming from the diaspora, will take a clear and unequivocal stand for God’s will for peace and justice, which are inextricably bound together, and will not be tempted to echo the doomed policies of the nations from which we come. The credibility of the Gospel of reconciliation is at stake here. It is significant, in this regard, to remember that the Sermon on the Mount, which calls us to such a ministry of reconciliation, ends with the image of two houses—one built on sand which is bound to fall, and one built on the rock of God’s way of peace. The world will be watching us to know whether we will meet the test of being truly a house of living stones, built on the rock of faith in God who wills peace for all, and the rights of all to be fully themselves whatever their creed or sex or race or class or nation.

A Fellowship of Unity

Seventhly, we have tried to be attentive to the prayer of our Lord that we should be a fellowship of unity. I have mentioned this central calling and task of the ecumenical movement and of the churches at this point, because many are all too prone to say that the World Council is indifferent to our primary task of becoming what we are in the work of God in Christ, one house of living stones offering the eucharistic sacrifice as one people who are destined to offer the sacrifice of their lives for the unity of the oikoumene.

On the contrary, I have mentioned this essential calling of the churches here precisely because all that has been said before is about the confession of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We can claim notable advances in the way toward unity, especially during these thirty-five years. We started timidly and with much mutual suspicion by covenanting to stay together. We tried to describe as openly and honestly as possible to each other the major doctrinal blocks to unity. We moved from there to consider our given unity in the undivided Christ whose crucified and risen life we share, and pledged to let this Christ do his work among us as we seek to be obedient to him. We have since expressed the goal of unity in each place and in all places and all ages in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, that the world may believe. We have gone further and engaged in bilateral and multilateral discussions between the different communions, and the Council has assisted in bringing these together into a forum of assessing where we are and where we are going. We see the way forward in working for conciliar fellowship, expressed in various ways, however feebly, not least in the World Council. And we have now asked the churches to facilitate a process by which the congregations can be involved in receiving convergent statements on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

The reactions so far received on this long march toward unity are mixed. But they certainly are marked by the fact that the churches have not yet sufficiently advanced in being a fellowship of confessing, of learning, of participation, of sharing, of healing, and of reconciliation, to overcome the stumbling blocks that have deeply divided them. Unity consists in the living stones being constantly built into the house of the living God and not in rearrangements within static structures. It is an interrelated process in which the diaspora churches are engaged. I hope therefore that all that we say and decide during this Assembly will be judged by whether it promotes the unity of God’s people as the house of living stones and as a sign and sacrament of God’s design to unite all peoples as the oikoumene under the loving rule of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A Fellowship of Expectancy

Finally, we have learned afresh during these years that the churches are a fellowship of expectancy. Their existence is not an end in itself. They point to and are called to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Their constant prayer is: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The image of the house of living stones is based on an act of celebration: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

At this Assembly we shall be overwhelmed with the dangers facing our world. Some may be tempted to adopt an
attitude of resignation as though all that is necessary is that we keep the faith and let the world go up in flames, an attitude which often goes along with accommodation with the deathly military policies of the powers. Many will be impatient that we are not doing enough and urgently enough to proclaim the Gospel to the world, or to work for peace and justice for all, or to achieve the unity of the churches. We are called to be steadfast in faith, and we will not shrink from speaking and acting boldly in hope and love.

Nevertheless, we can only do this as we celebrate our faith in Christ the living stone and as living stones being fitted together into the house of God. Our worship, our prayers, our sharing of our faith with one another will be central to all we say and do. But, as Peter tells the diaspora churches, our living hope as those born anew through the living and abiding word of God (1:23) and as those who taste that the Lord is good, must make us enter into the sufferings of the world as we share the sufferings of Christ. The way ahead is one of pain and suffering, of persecution and death for many. It is the way of faithful living by the deeds of God, but it is also the way of joy. As Peter says: “Rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:13).

What does all this say to us about the nature and calling of the churches and of the Council? Soon after the Council was formed, there was a big debate about “the ecclesiological significance of the World Council of Churches” at the Central Committee meeting in Toronto in 1950. It was recognized that the Council “represents a new and unprecedented approach to the problem of interchurch relationships” and that it “exists to break the deadlock between the churches.” Over thirty years after, we are able to say that the calling of the churches to be a fellowship of confessing, of learning, of participation, of sharing, of healing, of reconciliation, of unity and of expectancy, has precisely been the preoccupation and task of the World Council. What consequences does this reality pose for the churches and for the Council? Can the churches go on behaving as though the Council belongs to their external rather than their internal relations? Can the Council allow itself, through the decisions of representatives of the churches, to go its own way with programmes and activities reaching to groups and others, but not conceived, planned, communicated at all stages, and carried out with the active involvement of the churches? Can the churches conduct themselves as though they exist in isolation from each other and from their fellowship in the World Council, carrying on their programmes and activities with little relation with other churches around the world? Can we go on acting as though we are just stones ineffectually scattered around, or shall we allow ourselves to be living stones being gathered together and built into the house of our triune God?

Certainly, Peter’s image of the house of living stones reminds us of the inescapable fact that it is only as the churches relate to each other as living stones that they will discover new realities about their essential calling to be the Church, the house of the triune God. And this common calling demands a fellowship of confessing, learning, participation, sharing, healing, reconciliation, unity and expectancy, to the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The task of the World Council of Churches, as well as of regional and local councils, is to promote this common calling. At Nairobi in 1975 I reminded the Fifth Assembly that it would “have failed in its purpose if we did not advance to a new covenant relationship between the member churches at all levels of their life and the World Council at all levels of its activities.” This reminder is even more urgent here at Vancouver, especially because during this period the relations between several member churches and the Council have been strained, and the Council has come under heavy attack from the media for the actions it has taken in response to the mandate of the Assembly and of the Central Committee. However, our fellowship has become deeper and more lively as we have faced the conflicts openly and frankly under the victorious cross of Christ. There is no life without sharing. Our theme, “Jesus Christ—the Life of the World” is a clear call to let his life permeate our life together as we go forward in hope and with joyous courage to be living stones built into the house which will point to God’s oikoumene being filled with his life.

1.2 Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life And Witness

Desmond Tutu

Preamble

It has become trite to observe that we have experienced momentous changes in the world in recent years. Perhaps we tend to become blasé too easily. You might recall a cartoon in *Newsweek* which depicted two Russian astronauts conversing in space. The one says: “I am looking forward to returning home when President Gorbachev will welcome me,” and he is told that President Gorbachev is no longer in power. And then he says: “Ah well, I look forward to going home to the Soviet Union,” and he is told that there is no longer any Soviet Union, and he sighs and says he looks forward to drinking his vodka, and he is told it will cost him a zillion roubles. Poor chap.

1. The Most Rev. Desmond Tutu is Anglican the former archbishop of Cape Town, Republic of South Africa.
But the fact of the matter is that the church’s context, its *Sitz im Leben*, has changed quite dramatically in just a matter of a few years. There is now no longer any Berlin wall, no longer two Germanies, but one united state and one people, although from some accounts it has not been as simple a matter as one would have imagined to reintegrate a people who are one racially and were one before the Berlin wall was built. The fact to celebrate is that the wall has been breached, a wall that symbolized Churchill’s “iron curtain”, separating the globe into two spheres of influence, ideologically and militarily hostile to each other with serious repercussions for the people of the world.

We have entered a different and new epoch with the end of the cold war and the collapse of the communist bloc. The split of the world into Eastern and Western power blocs had a significant impact on a whole range of situations. It determined who were friendly nations, what was to be spent in the defence budget and the obscene arms race and who would receive what aid. It had an important bearing on Western imperialist and Soviet expansionism. When the elephants, the two superpowers, were fighting, the grass invariably suffered. Many regional conflicts were really an extension of the cold war when surrogates of the super adversaries fought to advance the course of their overlords. Morality hardly featured at all. You did not ask questions about justice, equity and freedom. The most important consideration was that of global superpower politics – did it benefit this or that power bloc? Repressive governments were supported and maintained in office despite a horrendous record of human-rights violations, as long as they claimed to be anti-communist. And so the West armed UNITA to oppose a duly elected but Marxist MPLA government in Angola, or certain client elites in Somalia, and so on, etc. Now we are reaping the consequences of these policies in the carnage in Angola, in Somalia, in Afghanistan, etc., etc.

We can say that there is both good news and bad news to proclaim. We must celebrate the end of the cold war, looking to see what the so-called peace dividend is likely to be, and welcome what significant changes have followed in the wake of the collapse of communism. Freedom has broken out in so many and in such unlikely places. Western patronage has come to be linked with respect for human rights and so we have witnessed the transformation of many military one-party dictatorships into multiparty democracies, especially in Africa (although we should add that multipartyism is not necessarily the same thing as genuine participation by the broad mass of the people in political decision-making). Namibia has become independent. Reasonably free and fair elections have taken place in, for example, the Seychelles, Madagascar, Zambia, Benin, Kenya, Angola, Lesotho, Burundi, Kampuchea, Haiti and so on. And of course the world rejoices with what has been happening in South Africa to vindicate the anti-apartheid movement. Captured in the moment when the world united as it rarely has, we watched Nelson Mandela step out of prison. It was a giddy moment when humanity experienced an exhilaration – we were all proud to be human. There was a nobility we all shared then, as when again we thrilled to see an unarmed student force a tank to keep changing direction in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. We are all waiting with bated breath for the end of apartheid and the establishment of a new dispensation in South Africa, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist.

Yes, there is much to be thankful for in the new milieu in which the church finds itself. Unfortunately we are not permitted the luxury of euphoria for there is much, far too much, that is sombre. The economy of the world is in lingering recession. When the economy is in poor shape, people look for scapegoats. That is how Hitler could pick on the Jews in Nazi Germany. It is not surprising then that there should be a resurgence of racism and xenophobia all over Europe, spectacularly exemplified by the skinheads assaulting and killing Turkish persons and other foreigners in Germany. Wonderfully, thousands of decent Germans have come out in massive demonstrations against this evil. It is a time of flux, when the old order is changing, giving place to the new. Familiar landmarks are no more and people are uncertain and apprehensive as they venture into the unknown. There is the turmoil and instability in transition periods when people want to assert their distinctiveness and their peculiar identity and cling to something that is reasonably familiar and reassuring.

And so there is a resurgence of nationalism seen in its most virulent form in the “ethnic cleansing” in the mess that is the disintegrating former Yugoslavia and in the breaking-up and fighting in the former Soviet Union. We are seeing it in the restrictive and plainly racist immigration and naturalization policies of some European countries, in the marginalization of the so-called third world as the West seems to concentrate on bailing out Eastern Europe. Is it a case of blood being indeed “thicker than water”, as reflected in saturation media coverage of the awfulness of Bosnia with scant attention to like events elsewhere in the world? It is in some ways like what is happening in South Africa – that the papers no longer make too much of a fuss about the killings of several blacks but will make a meal of those occasions when whites are the victims. Every violent death should be one too many. Hardly any positive reporting of the third world happens. When Africa gets in the news, as if to comply with a stereotype, it will be only the bad news that hits the media. People ask why the UN has
somehow it happens that the affluent North manages to get water and the security to lead normal fulfilled lives. And decent homes, adequate health care and nutrition, clean East. There are still too many of God’s children without ern Ireland and ethnic turmoil in Sri Lanka and the Middle Dalai Lama of Tibet. There is factional strife still in North-Somalis, the Kampucheans, the Burmese, the people of the Croatians, the Sudanese, the Liberians, the Angolans, the victims of natural and man-made disasters – the Kurds, the in Africa, in Latin America and elsewhere. Human-rights remain the same.

In a time of uncertainty and perplexity, when the familiar reference points have disappeared, it is not surprising that there will be resurgence of religious fundamentalism which gives people what they want – certitude in simplistic answers to what are often complex situations. Intolerance accompanies fundamentalism because other possible options and answers merely call into question the “orthodox” position, and would exacerbate the uncertainty which the fundamentalism was designed to deal with effectively. And why should we be surprised that there is an increase in violence?

The unity of the church in its koinonia may have something to offer to a world that is rapidly disintegrating in some places. Our identity as Christians’ which transcends all sorts of barriers and distinctions’ could give hope to those who are floundering in this time of flux, wondering who they are.

The collapse of communism has in some quarters been equated with the triumph of Western capitalism. Good theology is almost always a subversive thing, questioning the shibboleths of this or that status quo. Perhaps Christian theology will be obliged to have a prophetic stance against the ready assumption of Western capitalist triumphalism. There have been spectacular scientific and technological advances. Any euphoria accompanying these has had to be tempered by the sobering fact that modern sophisticated medicine stands, so far, baffled by the pandemic of AIDS. Genetic engineering, surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination by donor or father and test tube babies are presenting novel moral and ethical problems. And yet in some respects the more things change the more they remain the same.

We still have repressive, unrepresentative governments in Africa, in Latin America and elsewhere. Human-rights violations still give rise to a ragged file of refugees walking wearily in search of asylum. There are many who are victims of natural and man-made disasters – the Kurds, the Croatians, the Sudanese, the Liberians, the Angolans, the Somalis, the Kampucheans, the Burmese, the people of the Dalai Lama of Tibet. There is factional strife still in Northern Ireland and ethnic turmoil in Sri Lanka and the Middle East. There are still too many of God’s children without decent homes, adequate health care and nutrition, clean water and the security to lead normal fulfilled lives. And somehow it happens that the affluent North manages to get richer and the poor South poorer, carrying an enormous burden because of neo-colonialism and a hopelessly unjust international economic system, with the World Bank and the IMF often imposing conditions that are totally oblivious of the massive suffering they cause to the ordinary people – as if persons did not really count. The social cost has been far too exorbitant in numerous cases when the cure has been worse than the disease, or has led to the death of the patient.

The nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, our reckless pollution of the atmosphere and of our waters, and wanton destruction of irreplaceable rain forests and wanton use of fossil fuels show we have not begun to take seriously our ecological obligations as God’s stewards. Our irresponsible conduct is resulting in the hothouse effect and damage to the ozone layer through the reckless use of CFCs. It is this fascinating, changing, perplexed world and these times which form the context, the Sitz im Leben of the church.

Towards koinonia

Our Lord prayed solemnly for the unity of his followers because the credibility of his own mission depended on it. Hence it cannot be a matter of indifference for Christians, this issue of the reunion of Christians. We have no option but to work and pray that we might all be one. And yet there seems to be a universal inertia in the ecumenical movement. There are conversations, discussions and plans galore, but hardly anywhere has anything of much significance actually happened. There have been near-betrothals and engagements but hardly any nuptials, least of all consummations. We have had failed attempts or near attempts. There have been COCU, ARCIC, CUC (in South Africa), conversations between, say, Anglicans and Methodists, Anglicans and Orthodox, Anglicans and Lutherans, Anglicans and Baptists, etc., and such bilateral talks could be replicated for other denominations, confessions or communions. Often and again a remarkable degree of agreement or consensus has been reached, and yet, and yet ... they have somehow lacked something to propel them to take the logical next step – organic union, becoming one, in any sense that is of significance to their members or to a world looking on with desultory and waning interest. It has seemed that toes have been dipped in the water and then the courage or the will to take the plunge into the stream has failed.

Often we have heard people say that the world has been impatient of ecclesiastical tinkering with church structures; that the world was shouting an agenda for the churches, that God’s children were hurting out there
and it was almost obscene to appear to be obsessed with domestic trivia when God's children were hungry for justice and food and peace. The church deserved to be marginalized if it was consuming its energies on academic pursuits of interest to a peculiar elite, as if the scriptures had declared that God so “loved the church” . . . rather than “God so loved the world . . .” This particular concern for justice, for getting priorities right, was an important corrective but it was posing a false set of alternatives. It should never have been a question of either unity or justice. It should have been a case of “both . . . and”. It was God who indeed loved the world who set the agenda for the church which Christ loved so much that he had bought it with his own precious blood to present it as a pure bride for himself, God who determined that the church was intended to be God's agent for justice and peace.

People did grow impatient with what seemed an unconscionable concentration on apparently academic theological issues. They felt we ought to get on with the business of redeeming the world, making it more hospitable for human beings, making it a more humane environment where there was room for love, compassion, joy and laughter, peace and prosperity, sharing and caring—in short, the kind of world which clearly was becoming more and more what God intended it to be, a part of his kingdom.

Unity and justice

Our experience, which would probably be repeated elsewhere, has been that you really should not separate church unity from the pursuit of justice or, even more starkly, that that pursuit is made infinitely more hazardous and difficult, perhaps even impossible, when the church is divided. When our church held a consultation on mission, our overseas partners declared categorically “apartheid is too strong for a divided church”. Some of our more exhilarating moments in the struggle for justice, peace and freedom in South Africa have occurred when the churches have been involved in united witness against the iniquity of the vicious system of apartheid. I recall how an ecumenical group of about fifty clergy were arrested in Johannesburg for demonstrating against the iniquity of the vicious system of apartheid at a prayer service. The late Rev. Joseph Wing, the general secretary of the United Congregational Church and secretary of the church unity commission (and known affectionately as Mr Church Unity) broke down and with tears streaming down his face said: “I have been working many years for church unity. I have never experienced it to such an extent as now.” We even took a collection because Leah, who had disobeyed her husband and joined our protest march, had met a young woman who would go to jail unless she paid her fine. It was a rare moment when a church collection had such immediate and dramatic results.

When the South African government banned most popular political organizations, it did not think that the churches would do anything particularly significant. It must have been shocked when an impressive phalanx of church leaders, representing a very wide spectrum of church affiliation, descended on Cape Town and was arrested as it left the Anglican cathedral of St George to march on parliament next door. At the height of apartheid's repression when its perpetrators should have expected that the stuffing had been knocked out of our people, they must have been totally flabbergasted by the defiance campaign to disobey all apartheid laws under the aegis of the mass democratic movement. The churches participated in all this through the South African Council of Churches' inspired “Standing for the Truth” campaign. Church leaders, especially in Cape Town, were trying to get arrested with varying degrees of failure. Those were heady days. The South African government realized that it would have to increase the level of repression to an intensity that would be quite unacceptable to the international community.

A reasonably united church witness together with the resilience of the people must have helped to persuade Mr de Klerk to undertake his remarkable and very courageous initiatives, including the release of Nelson Mandela and others, and then announce to parliament on 2 February 1990 the unbanning of political groups such as the ANC, PAC, SACP, etc. The subsequent exciting developments in South Africa therefore are in part due to the witness of the churches, a witness more potent because relatively united. Indeed there might have been no apartheid in South Africa had some churches not sought to provide theological justification for this immoral and evil system.

From our experience, then, there can be no question at all that a united church is a far more effective agent for justice and peace against oppression and injustice. It may be that we will find our most meaningful unity as we strive together for justice and peace. Just imagine what would happen in Northern Ireland and elsewhere if the churches could indeed speak and act as one, for religious differences have exacerbated political, social and economic differences.
Unity: a practical imperative

It may be that we should sit far more loosely to huge international schemes and conversations and invest our resources more and more on regional, national and, even more effectively, on local initiatives and schemes. It would be what could be called “ecumenism at work”, a kind of bottom-up approach. There is no reason why Anglicans in Namibia should not go ahead into a far closer relationship with Lutherans than might necessarily be the case in, say, the Republic of South Africa, because their experience during the liberation war threw them willy-nilly into a close network of cooperation to survive as they ministered to people facing a common enemy. It may be that we should not expect to see spectacular developments at the international – what you might call the macro – level. It will happen mostly on the micro level as Christians face together the daunting problems in their locality. Sometimes the momentum will slacken because the enemy or the problem has been dealt with. Perhaps we must expect fluctuations in ecumenical zeal and enthusiasm. Facing a common enemy or problem tends to concentrate the mind. We must not be overagitated when the zeal flags.

Our unity is ultimately like that of the divine Trinity. Some theologians made a distinction between the essential Trinity and the economic trinity – the trinity of revelation, of salvation and sanctification, or what we might call the trinity “at work”. Maybe we should consider making a like distinction – between the essential ontological unity of the church and that unity as revealed in praxis.

The Faith and Order Commission has done a superb job with Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. A very substantial consensus has emerged about what the churches believe regarding baptism, the eucharist and ministry. I once asked when I was still a member of the Standing Commission: “Just what is sufficient consensus, such that the churches would be willing to take the leap of faith to embrace one another?” That is still a pertinent question. How much agreement is considered sufficient to justify going forward? It just might be that we cannot be argued into oneness, just as you cannot argue someone into faith in Jesus. Perhaps having done all we could cerebrally, we have to be like Philip and Andrew in their evangelistic method and say: “Come and see!” Come and experience what it can be to be one.

I once suggested that those churches which found that they had developed strong links through cooperating in witness should go ahead and take the risk of behaving “as if” they were united, and then let the theologians sort out the mess, such as it might be. In fact in a way the so-called united churches (that is to say, congregations or parishes) are doing precisely this kind of thing.

They may be anomalies in relation to the polity of their constituent churches, but they could blaze the trail in all their awkward ecclesiastical untidiness.

Do we accept the validity of one another’s baptism as the sacramental act by which each person is grafted into the body of Christ? Do we think we mean much the same things about our faith when we recite the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creeds? If the answers to these questions have been in the affirmative, then we share crucial elements that constitute conciliar fellowship. In addition we share a belief that the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are a unique record of God’s saving revelation. So far as I can tell, almost every denomination declares that even if it does not accept the sacramental validity of the ministerial orders of others, it acknowledges their efficacy in so far as God somehow vouchsafes his grace through those ministers.

I wonder how long we are going to keep making this distinction between an almost juridical validity and efficacy – how long can we do this without seeming to be ridiculous to a world watching us appear to be fiddling whilst our various Romes are burning? I have sometimes tried to imagine what would happen to, say, Anglicans if all their threefold-ordained ministers were swept away in a special flood and only those churches remained whose orders Anglicans did not recognize as valid. Would the surviving Anglicans refuse to receive “invalid” sacraments, I wonder. What about Roman Catholics, if the only surviving ministers were, say, Methodists or any others whom they did not believe stood in the apostolic succession ministerially? Don’t we say God is not bound by his covenanted means of grace? Why don’t we come together to pray that God will supply to all our churches whatever it may be that we believe the others might be lacking?

Unity and variety

We should each hold on to the things that we believe made us distinctive. I am fond of the Adam and Eve story – when God remarks that it is not good for man to be alone. Then Adam is asked to choose a mate from among the animals. He rejects all of them and it is only when God produces that delectable creature, Eve, from his rib that Adam exults and finds fulfilment. The story speaks fundamentally about how we need other human beings in order to be human, for none of us comes into the world fully formed. In our African idiom we say “a person is a person through other persons”. We are made for interdependence. We are different so that we may know our need of one another. We are made for complementarity. Consequently we should
realize that we seek unity, not uniformity, which thing we have asserted ad nauseam, and yet somehow we seem to give the impression that we cannot stand diversity in theology, liturgy, styles of worship, polity, etc., etc. We forget again that our unity is meant to reflect the unity of the Triune God, a unity in the diversity of persons. Most of us tend to be appalled by what is untraditional, unfamiliar and what is peculiar in theological thinking, in liturgical practice, in the ordering of church life, and so on.

The unity of the church is supposed to be celebrated as a foretaste of the kingdom of God that is surely characterized by that glorious diversity in which God calls people from all nations and races to worship him. We might have something to say to those who are worried about political schemes that would obliterate their distinctiveness if we hold up a paradigm of unity in diversity, and so stem the tide of fragmentation and fissiparousness. We could too, as the body of Jesus Christ where there is neither Jew nor Greek, etc., whose members although many form one body, put forward an example of profound unity where peculiar identity is not done away with but is subsumed under a unity that transcends all that tends to separate.

When in September 1989 we had a massive march in Cape Town against the police shootings of those who had been protesting against the racist elections, I marched with a Jewish rabbi on one side and a Muslim imam on the other. In our common quest for justice and peace we realized that our ecumenism was intended to embrace the oikoumene, the inhabited world and all its denizens, that God’s concern was for all his people whatever their faith or ideology, for the Bible depicts God making the Noahic covenant with all humankind. We worship a God who could regard an Assyria as the rod of his anger and who could exalt a Cyrus to the position of being his “anointed”, a God whose mercy and compassion were not the preserves of Christians alone. The rabbis tell how, after the episode of the Red Sea when the Egyptians were overwhelmed and the Israelites were celebrating their deliverance, Yahweh said: “How can you rejoice when my children have drowned?”

Yes indeed, God so loved the world, not the church . . . We cannot be serious about winning the world for God if we are not concerned about Christian unity. And we cannot be serious about ecumenism if we are not in earnest about interfaith dialogue. We must be unanimous in calling for secular states in which all religions are treated equally and even-handedly, with none enjoying unfair advantages over others. This will almost always be so in those countries where Christians are a majority. We hope that adherents of other faiths will want to do likewise in those countries where they are dominant, but whether they do or not we are obliged by the imperatives of our faith to do what is right in our own situations. Religious freedom and religious tolerance are precious things. We must be vigilant to resist the backlash of conservative Christian fundamentalism in the face of the proselytizing zeal of other faiths. Christianity must be commended to non-believers ultimately by the attractiveness of the lives of its adherents and not because it enjoys the patronage of the state.

**Solidarity – spiritual and material**

One of the most wonderful things about being harassed and in trouble with your government because of trying to be obedient to your Lord and Master, is discovering the exhilarating reality of being a member of the church of God. Ecclesiology comes alive. You realize that our Lord’s promise to Peter, to those who have left all to follow him, that they will have sisters and brothers, etc., more than they can number, is not frivolous. That it is true – that you have all this family round the globe most of whom you will not meet this side of death, and that they are praying for you, and that they love you, and uphold you. It is almost a physical sensation and you recall the vision in Zachariah when Yahweh promises that the restored Jerusalem will be so populous that it would not have conventional walls, but that Yahweh would be like a wall of fire round Jerusalem. We have experienced a like “wall of fire” in the love, prayers and concern of our sisters and brothers around the world. That is the deepest level of our koinonia, sharing in the life of the Spirit at this intimate level and that is why one of the most important things that has come out of WCC has been the ecumenical prayer cycle.

When I was general secretary of the SACC in some of our darkest moments of apartheid’s harassment, I received the newsletter of a Lutheran parish in Alaska, no less. And there I heard that we were being prayed for and the newsletter contained our names. We were being prayed for by name in Alaska – well, how could we not eventually win?

I once asked a solitary contemplative to tell me a little about her life. At the time she was living in the woods in California. Her day started at 2.00 a.m., and she said she prayed for me. Well, well – here was I being prayed for at 2.00 a.m. in the morning, in the woods in California and I thought: “What chance does the South African government stand?” Part of the South African government’s harassment led to its appointing a judicial commission, the Eloff commission, to investigate the SACC. The purpose was so to discredit us that none of
our overseas friends and partners, nor our South African member churches, would want to touch us with the proverbial barge pole. As it happened the government was hoisted with its own petard, for through making a few international telephone calls we had the most impressive array of overseas church leaders and delegations to descend on South Africa in a long time, to testify on behalf of the SACC. That was a tremendous act of solidarity and the government ended up with considerable egg on its face.

Thank you, dear friends, for your love and support of economic sanctions and other forms of pressure, together with your fervent prayers, which have brought us to this point when a new South Africa is about to be born. You have a substantial share in that victory.

We need to help the churches develop their best and greatest asset – their spiritual resources. We should do all we can to develop and support the growing retreat movement for deepening our spiritual life. We must become more and more in our churches power houses of prayer where vigils and fasts are normal, matter-of-course occurrences. We should grow in holiness and in stillness and contemplation for we are exhorted: “Be still and know that I am God.” Our warfare is not against flesh and blood. To take on the powers and principalities we have to put on the whole armour of God. As we grow closer to God, so we will draw closer or, rather, we will be drawn closer to one another. An authentic Christian existence is quite impossible without an authentic spirituality when we put God where God belongs – first and in the centre of our personal and corporate lives. Such a spirituality, such an authentic encounter with God, will invariably send us away to look with the eyes of God, to hear with the ears of God, and to feel with the heart of God, what is happening in God’s world so that we can become God’s fellow workers, his agents of transfiguration to transform the ugliness of this world, its hatred, its alienation, its poverty, its hostility, its hunger, its suffering, its pain, its screams from every nation, from every tribe, from every tongue, standing before the Lamb of God.

Friends, sisters and brothers, we are members of one family, God’s family, the human family. An important characteristic of the family is that it shares. We have benefitted from the generosity of our friends in the more affluent parts of our globe. Thank you. And yet we must admit that there is something not right when the poorer countries are having to pay out to the richer a great deal more than they are receiving because of the enormous debt burden they are carrying.

It is a theological issue about stewardship, about justice. It is a moral issue of right and wrong. You, our friends from the North, have been marvellous in your enthusiasm for the anti-apartheid movement. I want to suggest that the next critical issue of like global proportions is the question of the international economic system and especially the debt burden on third-world countries. I want to suggest that perhaps a year’s moratorium on repayments be called. Those countries which in that period engage seriously in the process of democratizing, in upholding basic human rights and in appropriate development benefiting the majority of their populations, should then have their debt cancelled. I call on the ecumenical movement to take this up as a major concern.

We have received so much from the North and have given hardly anything in return. I want to suggest that the West might consider a small gift we in Africa just could offer. It is the gift of ubuntu – a term difficult to translate into occidental languages. But it is the essence of being human. It declares that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours – the Old Testament spoke of the “bundle” of life. I am because I belong. My humanity does not depend on extraneous things. It is intrinsic to who I am. I have value because I am a person and I am judged not so much on the basis of material possessions but on spiritual attributes such as compassion, hospitality, warmth, caring about others.

The West has made wonderful strides in its impressive technological achievements and material prosperity. But its dominant achievement/success ethic is taking its toll. People feel worthless, are often considered worthless, if they do not achieve. The worst thing that can happen to anyone is to fail. You must succeed at whatever cost. Profits, things, are often prized above people. Ubuntu might remind us of a biblical truth – all that we are, all that we have is gift. We are because God loved us, loves us and will love us forever. We don’t have to do anything to earn God’s love, we don’t have to impress God. We can do nothing to make God love us less. We can do nothing to make God love us more.

Friends, sisters and brothers, Christianity is not a religion of virtue. Christianity is a religion of grace. Can we help as the church to transform our societies so that they are more people-friendly, more gentle, more caring, more compassionate, more sharing? Then we will see the fulfilment of that wonderful vision of Revelation 7:9-11:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the
Chapter 1. The History of the Ecumenical Movement

In part, this is due to the different locations in which the programmes were developed. The Community study was located in the Faith and Order commission, the Decade in the programme on Justice, Peace and Creation. Not surprisingly the approaches and emphases were influenced by the context in which each was developed. The Community study was more concerned with the reformation and renewal which was called for in the internal life of the church if we were to be more truly a community of women and men. The emphasis of the Decade was more on the church as it carries out its vocation in, and for, a world torn apart by unimaginable violence. The insights of the two studies complement one another and have helped to shape my own understanding of what sort of church God might be calling us to be. The insights of the two studies have been different.

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Insights from the Community Study

The “Community of Women and Men in the Church” study was inspired by two biblical texts: Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:27. In the light of these two biblical passages the programme began by encouraging a global exploration and conversation on women’s experiences. It encouraged women, and women and men together, from around the world to explore their experience. No value judgment was placed upon one person’s, or any group’s, experience above another’s. We discovered an underlying unity that existed due to women’s common experience in many and the most varied situations of oppression and powerlessness in both the churches and the world. We listened to the longings expressed for release, for liberation, for a greater wholeness and holiness. We listened to women who felt their perspectives were never listened to, their imaginations imprisoned and who heard churches addressing them as second-class citizens, made in the image of men and not of God. We listened to women who felt God was calling them to a ministry of word and sacrament but who found that that call could not be tested, or even spoken about. We began to see how the liturgical, the ministerial, and the structured life of many churches reinforced this feeling of exclusion and marginalization. We were shocked by the number of women (and men) who only seemed to experience their church as oppressor, and their church’s way of living as oppressive. We were challenged by Tissa Balasuriya to look beyond the boundaries of the churches and think of the women trapped in a web of oppression, the web of sexism, racism and classism.

Some of us brought up in a narrow academic background of disembodied, de-experienced learning had to be taught by others to have confidence in speaking about our inner feelings, and our intimate lives of prayer and spirituality. But we did find the words, we helped each other explore, and the flood-gates were opened. Monica Furlong from Britain described what was happening as “a new source of energy suddenly discovered in the church like a spring of water bubbling up, turning to a large pool and gradually into a river, irrigating a dry countryside.” Rose Zoe Obianga, an African theologian, reflected “I am because I participate.”

We discovered a way of doing theology beginning from experience, and we learned to bring our experience into dialogue with scripture and the church’s Tradition.

Mary Tanner

For more than twenty-five years my dreams for the future of the church have been influenced by insights coming from the fellowship of churches that worships, reflects and acts together through being a part of the World Council of Churches. Both the “Community of Women and Men in the Church” study of the 1980s and the more recent Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women have helped to shape my own understanding of what sort of church God might be calling us to be. The insights of the two studies have been different.

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1. Mary Tanner was general secretary of the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England, in London, and is a former moderator of the Faith and Order commission. This article draws in part upon the article “Solidarity with Women: Challenges to

2. Ibid., pp.43ff.


4. Ibid., p.68.

1.3 On Being Church: Some Thoughts Inspired by the Ecumenical Community

Mary Tanner

For more than twenty-five years my dreams for the future of the church have been influenced by insights coming from the fellowship of churches that worships, reflects and acts together through being a part of the World Council of Churches. Both the “Community of Women and Men in the Church” study of the I980s and the more recent Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women have helped to shape my own understanding of what sort of church God might be calling us to be. The insights of the two studies have been different.

In part this is due to the different locations in which the programmes were developed. The Community study was located in the Faith and Order commission, the Decade in the programme on Justice, Peace and Creation. Not surprisingly the approaches and emphases were influenced by the context in which each was developed. The Community study was more concerned with the reformation and renewal which was called for in the internal life of the church if we were to be more truly a community of women and men. The emphasis of the Decade was more on the church as it carries out its vocation in, and for, a world torn apart by unimaginable violence. The insights of the two studies complement one another and have helped to shape my own understanding of what sort of church God might be calling us to be together.

1. Mary Tanner was general secretary of the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England, in London, and is a former moderator of the Faith and Order commission. This article draws in part upon the article “Solidarity with Women: Challenges to

2. Ibid., pp.43ff.


4. Ibid., p.68.
Often our experience led us to see new and liberating things in scripture and Tradition. But equally there were times when scripture and Tradition posed questions to us about our experience. Those who were directing the study asked questions that would help us all, in our very different cultural and church contexts, to join in this ecumenical community of exploration. No one was told what to think. There were no right or wrong answers. After several years of exploration in the different parts of the world, the question began to be asked: “What are we learning, from this exploration of our experience of being women and men in different cultural and ecclesial contexts, about the sort of life God is calling us to live together?” “What sort of life together in the community of women and men in the Church would be a faithful response to God, and offer to the world a ‘whiff of its own possibility’?”

Gradually we began to recognize that this was a profoundly theological and ecclesiological study. There was one central question to which all others were related. This was not about the liberation of women, or getting women into positions of power and authority, or about the ordination of women, or about inclusive language, however sharp and pressing these questions were. The central question to which all the other issues were related is the theological question of our understanding of the nature and being of God.

We asked ourselves: Is God really Father? Is the male language of Father and Son, are the masculine attributes of power and lordship, or is the pattern of pyramidal hierarchy in the Trinity, any longer usable? We explored the language of Father and Son and asked: What is it that the unique relation between the unique Father, and the unique Son, safeguards and preserves that might not, in another time and place, be safeguarded by the relation of a unique mother to a unique daughter? Some of us were fearful of where we were being taken. We searched the Bible and Tradition, not to replace the traditional language, but rather to recover the feminine images for God, in order to find a balance and wholeness. We looked at Deuteronomy and Isaiah, at Jesus’ treatment of women, at Clement of Alexandria, Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross, as well as at contemporary feminist writings. We tried to understand Jürgen Moltmann’s plea to us to «zero content» the distorted notions of Father and Son and re-content them with the relation of utter mutuality, interdependence and conformity of mind and will that we see between Jesus and the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. We grasped at the emerging emphasis in theology on the personal and relational life of the Trinity, on the receiving and giving, giving and receiving life of God, on that mutual attentiveness of the persons to each other.

We held before us, at almost every meeting, the Rublev icon of the Trinity. The social Trinity was seen to correspond most directly to the most fundamental questionings of women about God, born out of their experience of personal relations. We came to see that if what we were discovering was the truth about God, then all churches must watch their language in the presence of this inclusive God. The language, symbols and imagery we use to speak about God have to be rich enough and evocative enough to help us encounter a God who is neither male nor female, neither masculine nor feminine but who encompasses and transcends all we have come to understand as male and female, masculine and feminine.

We recognized the need to find new and inclusive ways of talking about the community of those created and redeemed in the image of this inclusive God. Language shapes a community’s self-understanding, its identity. And we called for liturgical reform, not as a means of exchanging one “bag of tools” for another but of attempting a painful exchange of identity – a change to inclusive community. We needed it because the wholeness and holiness of the Christian community depends on it – and because, in the end, our vision of God was at stake.

Our perception about God led naturally to challenges about our understanding of ourselves, our identity as men and women created in the image of God, about what equality means, and how that might be lived out more faithfully in new relationships and patterns of living in different cultural contexts. The distinction given in creation between male and female raises profound questions of what it means that we are not simply human, but human as male or female. We explored questions about the relation between being and function, between biology and identity. We asked whether, and how, the distinctive functions of women and men should determine their roles in the family, in society, and in the church – whether gender is constitutive of identity, and whether difference of gender determines differences in status and role.

The ecclesiological challenges included challenges to the structures of the churches, to how power and authority were exercised and by whom. And with the question of power and exclusive, all-male leadership came questions about the ordination of women to a ministry of word and sacrament. For some, the fundamental question was a theological one: “Christian priesthood is called to be fully human, if God is to be known as fully God.”

The vision of God, the understanding of men and women in God’s image, the inclusive life of the church, its liturgy, its structures, and its ministry – all this was one vast interlocking agenda. We were in search of the wholeness and holiness that flow from our understanding of God’s
own mysterious trinitarian life. The Community study called for a radical transformation if the church was to be a more credible sign of wholeness, and holiness, in and for the world.

The Community study did help us see new possibilities in the biblical truths from Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28—that God created men and women “in God’s image”, and that in Christ “there is neither male nor female”. We did begin to see the implications of this for the unity and mission of the church. And what we had begun to see in the ecumenical community of exploration did make a difference to some churches whose lives were renewed by the insights and reflections of the ecumenical community. But it was only a beginning.

Churches in Solidarity with Women

The Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women – which turned out to be the Decade of Women in Solidarity with Women – was also inspired by a biblical image or story, by the story of the women coming to the tomb on the first Easter morning and their question, “Who will roll away the stone?” The earlier study was, in the main, concerned with renewal in the life of the church as a community of women and men. The Decade was, in the main, concerned with the grave impact of the global economy on women; with racism and xenophobia; with the dreadful violence against women in the world and, shockingly, in the churches also. The Decade also identified the continuing barriers that prevented women from participating fully in the life of the churches. The Decade uncovered the scope of violence against women in every country, age group, sect and society, in the home and the workplace, on the streets. Besides domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape and sex tourism, violence takes subtler forms in the psychological and emotional demeaning of women. Its extent is seldom acknowledged, its victims are often afraid to speak out, and are silenced or discredited if they do. The Decade understood, that like violence, economic oppression is constituted and multiplied by the intermingling of factors of gender, race, sexual orientation, age, ability, ethnicity and religion. Every indicator of women’s poverty and inequality is intensified for aboriginal, immigrants and disabled women.

The challenges of the Decade were different from those of the Community study, but they were complementary, all part of a single agenda which helps us to understand what sort of church God is calling us to be in and for the world. What are some features of this church which God is calling us to be?

First, the church is called to be a church in solidarity, in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, victims of violence. And because women, and women and children, are most often the most powerless in the face of economic injustice, the ravages of war, ethnic genocide, and racism and sexism, the church has a special responsibility of attentive solidarity with the women of the world. It is not enough for women to be in solidarity with women. The whole church is called to a ministry of solidarity with a bias towards women and children. The decade called for the church to be what some called a “moral community”, actively opposing all forms of violence against humanity and against the environment. Being a “moral community” is not about standing apart from the world, offering tokens of support, but rather about being mixed up with the brokenness of the world, alongside and in suffering solidarity with it. Delores Williams, an African American theologian, suggested that “along with the original distinguishing ‘marks of apostolicity’, catholicity and holiness, we add ‘oppression’ to all forms of violence against humanity, nature and environment.” The force of this is powerful. Indeed, the very call to holiness entails the call to moral community. But that implication is, as Williams makes clear, very often obscured by a narrow understanding of the mark of holiness. The Decade grasped, at a deep level, the fact that being a moral community is an integral aspect of the classical mark of the holiness of the church.

Secondly, the Decade saw that, given how many women are treated with violence, sexual harassment, psychological abuse and abuse of power, the church, within its own life and in the lives of the churches, is called to an attentive solidarity with women. It is not enough for women to be in solidarity with women; the cry that began the Decade – for the churches to be in solidarity with women – was not an empty cry. Through the visits to the churches, those “living letters”, the cry of women weeping was heard, women weeping because of the oppression they experience – in the churches as well as in the world outside. The Decade had very particular things to say about the way power and authority are experienced by women in the churches. It looked for another way of exercising power and authority. This was not simply a matter of a fairer numerical representation of women in the governing bodies of the churches, though that is important. It is about the sort of change that the theologian Letty Russell talks about, the change from a paradigm of domination

7. Ibid., pp.78,79.
to a paradigm of doxology. The experience of women in solidarity with women has been of sitting around a table, of leadership in the round, of something inclusive and open, welcoming and hospitable, where responsibility is shared, and where women have been prepared to take risks, and even to get things wrong. As one woman put it: women want to build a new church, stripping it of its hierarchical and crippling institutionalism so that it becomes a movement of concerned and involved men and women, engaged in a ministry of healing and reconciliation.

The insights of the Community study and the Decade complement each other. The primary focus of the first was on the internal life of the church; the primary focus of the second was on the church as it faces, and lives out, its calling in and for the world, particularly in attentive solidarity with women. The two belong together. As a result of the Community study and the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, the ecumenical community in many places around the world has been helped to envision something of the church God calls us to be, and it has helped churches in some places to take steps, albeit small steps, to realize that vision. It is important to acknowledge this, for these are the stepping stones for the future, the foundation on which we can now build.

**Being Church in the Future**

Without the imagination or poetic skills of an Ezekiel, or of the author of the book of Revelation, or a Mother Julian, it is hard to capture in words a vision for the future of “being church”. It was no accident that women in England chose to sum up the inspiration of the Decade by commissioning an icon of St Hilda of Whitby. The icon depicts Hilda, in a time of chaos, establishing ordered life for women; in a polarized hierarchical society establishing a community where no one was rich or poor; and in a time of awful barbarity and violence presiding, in love, over a community where the keynote was peace and charity. The icon of Hilda is a window on to a life of wholeness, where all are valued and violence no longer holds sway. Nor was it surprising that many in the Community study found a vision of wholeness and holiness most profoundly expressed in the Rublev icon of the Trinity with its portrayal of equality, mutual attentiveness, gentleness, and giving and receiving love. Whatever I envision about being church in the future, I know must include and bring together both the insights of both the Community study and the Decade. What are some of these insights?

First, the church in each and every place must become a community which is inclusive and not exclusive, where male and masculine is no longer valued above female and feminine. All must hear the church teaching that men and women are equally created in God’s image, equally assumed and redeemed in Christ, and equally recipients of the indwelling, sanctifying Spirit of God. There is no room for teaching, whether explicit or implicit, that perpetuates false notions of male domination and female subordination. There can be no room for structures that exclude women. Every person must hear and know themselves to be valued in, and for, who they are, and for the particular gift which God has given to them to use in the service of all. The church must lift up the hitherto-silent parts of the scriptures and the Tradition, and re-express the faith of the church in language, symbols and imagery which speak to women as well as to men. The worship life of the community must help all to encounter “in the depths” a God who is neither male nor female, neither masculine nor feminine, but who embraces and transcends all that we know as male and female, masculine and feminine. We must be a community of women and men who together dare to risk exploring a God who can never be trapped in our limited language or imagery.

Secondly, the church in each and every place must become the community which lives deeply from God’s gifts of scripture and the church’s Tradition, interpreted now in the light of the experience of women as well as of men, and expressed afresh in ways that speak to women as well as to men. The Community study and the Decade drew women into the circle of interpretation, and as a result there are a growing number of feminist theologies and rich resources for women’s spirituality. But there are still millions of Christian women all over the world who have not begun to find a voice, who don’t know how to put their intuitions, their deep longings and unfulfilled selves, into words. There are millions who have not been given confidence to think that their women’s experience is of any value in understanding the scriptures, or engaging with the Tradition, or that their expertise is of any use in guiding the church. There are millions of women who have not begun to formulate the questions that would take them, and all of us, towards a deeper understanding and realization of what the church of the future is called to be and to do.

Churches everywhere, in their catechetical teaching and their theological education, need intentionally to encourage women to bring their experience into the community of exploration, interpretation and proclamation of the faith of the church.

Thirdly, the church in each and every place must seek to be a community of women and men which lives from

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the power of God's gifts of sacramental grace. Those gifts must be celebrated, and administered, in ways that build up the church as a community of women and men. The very words and actions of the celebration, and the administration, must proclaim an symbolize that the community is a community of women and men. In that way the community will be empowered through the grace of sacrament to become what it is. And participation in the eucharist must lead to the community's active involvement in challenging all forms of violence and all kinds of injustice – not least of all those things that diminish and oppress the lives of women. This requires that the church be passionately aware of situations of injustice and violence, particularly as these affect the lives of women, and be ready to speak out prophetically and to act boldly to alleviate injustice.

Fourthly, the church in each and every place must be a community of women who know that they need all other Christian communities across the world, that their lives are interdependent. Of course, belonging to a worldwide Christian family requires some sort of structure of interconnectedness. The community of women and men walking together on the way (syn hodos) needs people to meet together, to share perspectives and to speak a Christian message on behalf of all, not least wherever issues of peace and justice involve us all. Different resources, material and spiritual, are there to be shared. The community requires structures of belonging that value the personal and the relational, the individual and the community, and that can hold the local, regional and world levels interdependent and mutually accountable. These are qualities which are hospitable to women's way of working. The insights of women on participation, inclusive oversight, power sharing, and what it means to be around a round table for consensus building, all need to be embodied in renewed structures of belonging and authority.

The worldwide sense of interconnectedness and interdependence must, at the same time, be balanced with structures and signs of continuity with the church of apostolic times: those signs and symbols of the church's continuity must become more inclusive. Holy women – as well as holy men – are personal signs of faithful continuity with the teaching and mission of the apostolic community. Women saints and martyrs deserve a more equal place in the liturgical life of the community. The visible signs of the church's continuity must be more inclusive.

Lastly, the church in each and every place, if it is to be credible as a community of women and men, must pick up that vast unfinished agenda of uncovering and confronting violence against women, and women and children. We are only just beginning to become conscious of how violence threatens the very foundations of life through the “colonizing of wombs”, through bio-technology, and through other scientific means, controlling women's reproductive choices and capacities, and threatening the very foundations of life itself. The church in each and every place must become the community that uncovers and challenges all the violent forces that hold women, and women and men, captive. Exposing violence, standing for peace, peace with justice, caring for the harmony of creation – all this is an indispensable part of being church. Being church requires that we continue to “roll away the stones” of prejudice, injustice and violence, particularly as this affects women all over the world.

I write this in Tantur, Jerusalem, on the way to Bethlehem, as news comes through of yet another bombing. Two women, who just happened to be passing on their way home to their ten children, have just died as innocent victims of a war not of their own choosing, of a situation of injustice not of their own making.

Any vision of the church as a community of women and men is hopelessly incomplete if it takes no account of the multifaith, pluralistic world of which the church is a part. The church is called to be a sign for the world of the world's own possibility for inclusive, participatory, non-violent, whole and holy life. But the church never has had, and never will have, a monopoly on the truth, nor has it always given convincing witness to the truth which it does have. Other faith communities and secular movements have things to tell the church. The community of women and men in the church of the future must be one which listens more attentively, engages in dialogue more humbly, and is not afraid to make common cause with others in confronting violence, not least violence against women.

There is a danger in envisioning being church in the future. Visions are vulnerable to the response, “it could never be so ... the brokenness goes too deep, the complexity of the issues is too great, the vested interests of those who want to keep the status quo are too strong”. But visions are important. We must be able to give some account of the hope that is in us! Nevertheless, words on their own are not enough. Renewal has to happen. The Community study and the Decade did inspire some changes in some churches. But the vision was lost all too soon, the urgency for renewal was no longer understood, and other agendas took over.

The World Council of Churches itself is in a unique position, through its varied programmes and studies, to keep alive the exploration of what sort of community of women and men in the church God calls us to be. There is much that could be brought together creatively from the past work done in all parts of the Council; once done, this could provide a firm foundation on which to build.
The Council also has possibilities to model, in its own life, inclusive and participatory ways of working and ways of reaching consensus. But, in the end, conversion has to happen in the churches themselves and action can only be taken by the churches themselves. The churches together, within the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, have the possibility to call one another to live more faithfully as communities of women and men proclaiming wholeness and holiness. The churches have the possibility to call one another to live together in unity as a community of women and men – to be the church as God intends us to be.

1.4 Called to Be the One Church

An invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue
23 February 2006

WCC Assemblies have adopted texts offering a vision, or identifying the qualities, of “the unity we seek”. In line with these texts the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre has adopted this text inviting the churches to continue their journey together, as a further step towards full visible unity. The purpose of this Invitation to the Churches is two-fold: (a) to reflect what the churches, at this point on their ecumenical journey, can say together about some important aspects of the Church; and (b) to invite the churches into a renewed conversation – mutually supportive, yet open and searching – about the quality and degree of their fellowship and communion, and about the issues which still divide them.

1. We, the delegates to the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, give thanks to the Triune God, Father; Son and Holy Spirit, who has brought our churches into living contact and dialogue. By God’s grace we have been enabled to remain together, even when this has not been easy. Considerable efforts have been made to overcome divisions. We are “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. We reaffirm that “the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe”. Our continuing divisions are real wounds to the body of Christ, and God’s mission in the world suffers.

2. Churches in the fellowship of the WCC remain committed to one another on the way towards full visible unity. This commitment is a gift from our gracious Lord. Unity is both a divine gift and calling. Our churches have affirmed that the unity for which we pray, hope, and work is “a koinonia given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God’s grace to all people and serving the whole of creation”. Such koinonia is to be expressed in each place, and through a conciliar relationship of churches in different places. We have much work ahead of us as together we seek to understand the meaning of unity and catholicity, and the significance of baptism.

II

3. We confess one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381). The Church’s oneness is an image of the unity of the Triune God in the communion of the divine Persons. Holy scripture describes the Christian community as the body of Christ whose interrelated diversity is essential to its wholeness: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and

1. The present Invitation to the Churches was produced at the request of the Central Committee of the WCC (2002), in a process organized by the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission. A first draft was written at a meeting in Nicosia, Cyprus in March 2004; this was revised (on the basis of extensive comments received from WCC governing bodies, the Faith and Order Commission, and the Steering Committee of the Special Commission) at a second meeting in Nicosia in May, 2005. Faith and Order extends on behalf of the WCC its appreciation to the Church of Cyprus, which graciously hosted these preparatory meetings. A final revision took place at the Faith and Order Standing Commission meeting in Aghios Nikolaos, Crete, in June 2005.


there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:4-7).

Thus, as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to manifest its oneness in rich diversity.

4. The Church as communion of believers is created by the Word of God, for it is through hearing the proclamation of the gospel that faith, by the action of His Holy Spirit, is awakened (Rom. 10:17). Since the good news proclaimed to awaken faith is the good news handed down by the apostles, the Church created by it is apostolic. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets the Church is God’s household, a holy temple in which the Holy Spirit lives and is active. By the power of the Holy Spirit believers grow into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2. 21-22).

5. We affirm that the apostolic faith of the Church is one, as the body of Christ is one. Yet there may legitimately be different formulations of the faith of the Church. The life of the Church as new life in Christ is one. Yet it is built up through different charisms and ministries. The hope of the Church is one. Yet it is expressed in different human expectations. We acknowledge that there are different ecclesiological starting points, and a range of views on the relation of the Church to the churches. Some differences express God’s grace and goodness; they must be discerned in God’s grace through the Holy Spirit. Other differences divide the Church; these must be overcome through the Spirit’s gifts of faith, hope, and love so that separation and exclusion do not have the last word. God’s “plan for the fullness of time [is] to gather up all things in him” (Eph. 1:10), reconciling human divisions. God calls his people in love to discernment and renewal on the way to the fullness of koinonia.

6. The catholicity of the Church expresses the fullness, integrity, and totality of its life in Christ through the Holy Spirit in all times and places. This mystery is expressed in each community of baptized believers in which the apostolic faith is confessed and lived, the gospel is proclaimed, and the sacraments are celebrated. Each church is the Church catholic and not simply a part of it. Each church is the Church catholic, but not the whole of it. Each church fulfills its catholicity when it is in communion with the other churches. We affirm that the catholicity of the Church is expressed most visibly in sharing holy communion and in a mutually recognised and reconciled ministry.

7. The relationship among churches is dynamically interactive. Each church is called to mutual giving and receiving gifts and to mutual accountability. Each church must become aware of all that is provisional in its life and have the courage to acknowledge this to other churches. Even today, when eucharistic sharing is not always possible, divided churches express mutual accountability and aspects of catholicity when they pray for one another, share resources, assist one another in times of need, make decisions together, work together for justice, reconciliation, and peace, hold one another accountable to the discipleship inherent in baptism, and maintain dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say “I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12:21). Apart from one another we are impoverished.

III

8. All who have been baptised into Christ are united with Christ in his body: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). In baptism, the Spirit confers Christ’s holiness upon Christ’s members. Baptism into union with Christ calls churches to be open and honest with one another, even when doing so is difficult: “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Baptism bestows upon the churches both the freedom and the responsibility to journey toward common proclamation of the Word, confession of the one faith, celebration of one eucharist, and full sharing in one ministry. There are some who do not observe the rite of baptism in water but share communion, and peace, hold one another accountable to the disciple-ship inherent in baptism, and maintain dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say “I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12:21). Apart from one another we are impoverished.

9. Our common belonging to Christ through baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit enables and calls churches to walk together, even when they are in disagreement. We affirm that there is one baptism, just as there is one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of us all (cf. Eph. 4:4-6). In God’s grace, baptism manifests the reality that we belong to one another, even though some churches are not yet able to recognise others as Church in the full sense of the word. We recall the words of the Toronto Statement, in which the member churches of the WCC affirm that “the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body. They seek, therefore, to enter into living

6. The scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.


contact with those outside their own ranks who confess the Lordship of Christ”.

IV

10. The Church as the creation of God’s Word and Spirit is a mystery, sign, and instrument of what God intends for the salvation of the world. The grace of God is expressed in the victory over sin given by Christ, and in the healing and wholeness of the human being. The kingdom of God can be perceived in a reconciled and reconciling community called to holiness: a community that strives to overcome the discriminations expressed in sinful social structures, and to work for the healing of divisions in its own life and for healing and unity in the human community. The Church participates in the reconciling ministry of Christ, who emptied himself, when it lives out its mission, affirming and renewing the image of God in all humanity and working alongside all those whose human dignity has been denied by economic, political, and social marginalisation.

11. Mission is integral to the life of the church. The Church in its mission expresses its calling to proclaim the Gospel and to offer the living Christ to the whole creation. The churches find themselves living alongside people of other living faiths and ideologies. As an instrument of God, who is sovereign over the whole creation, the Church is called to engage in dialogue and collaboration with them so that its mission brings about the good of all creatures and the well-being of the earth. All churches are called to struggle against sin in all its manifestations, within and around them, and to work with others to combat injustice, alleviate human suffering, overcome violence, and ensure fullness of life for all people.

V

12. Throughout its history the World Council of Churches has been a privileged instrument by which churches have been able to listen to one another and speak to one another, engaging issues that challenge the churches and imperil humankind. Churches in the ecumenical movement have also explored divisive questions through multilateral and bilateral dialogues. And yet churches have not always acknowledged their mutual responsibility to one another, and have not always recognised the need to give account to one another of their faith, life, and witness, as well as to articulate the factors that keep them apart. Bearing in mind the experience of the life we already share and the achievements of multilateral and bilateral dialogues, it is now time to take concrete steps together.

13. Therefore the Ninth Assembly calls upon the World Council of Churches to continue to facilitate deep conversations among various churches. We also invite all of our churches to engage in the hard task of giving a candid account of the relation of their own faith and order to the faith and order of other churches. Each church is asked to articulate the judgements that shape, and even qualify, its relationship to the others. The honest sharing of commonalities, divergences, and differences will help all churches to pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life.

14. Towards the goal of full visible unity the churches are called to address recurrent matters in fresh, more pointed ways. Among the questions to be addressed continually by the churches are these:

a. To what extent can your church discern the faithful expression of the apostolic faith in its own life, prayer, and witness and in that of other churches?

b. Where does your church perceive fidelity to Christ in the faith and life of other churches?

c. Does your church recognize a common pattern of Christian initiation, grounded in baptism, in the life of other churches?

d. Why does your church believe that it is necessary, or permissible, or not possible to share the Lord’s Supper with those of other churches?

e. In what ways is your church able to recognize the ordered ministries of other churches?

f. To what extent can your church share the spirituality of other churches?

g. How will your church stand with other churches to contend with problems such as social and political hegemonies, persecution, oppression, poverty, and violence?

h. To what extent will your church share with other churches in the apostolic mission?

i. To what extent does your church share with other churches in faith formation and theological education?

j. How fully can your church share in prayer with other churches?

In addressing these questions, churches will be challenged to recognize areas for renewal in their own lives, and new opportunities to deepen relations with those of other traditions.

15. Our churches journey together in conversation and common action, confident that the risen Christ will continue to disclose himself as he did in the breaking of bread at Emmaus, and that he will unveil the deeper meaning of fellowship and communion (Luke 24.13-35). Noting the progress made in the ecumenical movement, we encourage our churches to continue on this arduous yet joyous path, trusting in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose grace transforms our struggles for unity into the fruits of communion.

Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

1.5. The Church: Towards a Common Vision

Faith and Order Commission, Penang/Malaysia, 2012

This text is a major study and reference text of the WCC’s Commission on Faith and Order, a statement about the Church, which is a fruit of many years of work on ecclesiology which started with Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982) and the churches’ responses to it. The text The Church: Towards a Common Vision was received by the central committee in 2012 and sent to the churches to encourage further reflection on the Church, and to seek their formal responses to the text. The text is rooted in the nature and mission of the Church and reflects the constitutional aims and self-identity of the WCC as a fellowship of churches who call each other to the goal of visible unity.

INTRODUCTION

“Thy will be done” are words that countless believers from all Christian churches pray every day. Jesus himself prayed similar words in the garden of Gethsemane shortly before his arrest (cf. Matt. 26:39-42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). In John’s gospel, moreover, he revealed his will for the Church when he prayed to the Father that all of his disciples be one, so that the world may believe (cf. John 17:21). To pray that the Lord’s will be done thus necessarily requires a wholehearted endeavour to embrace his will for and gift of unity. The present text—The Church: Towards a Common Vision—addresses what many consider to be the most difficult issues facing the churches in overcoming any remaining obstacles to their living out the Lord’s gift of communion: our understanding of the nature of the Church itself. The great importance of that gift and goal highlights the significance of the issues to be treated in the pages that follow.

Our aim is to offer a convergence text, that is, a text which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues considered, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study. Rather, the following pages express how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the Church, showing the progress that has been made and indicating work that still needs to be done. The present text has been elaborated by the Faith and Order Commission, whose aim, like that of the World Council of Churches as a whole, is to serve the churches as they “call one another to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.” Such visible unity finds a most eloquent expression in the celebration of the eucharist, which glorifies the Triune God and enables the Church to participate in the mission of God for the transformation and salvation of the world. The present statement makes use of the responses of the churches to Faith and Order’s work on ecclesiology in recent years as well as earlier ecumenical documents which have sought convergence through common reflection upon God’s Word, in the hope that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s gift of unity can be fully realized. Thus it is the result of dialogue at the multilateral level, especially the responses of the churches to The Nature and Mission of the Church, of the suggestions offered by the meeting of the Faith and Order plenary commission held in Crete in 2009 and of the contributions of the Orthodox consultation held in Cyprus in 2011. In addition, the text draws upon the progress registered in many bilateral dialogues that have taken up the theme of “Church” in recent decades.

We hope that The Church: Towards a Common Vision will serve the churches in three ways: (1) by providing a synthesis of the results of ecumenical dialogue about important ecclesiological themes in recent decades; (2) by inviting them to appraise the results of this dialogue—confirming positive achievements, pointing out deficiencies and/or indicating areas that have not received sufficient attention; and (3) by providing an occasion for the churches to reflect upon their own understanding of the Lord’s will so as to grow towards greater unity (cf. Eph. 4:12-16). Hopefully, such a process of information, reaction and growth, by confirming, enriching and challenging all of the churches, will make a substantial contribution and even enable some decisive steps towards the full realization of unity.


2. For more details about this process, see the historical note which appears at the end of the text.
There is a structure to this text, based on the ecclesiological issues that we are addressing. The Church: Towards a Common Vision opens with a chapter exploring how the Christian community finds its origin in the mission of God for the saving transformation of the world. The Church is essentially missionary, and unity is essentially related to this mission. The second chapter sets out the salient features of an understanding of the Church as Communion, gathering the results of much common reflection both about how Scripture and subsequent tradition relate the Church to God and some of the consequences of this relation for the life and structure of the Church. The third chapter focuses upon the growth of the Church as the pilgrim people moving towards the kingdom of God, especially upon several difficult ecclesiological questions that have divided the churches in the past. It registers the progress towards greater convergence about some of these issues and clarifies points about which churches may need to seek further convergence. The fourth chapter develops several significant ways in which the Church relates to the world as a sign and agent of God’s love, such as proclaiming Christ within an interreligious context, witnessing to the moral values of the Gospel and responding to human suffering and need.

The many official responses to Faith and Order’s Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, of 1982, showed that the process of reception that follows the publication of a convergence text can prove to be just as important as that which led to its production. So as to serve as an instrument for genuine dialogue about ecclesiology to which all may make a significant contribution, the churches are urgently requested not only to give serious consideration to The Church: Towards a Common Vision but also to submit an official response to the Faith and Order Commission, in the light of the following questions:

- To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?
- To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?
- What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?
- What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the on-going work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

In addition to these general questions, readers will find, printed in italics and interspersed throughout the text, paragraphs about specific issues where divisions remain. These questions are intended to stimulate reflection and encourage further agreement among the churches on the path to unity.

CHAPTER I: God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church

A. The Church in the Design of God

1. The Christian understanding of the Church and its mission is rooted in the vision of God’s great design (or “economy”) for all creation: The “kingdom” which was both promised by and manifested in Jesus Christ. According to the Bible, man and woman were created in God’s image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27), so bearing an inherent capacity for communion (in Greek koinonia) with God and with one another. God’s purpose in creation was thwarted by human sin and disobedience (cf. Gen. 3-4; Rom. 1:18-3:20), which damaged the relationship between God, human beings and the created order. But God persisted in faithfulness despite human sin and error. The dynamic history of God’s restoration of koinonia found its irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world. Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.

2. During his earthly ministry, “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them...” (Matt. 9:35-36). The Church takes its mandate from the act and promise of Christ himself, who not only proclaimed the kingdom of God in word and deed but also called men and women and sent them out, empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23). The Acts of the Apostles tell us that the last words Jesus addressed to the apostles before his ascension into heaven...
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were: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Each of the four gospels closes with a missionary mandate; Matthew recounts: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age’” (Matt. 28:18-20; see also Mark 16:15; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:19-21). This command by Jesus already hints at what he wanted his Church to be in order to carry out this mission. It was to be a community of witness, proclaiming the kingdom which Jesus had first proclaimed, inviting human beings from all nations to saving faith. It was to be a community of worship, initiating new members by baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. It was to be a community of discipleship, in which the apostles, by proclaiming the Word, baptizing and celebrating the Lord’s Supper, were to guide new believers to observe all that Jesus himself had commanded.

3. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the morning of Pentecost for the purpose of equipping them to begin the mission entrusted to them (cf. Acts 2:1-41). God’s plan to save the world (sometimes referred to with the Latin expression missio Dei or “the mission of God”), is carried out through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This saving activity of the Holy Trinity is essential to an adequate understanding of the Church. As the Faith and Order study document Confessing the One Faith pointed out: “Christians believe and confess with the Creed that there is an indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the reality of the Church. This is the testimony of the Scriptures. The origin of the Church is rooted in the plan of the Triune God for humankind’s salvation.”

4. Jesus described his ministry as preaching the good news to the poor, releasing the captives, giving sight to the blind, liberating the oppressed and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord (cf. Luke 4:18-19, quoting Is. 61:1-2). “The mission of the Church ensues from the nature of the Church as the body of Christ, sharing in the ministry of Christ as Mediator between God and his creation. At the heart of the Church’s vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen. Through its internal life of eucharistic worship, thanksgiving, intercessory prayer, through planning for mission and evangelism, through a daily life-style of solidarity with the poor, through advocacy even to confrontation with the powers that oppress human beings, the churches are trying to fulfil this evangelistic vocation.”

B. The Mission of the Church in History

5. Since these origins, the Church has always been dedicated to proclaiming in word and deed the good news of salvation in Christ, celebrating the sacraments, especially the eucharist, and forming Christian communities. This effort has sometimes encountered bitter resistance; it has sometimes been hindered by opponents or even betrayed by the sinfulness of the messengers. In spite of such difficulties, this proclamation has produced great fruit (cf. Mark 4:8, 20, 26-32).

6. One challenge for the Church has been how to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in a way that awakens a response in the different contexts, languages and cultures of the people who hear that proclamation. St Paul’s preaching of Christ in the Areopagus at Athens (Acts 17:22-34), making use of local beliefs and literature, illustrates how the very first generation of Christians attempted to share the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection, drawing upon and, when necessary, transforming, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the cultural heritage of their listeners and serving as a leaven to foster the well-being of the society in which they lived. Over the centuries, Christians have witnessed to the Gospel within ever increasing horizons, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). Often their witness to Jesus resulted in martyrdom, but it also led to the spread of the faith and to the establishment of the Church in every corner of the earth. At times, the cultural and religious heritage of those to whom the Gospel was proclaimed was not given the respect it deserved, as when those engaging in evangelization were complicit in imperialistic colonization, which pillaged and even exterminated peoples unable to defend themselves from more powerful invading nations. Notwithstanding such tragic events, God’s grace, more powerful than human sinfulness, was able to raise up true disciples and friends of Christ in many lands and establish the Church within the rich variety of many cultures. Such diversity within the unity of the one Christian community was understood by some early writers as an expression of the beauty which Scripture attributes to the bride of


Christ (cf. Eph. 5:27 and Rev. 21:2).  

7. Today the proclamation of the kingdom of God continues throughout the world within rapidly changing circumstances. Some developments are particularly challenging to the Church’s mission and self-understanding. The widely diffused awareness of religious pluralism challenges Christians to deepen their reflection about the relation between the proclamation that Jesus is the one and only Saviour of the world, on the one hand, and the claims of other faiths, on the other. The development of means of communication challenges the churches to seek new ways to proclaim the Gospel and to establish and maintain Christian communities. The “emerging churches,” which propose a new way of being the Church, challenge other churches to find ways of responding to today’s needs and interests in ways which are faithful to what has been received from the beginning. The advance of a global secular culture challenges the Church with a situation in which many question the very possibility of faith, believing that human life is sufficient unto itself, without any reference to God. In some places, the Church faces the challenge of a radical decline in membership and is perceived by many as no longer relevant to their lives, leading those who still believe to speak of the need for a re-evangelization. All churches share the task of evangelization in the face of these challenges and others that may arise within particular contexts.

C. The Importance of Unity

8. The importance of Christian unity to the mission and nature of the Church was already evident in the New Testament. In Acts 15 and Galatians 1-2, it is clear that the mission to the Gentiles gave birth to tensions and threatened to create divisions between Christians. In a way, the contemporary ecumenical movement is reliving the experience of that first council of Jerusalem. The present text is an invitation to the leaders, theologians and faithful of all churches to seek the unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve before he offered his life for the salvation of the world (cf. John 17:21).

9. Visible unity requires that churches be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381) calls the “one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.” This recognition, in turn, may in some instances depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry within any given community. This represents a significant challenge for churches in their journey towards unity.

10. Currently, some identify the Church of Christ exclusively with their own community, while others would acknowledge in communities other than their own a real but incomplete presence of the elements which make up the Church. Others have joined into various types of covenant relationships, which sometimes include the sharing of worship. Some believe that the Church of Christ is located in all communities that present a convincing claim to be Christian, while others maintain that Christ’s church is invisible and cannot be adequately identified during this earthly pilgrimage.

**Fundamental Issues on the Way to Unity**

Ever since the Toronto Declaration of 1950, the WCC has challenged the churches to “recognize that the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body.” Moreover, mutual regard between churches and their members has been profoundly encouraged and advanced by ecumenical encounter. Nevertheless, differences on some basic questions remain and need to be faced together: “How can we identify the Church which the creed calls one, holy, catholic and apostolic?” “What is God’s will for the unity of this Church?” “What do we need to do to put God’s will into practice?” This text has been written in order to assist the churches as they reflect upon such questions, seeking common answers.

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4. Such solidarity of mutual assistance is to be clearly distinguished from proselytism, which wrongly considers other Christian communities as a legitimate field for conversion.
6. Thus the present text hopes to build upon the unity statement of the Porto Alegre General Assembly of the World Council of Churches entitled “Called to Be One Church,” whose subtitle is “An Invitation to the Churches to Renew Their Commitment to the Search for Unity and to Deepen Their Dialogue,” in Growth in Agreement III, 606-610.
CHAPTER II: The Church of the Triune God

A. Discerning God’s Will for the Church

11. All Christians share the conviction that Scripture is normative, therefore the biblical witness provides an irreplaceable source for acquiring greater agreement about the Church. Although the New Testament provides no systematic ecclesiology, it does offer accounts of the faith of the early communities, of their worship and practice of discipleship, of various roles of service and leadership, as well as images and metaphors used to express the identity of the Church. Subsequent interpretation within the Church, seeking always to be faithful to biblical teaching, has produced an additional wealth of ecclesiological insights over the course of history. The same Holy Spirit who guided the earliest communities in producing the inspired biblical text continues, from generation to generation, to guide later followers of Jesus as they strive to be faithful to the Gospel. This is what is understood by the “living Tradition” of the Church. The great importance of Tradition has been acknowledged by most communities, but they vary in assessing how its authority relates to that of Scripture.

12. A wide variety of ecclesiological insights can be found in the various books of the New Testament and in subsequent Tradition. The New Testament canon, by embracing this plurality, testifies to its compatibility with the unity of the Church, though without denying the limits to legitimate diversity. Legitimate diversity is not accidental to the life of the Christian community but is rather an aspect of its catholicity, a quality that reflects the fact that it is part of the Father’s design that salvation in Christ be incarnational and thus “take flesh” among the various peoples to whom the Gospel is proclaimed. An adequate approach to the mystery of the Church requires the use and interaction of a wide range of images and insights (people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit, vine, flock, bride, household, soldiers, friends and so forth). The present text seeks to draw upon the richness of the biblical witness, along with insights from the Tradition.

B. The Church of the Triune God as Koinonia

13. The Church is called into being by the God, who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life” (John 3:16) and who sent the Holy Spirit to lead these believers into all truth, reminding them of all that Jesus taught (cf. John 14:26). In the Church, through life and unity of the Church. This quest presupposes that communion is not simply the union of existing churches in their current form. The noun koinonia (communion, participation, fellowship, sharing), which derives from a verb meaning “to have something in common,” “to share,” “to participate,” “to have part in” or “to act together,” appears in passages recounting the sharing in the Lord’s Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17), the reconciliation of Paul with Peter, James and John (cf. Gal. 2:7-10), the collection for the poor (cf. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:3-4) and the experience and witness of the Church (cf. Acts 2:42-45). As a divinely established communion, the Church belongs to God and does not exist for itself. It is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom.

14. The Church is centred and grounded in the Gospel, the proclamation of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Son of the Father. This is reflected in the New Testament affirmation, “You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). Through the preaching of the Gospel (cf. Rom. 10:14-18) and under the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3), human beings come to saving faith and, by sacramental means, are incorporated into the body of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:23). Some communities, following this teaching, would call the Church creatura evangeli or “creature of the Gospel.” A defining aspect of the Church’s life is the Holy Spirit, believers are united with Jesus Christ

3. See the section “The Church as ‘Creature of the Gospel’” in Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, “Church and Justification,” in J. Gros, FSC, H. Meyer and W. G. Rusch, (eds.), Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998, Geneva/Grand Rapids, WCC-Eerdmans, 2000, 495-498, which refers to Martin Luther’s use of this expression in WA 2, 430, 6-7: “Ecclesia enim creatura est evangeli.” Some bilateral dialogues have used the Latin creatura verbi to express this same idea: see the section “Two Conceptions of the Church” (§§94-113), which describes the Church as “creatura verbi” and “sacrament of grace” in the Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” in Growth in Agreement II, 801-805. See also the statement “Called to Be the One Church,” cf. ch. 1n.6 above.
and thereby share a living relationship with the Father, who speaks to them and calls forth their trustful response. The biblical notion of koinonia has become central in the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the to be a community that hears and proclaims the word of God. The Church draws life from the Gospel and discovers ever anew the direction for her journey.

15. The response of Mary, the Mother of God (Theotokos), to the angel’s message at the annunciation, “Let it be done with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38), has been seen as a symbol of and model for the Church and the individual Christian. The Faith and Order study document Church and World (1990) noted that Mary is “an important example for all who seek to understand the full dimensions of life in Christian community” in that she receives and responds to the Word of God (Luke 1:26-38); shares the joy of the good news with Elizabeth (Luke 1:46-55); meditates, suffers and strives to understand the events of the birth and childhood of Jesus (Matt. 2:13-23; Luke 2:19, 41-51); seeks to comprehend the full implications of discipleship (Mark 3:31-35; Lk 18:19-20); stands by him under the cross and accompanies his body to the tomb (Matt. 27:55-61; John 19:25-27) and waits with the disciples and receives with them the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4).1

16. Christ prayed to the Father to send the Spirit on his disciples to guide them into all truth (John 15:26, 16:13), and it is the Spirit who not only bestows faith and other charisms upon individual believers but also equips the Church with its essential gifts, qualities and order. The Holy Spirit nourishes and enlivens the body of Christ through the living voice of the preached Gospel, through sacramental communion, especially in the Eucharist, and through ministries of service.

The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God

17. In the call of Abraham, God was choosing for himself a holy people. The prophets frequently recalled this election and vocation in the following powerful formulation: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 37:27; echoed in 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10). The covenant with Israel marked a decisive moment in the unfolding realization of the plan of salvation. Christians believe that in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit, God established the new covenant for the purpose of uniting all human beings with himself and with one another. There is a genuine newness in the covenant initiated by Christ and yet the Church remains, in God’s design, profoundly related to the people of the first covenant, to whom God will always remain faithful (cf. Rom. 11:11-36).

18. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel are journeying towards the fulfilment of the promise that in Abraham all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. All those who turn to Christ find this promise fulfilled in him, when, on the cross, he broke down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile (cf. Eph. 2:14). The Church is a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet. 2:9-10). While acknowledging the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ, whose one sacrifice institutes the new covenant (cf. Heb. 9:15), believers are called to express by their lives the fact that they have been named a “royal priesthood,” offering themselves “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1). Every Christian receives gifts of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the Church and for his or her part in the mission of Christ. These gifts are given for the common good (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:11-13) and place obligations of responsibility and mutual accountability on every individual and local community and on the Church as a whole at every level of its life. Strengthened by the Spirit, Christians are called to live out their discipleship in a variety of forms of service.

19. The whole people of God is called to be a prophetic people, bearing witness to God’s word; a priestly people, offering the sacrifice of a life lived in discipleship; and a royal people, serving as instruments for the establishment of God’s reign. All members of the Church share in this vocation. In calling and sending the Twelve, Jesus laid foundations for the leadership of the community of his disciples in their on-going proclamation of the kingdom. Faithful to his example, from the earliest times some believers were chosen under the guidance of the Spirit and given specific authority and responsibility. Ordained ministers “assemble and build up the Body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry.” All members of the body, ordained and lay, are interrelated members of God’s priestly people. Ordained ministers remind the community of its dependence on Jesus Christ, who is the source of its unity

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and mission, even as they understand their own ministry as dependent on him. At the same time, they can fulfill their calling only in and for the Church; they need its recognition, support and encouragement.

20. There is widespread agreement among churches of different traditions about the vital place of ministry. This was succinctly expressed in the Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), which stated that “the Church has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility,” noting that, “Jesus chose and sent the disciples to be witnesses of the kingdom.”6 The mission which Jesus entrusted to the eleven in Matthew 28 entails “a ministry of word, sacrament and oversight given by Christ to the Church to be carried out by some of its members for the good of all. This triple function of the ministry equips the Church for its mission in the world.”7 Agreed statements are making it clear that the royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the church, and not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives. At the same time, churches differ about who is competent to make final decisions for the community; for some that task is restricted to the ordained, while others see the laity as having a role in such decisions.

**Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit**

21. Christ is the abiding head of his body, the Church, guiding, purifying and healing it (cf. Eph. 5:26). At the same time, he is intimately united to it, giving life to the whole in the Spirit (Rom. 12:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). Faith in Christ is fundamental to membership of the body (Rom. 10:9). According to the understanding of most traditions, it is also through the rites or sacraments of initiation that human beings become members of Christ and in the Lord’s Supper their participation in his body (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16) is renewed again and again. The Holy Spirit confers manifold gifts upon the members and brings forth their unity for the building up of the body (cf. Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:30). He renews their hearts, equipping and calling them to good works,7 thus enabling them to serve the Lord in furthering the kingdom in the world. Thus the image of “body of Christ,” though explicitly and primarily referring the Church to Christ, also deeply implies a relation to the Holy Spirit, as witnessed to throughout the entire New Testament. A vivid example of this is the account of the descent of tongues of fire upon the disciples gathered in the upper room on the morning of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-4). By the power of the Holy Spirit believers grow into “a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21-22), into a “spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:5). Filled with the Holy Spirit, they are called to lead a life worthy of their calling in worship, witness and service, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Eph. 4:1-3). The Holy Spirit enlivens and equips the Church to play its role in proclaiming and bringing about that general transformation for which all creation groans (cf. Rom. 8:22-23).

**The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church**

22. Since the time of the second ecumenical council, held at Constantinople in 381, most Christians have included in their liturgies the creed which professes the Church to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These attributes, which are not separate from one another but which inform one another and are mutually interrelated, are God’s gifts to the Church which believers, in all their human frailty, are constantly called to actualize.

- The Church is one because God is one (cf. John 17:11; 1Tim. 2:5). In consequence, the apostolic faith is one; the new life in Christ is one; the hope of the Church is one.” Jesus prayed that all his disciples be one so that the world might believe (cf. John 17:20-21) and sent the Spirit to form them into one body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1213). Current divisions within and between the churches stand in contrast to this oneness; “these must be overcome through the Spirit’s gifts of faith, hope, and love so that separation and exclusion do not have the last word.”10 Yet, in spite of all divisions, all the churches understand themselves as founded in the one Gospel (cf. Gal. 1:5-9), and they are united in many features of their lives (cf. Eph. 4:4-7).

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6. Ibid., section on Ministry, §9.
7. Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” §132, in *Growth in Agreement II*, §10. See also the Lutheran-Roman Catholic report “Ministry in the Church,” §17, in H. Meyer and L. Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, Ramsey-Geneva, Paulist-WCC, 1984, 252-253: “The New Testament shows how there emerged from among the ministries a special ministry which was understood as standing in the succession of the apostles sent by Christ. Such a special ministry proved to be necessary for the sake of leadership in the communities. One can, therefore, say that according to the New Testament the ‘special ministry’ established by Jesus Christ through the calling and sending of the apostles ‘was essential then—it is essential in all times and circumstances.’”


10. Ibid.
• The Church is holy because God is holy (cf. Is. 6:3; Lev. 11:44-45). Jesus “loved the Church and gave himself up for her in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word...so that she may be holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:26-27). The essential holiness of the Church is witnessed to in every generation by holy men and women and by the holy words and actions the Church proclaims and performs in the name of God, the All Holy. Nevertheless, sin, which contradicts this holiness and runs counter to the Church’s true nature and vocation, has again and again disfigured the lives of believers. For this reason, part of the holiness of the Church is its ministry of continually calling people to repentance, renewal and reform.

• The Church is catholic because of the abundant goodness of God “who desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Through the life-giving power of God, the Church’s mission transcends all barriers and proclaims the Gospel to all peoples. Where the whole mystery of Christ is present, there too is the Church catholic (cf. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrneans, 6), as in the celebration of the eucharist. The essential catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differences are allowed to develop into division. Christians are called to remove all obstacles to the embodiment of this fullness of truth and life bestowed upon the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

• The Church is apostolic because the Father sent the Son to establish it. The Son, in turn, chose and sent the apostles and prophets, empowered with the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to serve as its foundation and to oversee its mission (cf. Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14; and Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians 42). The Christian community is called to be ever faithful to these apostolic origins; infidelity in worship, witness or service contradicts the Church’s apostolicity. Apostolic succession in ministry, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church.11

23. In the light of the previous paragraphs (13-22), it is clear that the Church is not merely the sum of individual believers among themselves. The Church is fundamentally a communion in the Triune God and, at the same time, a communion whose members partake together in the life and mission of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4), who, as Trinity, is the source and focus of all communications. Thus the Church is both a divine and a human reality.

24. While it is a common affirmation that the Church is a meeting place between the divine and the human, churches nonetheless have different sensitivities or even contrasting convictions concerning the way in which the Holy Spirit’s activity in the Church is related to institutional structures or ministerial order. Some see certain essential aspects of the Church’s order as willed and instituted by Christ himself for all time; therefore, in faithfulness to the Gospel, Christians would have no authority fundamentally to alter this divinely instituted structure. Some affirm that the ordering of the Church according to God’s calling can take more than one form while others affirm that no single institutional order can be attributed to the will of God. Some hold that faithfulness to the Gospel may at times require a break in institutional continuity, while others insist that such faithfulness can be maintained by resolving difficulties without breaks which lead to separation.

How Continuity and Change in the Church Relate to God’s Will

Through their patient encounter, in a spirit of mutual respect and attention, many churches have come to a deeper understanding of these differing sensitivities and convictions regarding continuity and change in the Church. In that deeper understanding, it becomes clear that the same intent—to obey God’s will for the ordering of the Church—may, in some, inspire commitment to continuity and, in others, commitment to change. We invite the churches to recognize and honour each other’s commitments to seeking the will of God in the ordering of the Church. We further invite them to reflect together about the criteria which are employed in different churches for considering issues about continuity and change. How far are such criteria open to development in the light of the urgent call of Christ to reconciliation (cf. Matt. 5:23-24)? Could this be the time for a new approach?

C. The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World

25. It is God’s design to gather humanity and all of creation into communion under the Lordship of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10). The Church, as a reflection of the communion of the Triune God, is meant to serve this goal and is called to manifest God’s mercy to human beings, helping them to achieve the purpose for which they were created and in which their joy ultimately is found: to praise and glorify God together with all the heavenly hosts. This mission of the Church is fulfilled by its members through the witness of their lives and, when possible, through the open proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. The mission

11. The World Council of Churches statement “Called to Be the One Church,” §3-7, offers a similar explanation of the creed’s profession that the Church is “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” Cf. Growth in Agreement III, 607.
of the Church is to serve this purpose. Since God wills all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4), Christians acknowledge that God reaches out to those who are not explicit members of the Church, in ways that may not be immediately evident to human eyes. While respecting the elements of truth and goodness that can be found in other religions and among those with no religion, the mission of the Church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come to know and love Christ Jesus.

26. Some New Testament passages use the term mystery (mysterion) to speak both of God’s design of salvation in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:9; 3:4-6) and of the intimate relation between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph. 5:32; Col. 1:24-28). This suggests that the Church enjoys a spiritual, transcendent quality which cannot be grasped simply by looking at its visible appearance. The earthly and spiritual dimensions of the Church cannot be separated. The organizational structures of the Christian community need to be seen and evaluated, for good or ill, in the light of God’s gifts of salvation in Christ, celebrated in the liturgy. The Church, embodying in its own life the mystery of salvation and the transfiguration of humanity, participates in the mission of Christ to reconcile all things to God and to one another through Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 8:18-25).

27. While there is wide agreement that God established the Church as the privileged means for bringing about his universal design of salvation, some communities believe that this can be suitably expressed by speaking of the “Church as sacrament,” while others do not normally use such language or reject it outright. Those who use the expression “Church as sacrament” do so because they understand the Church as an effective sign and means (sometimes described by the word instrument) of the communion of human beings with one another through their communion in the Triune God.12 Those who refrain from employing this expression believe that its use could obscure the distinction between the Church as a whole and the individual sacraments and that it may lead one to overlook the sinfulness still present among members of the community. All agree that God is the author of salvation; differences appear concerning the ways in which the various communities understand the nature and role of the Church and its rites in that saving activity.

The Expression, “the Church as Sacrament”

Those who use the expression “the Church as sacrament” do not deny the unique “sacramentality” of the sacraments nor do they deny the frailty of human ministers. Those who reject this expression, on the other hand, do not deny that the Church is an effective sign of God’s presence and action. Might this, therefore, be seen as a question where legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable?

D. Communion in Unity and Diversity

28. Legitimate diversity in the life of communion is a gift from the Lord. The Holy Spirit bestows a variety of complementary gifts on the faithful for the common good (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-7). The disciples are called to be fully united (cf. Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37), while respectful of and enriched by their diversities (1 Cor 12:14-26). Cultural and historical factors contribute to the rich diversity within the Church. The Gospel needs to be proclaimed in languages, symbols and images that are relevant to particular times and contexts so as to be lived authentically in each time and place. Legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones, to be imposed upon Christians of other cultures.

29. At the same time, unity must not be surrendered. Through shared faith in Christ, expressed in the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and lives of service and witness, each local church is in communion with the local churches of all places and all times. A pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity is one of the important means given to the Church in aiding those with different gifts and perspectives to remain mutually accountable to each other.

30. Issues concerning unity and diversity have been a principal concern since the Church discerned, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, that Gentiles were to be welcomed into communion (cf. Acts 15:1-29; 10:1-11:18). The letter

addressed from the meeting in Jerusalem to the Christians in Antioch contains what might be called a fundamental principle governing unity and diversity: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials” (Acts 15:28). Later, the Ecumenical Councils provided further examples of such “essentials,” as when, at the first Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325), the bishops clearly taught that communion in faith required the affirmation of the divinity of Christ.

In more recent times, churches have joined together in enunciating firm ecclesial teachings which express the implications of such foundational doctrine, as in the condemnation of apartheid by many Christian communities.13 There are limits to legitimate diversity; when it goes beyond acceptable limits it can be destructive of the gift of unity. Within the Church, heresies and schisms, along with political conflicts and expressions of hatred, have threatened God’s gift of communion. Christians are called not only to work untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of liturgy, custom and law and to foster legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological method and formulation in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole.14


14. Cf. the World Council of Churches statement “The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling”: “Diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic or historical contacts are integral to the nature of communion; yet there are limits to diversity. Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). . . . In communion diversities are brought together in harmony as gifts of the Holy Spirit, contributing to the richness and fullness of the church of God.” In M. Kinnamon (ed.), Signs of the Spirit: Official Report Seventh Assembly, Geneva-Grand Rapids, WCC-Eerdmans, 1991, 173. Legitimate diversity is frequently treated in the international bilateral dialogues. The Anglican-Orthodox dialogue, for instance, notes the wide diversity in life of the local churches: “As long as their witness to the one faith remains unimpaired, such diversity is seen not as a deficiency or cause for division, but as a mark of the fullness of the one Spirit who distributes to each according to his will.” The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Statement Agreed by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue 2006, London, Anglican Communion Office, 2006, 91. See also: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, Facing Unity (1984), §§5-7, 27-30, and especially 31-34, in Growth in Agreement II, 445-446, 449-450; Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, The Gift of Authority, §§26-31, in Growth in Agreement III, 68-69; Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue, Speaking the Truth in Love, §50, in Growth in Agreement III, 154.

E. Communion of Local Churches

31. The ecclesiology of communion provides a helpful framework for considering the relation between the local church and the universal Church. Most Christians could agree that the local church is “a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of episkopé exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community.”15 Culture, language and shared history all enter into the very fabric of the local church. At the same time, the Christian community in each place shares with all the other local communities all that is essential to the life of communion. Each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church. It is wholly Church, but not the whole Church. Thus, the local church should not be seen in isolation from but in dynamic relation with other local churches. From the beginning communion was maintained between local churches by collections, exchanges of letters, visits, eucharistic hospitality and tangible expressions of solidarity (cf. 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8:1-9; Gal. 2:1-10). From time to
Chapter 1. The History of the Ecumenical Movement

The Relationship between Local and Universal Church

Many churches can embrace a shared understanding of the fundamental relationship and communion of local churches within the universal Church. They share the understanding that the presence of Christ, by the will of the Father and the power of the Spirit, is truly manifested in the local church (it is “wholly Church”), and that this very presence of Christ impels the local church to be in communion with the universal Church (it is not “the whole Church”). Where this fundamental agreement is found, the expression “local church” may nonetheless be used in varying ways. In our common quest for closer unity, we invite the churches to seek more precise mutual understanding and agreement in this area: what is the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations?

32. Within this shared understanding of the communion of the local churches in the universal Church, differences arise, not only about the geographical extent of the community intended by the expression “local church” but also in relation to the role of bishops. Some churches are convinced that the bishop, as a successor to the apostles, is essential to the structure and reality of the local church. Thus, in a strict sense, the local church is a diocese, comprised of a number of parishes. For others, having developed various forms of self-understanding, the expression “local church” is less common and not defined in reference to the ministry of a bishop. For some of those churches, the local church is simply the congregation of believers gathered in one place to hear the Word and celebrate the Sacraments. Both for those who see the bishop as essential and for those who do not, the expression “local church” has also at times been used to refer to a regional configuration of churches, gathered together in a synodal structure under a presidency. Finally there is not yet agreement about how local, regional and universal levels of ecclesial order relate to one another, although valuable steps in seeking convergence about those relations can be found in both multilateral and bilateral dialogues.


CHAPTER III: The Church: Growing in Communion

A. Already but Not Yet

33. The Church is an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom, but not yet its full realization. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent in establishing the kingdom and in guiding the Church so that it can be a servant of God’s work in this process. Only as we view the present in the light of the activity of the Holy Spirit, guiding the whole process of salvation history to its final recapitulation in Christ to the glory of the Father, do we begin to grasp something of the mystery of the Church.

34. On the one hand, as the communion of believers held in personal relationship with God, the Church is already the eschatological community God wills. Visible and tangible signs which express that this new life of communion has been effectively realized are: receiving and sharing the faith of the apostles, baptising, breaking and sharing the eucharistic bread, praying with and for one another and for the needs of the world, serving one another in love, participating in each other’s joys and sorrows, giving material aid, proclaiming and witnessing to the good news in mission and working together for justice and peace. On the other hand, as an historical reality the Church is made up...
of human beings who are subject to the conditions of the world. One such condition is change, either positive in the sense of growth and development or negative in the sense of decline and distortion. Other conditions include cultural and historical factors which can have either a positive or a negative impact on the Church’s faith, life and witness.

35. As a pilgrim community the Church contends with the reality of sin. Ecumenical dialogue has shown that there are deep, commonly-held convictions behind what have sometimes been seen as conflicting views concerning the relation between the Church’s holiness and human sin. There are significant differences in the way in which Christians articulate these common convictions. For some, their tradition affirms that the Church is sinless since, being the body of the sinless Christ, it cannot sin. Others consider that it is appropriate to refer to the Church as sinning, since sin may become systemic so as to affect the institution of the Church itself and, although sin is in contradiction to the true identity of the Church, it is nonetheless real. The different ways in which various communities understand sin itself, whether primarily as moral imperfection or primarily as a break in relationship, as well as whether and how sin may be systemic, can also have an impact upon this question.

36. The Church is the body of Christ; according to his promise, the gates of hell cannot prevail against it (cf. Matt. 16:18). Christ’s victory over sin is complete and irreversible, and by Christ’s promise and grace Christians have confidence that the Church will always share in the fruits of that victory. They also share the realization that, in this present age, believers are vulnerable to the power of sin, both individually and collectively. All churches acknowledge the fact of sin among believers and its often grievous impact. All recognize the continual need for Christian self-examination, penitence, conversion (metanoia), reconciliation and renewal. Holiness and sin relate to the life of the Church in different and unequal ways. Holiness expresses the Church’s identity according to the will of God, while sin stands in contradiction to this identity (cf. Rom. 6:1-11).

**B. Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry**

37. The journey towards the full realization of God’s gift of communion requires Christian communities to agree about the fundamental aspects of the life of the Church. “The ecclesial elements required for full communion within a visibly united church—the goal of the ecumenical movement—are communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making; and in common witness and service in the world.” These attributes serve as a necessary framework for maintaining unity in legitimate diversity. Moreover, the growth of churches towards the unity of the one Church is intimately related to their calling to promote the unity of the whole of humanity and of creation, since Christ, who is head of the Church, is the one in whom all are to be reconciled. Dialogue, such as that which accompanied the writing and reception of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, has already registered significant progress in convergence about these essential elements of communion, though less on ministry than on the other two. It is not the intention of the present text to repeat those past achievements but rather to summarize them briefly and to indicate a few of the further steps forward that have been made in recent years.

**Faith**

38. Regarding the first of these elements, there is widespread agreement that the Church is called to proclaim,

1. This condition of change is not meant to obscure the enduring meaning of Jesus Christ and his Gospel: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).
in each generation, the faith “once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude v. 3) and to remain steadfast in the teaching first handed on by the apostles. Faith is evoked by the Word of God, inspired by the grace of the Holy Spirit, attested in Scripture and transmitted through the living tradition of the Church. It is confessed in worship, life, service and mission. While it must be interpreted in the context of changing times and places, these interpretations must remain in continuity with the original witness and with its faithful explication throughout the ages. Faith has to be lived out in active response to the challenges of every age and place. It speaks to personal and social situations, including situations of injustice, of the violation of human dignity and of the degradation of creation.

39. Ecumenical dialogue has shown that, on many central aspects of Christian doctrine, there is a great deal that already unites believers.3 In 1991, the study text Confessing the One Faith not only succeeded in showing substantial agreement among Christians concerning the meaning of the Nicene Creed professed in the liturgies of most churches. It also explained how the faith of the creed is grounded in Scripture, confessed in the ecumenical symbol and has to be confessed afresh in relation to the challenges of the contemporary world. The intention was not only to help churches recognize fidelity to that faith in themselves and in others but also to provide a credible ecumenical tool for proclaiming the faith today. In 1998, A Treasure in Earthen Vessels explored the ongoing interpretation of Scripture and Tradition in handing on the faith, noting: “The Holy Spirit inspires and leads the churches each to rethink and reinterpret their tradition in conversation with each other, always aiming to embody the one Tradition in the unity of God’s Church.”4 While the churches generally agree as to the importance of Tradition in the generation and subsequent interpretation of scripture, more recent dialogue has tried to understand how the Christian community engages in such interpretation. Many bilateral dialogues have acknowledged that ecclesial interpretation of the contemporary meaning of the Word of God involves the faith experience of the whole people, the insights of theologians, and the discernment of the ordained ministry.5 The challenge today is for churches to agree on how these factors work together.

Sacraments

40. Regarding the sacraments, the churches registered a significant degree of approval with the way in which Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982) described the meaning and celebration of baptism and eucharist.6 That text also suggested avenues seeking further convergence on what remained the most significant unresolved issues: who may be baptized, the presence of Christ in the eucharist and the relation of the eucharist to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. At the same time, while briefly commenting on chrismation or confirmation, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry did not address the other rites celebrated in many communities and considered by some as sacraments, nor was it designed to take into account the view of those communities who affirm that their vocation does not include the rites of baptism and the eucharist, while affirming that they share in the sacramental life of the Church.

41. The growing convergence among churches in their understanding of baptism may be summarized as follows.7 Through Baptism with water in the name of the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Christians are united with Christ and with each other in the Church


7. This paragraph recounts the material elaborated under the subtitle “II. The Meaning of Baptism,” in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Section on Baptism, §§2-7. Very similar affirmations from four international bilateral dialogues are found in “Common Understanding of Baptism” of W. Kasper, Harvesting the Fruits, 164-168, as well as in the Faith and Order study text entitled One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition, Geneva, WCC, 2011.
of every time and place. Baptism is the introduction to and celebration of new life in Christ and of participation in his baptism, life, death and resurrection (cf. Matt. 3:13-17; Rom. 6:3-5). It is “the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3,5) incorporating believers into the body of Christ and enabling them to share in the kingdom of God and the life of the world to come (cf. Eph 2:6). Baptism involves confession of sin, conversion of heart, pardoning, cleansing and sanctification; it consecrates the believer as a member of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). Baptism is thus a basic bond of unity. Some churches see the gift of the Holy Spirit as given in a special way through chrismation or confirmation, which is considered by them as one of the sacraments of initiation. The general agreement about baptism has led some who are involved in the ecumenical movement to call for the mutual recognition of baptism.

42. There is a dynamic and profound relation between baptism and the eucharist. The communion into which the newly initiated Christian enters is brought to fuller expression and nourished in the eucharist, which reaffirms baptismal faith and gives grace for the faithful living out of the Christian calling. The progress in agreement about the eucharist registered in ecumenical dialogue may be summarized as follows. The Lord’s Supper is the celebration in which, gathered around his table, Christians receive the body and blood of Christ. It is a proclamation of the Gospel, a glorification of the Father for everything accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification (doxologia); a memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus and what was accomplished once for all on the Cross (anamnesis); and an invocation of the Holy Spirit to transform both the elements of bread and wine and the participants themselves (epiclesis). Intercession is made for the needs of the Church and the world, the communion of the faithful is again deepened as an anticipation and foretaste of the kingdom to come, impelling them to go out and share Christ’s mission of inaugurating that kingdom even now. St Paul highlights the connection between the Lord’s Supper and the very life of the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-33).

43. Just as the confession of faith and baptism are inseparable from a life of service and witness, so too the eucharist demands reconciliation and sharing by all those who are brothers and sisters in the one family of God. “Christians are called in the eucharist to be in solidarity with the outcast and to become signs of the love of Christ who lived and sacrificed himself for all and now gives himself in the eucharist.” The eucharist brings into the present age a new reality which transforms Christians into the image of Christ and therefore makes them his effective witnesses.”

The liturgical renewal among some churches may be seen in part as a reception of the convergences registered in ecumenical dialogue about the sacraments.

44. Different Christian traditions have diverged as to whether baptism, eucharist and other rites should be termed “sacraments” or “ordinances.” The word sacrament (used to translate the Greek mysterion) indicates that God’s saving work is communicated in the action of the rite, whilst the term ordinance emphasizes that the action of the rite is performed in obedience to Christ’s word and example. These two positions have often been seen as mutually opposed. However, as the Faith and Order study text One Baptism points out, “Most traditions, whether they use the term “sacrament” or “ordinance,” affirm that these events are both instrumental (in that God uses them to bring about a new reality), and expressive (of an already-existing reality). Some traditions emphasize the instrumental dimension... Others emphasize the expressive dimension.” Might this difference then be more one of emphasis than of doctrinal disagreement? These rites express both the “institutional” and “charismatic” aspects of the Church. They are visible, effective actions instituted by Christ and, at the same time, are made effective by the action of the Holy Spirit who, by means of them, equips those who receive the sacraments with a variety of gifts for the edification of the Church and its mission in and for the world.

Sacraments and Ordinances

In the light of the convergences on Baptism and Eucharist and of further reflection upon the historical roots and potential compatibility of the expressions “sacrament” and “ordinance,” the churches are challenged to explore whether they are able to arrive at deeper agreement about that dimension of the life of the Church that involves

8. An example of such mutual recognition of baptism was that achieved by eleven of the sixteen member communities of the Christian Council of Churches in Germany on April 29, 2007, which is recounted at www.ekd.de/english/mutual_recognition_of_baptism.html.


11. The Latin term sacramentum denoted the oath that a recruit pronounced upon entering military service and was used by the first major theologian to write in the Latin language, Tertullian (160-220), in reference to baptism.

these rites. Such convergence could lead them to consider several additional questions. Most churches celebrate other rites or sacraments, such as chrismations/confirmations, weddings and ordinations within their liturgies and many also have rites for the forgiveness of sin and the blessing of the sick: to whether baptism, eucharist and other rites should be termed “sacraments” or “ordinances.” The word sacrament may not the number and ecclesial status of these sacraments or ordinances be addressed in ecumenical dialogue? We also invite churches to consider whether they can now achieve closer convergence about who may receive baptism and who may preside at the Church’s liturgical celebrations? Further, are there ways in which fuller mutual understanding can be established between the churches which celebrate these rites and those Christian communities convinced that the sharing of life in Christ does not require the celebration of sacraments or other rites?

Ministry within the Church

Ordained Ministry

45. All churches affirm the biblical teaching that, unlike the many priests of the Old Covenant (cf. Heb. 7:23), Jesus, our high priest (cf. Heb. 8:10), offered his redeeming sacrifice “once for all” (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 9:26; 10:10, 12-14). They differ on the implications they draw from these texts. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry noted that ordained ministers “may appropriately be called priests because they fulfill a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments, through their prayers of intercession, and through their pastoral guidance of the community.”

13 In line with that view, some churches hold that ordained ministry stands in a special relationship with the unique priesthood of Christ that it is distinct from, even if related to, that royal priesthood described in 1 Pet. 2:9. These churches believe that some persons are ordained to a particular priestly function through the sacrament of ordination. Others do not consider ordained ministers as “priests,” nor do some understand ordination in sacramental terms. Christians disagree as well over the traditional restriction of ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament to men only.

46. There is no single pattern of ministry in the New Testament, though all churches would look to Scripture in seeking to follow the will of the Lord concerning how ordained ministry is to be understood, ordered and exercised. At times, the Spirit has guided the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs (cf. Acts 6:1-6). Various forms of ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Spirit. Early writers, such as Ignatius of Antioch, insisted upon the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon. This pattern of three related ministries can be seen to have roots in the New Testament; eventually it became the generally accepted pattern and is still considered normative by many churches today. Some churches, since the time of the Reformation, have adopted different patterns of ministry. Among the several means for maintaining related to, the Church’s apostolicity, such as the scriptural canon, dogma and liturgical order, ordained ministry has played an important role. Succession in ministry is meant to serve the apostolic continuity of the Church.

47. Almost all Christian communities today have a formal structure of ministry. Frequently this structure is diversified and reflects, more or less explicitly, the threefold pattern of episkopos-presbyteros-diakonos. Churches remain divided, however, as to whether or not the “historic episcopate” (meaning bishops ordained in apostolic succession back to the earliest generations of the Church), or the apostolic succession of ordained ministry more generally, is something intended by Christ for his community. Some believe that the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon is a sign of continuing faithfulness to the Gospel and is vital to the apostolic continuity of the Church as a whole.

17. On this point, the Lutheran-Roman Catholic “Church and Justification” (1993), §185, states: “There is no contradiction between the doctrine of justification and the idea of an ordained ministry instituted by God and necessary for the church” (Growth
In contrast, others do not view faithfulness to the Gospel as closely bound to succession in ministry, and some are wary of the historic episcopate because they see it as vulnerable to abuse and thus potentially harmful to the well-being of the community. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, for its part, only affirmed that the threefold ministry “may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.”

**The Threefold Ministry**

*Given the signs of growing agreement about the place of ordained ministry in the Church, we are led to ask if the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills.*

**The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church**

48. All authority in the Church comes from her Lord and head, Jesus Christ, whose authority, conveyed with the word *exousia* (power, delegated authority, moral authority, influence; literally “from out of one’s being”) in the New Testament, was exercised in his teaching (cf. Matt. 5:2; Luke 5:3), his performing of miracles (cf. Mark. 1:30-34; Matt. 14:35-36), his exorcisms (cf. Mark 1:27; Luke 4:35-36), his forgiveness of sins (cf. Mark 2:10; Luke 5:4) and his leading the disciples in the ways of salvation (cf. Matt. 16:24). Jesus’ entire ministry was characterized by authority (Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36) which placed itself at the service of human beings. Having received “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), Jesus shared his authority with the apostles (cf. John 20:22). Their successors in the ministry of oversight (*episkopé*) exercised authority in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the eucharist, and in the pastoral guidance of believers. 19

49. The distinctive nature of authority in the Church can be understood and exercised correctly only in the light of the authority of its head, the one who was crucified, who “emptied himself” and “obediently accepted even death, death on the cross” (Phil. 2:7-8). This authority is to be understood within Jesus’ eschatological promise to guide the Church to fulfilment in the reign of heaven. Thus, the Church’s authority is different from that of the world. When the disciples sought to exercise power over one another, Jesus corrected them, saying that he came not to be served but to serve, and to offer his life for others (cf. Mark 10:41-45; Luke 22:25). Authority within the Church must be understood as humble service, nourishing and building up the *koinonia* of the Church in faith, life and witness; it is exemplified in Jesus’ action of washing the feet of the disciples (cf. John 13:1-17). It is a service (*diakonia*) of love, without any domination or coercion.

50. Thus, authority in the Church in its various forms and levels, must be distinguished from mere power. This authority comes from God the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit; as such it reflects the holiness of God. The sources of authority recognized in varying degrees by the churches such as Scripture, Tradition, worship, councils and synods, also reflect the holiness of the Triune God. Such authority is recognized wherever the truth which leads to holiness is expressed and the holiness of God is voiced “from the lips of children and infants” (Ps. 8:2; cf. Matt. 21:16). Holiness means a greater authenticity in relationship with God, with others and with all creation. Throughout history the Church has recognized a certain authority in the lives of the saints, in the witness of monasticism and in various ways that groups of believers have lived out and expressed the truth of the gospel. Accordingly, a certain kind of authority may be recognized in the ecumenical dialogues and the agreed statements they produce, when they reflect a common search for and discovery of the truth in love (cf. Eph. 4:15), urge believers to seek the Lord’s will for ecclesial communion, and invite on-going metanoia and holiness of life.

51. The authority which Jesus Christ, the one head of the Church, shares with those in ministries of leadership is neither only personal, nor only delegated by the community. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the service (*diakonia*) of the Church in love. Its exercise includes the participation of the whole community, whose sense of the faith (sensus fidei) contributes to the overall understanding of God’s Word and whose reception of the guidance and teaching of the ordained ministers testifies to the authenticity of that leadership. A relation of mutual love
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and dialogue unites those who exercise authority and those who are subject to it. As a means of guiding the Christian community in faith, worship and service with the exousia of the crucified and risen Lord, the exercise of authority can call for obedience, but such a call is meant to be welcomed with voluntary cooperation and consent since its aim is to assist believers in growing to full maturity in Christ (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). The “sense” for the authentic meaning of the Gospel that is shared by the whole people of God, the insights of those dedicated in a special way to biblical and theological studies, and the guidance of those especially consecrated for the ministry of oversight, all collaborate in the discernment of God’s will for the community. Decision-making in the Church seeks and elicits the consensus of all and depends upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, discerned in attentive listening to God’s Word and to one another. By the process of active reception over time, the Spirit resolves possible ambiguities in decisions. The ecumenical movement has made it possible for authoritative teaching by some Christian leaders to have an effect beyond the boundaries of their own communities, even now in our current state of division. For example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s leadership in declaring that “apartheid was too strong to be overcome by a divided Church,”21 the initiatives by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to unite Christian leaders in the cause of ecology, the efforts by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI to invite Christians and leaders from other faiths to join together in praying for and promoting peace, and of the influence of Brother Roger Schutz as he inspired countless Christian believers, especially the young, to join together in common worship of the Triune God.

Authority in the Church and Its Exercise

Significant steps towards convergence on authority and its exercise have been recorded in various bilateral dialogues.22 Differences continue to exist between churches, however, as to the relative weight to be accorded to the different sources of authority, as to how far and in what ways the Church has the means to arrive at a normative expression of its faith, and as to the role of ordained ministers in providing an authoritative interpretation of revelation. Yet all churches share the urgent concern that the Gospel be preached, interpreted and lived out in the world humbly, but with compelling authority. May not the seeking of ecumenical convergence on the way in which authority is recognized and exercised play a creative role in this missionary endeavour of the churches?

The Ministry of Oversight (Episkopé)

52. The Church, as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God, is built up by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or ministries. These gifts may enrich the whole Church, its unity and mission.23 The faithful exercise of the ministry of episkopé under the Gospel by persons chosen and set aside for such ministry is a requirement of fundamental importance for the Church’s life and mission. The specific development of structures of episkopé varied in different times and places; but all communities, whether episcopally ordered or not, continued to see the need for a ministry of episkopé. In every case episkopé is in the service of maintaining continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life. In addition to preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments, a principal purpose of this ministry is faithfully to safeguard and hand on revealed truth, to hold the local congregations in communion, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the Gospel. Such guidance includes the oversight of the various Christian service organizations dedicated to bettering human life and to the relief of suffering, aspects of the Church’s service (diakonia) to the world to which we will return in the next chapter. All these functions, summed up in the term episkopé or oversight, are exercised by persons who relate to the faithful of their own communities as well as to those who exercise such a ministry in other local communities. This is what it means to affirm that the ministry of oversight, as all ministry in the Church, needs to be exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways.24 These ways of exercise have been succinctly described in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry as follows: “It should be personal, because the presence

22. See, for example, the Anglican-Roman Catholic report “Authority in the Church” (1976) in Growth in Agreement I, 88-105; “Authority in the Church II” in Growth in Agreement II, 106-18; “The Gift of Authority” (1998), in Growth in Agreement III, 60-81; this is also echoed in §§83-84 of the Methodist-Roman Catholic document “Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists,” in Growth in Agreement III, 163-164.
24. Already at the first world conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927, the ordering of the churches in “episcopal,” “presbyteral” and “congregational” systems was noted and the values underlying these three orders were “believed by many to be essential to the good order of the Church.” In H. N. Bate (ed.), Faith and Order Proceedings of the World Conference: Lausanne, August 3-21, 1927, London, Student Christian Movement, 1927, 379. Fifty-five years later, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, section on Ministry, Commentary on §26, cited this Lausanne text in justification of its affirmation that ordained ministry should be exercised in ways that are personal, collegial and communal.
of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community’s effective participation in the discovery of God’s will and the guidance of the Spirit.25

53. One such exercise of oversight reflects that quality of the Church which might be termed “synodality” or “conciliarity.” The word synod comes from the Greek terms syn (with) and odos (way) suggesting a “walking together.” Both synodality and conciliarity signify that “each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility” in the communion of the church.26 Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the whole Church is synodal/conciliar, at all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional and universal. The quality of synodality or conciliarity reflects the mystery of the trinitarian life of God, and the structures of the Church express this quality so as to actualize the community’s life as a communion. In the local Eucharistic community, this quality is experienced in the profound unity in love and truth between the members and their presiding minister. In crucial situations synods have come together to discern the apostolic faith in response to doctrinal or moral dangers or heresies, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to send after his return to the Father (cf. John 16:7.12-14). Ecumenical synods enjoyed the participation of leaders from the entire Church; their decisions were received by all as an acknowledgment of the important service they played in fostering and maintaining communion throughout the Church as a whole.27 The churches currently have different views and practices about the participation and role of the laity in synods.

The Authority of Ecumenical Councils
While most churches accept the doctrinal definitions of the early Ecumenical Councils as expressive of the teaching of the New Testament, some maintain that all post-biblical doctrinal decisions are open to revision, while others consider some doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irreformable expressions of the faith. Has ecumenical dialogue made possible a common assessment of the normativity of the teaching of the early Ecumenical Councils?

54. Wherever the Church comes together to take counsel and make important decisions, there is need for someone to summon and preside over the gathering for the sake of good order and to facilitate the process of promoting, discerning and articulating consensus. Those who preside are always to be at the service of those among whom they preside for the edification of the Church of God, in love and truth. It is the duty of the one who presides to respect the integrity of local churches, to give voice to the voiceless and to uphold unity in diversity.

55. The word primacy refers to the custom and use, already recognized by the first ecumenical councils as an ancient practice, whereby the bishops of Alexandria, Rome and Antioch, and later Jerusalem and Constantinople, exercised a personal ministry of oversight over an area much wider than that of their individual ecclesiastical provinces. Such primatial oversight was not seen as opposed to synodality/conciliarity, which expresses more the collegial service to unity. Historically, forms of primacy have existed at various levels. According to canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons, which is expressive of the Church’s self-understanding in the early centuries and is still held in honour by many, though not all, Christians today, the first among the bishops in each nation would only make a decision in agreement with the other bishops and the latter would make no important decision without the agreement of the first.28 Even in the early centuries, the various ministries of primacy were plagued at times by competition between Church leaders. A primacy of decision-making (jurisdiction) and teaching authority, extending to the whole people of God, was gradually claimed by the Bishop of Rome on

26. See Orthodox-Roman Catholic International Dialogue, “Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority,” §5, which notes that synodality may be taken as synonymous with conciliarity.
27. An “ecumenical” council or synod would be one representing the whole Christian world. The first such council is universally recognized as that held at Nicaea in 325 to affirm the divinity of Christ in response to the new teaching of Arius, which denied the Son’s equality with the Father. Churches differ on how many such councils have been held. On ecumenical councils and their authority, see, for example, the Lutheran-Orthodox “Authority in and of the Church: The Ecumenical Councils” (1993), in Growth in Agreement III, 12-14; the subsection “Councils and the Declaration of the Faith” of the Disciples-Roman Catholic, “Receiving and

28. This canon can be found at www.newadvent.org/fathers/3820.htm.
the basis of the relation of that local church to the apostles Peter and Paul. While acknowledged by many churches in the early centuries, its essential role and manner of exercise were matters of significant controversy. In recent years, the ecumenical movement has helped to create a more conciliatory climate in which a ministry in service to the unity of the whole Church has been discussed.

56. Partly because of the progress already recorded in bilateral and multilateral dialogues, the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order raised the question “of a universal ministry of Christian unity.”29 In his encyclical Ut Unum Sint, Pope John Paul II quoted this text when he invited Church leaders and their theologians to “enter into patient and fraternal dialogue” with him concerning this ministry.30 In subsequent discussion, despite continuing areas of disagreement, some members of other churches have expressed an openness to considering how such a ministry might foster the unity of local churches throughout the world and promote, not endanger, the distinctive features of their witness. Given the ecumenical sensitivity of this issue, it is important to distinguish between the essence of a ministry of primacy and any particular ways in which it has been or is currently being exercised. All would agree that any such personal primatial ministry would need to be exercised in communal and collegial ways.

57. There is still much work to be done to arrive at a convergence on this topic. At present Christians do not agree that a universal ministry of primacy is necessary or even desirable, although several bilateral dialogues have acknowledged the value of a ministry in service to the unity of the whole Christian community or even that such a ministry may be included in Christ’s will for his Church.31 The lack of agreement is not simply between certain families of churches but exists within some churches. There has been significant ecumenical discussion of New Testament evidence about a ministry serving the wider unity of the Church, such as those of St Peter or of St Paul. Nevertheless, disagreements remain about the significance of their ministries and what they may imply concerning God’s possible intention for some form of ministry in service to the unity and mission of the Church as a whole.

A Universal Ministry of Unity
If, according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?

CHAPTER IV: The Church: In and for the World
A. God’s Plan for Creation: The Kingdom
58. The reason for the mission of Jesus is succinctly expressed in the words, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). Thus the first and foremost attitude of God towards the world is love, for every child, woman and man who has ever become part of human history and, indeed, for the whole of creation. The kingdom of God, which Jesus preached by revealing the Word of God in parables and inaugurated by his mighty deeds, especially by the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, is the final destiny of the whole universe. The Church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world. Thus, service (diakonia) belongs to the very being of the Church. The study document Church and World described such service in the following way: “As the body of Christ, the Church participates in the divine mystery. As mystery, it reveals Christ to the world by proclaiming the Gospel, by celebrating the sacraments (which are themselves called ‘mysteries’), and by manifesting the newness of life given by him, thus anticipating the Kingdom already present in him.”

59. The Church’s mission in the world is to proclaim to all people, in word and deed, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ (cf. Mk.16:15). Evangelization is thus one of the foremost tasks of the Church in obedience to the command of Jesus (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). The Church is called by Christ in the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the Father’s reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation.

Thus a constitutive aspect of evangelization is the promotion of justice and peace.

60. Today Christians are more aware of the wide array of different religions other than their own and of the positive truths and values they contain. This occasions Christians to recall those gospel passages in which Jesus himself speaks positively about those who were “foreign” or “others” in relation to his listeners (cf. Matt. 8:11-12; Luke 7:9; 13:28-30). Christians acknowledge religious freedom as one of the fundamental dimensions of human dignity and, in the charity called for by Christ himself, they seek to respect that dignity and to dialogue with others, not only to share the riches of Christian faith but also to appreciate whatever elements of truth and goodness are present in other religions. In the past, when proclaiming the Gospel to those who had not yet heard it, due respect was not always given to their religions. Evangelization should always be respectful of those who hold other beliefs. Sharing the joyful news of the truth revealed in the New Testament and inviting others to the fullness of life in Christ is an expression of respectful love. Within the contemporary context of increased awareness of religious pluralism, the possibility of salvation for those who do not explicitly believe in Christ and the relation between interreligious dialogue and the proclamation that Jesus is Lord have increasingly become topics of reflection and discussion among Christians.

Ecumenical Response to Religious Pluralism
There remain serious disagreements within and between churches concerning these issues. The New Testament teaches that God wills the salvation of all people (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4) and, at the same time, that Jesus is the one and only saviour of the world (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5 and Acts 4:12). What conclusions may be drawn from these biblical teachings regarding the possibility of salvation for those who do not believe in Christ? Some hold that, in ways known to God, salvation in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is possible for those who do not explicitly share Christian faith. Others do not see how such a view sufficiently corresponds to biblical passages about the necessity of faith and baptism for salvation. Differences on this question will have an impact upon how one understands and puts into practice the mission of the Church. Within today’s context of increased awareness of the vitality of various religions throughout the world, how may the churches arrive at greater convergence about these issues and cooperate more effectively in witnessing to the Gospel in word and deed?

B. The Moral Challenge of the Gospel
61. Christians are called to repent of their sins, to forgive others and to lead sacrificial lives of service: discipleship demands moral commitment. However, as St Paul so emphatically teaches, human beings are justified not through works of the law but by grace through faith (cf. Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:19-21). Thus the Christian community lives within the sphere of divine forgiveness and grace, which calls forth and shapes the moral life of believers. It is of significant importance for the reestablishment of unity that the two communities whose separation marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation have achieved consensus about the central aspects of the doctrine of justification by faith, the major focus of disagreement at the time of their division. It is on the basis of faith and grace that moral engagement and common action are possible and should be affirmed as intrinsic to the life and being of the Church.

62. The ethics of Christians as disciples are rooted in God, the creator and revealer, and take shape as the community seeks to understand God’s will within the various circumstances of time and place. The Church does not stand in isolation from the moral struggles of humankind as a whole. Together with the adherents of other religions as well as with all persons of good will, Christians must promote not only those individual moral values which are essential

2. On questions relating to this topic, see “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding” (2006), the result of a study process in response to suggestions made in 2002 at the WCC central committee to the three staff teams on Faith and Order, Inter-religious Relations, and Mission and Evangelism, available at: www.oikoumen.org/en/resources/20documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/3-preparatory-and-background%20documents/religious-plurality-christian-self-understanding.html. This statement follows the discussion of the relation between mission and world religions at the conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism held in San Antonio in 1989. Because of its relevance to the general themes taken up in this chapter, some mention of interreligious relations will appear in each of its three sections.

3. The “Charta Oecumenica” (2001) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE), §2, states: “We commit ourselves to recognise that every person can freely choose his or her religious and church affiliation as a matter of conscience, which means not inducing anyone to convert through moral pressure or material incentive, but also not hindering anyone from entering into conversion of his or her own free will. See also “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct” of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance, approved on 28 January 2011, and available at: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interrelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20111110_testimonianza-christiana_en.html.

to the authentic realization of the human person but also the social values of justice, peace and the protection of the environment, since the message of the Gospel extends to both the personal and the communal aspects of human existence. Thus koinonia includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based upon the inspiration and insights of the Gospel. Notwithstanding their current state of division, the churches have come so far in fellowship with one another that they are aware that what one does affects the life of others, and, in consequence, are increasingly conscious of the need to be accountable to each other with respect to their ethical reflections and decisions. As churches engage in mutual questioning and affirmation, they give expression to what they share in Christ.

63. While tensions about moral issues have always been a concern for the Church, in the world of today, philosophical, social and cultural developments have led to the rethinking of many moral norms, causing new conflicts over moral principles and ethical questions to affect the unity of the churches. At the same time, moral questions are related to Christian anthropology, and priority is given to the Gospel in evaluating new developments in moral thinking. Individual Christians and churches sometimes find themselves divided into opposing opinions about what principles of personal or collective morality are in harmony with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Moreover, some believe that moral questions are not of their nature “church-dividing,” while others are firmly convinced that they are.

Moral Questions and the Unity of the Church
Ecumenical dialogue at the multilateral and bilateral levels has begun to sketch out some of the parameters of the significance of moral doctrine and practice for Christian unity.5 If present and future ecumenical dialogue is to serve both the mission and the unity of the Church, it is important that this dialogue explicitly address the challenges to convergence represented by contemporary moral issues. We invite the churches to explore these issues in a spirit of mutual attentiveness and support. How might the churches, guided by the Spirit, discern together what it means today to understand and live in fidelity to the teaching and attitude of Jesus? How can the churches, as they engage together in this task of discernment, offer appropriate models of discourse and wise counsel to the societies in which they are called to serve?

C. The Church in Society
64. The world that “God so loved” is scarred with problems and tragedies which cry out for the compassionate engagement of Christians. The source of their passion for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ. They believe that God, who is absolute love, mercy and justice, can work through them, in the power of the Holy Spirit. They live as disciples of the One who cared for the blind, the lame and the leper, who welcomed the poor and the outcast, and who challenged authorities who showed little regard for human dignity or the will of God. The Church needs to help those without power in society to be heard; at times it must become a voice for those who are voiceless. Precisely because of their faith, Christian communities cannot stand idly by in the face of natural disasters which affect their fellow human beings or threaten to health such as the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Faith also impels them to work for a just social order, in which the goods of this earth may be shared equitably, the suffering of the poor eased and absolute destitution one day eliminated. The tremendous economic inequalities that plague the human family, such as those in our day that often differentiate the global North from the global South, need to be an abiding concern for all the churches. As followers of the “Prince of Peace,” Christians advocate peace, especially by seeking to overcome the causes of war (principal among which are economic injustice, racism, ethnic and religious hatred, exaggerated nationalism, oppression and the use of violence to resolve differences). Jesus said that he came so that human beings may have life in abundance (cf. John 10:10); his followers acknowledge their responsibility to defend human life and dignity. These are obligations on churches as much as on individual believers. Each context will provide its own clues to discern what is the appropriate Christian response within any particular set of circumstances. Even now, divided Christian communities can and do carry out such discernment together and have acted jointly to bring relief to suffering human beings and to help create a society that fosters human dignity.6


6. See, for example, the Reformed-Roman Catholic text “The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God,” whose second chapter narrates cooperation between these churches concerning aboriginal rights in Canada, apartheid in South Africa and peace in Northern Ireland and whose third chapter describes the patterns of discernment used in each community, in PCPCU, Information Service N. 125 (2007/III), 121-138, and Reformed World 57(2/3), June-September 2007, 105-207.
Christians will seek to promote the values of the kingdom of God by working together with adherents of other religions and even with those of no religious belief.

65. Many historical, cultural and demographic factors condition the relation between Church and state, and between Church and society. Various models of this relation based on contextual circumstances can be legitimate expressions of the Church’s catholicity. It is altogether appropriate for believers to play a positive role in civic life. However, Christians have at times colluded with secular authorities in ways that condoned or even abetted sinful and unjust activities. The explicit call of Jesus that his disciples be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (cf. Matt. 5:13-16) has led Christians to engage with political and economic authorities in order to promote the values of the kingdom of God, and to oppose policies and initiatives which contradict them. This entails critically analyzing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation, but also supporting initiatives of the civil authorities that promote justice, peace, the protection of the environment and the care for the poor and the oppressed. In this way Christians are able to stand in the tradition of the prophets who proclaimed God’s judgment on all injustice. This will very likely expose them to persecution and suffering. The servanthood of Christ led to the offering of his life on the cross and he himself foretold that his followers should expect a similar fate. The witness (Martyria) of the Church will entail, for both individuals and for the community, the way of the cross, even to the point of martyrdom (cf. Matt. 10:16-33).

66. The Church is comprised of all socio-economic classes; both rich and poor are in need of the salvation that only God can provide. After the example of Jesus, the Church is called and empowered in a special way to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalized. The Church proclaims the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, engages in works of compassion and mercy (cf. Luke 4:18-19) and is commissioned to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to serve God in the ministry of reconciling those divided by hatred or estrangement (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21). Together with all people of goodwill, the Church seeks to care for creation, which groans to share in the freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom. 8:20-22), by opposing the abuse and destruction of the earth and participating in God’s healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity.

CONCLUSION

67. The unity of the body of Christ consists in the gift of koinonia or communion that God graciously bestows upon human beings. There is a growing consensus that koinonia, as communion with the Holy Trinity, is manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (in all its forms, including ministry and mission). The liturgy, especially the celebration of the eucharist, serves as a dynamic paradigm for what such koinonia looks like in the present age. In the liturgy, the people of God experience communion with God and fellowship with Christians of all times and places. They gather with their presider, proclaim the Good News, confess their faith, pray, teach and learn, offer praise and thanksgiving, receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, and are sent out in mission.1 St John Chrysostom spoke about two altars: one in the Church and the other among the poor, the suffering and those in distress.2 Strengthened and nourished by the liturgy, the Church must continue the life-giving mission of Christ in prophetic and compassionate ministry to the world and in struggle against every form of injustice and oppression, mistrust and conflict created by human beings.

68. One blessing of the ecumenical movement has been the discovery of the many aspects of discipleship which churches share, even though they do not yet live in full communion. Our brokenness and division contradict Christ’s will for the unity of his disciples and hinder the mission of the Church. This is why the restoration of unity between Christians, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is such an urgent task. Growth in communion unfolds within that wider fellowship of believers that extends back into the past and forward into the future to include the entire communion of saints. The final destiny of the Church is to be caught up in the koinonia communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to be part of the new creation, praising and rejoicing in God forever (cf. Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5).

69. “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). The New Testament ends with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, transformed by the grace of God (cf. Rev. 21:1-22:5). This new cosmos

1. The previous sentences largely repeat and paraphrase the statement from the 9th Forum on Bilateral Dialogues, held in Breklum, Germany, in March 2008. For the statement drawn up by this forum, see The Ecumenical Review 61(3), October 2009, 343-347; see also www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/breklum-statement.pdf.

is promised for the end of history but is already present in an anticipatory way even now as the Church, upheld by faith and hope in its pilgrimage through time, calls out in love and worship “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). Christ loves the Church as the bridegroom loves his bride (cf. Eph. 5:25) and, until the wedding feast of the Lamb in the kingdom of heaven (cf. Rev. 19:7), shares with her his mission of bringing light and healing to human beings until he comes again in glory.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Process Leading to the Church: Towards a Common Vision
The World Council of Churches describes itself as “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” This “common calling” impels the churches to seek together convergence and greater consensus on the ecclesiological issues that yet divide them: What is the Church? What is the Church’s role in God’s cosmic design of recapitulation of all things in Jesus Christ?

During the past centuries, the way Christian churches have answered these questions has been marked by the fact that they live and do theology in an abnormal situation of ecclesial division. Therefore it is not surprising that a strong emphasis on ecclesiology—the theological question about the Church—accompanies the history of the modern ecumenical movement.

Thus, the 1927 World Conference on Faith and Order focused on seven theological subjects. One of them was dedicated to the nature of the Church; a second dealt with the relation between the one Church we confess and the divided churches we experience in history. Based on the churches’ responses to the findings of that meeting, the organizers of the 1937 Second World Conference on Faith and Order proposed that the overarching theme for the next World Conference should be “The Church in the Purpose of God.” While the Second World Conference did not abide specifically with this theme, two of its five sections addressed core ecclesiological issues: “The Church of Christ and the Word of God” and “The Communion of Saints.” The 1937 World Conference concluded with the conviction that questions about the nature of the Church were at the root of most of the remaining dividing issues.

In 1948 the recognition of oneness in Christ gave rise to a fellowship of still divided communions, made manifest in the establishment of the World Council of Churches. The report of that first WCC Assembly stated clearly that despite their oneness in Christ, the churches were fundamentally divided into two mutually inconsistent understandings of the Church, shaped by a more “active” or a more “passive” understanding of the role of the Church in God’s salvation of the world. It was in this new, complex ecumenical context—in which convergence on a lived Christology was helping the churches to recognize in each other vestiges of the one Church while remaining ecclesially and ecclesiologically divided—that the World Council of Churches’ Commission on Faith and Order held its 1952 Third World Conference.

Unsurprisingly, once again, the first of the three theological reports prepared for the Third World Conference was based on a comprehensive exercise of comparative ecumenical ecclesiology. The fruits of this exercise were gathered in the book The Nature of the Church, and this, in turn, issued in the third chapter of the Conference’s final report entitled “Christ and His Church.”

7. Ibid., 228-235, 236-238.
precisely the theme of the study report13 presented, eleven years later, to the Section I of the 1963 Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, called “The Church in the Purpose of God.”14

The same emphasis on ecumenical ecclesiology has been demonstrated by the major statements about unity received by the assemblies of the WCC: The 1961 New Delhi statement on the unity of “all in each place”; the 1975 Nairobi statement on the one Church as a conciliar fellowship; the 1991 Canberra statement on the unity of the Church as koinonia/communion; and the 2006 Porto Alegre statement “Called to Be the One Church.”15 All these have been cumulative steps towards convergence and greater consensus on ecclesiology.

Compelled by the ecumenical vision of “all in each place” brought by the Holy Spirit into full visible unity in the apostolic faith, sacramental life, ministry, and mission, the Commission on Faith and Order dedicated a significant amount of its work in the years following the 1961 New Delhi Assembly to a convergence text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.*16

A significant moment in Faith and Order reflection on ecclesiology was the Fifth World Conference of 1993 at Santiago de Compostela, Spain. A number of factors shaped this World Conference with its theme “Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness.” The first factor was the interpretation of the churches’ responses to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,* with its six published volumes of official responses.20 The careful analysis of the 186 responses to BEM concluded with a list of several major ecclesiological themes that were requested for further study: The role of the Church in God’s saving purpose; koinonia; the Church as a gift of the word of God (creatura verbi); the Church as mystery or sacrament of God’s love for the world; the Church as the pilgrim people of God; the Church as prophetic sign and servant of God’s coming kingdom.21 The second factor shaping the 1993 Conference was the results of the Faith and Order study process “Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today,”22 which demonstrated an encouraging convergence about the entire doctrinal content of the Creed, including what it professes regarding the Church. The third factor was the study process on “The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community,”23 which underlined the nature of the Church as sign and instrument of God’s saving design for the world. And fourth were the ecclesiological challenges raised by the conciliar process on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.24 As well, there was new ecumenical momentum created by the growing prominence of communion ecclesiology in the bilateral dialogues. These movements in the 1980s converged in the decision, taken by the Faith and Order Plenary Commission in 1989, to launch a new study on what was then called “The Nature and Mission of the Church—Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology.”25 The very theme of the Fifth World Conference—“Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness”—reflected all these study processes of the 1980s. While *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* takes its place within this long trajectory of Faith and Order reflection on the Church, fresh impetus was given to this work at the Fifth World Conference in 1993.


Chapter 1. The History of the Ecumenical Movement

The second chapter on history highlighted the problems as servant of the Kingdom and with the creedal affirmations that the nature and mission of the Church as people of God, body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit, with biblical insights on the church as community (koinonia) and on the mission of the Church as servant of the Kingdom and with the creedal affirmation of the Church as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. The second chapter on history highlighted the problems that afflict the churches in their present division: how can diversity be harmonized with unity and what makes for legitimate diversity? How do the churches understand the local church and how is it related to all other churches? What are the historic and ongoing issues that divide Christians? The third chapter highlighted the elements necessary for communion between the churches, such as apostolic faith, baptism, eucharist, ministry, episkopé, councils and synods, with the themes of universal primacy and authority now included. A final chapter more briefly explored the Church’s service to the world in assisting those who suffer, defending the oppressed, witnessing to the moral message of the Gospel, working for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and generally seeking to promote a human society more in keeping with the values of the Kingdom of God.

This revised text on ecclesiology was also subtitled “A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement,” and it too was sent to the churches for response. Over eighty responses were received, although only around thirty were specifically from the churches. Most of the responses were received, although only around thirty were specifically from the churches. Most of the responses from the churches, academic and ecumenical institutes, and significantly from missionary organizations, expressed satisfaction that the mission of the Church was given greater prominence, even having a place in the title. Other comments were concerned that the use of the two words—nature and mission—would obscure the fact that the Church is by its very nature missionary. To assist the Ecclesiology Working Group in assessing the responses to The Nature and Mission of the Church, Faith and Order staff prepared detailed summaries and initial analyses of every response.

Three particularly significant steps were taken in evaluating The Nature and Mission of the Church. First, the Plenary Commission of Faith and Order, with its 120 members representing the various churches, held its meeting in Crete in October 2009. This gathering brought together many who were participating in Faith and Order for the first time and the meeting was structured in such a way as to maximize the input of the commissioners to the three study projects of Faith and Order, especially the ecclesiology study. A number of plenary sessions assessed The Nature and Mission of the Church. A major direction from the Plenary Commission was to shorten the text and to make it more contextual, more reflective of the lives of the churches throughout the world, and more accessible to a wider readership. Twelve working groups discussed The Nature and Mission of the Church, and produced detailed evaluations on the text.

31. Cf. ibid. 207-231.
Second, in June 2010 at Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia, the Faith and Order Standing Commission decided that after a careful examination of the responses to *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, and the evaluations of the text from the meeting of the Plenary Commission in Crete, the time was right to begin a final revision. A drafting committee was appointed with theologians coming from the Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, and Reformed traditions; the two co-moderators came from the Methodist and Orthodox traditions respectively.

Third, the commission was aware of a significant lacuna in the responses process: There was as yet no substantial response from the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. Accordingly, a major inter-Orthodox consultation was held Aghia Napa, Cyprus, in the Holy Metropolitane of Constantia, in March of 2011, which included 40 delegated theologians from ten Eastern Orthodox and three Oriental Orthodox churches. The consultation produced an extensive evaluation of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. A major suggestion was to integrate more clearly the material on baptism, eucharist and ministry into the presentation of what is essential to the life of the Church. The consultation and its report became a significant component of the next meeting of the Ecclesiology Working Group, and hence played a unique role in the process that led to the new text.

Extensive analysis of the responses continued at the first meeting of the drafting committee in Geneva in late November, 2010. The process was given fresh impetus after the inter-Orthodox consultation in early March, 2011. A meeting of the Ecclesiology Working Group which took place in Columbus, Ohio, USA, later that month produced a new draft version of the text that was presented to the Standing Commission of Faith and Order in Gazzada, Italy, in July 2011. Many comments were received from the commissioners, mostly quite favorable but suggesting that the text needed to emphasize more clearly ways in which progress had been made towards greater convergence, especially on the ministry, and in particular in bilateral agreed statements, as well as recent Faith and Order work, such as the study text *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*.32

This request was addressed by strengthening some of the formulations and supporting them with notes which substantiate the progress achieved towards convergence. Subsequently, another version was prepared by the drafting committee at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, in December 2011. The drafting committee was much aided by reflections coming from staff of the WCC’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The resulting text was then submitted to four outside ecumenical experts for a fresh evaluation; their suggestions were evaluated and incorporated by the drafting committee and presented to the Ecclesiology Working Group in a meeting held in Freising, Germany, late March 2012. On the basis of the discussions and reactions to the text at the Freising meeting, the Ecclesiology Working Group arrived at a final draft to be presented to the Faith and Order Standing Commission.

In Penang, Malaysia, on 21 June 2012, the final text was presented to the Standing Commission, which unanimously approved it as a convergence statement with the title *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Thus the present text is not a stage on the way to a further common statement; it is the common statement to which its previous versions—*The Nature and Purpose of the Church* and *The Nature and Mission of the Church*—were directed. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* brings to completion a particular stage of Faith and Order reflection on the Church. The commission believes that its reflection has reached such a level of maturity that it can be identified as a convergence text, that is, a text of the same status and character as the 1982 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. As such, it is being sent to the churches as a common point of reference in order to test or discern their own ecclesiological convergences with one another, and so to serve their further pilgrimage towards the manifestation of that unity for which Christ prayed. The central committee of the World Council of Churches at its meeting in Crete, Greece, in early September, 2012, received *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and commended it to the member churches for study and formal response.

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1.6 THE MISSION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN TODAY’S WORLD

The contribution of the Orthodox Church in realizing peace, justice, freedom, fraternity and love between peoples, and in the removal of racial and other discriminations.

For God so loved the world that he gave his Only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). The Church of Christ exists in the world, but is not of the world (cf. Jn 17:11, 14-15). The Church as the Body of the incarnate Logos of God (John Chrysostom, Homily before Exile, 2 PG 52, 429) constitutes the living “presence” as the sign and image of the Kingdom of the Triune God in history, proclaims the good news of a new creation (II Cor 5:17), of new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (II Pt 3:13); news of a world in which God will wipe away every tear from people’s eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain (Rev 21:4-5).

Such hope is experienced and foretasted by the Church, especially each time the Divine Eucharist is celebrated, bringing together (I Cor 11:20) the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52) without regard to race, sex, age, social, or any other condition into a single body where there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11).

This foretaste of the new creation—of a world transfigured—is also experienced by the Church in the countenance of her saints who, through their spiritual struggles and virtues, have already revealed the image of the Kingdom of God in this life, thereby proving and affirming that the expectation of a world of peace, justice, and love is not a utopia, but the substance of things hoped for (Heb 11:1), attainable through the grace of God and man’s spiritual struggle.

Finding constant inspiration in this expectation and foretaste of the Kingdom of God, the Church cannot remain indifferent to the problems of humanity in each period. On the contrary, she shares in our anguish and existential problems, taking upon herself—as the Lord did—our suffering and wounds, which are caused by evil in the world and, like the Good Samaritan, pouring oil and wine upon our wounds through words of patience and comfort (Rom 15:4; Heb 13:22), and through love in practice.

The word addressed to the world is not primarily meant to judge and condemn the world (cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47), but rather to offer to the world the guidance of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—namely, the hope and assurance that evil, no matter its form, does not have the last word in history and must not be allowed to dictate its course.

The conveyance of the Gospel’s message according to the last commandment of Christ, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matt 28:19) is the diachronic mission of the Church. This mission must be carried out not aggressively or by different forms of proselytism, but in love, humility and respect towards the identity of each person and the cultural particularity of each people. All the Orthodox Church have an obligation to contribute to this missionary endeavor.

Drawing from these principles and the accumulated experience and teaching of her patristic, liturgical, and ascetical tradition, the Orthodox Church shares the concern and anxiety of contemporary humanity with regard to fundamental existential questions that preoccupy the world today. She thus desires to help resolve these issues, allowing the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7), reconciliation, and love to prevail in the world.

A. The Dignity of the Human Person

1. The human person’s unique dignity, which stems from being created in the image and likeness of God and from our role in God’s plan for humanity and the world, was the source of inspiration for the Church Fathers, who entered deeply into the mystery of divine oikonomia. Regarding the human being, St. Gregory the Theologian characteristically emphasizes that: The Creator sets a sort of second world upon the earth, great in its smallness, another angel, a worshipper of composite nature, contemplator of visible creation, and initiate of intelligible creation, a king over all that is on earth... a living being, prepared here and transported elsewhere and (which is the culmination of the mystery) deified through attraction towards God (Homily 45, On Holy Pascha, 7. PG 36, 632AB). The purpose of the incarnation of the Word of God is the deification of the human being. Christ, having renewed within himself the old Adam (cf. Eph 2:15), made the human person divine like himself; the beginning of our hope (Eusebius of Caesarea, Demonstrations on the Gospel, Book 4, 14. PG 22, 289A). For just as the entire human race was contained in the old Adam, so too, the entire human race is now gathered in the new Adam: The Only-begotten One became man in order to gather into one and return to its
original condition the fallen human race (Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of John, Book 9, PG 74, 273D–275A). This teaching of the Church is the endless source of all Christian efforts to safeguard the dignity and majesty of the human person.

2. On this basis, it is essential to develop inter-Christian cooperation in every direction for the protection of human dignity and of course for the good of peace, so that the peace-keeping efforts of all Christians without exception may acquire greater weight and significance.

3. As a presupposition for a wider co-operation in this regard the common acceptance of the highest value of the human person may be useful. The various local Orthodox Churches can contribute to inter-religious understanding and co-operation for the peaceful co-existence and harmonious living together in society, without this involving any religious syncretism.

4. We are convinced that, as God’s fellow workers (I Cor 3:9), we can advance to this common service together with all people of good will, who love peace that is pleasing to God, for the sake of human society on the local, national, and international levels. This ministry is a commandment of God (Mt 5:9).

B. Freedom and Responsibility

1. Freedom is one of God’s greatest gifts to the human being. He who created man in the beginning made him free and self-determined, limiting him solely by the laws of the commandment (Gregory the Theologian, Homily 14, On Love for the Poor, 25. PG 35, 892A). Freedom renders the human being capable of progressing toward spiritual perfection; yet, it also includes the risk of disobedience as independence from God and consequently the fall, which tragically gives rise to evil in the world.

2. The consequences of evil include those imperfections and shortcomings prevailing today, including: secularism; violence; moral laxity; detrimental phenomena such as the use of addictive substances and other addictions especially in the lives of certain youth; racism; the arms race and wars, as well as the resulting social catastrophes; the oppression of certain social groups, religious communities, and entire peoples; social inequality; the restriction of human rights in the field of freedom of conscience—in particular religious freedom; the misinformation and manipulation of public opinion; economic misery; the disproportionate redistribution of vital resources or complete lack thereof; the hunger of millions of people; forced migration of populations and human trafficking; the refugee crisis; the destruction of the environment; and the unrestrained use of genetic biotechnology and biomedicine at the beginning, duration, and end of human life. These all create infinite anxiety for humanity today.

3. Faced with this situation, which has degraded the concept of the human person, the duty of the Orthodox Church today is—through its preaching, theology, worship, and pastoral activity—to assert the truth of freedom in Christ. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being…for why is my liberty judged of another man’s conscience? (I Cor 10:23–24, 29). Freedom without responsibility and love eventually leads to loss of freedom.

C. Peace and Justice

1. The Orthodox Church has diachronically recognized and revealed the centrality of peace and justice in people’s lives. The very revelation of Christ is characterized as a gospel of peace (Eph 6:15), for Christ has brought peace to all through the blood of His Cross (Col 1:20), preached peace to those afar and near (Eph 2:17), and has become our peace (Eph 2:14). This peace, which surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7), as the Lord Himself told His disciples before His passion, is broader and more essential than the peace promised by the world: peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you (Jn 14:27). This is because the peace of Christ is the ripe fruit of the restoration of all things in Him, the revelation of the human person’s dignity and majesty as an image of God, the manifestation of the organic unity in Christ between humanity and the world, the universality of the principles of peace, freedom, and social justice, and ultimately the blossoming of Christian love among people and nations of the world. The reign of all these Christian principles on earth gives rise to authentic peace. It is the peace from above, for which the Orthodox Church prays constantly in its daily petitions, asking this of the almighty God, Who hears the prayers of those that draw near to Him in faith.

2. From the aforementioned, it is clear why the Church, as the body of Christ (I Cor 12:27), always prays for the peace of the whole world; this peace, according to Clement of Alexandria, is synonymous with justice (Stromates 4, 25. PG 8, 1369B–72A). To this, Basil the Great adds: I cannot convince myself that without mutual love and without peace with all people, in as far as it is within
my possibilities, I can call myself a worthy servant of Jesus Christ (Epistle 203, 2. PG 32, 737B). As the same Saint notes, this is self-evident for a Christian, for nothing is so characteristic of a Christian as to be a peacemaker (Epistle 114. PG 32, 528B). The peace of Christ is a mystical power that springs forth from the reconciliation between the human being and the heavenly Father, according to the providence of Christ, Who brings all things to perfection in Him and who makes peace ineffable and predestined from the ages, and Who reconciles us with Himself, and in Himself with the Father (Dionysius the Aeropagite, On the Divine Names, 11, 5, PG 3, 953AB).

3. At the same time, we are obligated to underline that the gifts of peace and justice also depend on human synergy. The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts when, in repentance, we seek God’s peace and righteousness. These gifts of peace and justice are manifested wherever Christians strive for the work of faith, love, and hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thes 1:3).

4. Sin is a spiritual illness, whose external symptoms include conflict, division, crime, and war, as well as the tragic consequences of these. The Church strives to eliminate not only the external symptoms of illness, but the illness itself, namely, sin.

5. At the same time, the Orthodox Church considers it is her duty to encourage all that which genuinely serves the cause of peace (Rom 14:19) and paves the way to justice, fraternity, true freedom, and mutual love among all children of the one heavenly Father as well as between all peoples who make up the one human family. She suffers with all people who in various parts of the world are deprived of the benefits of peace and justice.

D. Peace and the Aversion of War

1. The Church of Christ condemns war in general, recognizing it as the result of the presence of evil and sin in the world: Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? (Jm 4:1). Every war threatens to destroy creation and life.

This is most particularly the case with wars with weapons of mass destruction because their consequences would be horrific not only because they lead to the death of an unforeseeable number of people, but also because they render life unbearable for those who survive. They also lead to incurable diseases, cause genetic mutations and other disasters, with catastrophic impact on future generations.

The amassing not only of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, but of all kinds of weapons, poses very serious dangers inasmuch as they create a false sense of superiority and dominance over the rest of the world. Moreover, such weapons create an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, becoming the impetus for a new arms race.

2. The Church of Christ, which understands war as essentially the result of evil and sin in the world, supports all initiatives and efforts to prevent or avert it through dialogue and every other viable means. When war becomes inevitable, the Church continues to pray and care in a pastoral manner for her children who are involved in military conflict for the sake of defending their life and freedom, while making every effort to bring about the swift restoration of peace and freedom.

3. The Orthodox Church resolutely condemns the multi-faceted conflicts and wars provoked by fanaticism that derives from religious principles. There is grave concern over the permanent trend of increasing oppression and persecution of Christians and other communities in the Middle East and elsewhere because of their beliefs; equally troubling are the attempts to uproot Christianity from its traditional homelands. As a result, existing interfaith and international relations are threatened, while many Christians are forced to abandon their homes. Orthodox Christians throughout the world suffer with their fellow Christians and all those being persecuted in this region, while also calling for a just and lasting resolution to the region’s problems.

Wars inspired by nationalism and leading to ethnic cleansing, the violation of state borders, and the seizure of territory are also condemned.

E. The Attitude of the Church toward Discrimination

1. The Lord, as King of righteousness (Heb 7:2-3) denounces violence and injustice (Ps 10:5), while condemning the inhumane treatment of one’s neighbor (Mt 25:41-46; Jm 2:15-16). In His Kingdom, reflected and present in His Church on earth, there is no place for hatred, enmity, or intolerance (Is 11:6; Rom 12:10).

2. The Orthodox Church’s position on this is clear. She believes that God has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth (Acts 17:26) and that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). To the question: Who is my neighbor?, Christ responded with the parable of the
Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). In so doing, He taught us to tear down all barriers erected by enmity and prejudice. The Orthodox Church confesses that every human being, regardless of skin color, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society. Consistent with this belief, the Orthodox Church rejects discrimination for any of the aforementioned reasons since these presuppose a difference in dignity between people.

3. The Church, in the spirit of respecting human rights and equal treatment of all, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the role of both genders in the Church, and the overall principles of Church tradition. The Church has the right to proclaim and witness to her teaching in the public sphere.

F. The Mission of the Orthodox Church as a Witness of Love through Service

1. In fulfilling her salvific mission in the world, the Orthodox Church actively cares for all people in need, including the hungry, the poor, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the persecuted, those in captivity and prison, the homeless, the orphans, the victims of destruction and military conflict, those affected by human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. The Orthodox Church’s efforts to confront destitution and social injustice are an expression of her faith and the service to the Lord, Who identifies Himself with every person and especially with those in need: Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Mt 25:40). This multidimensional social service enables the Church to cooperate with various relevant social institutions.

2. Competition and enmity in the world introduce injustice and inequitable access among individuals and peoples to the resources of divine creation. They deprive millions of people of fundamental goods and lead to the degradation of human person; they incite mass migrations of populations, and they engender ethnic, religious, and social conflicts, which threaten the internal cohesion of communities.

3. The Church cannot remain indifferent before economic conditions that negatively impact humanity as a whole. She insists not only on the need for the economy to be grounded upon ethical principles, but that it must also tangibly serve the needs of human beings in accordance with the teaching of the Apostle Paul: By laboring like this, you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35). Basil the Great writes that each person should make it his duty to help those in need and not satisfy his own needs (Moral Rules, 42. PG 31, 1025A).

4. The gap between rich and poor is dramatically exacerbated due to the financial crisis, which normally results from the unbridled profiteering by some representatives of financial circles, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and perverted business practices devoid of justice and humanitarian sensitivity, which ultimately do not serve humanity’s true needs. A sustainable economy is that which combines efficiency with justice and social solidarity.

5. In light of such tragic circumstances, the Church’s great responsibility is perceived in terms of overcoming hunger and all other forms of deprivation in the world. One such phenomenon in our time—whereby nations operate within a globalized economic system—points to the world’s serious identity crisis, for hunger not only threatens the divine gift of life of whole peoples, but also offends the lofty dignity and sacredness of the human person, while simultaneously offending God. Therefore, if concern over our own sustenance is a material issue, then concern over feeding our neighbor is a spiritual issue (Jm 2:14-18). Consequently, it is the mission of all Orthodox Churches to exhibit solidarity and administer assistance effectively to those in need.

6. The Holy Church of Christ, in her universal body—embracing in her fold many peoples on earth—emphasizes the principle of universal solidarity and supports the closer cooperation of nations and states for the sake of resolving conflicts peacefully.

7. The Church is concerned about the ever-increasing imposition upon humanity of a consumerist lifestyle, devoid of Christian ethical principles. In this sense, consumerism combined with secular globalization tends to lead to the loss of nations’ spiritual roots, their historical loss of memory, and the forgetfulness of their traditions.

8. Mass media frequently operate under the control of an ideology of liberal globalization and is thus rendered an instrument for disseminating consumerism and immorality. Instances of disrespectful—at times blasphemous—attitudes toward religious values are cause for particular concern, inasmuch as arousing division and conflict in society. The Church warns her children of the risk of influence on their conscience by the mass media, as well as its use to manipulate rather than bring people and nations together.
9. Even as the Church proceeds to preach and realize her salvific mission for the world, she is all the more frequently confronted by expressions of secularism. The Church of Christ in the world is called to express once again and to promote the content of her prophetic witness to the world, grounded on the experience of faith and recalling her true mission through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the cultivation of a sense of unity among her flock. In this way, she opens up a broad field of opportunity since an essential element of her ecclesiology promotes Eucharistic communion and unity within a shattered world.

10. The yearning for continuous growth in prosperity and an unfettered consumerism inevitably lead to a disproportionate use and depletion of natural resources. Nature, which was created by God and given to humankind to work and preserve (cf. Gen 2:15), endures the consequences of human sin: For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now (Rom 8:20-22).

The ecological crisis, which is connected to climate change and global warming, makes it incumbent upon the Church to do everything within her spiritual power to protect God’s creation from the consequences of human greed. As the gratification of material needs, greed leads to spiritual impoverishment of the human being and to environmental destruction. We should not forget that the earth's natural resources are not our property, but the Creator’s: The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world, and those who dwell therein (Ps 23:1). Therefore, the Orthodox Church emphasizes the protection of God’s creation through the cultivation of human responsibility for our God-given environment and the promotion of the virtues of frugality and self-restraint. We are obliged to remember that not only present, but also future generations have a right to enjoy the natural goods granted to us by the Creator.

11. For the Orthodox Church, the ability to explore the world scientifically is a gift from God to humanity. However, along with this positive attitude, the Church simultaneously recognizes the dangers latent in the use of certain scientific achievements. She believes that the scientist is indeed free to conduct research, but that the scientist is also obliged to interrupt this research when it violates basic Christian and humanitarian values. According to St. Paul, All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful (1 Cor 6:12), and according to St. Gregory the Theologian, Goodness is not goodness if the means are wrong (1st Theological Oration, 4, PG 36, 16C). This perspective of the Church proves necessary for many reasons in order to establish proper boundaries for freedom and the application of the fruits of science, where in almost all disciplines, but especially in biology, we can expect both new achievements and risks. At the same time, we emphasize the unquestionable sacredness of human life from its conception.

12. Over the last years, we observe an immense development in the biological sciences and in corresponding biotechnologies. Many of these achievements are considered beneficial for humankind, while others raise ethical dilemmas and still others are deemed unacceptable. The Orthodox Church believes that the human being is not merely a composition of cells, bones, and organs; nor again is the human person defined solely by biological factors. Man is created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and reference to humanity must take place with due respect. The recognition of this fundamental principle leads to the conclusion that, both in the process of scientific investigation as well as in the practical application of new discoveries and innovations, we should preserve the absolute right of each individual to be respected and honored at all stages of life. Moreover, we should respect the will of God as manifested through creation. Research must take into account ethical and spiritual principles, as well as Christian precepts. Indeed, due respect must be rendered to all of God’s creation in regard to both the way humanity treats and science explores it, in accordance to God’s commandment (Gen 2:15).

13. In these times of secularization marked by a spiritual crisis characteristic of contemporary civilization, it is especially necessary to highlight the significance of life’s sacredness. The misunderstanding of freedom as permissiveness leads to an increase in crime, the destruction and defacement of those things held in high regard, as well as the total disrespect of our neighbor's freedom and of the sacredness of life. Orthodox Tradition, shaped by the experience of Christian truths in practice, is the bearer of spirituality and the ascetic ethos, which must especially be encouraged in our time.

14. The Church’s special pastoral care for young people represents an unceasing and unchanging Christ-centered process of formation. Of course, the pastoral responsibility of the Church also extends to the divinely-granted
Together towards Life: Introducing the Theme

1. We believe in the Triune God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life. God created the whole *oikoumene* in God’s image and constantly works in the world to affirm and safeguard life. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Life of the world, the incarnation of God’s love for the world (John 3:16). Affirming life in all its fullness is Jesus Christ’s ultimate concern and mission (John 10:10). We believe in God, the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver, who sustains and empowers life and renews the whole creation (Genesis 2:7; John 3:8). A denial of life is a rejection of the God of life. God invites us into the life-giving mission of the Triune God and empowers us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life for all in the new heaven and earth. How and where do we discern God’s life-giving work that enables us to participate in God’s mission today?

2. Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God and the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation. The missionary God who sent the Son to the world calls all God’s people (John 20:21), and empowers them to be a community of hope. The church is commissioned to celebrate life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit. How important it is to “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22) to become living witnesses to the coming reign of God! From a renewed appreciation of the mission of the Spirit, how do we re-envision God’s mission in a changing and diverse world today?

3. Life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission, the core of why we do what we do, and how we live our lives. Spirituality gives deepest meaning to our lives and motivates our actions. It is a sacred gift from the Creator, the energy for affirming and caring for life. This mission spirituality has a dynamic of transformation which, through spiritual commitment of people, is capable of transforming the world in God’s grace. How can we reclaim mission as transformative spirituality which is life-affirming?

4. God did not send the Son for the salvation of humanity alone or give us a partial salvation. Rather the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is, therefore, vital to recognize God’s mission in a cosmic sense, and to affirm all life, the whole *oikoumene*, as being interconnected in God’s web of life. As threats to the future of our planet are
evident, what are their implications for our participation in God’s mission?

5. The history of Christian mission has been characterized by conceptions of geographical expansion from a Christian centre to the “un-reached territories,” to the ends of the earth. But today we are facing a radically changing ecclesial landscape described as “world Christianity” where the majority of Christians are either living, or have their origins in the global South and East. Migration has become a worldwide, multi-directional phenomenon which is re-shaping the Christian landscape. The emergence of strong Pentecostal and charismatic movements from different localities is one of the most noteworthy characteristics of world Christianity today. What are the insights for mission and evangelism—theologies, agendas and practices—of this “shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity”?

6. Mission has been understood as a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginalized of society. Now people at the margins are claiming their key role as agents of mission and affirming mission as transformation. This reversal of roles in terms of envisioning mission has strong biblical foundations because God chose the poor, the foolish and the powerless (1 Corinthians 1:18-31) to further God’s mission of justice and peace so that life may flourish. If there is a shift of the mission concept from “mission to the margins” to “mission from the margins,” what then is the distinctive contribution of the people from the margins? And why are their experiences and visions crucial for re-imagining mission and evangelism today?

7. We are living in a world in which faith in mammon threatens the credibility of the gospel. Market ideology is spreading the propaganda that the global market will save the world through unlimited growth. This myth is a threat not only to economic life but also to the spiritual life of people, and not only to humanity but also to the whole creation. How can we proclaim the good news and values of God’s kingdom in the global market, or win over the spirit of the market? What kind of missional action can the church take in the midst of economic and ecological injustice and crisis on a global scale?

8. All Christians, churches and congregations are called to be vibrant messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the good news of salvation. Evangelism is a confident but humble sharing of our faith and conviction with other people. Such sharing is a gift to others which announces the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ. It is the inevitable fruit of genuine faith. Therefore, in each generation, the church must renew its commitment to evangelism as an essential part of the way we convey God’s love to the world. How can we proclaim God’s love and justice to a generation living in an individualized, secularized and materialized world?

9. The church lives in multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts and new communication technology is also bringing the people of the world into a greater awareness of one another’s identities and pursuits. Locally and globally Christians are engaged with people of other religions and cultures in building societies of love, peace and justice. Plurality is a challenge to the churches and serious commitment to inter-faith dialogue and cross-cultural communication is therefore indispensable. What are the ecumenical convictions regarding common witnessing and practising life-giving mission in a world of many religions and cultures?

10. The church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation towards the kingdom of God. Its mission is to bring new life and announce the loving presence of God in our world. We must participate in God’s mission in unity, overcoming the divisions and tensions that exist among us, so that the world may believe and all may be one (John 17:21). The church, as the communion of Christ’s disciples, must become an inclusive community and exists to bring healing and reconciliation to the world. How can the church renew herself to be missional and move forward together towards life in its fullness?

11. This statement highlights some key developments in understanding the mission of the Holy Spirit within the mission of the Triune God (missio Dei) which have emerged through the work of CWME. It does so under four main headings:

- Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life
- Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins
- Spirit of Community: Church on the Move
- Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All

Reflection on such perspectives enables us to embrace dynamism, justice, diversity and transformation as key concepts of mission in changing landscapes today. In response to the questions posed above, we conclude with ten affirmations for mission and evangelism today.

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Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life

The Mission of the Spirit

12. God's Spirit—*ru'ach*—moved over the waters at the beginning (Genesis 1:2), being the source of life and the breath of humankind (Genesis 2:7). In the Hebrew Bible, the Spirit led the people of God—inspiring wisdom (Proverbs 8), empowering prophecy (Isaiah 61:1), stirring life from dry bones (Ezekiel 37), prompting dreams (Joel 2) and bringing renewal as the glory of the Lord in the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1).

13. The same Spirit of God, which “swept over the face of the waters” in creation, descended on Mary (Luke 1:35) and brought forth Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:10) and commissioned him for his mission (Luke 4:14, 18). Jesus Christ, full of the Spirit of God, died on the cross. He gave up the spirit (John 19:30). In death, in the coldness of the tomb, by the power of the Holy Spirit he was raised to life, the firstborn from the dead (Romans 8:11).

14. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to his community and sent his disciples in mission: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21-22). By the gift of the Holy Spirit, “the power from on high,” they were formed into a new community of witness to the hope in Christ (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). In the Spirit of unity, the early church lived together and shared her goods among her members (Acts 2:44-45).

15. The universality of the Spirit’s economy in creation and the particularity of the Spirit’s work in redemption have to be understood together as the mission of the Spirit for the new heaven and earth, when God finally will be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The Holy Spirit works in the world often in mysterious and unknown ways beyond our imagination (Luke 1:34-35; John 3:8; Acts 2:16-21).

16. Biblical witness attests to a variety of understandings of the role of the Holy Spirit in mission. One perspective of the role of the Holy Spirit in mission emphasizes the Holy Spirit as fully dependent on Christ, the Paraclete and the one who will come as Counsellor and Advocate only after Christ has gone to the Father. The Holy Spirit is seen as the continuing presence of Christ, his agent to fulfil the task of mission. This understanding leads to a missiology focusing on sending out and going forth. Therefore, a pneumatological focus on Christian mission recognizes that mission is essentially christologically based and relates the work of the Holy Spirit to the salvation through Jesus Christ.

17. Another perspective emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Truth” that leads us to the “whole truth” (John 16:13) and blows wherever he/she wills (John 3:8), thus embracing the whole of the cosmos, therefore proclaiming the Holy Spirit as the source of Christ, and the church as the eschatological coming together (*synaxis*) of the people of God in God’s kingdom. The second perspective posits that the faithful go forth in peace (in mission) after they have experienced in their eucharistic gathering the eschatological kingdom of God as a glimpse and foretaste of it. Mission as going forth is thus the outcome, rather than the origin of the church, and is called “liturgy after the liturgy.”

18. What is clear is that by the Spirit we participate in the mission of love that is at the heart of the life of the Trinity. This results in Christian witness which unceasingly proclaims the salvific power of God through Jesus Christ and constantly affirms God’s dynamic involvement, through the Holy Spirit, in the whole created world. All who respond to the outpouring of the love of God are invited to join in with the Spirit in the mission of God.

Mission and the Flourishing of Creation

19. Mission is the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God. God’s mission begins with the act of creation. Creation’s life and God’s life are entwined. The mission of God’s Spirit encompasses us all in an ever-giving act of grace. We are therefore called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all created life. We hear the cry of the earth as we listen to the cries of the poor and we know that from its beginning the earth has cried out to God over humanity’s injustice (Genesis 4:10).

20. Mission with creation at its heart is already a positive movement in our churches through campaigns for eco-justice and more sustainable lifestyles and the development of spiritualities that are respectful of the earth. However, we have sometimes forgotten that the whole of creation is included in the reconciled unity towards which we are all called (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). We do not believe that the earth is to be discarded and only souls saved; both the earth and our bodies have to be transformed through the Spirit’s grace. As the vision of Isaiah and John’s revelation testify, heaven and earth

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Chapter 1. The History of the Ecumenical Movement

21. Our participation in mission, our being in creation and our practice of the life of the Spirit need to be woven together for they are mutually transformative. We ought not to seek the one without the others. If we do, we will lapse into an individualistic spirituality that leads us to falsely believe we can belong to God without belonging to our neighbour and we will fall into a spirituality that simply makes us feel good while other parts of creation hurt and yearn.

22. We need a new conversion (metanoia) in our mission, which invites a new humility in regard to the mission of God’s Spirit. We tend to understand and practise mission as something done by humanity to others. Instead, humans can participate in communion with all of creation in celebrating the work of the Creator. In many ways creation is in mission to humanity, for instance the natural world has a power that can heal the human heart and body. The wisdom literature affirms creation’s praise of its Creator (Psalm 19:1-4; 66:1; 96:11-13; 98:4; 100:1; 150:6). The Creator’s joy and wonder in creation is one of the sources of our spirituality (Job 38–39).

23. We want to affirm our spiritual connection with creation, yet the reality is the earth is being polluted and exploited. Consumerism triggers not limitless growth but rather endless exploitation of the earth’s resources. Human greed is contributing to global warming and other forms of climate change. If this trend continues and earth is fatally damaged, what can we imagine salvation to be? Humanity cannot be saved alone while the rest of the created world perishes. Eco-justice cannot be separated from salvation, and salvation cannot come without a new humility that respects the needs of all life on earth.

24. The Holy Spirit gives gifts freely and impartially (1 Corinthians 12:8-10; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11) which are to be shared for the building up of others (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:26) and the reconciliation of the whole creation (Romans 8:19-23). One of the gifts of the Spirit is discernment of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10). We discern the Spirit of God wherever life in its fullness is affirmed and in all its dimensions, including liberation of the oppressed, healing and reconciliation of broken communities and the restoration of the creation. We also discern evil spirits wherever forces of death and destruction of life prevail.

25. The early Christians, like many today, experienced a world of many spirits. The New Testament witnesses to diverse spirits, including evil spirits, “ministering spirits” (i.e. angels, Hebrews 1:14), “principalities” and “powers” (Ephesians 6:12), the beast (Revelation 13:1-7) and other powers—both good and evil. The apostle Paul also testifies to some spiritual struggle (Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 10:4-6) and the injunction to resist the devil (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8). The churches are called to discern the work of the life-giving Spirit sent into the world and to join with the Holy Spirit in bringing about God’s reign of justice (Acts 1:6-8). When we have discerned the Holy Spirit’s presence, we are called to respond, recognizing that God’s Spirit is often subversive, leading us beyond boundaries and surprising us.

26. Our encounter with the Triune God is inward, personal, and communal but also directs us outward in missionary endeavour. The traditional symbols and titles for the Spirit (such as fire, light, dew, fountain, anointing, healing, melting, warming, solace, comfort, strength, rest, washing, shining) show that the Spirit is familiar with our lives and connected with all the aspects of relationship, life and creation with which mission is concerned. We are led by the Spirit into various situations and moments, into meeting points with others, into spaces of encounter and into critical locations of human struggle.

27. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom (Isaiah 11:3; Ephesians 1:17) and guides into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit inspires human cultures and creativity, so it is part of our mission to acknowledge, respect and cooperate with life-giving wisdoms in every culture and context. We regret that mission activity linked with colonization has often denigrated cultures and failed to recognize the wisdom of local people. Local wisdom and culture which is life-affirming is a gift from God’s Spirit. We lift up testimonies of peoples whose traditions have been scorned and mocked by theologians and scientists, yet their wisdom offers us the vital and sometimes new orientation that can connect us again with the life of the Spirit in creation, which helps us to consider the ways in which God is revealed in creation.

28. The claim that the Spirit is with us is not for us to make, but for others to recognize in the life that we lead. The apostle Paul expresses this by encouraging the church to bear the fruits of the Spirit which entail love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:23). As we bear these fruits,
Transformative Spirituality

29. Authentic Christian witness is not only in what we do in mission but how we live our mission. The church in mission can only be sustained by spiritualities deeply rooted in the Trinity's communion of love. Spirituality gives our lives their deepest meaning. It stimulates, motivates and gives dynamism to life's journey. It is energy for life in its fullness and calls for a commitment to resist all forces, powers and systems which deny, destroy and reduce life.

30. Mission spirituality is always transformative. Mission spirituality resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches. “Our faithfulness to God and God's free gift of life compels us to confront idolatrous assumptions, unjust systems, politics of domination and exploitation in our current world economic order. Economics and economic justice are always matters of faith as they touch the very core of God's will for creation.” Mission spirituality motivates us to serve God's economy of life, not mammon, to share life at God's table rather than satisfy individual greed, to pursue change to a better world while challenging the self-interest of the powerful who desire to maintain the status quo.

31. Jesus has told us, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24, KJV). The policy of unlimited growth through the domination of the global free market is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and from nature. “It makes the false promise that it can save the world through creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance which amounts to idolatry.” This is a global system of mammon that protects the unlimited growth of wealth of only the rich and powerful through endless exploitation. This tower of greed is threatening the whole household of God. The reign of God is in direct opposition to the empire of mammon.

32. Transformation can be understood in the light of the Paschal mystery: “If we have died with Christ, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:11-12). In situations of oppression, discrimination and hurt, the cross of Christ is the power of God for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18). Even in our time, some have paid with their lives for their Christian witness, reminding us all of the cost of discipleship. The Spirit gives Christians courage to live out their convictions, even in the face of persecution and martyrdom.

33. The cross calls for repentance in light of misuse of power and use of the wrong kind of power in mission and in the church. “Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures.” The Spirit empowers the powerless and challenges the powerful to empty themselves of their privileges for the sake of the disempowered.

34. Experiencing life in the Spirit is to taste life in its fullness. We are called to witness to a movement towards life, celebrating all that the Spirit continues to call into being, walking in solidarity in order to cross the rivers of despair and anxiety (Psalm 23, Isaiah 43:1-5). Mission provokes in us a renewed awareness that the Holy Spirit meets us and challenges us at all levels of life, and brings newness and change to the places and times of our personal and collective journeys.

35. The Holy Spirit is present with us as companion, yet never domesticated or “tame.” Among the surprises of the Spirit are the ways in which God works from locations which appear to be on the margins and through people who appear to be excluded.

Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins

36. God’s purpose for the world is not to create another world, but to re-create what God has already created in love and wisdom. Jesus began his ministry by claiming that to be filled by the Spirit is to liberate the oppressed, to open eyes that are blind, and to announce the coming of God’s reign (Luke 4:16-18). He went about fulfilling this mission by opting to be with the marginalized people of his time, not out of paternalistic charity but because their situations testified to the sinfulness of the world, and their yearnings for life pointed to God’s purposes.

37. Jesus Christ relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized in society, in order to confront and transform all that denies life. This includes cultures and systems which generate and sustain massive poverty, discrimination and dehumanization, and that...
exploit or destroy people and the earth. Mission from the margins calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities. Christian mission has at times been understood and practised in ways which failed to recognize God’s alignment with those consistently pushed to the margins. Therefore, mission from the margins invites the church to re-imagine mission as a vocation from God’s Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all.

Why Margins and Marginalization?

38. Mission from the margins seeks to counteract injustices in life, church, and mission. It seeks to be an alternative missional movement against the perception that mission can only be done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalized. Such approaches can contribute to oppression and marginalization. Mission from the margins recognizes that being in the centre means having access to systems that lead to one's rights, freedom and individuality being affirmed and respected; living in the margins means exclusion from justice and dignity. Living on the margins, however, can provide its own lessons. People on the margins have agency, and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view. People on the margins, living in vulnerable positions, often know what exclusionary forces are threatening their survival and can best discern the urgency of their struggles; people in positions of privilege have much to learn from the daily struggles of people living in marginal conditions.

39. Marginalized people have God-given gifts that are under-utilized because of disempowerment, and denial of access to opportunities and/or justice. Through struggles in and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.

40. Because the context of missional activity influences its scope and character, the social location of all engaged in mission work must be taken into account. Missiological reflections need to recognize the different value orientations that shape missional perspectives. The aim of mission is not simply to move people from the margins to centres of power but to confront those who remain the centre by keeping people on the margins. Instead, churches are called to transform power structures.

41. The dominant expressions of mission, in the past and today, have often been directed at people on the margins of societies. These have generally viewed those on the margins as recipients and not active agents of missionary activity. Mission expressed in this way has too often been complicit with oppressive and life-denying systems. It has generally aligned with the privileges of the centre and largely failed to challenge economic, social, cultural and political systems which have marginalized some peoples. Mission from the centre is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex. Historically, this has equated Christianity with Western culture and resulted in adverse consequences, including the denial of the full personhood of the victims of such marginalization.

42. A major common concern of people from the margins is the failure of societies, cultures, civilizations, nations and even churches to honour the dignity and worth of all persons. Injustice is at the roots of the inequalities that give rise to marginalization and oppression. God’s desire for justice is inextricably linked to God’s nature and sovereignty: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords....who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who also loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). All missional activity must, therefore, safeguard the sacred worth of every human being and of the earth (cf. Isaiah 58).

Mission as Struggle and Resistance

43. The affirmation of God’s mission (missio Dei) points to the belief in God as One who acts in history and in creation, in concrete realities of time and contexts, who seeks the fullness of life for the whole earth through justice, peace and reconciliation. Participation in God’s ongoing work of liberation and reconciliation by the Holy Spirit, therefore, includes discerning and unmasking the demons that exploit and enslave. For example, this involves deconstructing patriarchal ideologies, upholding the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples, and challenging the social embeddedness of racism and casteism.

44. The church’s hope is rooted in the promised fulfilment of the reign of God. It entails the restoration of right relationships between God and humanity and all of creation. Even though this vision speaks to an eschatological reality, it deeply energizes and informs our current participation in God’s salvific work in this penultimate period.
45. Participation in God’s mission follows the way of Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45); who tears down the mighty and powerful and exalts the lowly (Luke 1:46-55); and whose love is characterized by mutuality, reciprocity and interdependence. It, therefore, requires a commitment to struggle and resist the powers that obstruct the fullness of life that God wills for all, and a willingness to work with all people involved in movements and initiatives committed to the causes of justice, dignity and life.

**Mission Seeking Justice and Inclusivity**

46. The good news of God’s reign is about the promise of the actualization of a just and inclusive world. Inclusivity fosters just relationships in the community of humanity and creation, with mutual acknowledgement of persons and creation, and mutual respect and sustenance of each one’s sacred worth. It also facilitates each one’s full participation in the life of the community. Baptism in Christ implies a lifelong commitment to give an account of this hope by overcoming the barriers in order to find a common identity under the sovereignty of God (Galatians 3:27-28). Therefore, discrimination of all types against any human being is unacceptable in the sight of God.

47. Jesus promises that the last shall be first (Matthew 20:16). To the extent that the church practises radical hospitality to the estranged in society, it demonstrates commitment to embodying the values of the reign of God (Isaiah 58:6). To the extent that it denounces self-centredness as a way of life, it makes space for the reign of God to permeate human existence. To the extent that it renounces violence in its physical, psychological and spiritual manifestations both in personal interactions and in the economic, political, social systems, it testifies to the reign of God at work in the world.

48. In reality, however, mission, money and political power are strategic partners. Although our theological and missiological talk says a lot about the mission of the church being in solidarity with the poor, sometimes in practice it is much more concerned with being in the centres of power, eating with the rich and lobbying for money to maintain ecclesial bureaucracy. This poses particular challenges to reflect on what is the good news for people who are privileged and powerful.

49. The church is called to make present God’s holy and life-affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. It means rejecting values and practices which lead to the destruction of community. Christians are called to acknowledge the sinful nature of all forms of discrimination and transform unjust structures. This call places certain expectations on the church. It must refuse to harbour oppressive forces within its ranks, acting instead as a counter-cultural community. The biblical mandate to the covenant community in both testaments is characterized by the dictum, “It shall not be so among you” (Matthew 20:26, KJV).

**Mission as Healing and Wholeness**

50. Actions towards healing and wholeness of life of persons and communities are an important expression of mission. Healing was not only a central feature of Jesus’ ministry but also a feature of his call to his followers to continue his work (Matthew 10:1). Healing is also one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9; Acts 3). The Spirit empowers the church for a life-nurturing mission, which includes prayer, pastoral care, and professional health care on the one hand, and prophetic denunciation of the root causes of suffering, transforming structures that dispense injustice and the pursuit of scientific research on the other.

51. Health is more than physical and/or mental well-being, and healing is not primarily medical. This understanding of health coheres with the biblical-theological tradition of the church, which sees a human being as a multidimensional unity, and the body, soul and mind as interrelated and interdependent. It thus affirms the social, political and ecological dimensions of personhood and wholeness. Health, in the sense of wholeness, is a condition related to God’s promise for the end of time, as well as a real possibility in the present. Wholeness is not a static balance of harmony but rather involves living-in-community with God, people and creation. Individualism and injustice are barriers to community building, and therefore to wholeness. Discrimination on grounds of medical conditions or disability—including HIV and AIDS—is contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ. When all the parts of our individual and corporate lives that have been left out are included, and wherever the neglected or marginalized are brought together in love, such that wholeness is experienced, we may discern signs of God’s reign on earth.

52. Societies have tended to see disability or illness as a manifestation of sin or a medical problem to be solved. The medical model has emphasized the correction or cure of what is assumed to be the “deficiency” in the individual. Many who are marginalized, however, do not see themselves as “deficient” or “sick.” The Bible

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recounts many instances where Jesus healed people with various infirmities but, equally importantly, he restored people to their rightful places within the fabric of the community. Healing is more about the restoration of wholeness than about correcting something perceived as defective. To become whole, the parts that have become estranged need to be reclaimed. The fixation on cure is thus a perspective that must be overcome in order to promote the biblical focus. Mission should foster the full participation of people with disabilities and illness in the life of the church and society.

53. Christian medical mission aims at achieving health for all, in the sense that all people around the globe will have access to quality health care. There are many ways in which churches can be, and are, involved in health and healing in a comprehensive sense. They create or support clinics and mission hospitals; they offer counselling services, care groups and health programmes; local churches can create groups to visit sick congregation members. Healing processes could include praying with and for the sick, confession and forgiveness, the laying-on of hands, anointing with oil, and the use of charismatic spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12). But it must also be noted that inappropriate forms of Christian worship, including triumphalistic healing services in which the healer is glorified at the expense of God, and where false expectations are raised, can deeply harm people. This is not to deny God's miraculous intervention of healing in some cases.

54. As a community of imperfect people, and as part of a creation groaning in pain and longing for its liberation, the Christian community can be a sign of hope, and an expression of the kingdom of God here on earth (Romans 8:22-24). The Holy Spirit works for justice and healing in many ways and is pleased to indwell the particular community which is called to embody Christ's mission.

55. The life of the church arises from the love of the Triune God. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Mission is a response to God’s urging love shown in creation and redemption. “God’s love invites us” (Caritas Christi urget nos). This communion (koinonia) opens our hearts and lives to our brothers and sisters in the same movement of sharing God’s love (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Living in that love of God, the church is called to become good news for all. The Triune God’s overflowing sharing of love is the source of all mission and evangelism.

56. God's love, manifest in the Holy Spirit, is an inspirational gift to all humanity “in all times and places” and for all cultures and situations. The powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, revealed in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, initiates us into the fullness of life that is God’s gift to each one of us. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, revealing God’s purposes for the world, and empowering and enabling its members to participate in the realization of those purposes.

57. The church in history has not always existed but, both theologically and empirically, came into being for the sake of mission. It is not possible to separate church and mission in terms of their origin or purpose. To fulfil God’s missionary purpose is the church’s aim. The relationship between church and mission is very intimate because the same Spirit of Christ who empowers the church in mission is also the life of the church. At the same time as he sent the church into the world, Jesus Christ breathed the Holy Spirit into the church (John 20:19-23). Therefore, the church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church.

58. Starting with God’s mission leads to an ecclesiological approach “from below.” In this perspective it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church. Mission is not a project of expanding churches but of the church embodying God’s salvation in this world. Out of this follows a dynamic understanding of the apostolicity of the church: Apostolicity is not only safeguarding the faith of the church through the ages but also participating in the apostolate. Thus the churches mainly and foremost need to be missionary churches.

Spirit of Community: Church on the Move

**God’s Mission and the Life of the Church**

55. The life of the church arises from the love of the Triune God. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Mission is a response to God’s urging love shown in creation and redemption. “God’s love invites us” (Caritas Christi urget nos). This communion (koinonia) opens our hearts and lives to our brothers and sisters in the same movement of sharing God’s love (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Living in that love of God, the church is called to become good

56. God’s love, manifest in the Holy Spirit, is an inspirational gift to all humanity “in all times and places” and for all cultures and situations. The powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, revealed in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, initiates us into the fullness of life that is God’s gift to each one of us. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, revealing God’s purposes for the world, and empowering and enabling its members to participate in the realization of those purposes.

57. The church in history has not always existed but, both theologically and empirically, came into being for the sake of mission. It is not possible to separate church and mission in terms of their origin or purpose. To fulfil God’s missionary purpose is the church’s aim. The relationship between church and mission is very intimate because the same Spirit of Christ who empowers the church in mission is also the life of the church. At the same time as he sent the church into the world, Jesus Christ breathed the Holy Spirit into the church (John 20:19-23). Therefore, the church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church.

58. Starting with God’s mission leads to an ecclesiological approach “from below.” In this perspective it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church. Mission is not a project of expanding churches but of the church embodying God’s salvation in this world. Out of this follows a dynamic understanding of the apostolicity of the church: Apostolicity is not only safeguarding the faith of the church through the ages but also participating in the apostolate. Thus the churches mainly and foremost need to be missionary churches.

**God’s Mission and the Church’s Unity**

59. Living out our faith in community is an important way of participating in mission. Through baptism, we become sisters and brothers belonging together in Christ (Hebrews 10:25). The church is called to be an inclusive community that welcomes all. Through word and deed and in its very being, the church foretastes and witnesses to the vision of the coming reign of God. The church is the coming together of the faithful and their going forth in peace.

60. Practically, as well as theologically, mission and unity belong together. In this regard, the integration in 1961 of IMC and WCC was a significant step. This historical experience encourages us to believe that mission and church can come together. This aim, however, is not yet fully accomplished. We have to continue this journey in our century with fresh attempts so that the church becomes truly missionary.

61. The churches realize today that in many respects they are still not adequate embodiments of God's mission. Sometimes, a sense of separation of mission and church still prevails. The lack of full and real unity in mission still harms the authenticity and credibility of the fulfillment of God's mission in this world. Our Lord prayed "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). Thus mission and unity are intertwined. Consequently there is the need to open up our reflections on church and unity to an even wider understanding of unity: The unity of humanity and even the cosmic unity of the whole of God's creation.

62. The highly competitive environment of the free market economy has unfortunately influenced some churches and para-church movements to seek to be "winners" over others. This can even lead to the adoption of aggressive tactics to persuade Christians who already belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance. Seeking numerical growth at all costs is incompatible with the respect for others required of Christian disciples. Jesus became our Christ not through power or money but through his self-emptying (kenosis) and death on the cross. This humble understanding of mission does not merely shape our methods, but is the very nature and essence of our faith in Christ. The missionary church glorifies God in self-emptying love.

63. The Christian communities in their diversity are called to identify and practise ways of common witness in a spirit of partnership and cooperation, including through mutually respectful and responsible forms of evangelism. Common witness is what the "churches, even while separated, bear together, especially through joint efforts, by manifesting whatever divine gifts of truth and life they already share and experience in common."^9

64. The missionary nature of the church also means that there must be a way that churches and para-church structures can be more closely related. The integration of IMC and WCC brought about a new framework for consideration of church unity and mission. While discussions of unity have been very concerned with structural questions, mission agencies can represent flexibility and subsidiarity in mission. While para-church movements can find accountability and direction through ecclesial mooring, para-church structures can help churches not to forget their dynamic apostolic character.

65. The CWME, the direct heir of Edinburgh 1910’s initiatives on cooperation and unity, provides a structure for churches and mission agencies to seek ways of expressing and strengthening unity in mission. Being an integral part of the WCC, the CWME has been able to encounter new understandings of mission and unity from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Indigenous churches from all over the globe. In particular, the context of the WCC has facilitated close working relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. A growing intensity of collaboration with Evangelicals, especially with the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Alliance, has also abundantly contributed to the enrichment of ecumenical theological reflection on mission in unity. Together we share a common concern that the whole church should witness to the whole gospel in the whole world.\^10

66. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity, unites people and churches too, to celebrate unity in diversity both proactively and constructively. The Spirit provides both the dynamic context and the resources needed for people to explore differences in a safe, positive and nurturing environment in order to grow into an inclusive and mutually responsible community.

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Christians and all churches, not only for particular individuals or specialized groups.\(^1\)

68. What makes the Christian message of God’s abundant love for humanity and all creation credible is our ability to speak with one voice, where possible, and to give common witness and an account of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). The churches have therefore produced a rich array of common declarations, some of them resulting in uniting or united churches, and of dialogues, seeking to restore the unity of all Christians in one living organism of healing and reconciliation. A rediscovery of the work of the Holy Spirit in healing and reconciliation, which is at the heart of today’s mission theology, has significant ecumenical implications.\(^1\)

69. While acknowledging the great importance of “visible” unity among churches, nonetheless unity need not be sought only at the level of organizational structures. From a mission perspective, it is important to discern what helps the cause of God’s mission. In other words, unity in mission is the basis for the visible unity of the churches which also has implications for the order of the church. Attempts to achieve unity must be in concert with the biblical call to seek justice. Our call to do justice may sometimes involve breaking false unities that silence and oppress. Genuine unity always entails inclusivity and respect for others.

70. Today’s context of large-scale worldwide migration challenges the churches’ commitment to unity in very practical ways. We are told: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2, NIV). Churches can be a place of refuge for migrant communities; they can also be intentional focal points for inter-cultural engagement.\(^1\) The churches are called to be one to serve God’s mission beyond ethnic and cultural boundaries and ought to create multi-cultural ministry and mission as a concrete expression of common witness in diversity. This may entail advocating justice in regard to migration policies and resistance to xenophobia and racism. Women, children, and undocumented workers are often the most vulnerable among migrants in all contexts. But, women are also often at the cutting edge of new migrant ministries.

71. God’s hospitality calls us to move beyond binary notions of culturally dominant groups as hosts, and migrant and minority peoples as guests. Instead, in God’s hospitality, God is host and we are all invited by the Spirit to participate with humility and mutuality in God’s mission.

**Local Congregations: New Initiatives**

72. While cherishing the unity of the Spirit in the one Church, it is also important to honour the ways in which each local congregation is led by the Spirit to respond to their own contextual realities. Today’s changed world calls for local congregations to take new initiatives. For example, in the secularizing global north, new forms of contextual mission, such as “new monasticism,” “emerging church,” and “fresh expressions,” have re-defined and re-vitalized churches. Exploring contextual ways of being church can be particularly relevant to young people. Some churches in the global north now meet in pubs, coffee houses, or converted movie theatres. Engaging with church life online is an attractive option for young people thinking in a non-linear, visual, and experiential way.

73. Like the early church in the Book of Acts, local congregations have the privilege of forming a community marked by the presence of the risen Christ. For many people, acceptance or refusal to become members of the church is linked to their positive or negative experience with a local congregation, which can be either a stumbling block or an agent of transformation.\(^4\) Therefore, it is vital that local congregations are constantly renewed and inspired by the Spirit of mission. Local congregations are frontiers and primary agents of mission.

74. Worship and the Sacraments play a crucial role in the formation of transformative spirituality and mission. Reading the Bible contextually is also a primary resource in enabling local congregations to be messengers and witnesses to God’s justice and love. Liturgy in the sanctuary only has full integrity when we live out God’s mission in our communities in our daily life. Local congregations are therefore impelled to step out of their comfort zones and cross boundaries for the sake of the mission of God.

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75. More than ever before, local congregations today can play a key role in emphasizing the crossing of cultural and racial boundaries, and affirming cultural difference as a gift of the Spirit. Rather than being perceived as a problem, migration can be seen as offering new possibilities for churches to re-discover themselves afresh. It inspires opportunities for the creation of intercultural and multicultural churches at local level. All churches can create space for different cultural communities to come together; and embrace exciting opportunities for contextual expressions of intercultural mission in our time.

76. Local congregations can also, as never before, develop global connections. Many inspirational and transformative linkages are being formed between churches that are geographically far apart and located in very different contexts. These offer innovative possibilities but are not without pitfalls. The increasingly popular short-term “mission trips” can help to build partnerships between churches in different parts of the world but in some cases place an intolerable burden on poor local churches, or disregard the existing churches altogether. While there is some danger and caution around such trips, these exposure opportunities in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts can also lead to long-term change when the traveller returns to their home community. The challenge is to find ways of exercising spiritual gifts which build up the whole church in every part (1 Corinthians 12-14).

77. Advocacy for justice is no longer the sole prerogative of national assemblies and central offices but a form of witness which calls for the engagement of local churches. For example, the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2011) concluded with a plea in the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation that: “Churches must help in identifying the everyday choices that can abuse and promote human rights, gender justice, climate justice, unity and peace.” Their grounding in everyday life gives local churches both legitimacy and motivation in the struggle for justice and peace.

78. The church in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to service (diakonia)—to live out the faith and hope of the community of God’s people, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ. Through service the church participates in God’s mission, following the way of its Servant Lord. The church is called to be a diaconal community manifesting the power of service over the power of domination, enabling and nurturing possibilities for life, and witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s reign.16

79. As the church discovers more deeply its identity as a missionary community, its outward-looking character finds expression in evangelism.3

**Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All**

**The Call to Evangelize**

80. Witness (Martyria) takes concrete form in evangelism—the communication of the whole gospel to the whole of humanity in the whole world.17 Its goal is the salvation of the world and the glory of the Triune God. Evangelism is mission activity which makes explicit and unambiguous the centrality of the incarnation, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ without setting limits to the saving grace of God. It seeks to share this good news with all who have not yet heard it and invites them to an experience of life in Christ.

81. “Evangelism is the outflow of hearts that are filled with the love of God for those who do not yet know him.”18 At Pentecost, the disciples could not but declare the mighty works of God (Acts 2:4; 4:20). Evangelism, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel, including “the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship.”19 While the Holy Spirit calls some to be evangelists (Ephesians 4:11), we all are called to give an account of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Not only individuals but also the whole church together is called to evangelize (Mark 16:15; 1 Peter 2:9).

82. Today’s world is marked by excessive assertion of religious identities and persuasions that seem to break and brutalize in the name of God rather than heal and nurture communities. In such a context, it is important to recognize that proselytism is not a legitimate way of practising evangelism.20 The Holy Spirit chooses to


17. Minutes and Reports of the Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee, (Rolle, Switzerland: WCC, 1951), 66.


20. *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible*
work in partnership with peoples’ preaching and demonstration of the good news (cf. Romans 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6), but it is only God’s Spirit who creates new life and brings about rebirth (John 3:5-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6). We acknowledge that evangelism at times has been distorted and lost its credibility because some Christians have forced “conversions” by violent means or the abuse of power. In some contexts, however, accusations of forceful conversions are motivated by the desire of dominant groups to keep the marginalized living with oppressed identities and in dehumanizing conditions.

83. Evangelism is sharing one’s faith and conviction with other people, inviting them to discipleship, whether or not they adhere to other religious traditions. Such sharing is to take place with both confidence and humility and as an expression of our professed love for our world. If we claim to love God and to love our fellow human beings but fail to share the good news with them urgently and consistently, we deceive ourselves as to the integrity of our love for either God or people. There is no greater gift we can offer to our fellow human beings than to share and or introduce them to the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ.

84. Evangelism leads to repentance, faith and baptism. Hearing the truth in the face of sin and evil demands a response—positive or negative (John 4:28-29 cf. Mark 10:22). It provokes conversion, involving a change of attitudes, priorities and goals. It results in salvation of the lost, healing of the sick and the liberation of the oppressed and the whole creation.

85. “Evangelism,” while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel, including “the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship.” In different churches, there are differing understandings of how the Spirit calls us to evangelize in our contexts. For some, evangelism is primarily about leading people to personal conversion through Jesus Christ; for others, evangelism is about being in solidarity and offering Christian witness through presence with oppressed peoples; others again look on evangelism as one component of God’s mission. Different Christian traditions denote aspects of mission and evangelism in different ways; however, we can still affirm that the Spirit calls us all towards an understanding of evangelism which is grounded in the life of the local church where worship (leiturgia) is inextricably linked to witness (Martyria), service (diakonia) and fellowship (koinonia).

**Evangelism in Christ’s Way**

86. Evangelism is sharing the good news both in word and action. Evangelizing through verbal proclamation or preaching of the gospel (kerygma) is profoundly biblical. However, if our words are not consistent with our actions, our evangelism is inauthentic. The combination of verbal declaration and visible action bears witness to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and of his purposes. Evangelism is closely related to unity: The love for one another is a demonstration of the gospel we proclaim (John 13:34-35) while disunity is an embarrassment to the gospel (1 Corinthians 1).

87. There are historical and contemporary examples of faithful, humble service by Christians, working in their own local contexts, with whom the Spirit has partnered to bring about fullness of life. Also, many Christians who lived and worked as missionaries far away from their own cultural contexts did so with humility, mutuality, and respect; God’s Spirit also stirred in those communities to bring about transformation.

88. Regrettably, sometimes evangelism has been practised in ways which betray rather than incarnate the gospel. Whenever this occurs repentance is in order. Mission in Christ’s way involves affirming the dignity and rights of others. We are called to serve others as Christ did (cf. Mark 10:45; Matthew 25:45), without exploitation or any form of allurement. In such individualized contexts, it may be possible to confuse evangelism with buying and selling a “product,” where we decide what aspects Christian life we want to take on. Instead, the Spirit rejects the idea that Jesus’ good news for all can be consumed under capitalist terms, and the Spirit calls us to conversion and transformation at a personal level, which leads us to the proclamation of the fullness of life for all.

21. It is important to note that not all churches understand evangelism as expressed in the above. The Roman Catholic Church refers to “evangelization” as the *missio ad gentes* [mission to the peoples] directed to those who do not know Christ. In a wider sense, it is used to describe ordinary pastoral work, while the phrase “new evangelization” designates pastoral outreach to those who no longer practise the Christian faith. Cf. Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization.

89. Authentic evangelism is grounded in humility and respect for all, and flourishes in the context of dialogue. It promotes the message of the gospel, of healing and reconciliation, in word and deed. “There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the message of God’s coming reign.”

Evangelism, therefore, inspires the building of inter-personal and community relationships. Such authentic relationships are often best nourished in local faith communities, and based on local cultural contexts. Christian witness is as much by our presence as by our words. In situations where the public testimony to one’s faith is not possible without risking one’s life, simply living the gospel may be a powerful alternative.

90. Aware of tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and varied interpretations of Christian witness, authentic evangelism must always be guided by life-affirming values, as stated in the joint statement on “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”:

a. Rejection of all forms of violence, discrimination and repression by religious and secular authority, including the abuse of power—psychological or social.

b. Affirming the freedom of religion to practise and profess faith without any fear of reprisal and or intimidation. Mutual respect and solidarity which promote justice, peace and the common good of all.

c. Respect for all people and human cultures, while also discerning the elements in our own cultures, such as patriarchy, racism, casteism etc., that need to be challenged by the gospel.

d. Renunciation of false witness and listening in order to understand in mutual respect.

e. Ensuring freedom for ongoing discernment by persons and communities as part of decision-making.

f. Building relationships with believers of other faiths or no faith to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

91. We live in a world strongly influenced by individualism, secularism and materialism, and other ideologies that challenge the values of the kingdom of God. Although the gospel is ultimately good news for all, it is bad news for the forces which promote falsehood, injustice and oppression. To that extent, evangelism is also a prophetic vocation which involves speaking truth to power in hope and in love (Acts 26:25; Colossians 1:5; Ephesians 4:15). The gospel is liberative and transformative. Its proclamation must involve transformation of societies with a view to creating just and inclusive communities.

92. Standing against evil or injustice and being prophetic can sometimes be met with suppression and violence, and thus consequently lead to suffering, persecution, and even death. Authentic evangelism involves being vulnerable, following the example of Christ by carrying the cross and emptying oneself (Philippians 2:5-11). Just as the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church under Roman persecution, today the pursuit of justice and righteousness makes a powerful witness to Christ. Jesus linked such self-denial with the call to follow him and with eternal salvation (Mark 8:34-38).

**Evangelism, Interfaith Dialogue and Christian Presence**

93. In the plurality and complexity of today’s world, we encounter people of many different faiths, ideologies and convictions. We believe that the Spirit of Life brings joy and fullness of life. God’s Spirit, therefore, can be found in all cultures that affirm life. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways, and we do not fully understand the workings of the Spirit in other faith traditions. We acknowledge that there is inherent value and wisdom in diverse life-giving spiritualities. Therefore, authentic mission makes the “other” a partner in, not an “object” of mission.

94. Dialogue is a way of affirming our common life and goals in terms of the affirmation of life and the integrity of creation. Dialogue at the religious level is possible only if we begin with the expectation of meeting God who has preceded us and has been present with people within their own contexts. God is there before we come (Acts 17) and our task is not to bring God along, but to witness to the God who is already there. Dialogue provides for an honest encounter where each party brings to the table all that they are in an open, patient and respectful manner.

95. Evangelism and dialogue are distinct but interrelated. Although Christians hope and pray that all people may come to living knowledge of the Triune God,
evangelism is not the purpose of dialogue. However, since dialogue is also “a mutual encounter of commitments,” sharing the good news of Jesus Christ has a legitimate place in it. Furthermore, authentic evangelism takes place in the context of the dialogue of life and action, and in “the spirit of dialogue”: “an attitude of respect and friendship.” Evangelism entails not only proclamation of our deepest convictions, but also listening to others, and being challenged and enriched by others (Acts 10).

96. Particularly important is dialogue between people of different faiths, not only in multi-religious contexts but equally where there is a large majority of a particular faith. It is necessary to protect rights of minority groups and religious freedom and to enable all to contribute to the common good. Religious freedom should be upheld because it flows from the dignity of the human person, grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). Followers of all religions and beliefs have equal rights and responsibilities.

**Evangelism and Cultures**

97. The gospel takes root in different contexts through engagement with specific cultural, political and religious realities. Respect for people and their cultural and symbolic life-worlds are necessary if the gospel is to take root in those different realities. In this way it must begin with engagement and dialogue with the wider context in order to discern how Christ is already present and where God’s Spirit is already at work.

98. The connection of evangelism with colonial powers in the history of mission has led to the presupposition that Western forms of Christianity are the standards by which other’s adherence to the gospel should be judged. Evangelism by those who enjoy economic power or cultural hegemony risks distorting the gospel. Therefore, they must seek the partnership of the poor, the dispossessed and minorities, and be shaped by their theological resources and visions.

99. The enforcement of uniformity discredits the uniqueness of each individual created in the image and likeness of God. Whereas Babel attempted to enforce uniformity, the preaching of the disciples on the day of Pentecost resulted in a unity in which personal particularities and community identities were not lost but respected—they heard the good news in their own languages.

100. Jesus calls us out of the narrow concerns of our own kingdom, our own liberation and our own independence (Acts 1:6) by unveiling to us a larger vision and empowering us by the Holy Spirit to go “to the ends of the earth” as witnesses in each context of time and space to God’s justice, freedom and peace. Our calling is to point all to Jesus, rather than to ourselves or our institutions, looking out for the interests of others rather than our own (cf. Philippians 2:3-4). We cannot capture the complexities of the scriptures, through one dominant cultural perspective. A plurality of cultures is a gift of the Spirit to deepen our understanding of our faith and one another. As such, intercultural communities of faith, where diverse cultural communities worship together, is one way in which cultures can engage one another authentically, and where culture can enrich gospel. At the same time, the gospel critiques notions of cultural superiority. Therefore, “the gospel, to be fruitful, needs to be both true to itself and incarnated or rooted in the culture of a people…We need constantly to seek the insight of the Holy Spirit in helping us to better discern where the gospel challenges, endorses or transforms a particular culture” for the sake of life.

**Feast of Life: Concluding Affirmations**

101. We are the servants of the Triune God, who has given us the mission of proclaiming the good news to all humanity and creation, especially the oppressed and the suffering people who are longing for fullness of life. Mission—as a common witness to Christ—is an invitation to the “feast in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15). The mission of the church is to prepare the banquet and to invite all people to the feast of life. The feast is a celebration of creation and fruitfulness overflowing from the love of God, the source of life in abundance. It is a sign of the liberation and reconciliation of the whole creation which is the goal of mission. With a renewed appreciation of the mission of God’s Spirit, we offer the following affirmations in response to the question posed at the beginning of this document.

102. **We affirm that the purpose of God’s mission is fullness of life (John 10:10) and this is the criterion for discernment in mission.** Therefore, we are called to discern the Spirit of God wherever there is life in

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28. *Called to One Hope*, pp. 21-22; 24.
its fullness, particularly in terms of the liberation of the oppressed peoples, the healing and reconciliation of broken communities and the restoration of the whole creation. We are challenged to appreciate the life-affirming spirits present in different cultures and to be in solidarity with all those who are involved in the mission of affirming and preserving life. We also discern and confront evil spirits wherever forces of death and negation of life are experienced.

103. **We affirm that mission begins with God’s act of creation and continues in re-creation, by the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit, poured out in tongues of fire at Pentecost, fills our hearts and makes us into Christ’s church. The Spirit which was in Christ Jesus inspires us to a self-emptying and cross-bearing life-style and accompanies God’s people as we seek to bear witness to the love of God in word and deed. The Spirit of truth leads into all truth and empowers us to defy the demonic powers and speak the truth in love. As a redeemed community we share with others the waters of life and look for the Spirit of unity to heal, reconcile and renew the whole creation.

104. **We affirm that spirituality is the source of energy for mission and that mission in the Spirit is transformative.** Thus we seek a re-orienting of our perspective between mission, spirituality and creation. Mission spirituality that flows from liturgy and worship reconnects us with one another and with the wider creation. We understand that our participation in mission, our existence in creation and our practice of the life of the Spirit are woven together for they are mutually transformative. Mission that begins with creation invites us to celebrate life in all its dimensions as God’s gift.

105. **We affirm that the mission of God’s Spirit is to renew the whole creation.** “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1, NIV). The God of life protects, loves and cares for nature. Humanity is not the master of the earth but is responsible to care for the integrity of creation. Excessive greed and unlimited consumption which lead to continuous destruction of nature must end. God’s love does not proclaim a human salvation separate from the renewal of the whole creation. We are called to participate in God’s mission beyond our human-centred goals. God’s mission is to all life and we have to both acknowledge it and serve it in new ways of mission. We pray for repentance and forgiveness, but we also call for action now. Mission has creation at its heart.

106. **We affirm that today mission movements are emerging from the global South and East which are multi-directional and many faceted.** The shifting centre of gravity of Christianity to the global South and East challenges us to explore missiological expressions that are rooted in these contexts, cultures and spiritualities. We need to develop further mutuality and partnership and affirm interdependence within mission and the ecumenical movement. Our mission practice should show solidarity with suffering peoples and harmony with nature. Evangelism is done in self-emptying humility, with respect towards others and in dialogue with people of different cultures and faiths. It should, in this landscape, also involve confronting structures and cultures of oppression and dehumanization that are in contradiction to the values of God’s reign.

107. **We affirm that marginalized people are agents of mission and exercise a prophetic role which emphasizes that fullness of life is for all.** The marginalized in society are the main partners in God’s mission. Marginalized, oppressed and suffering people have a special gift to distinguish what news is good for them and what news is bad for their endangered life. In order to commit ourselves to God’s life-giving mission, we have to listen to the voices from the margins to hear what is life-affirming and what is life-destroying. We must turn our direction of mission to the actions that the marginalized are taking. Justice, solidarity and inclusivity are key expressions of mission from the margins.

108. **We affirm that the economy of God is based on values of love and justice for all and that transformative mission resists idolatry in the free-market economy.** Economic globalization has effectively supplanted the God of life with mammon, the god of free-market capitalism that claims the power to save the world through the accumulation of undue wealth and prosperity. Mission in this context needs to be counter-cultural, offering alternatives to such idolatrous visions because mission belongs to the God of life, justice and peace and not to this false god who brings misery and suffering to people and nature. Mission, then, is to denounce the economy of greed and to participate in and practise the divine economy of love, sharing and justice.

109. **We affirm that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news in all ages and places and should be proclaimed in the Spirit of love and humility.** We affirm the centrality of the incarnation, the cross and
the resurrection in our message and also in the way we do evangelism. Therefore, evangelism is pointing always to Jesus and the kingdom of God rather than to institutions, and it belongs to the very being of the church. The prophetic voice of the church should not be silent in times that demand this voice be heard. The church is called to renew its methods of evangelism to communicate the good news with persuasion, inspiration and conviction.

110. **We affirm that dialogue and cooperation for life are integral to mission and evangelism.** Authentic evangelism is done with respect to freedom of religion and belief, for all human beings, as images of God. Proselytism by violent means, economic incentive or abuse of power is contrary to the message of the gospel. In doing evangelism it is important to build relations of respect and trust between people of different faiths. We value each and every human culture and recognize that the gospel is not possessed by any group but is for every people. We understand that our task is not to bring God along but to witness to the God who is already there (Acts 17:23-28). Joining in with the Spirit we are enabled to cross cultural and religious barriers to work together towards Life.

111. **We affirm that God moves and empowers the church in mission.** The church as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit is dynamic and changing as it continues the mission of God. This leads to a variety of forms of common witness, reflecting the diversity of world Christianity. Thus the churches need to be on the move, journeying together in mission, continuing in the mission of the apostles. Practically, this means that church and mission should be united, and different ecclesial and missional bodies need to work together for the sake of Life.

112. The Triune God invites the whole creation to the Feast of Life, through Jesus Christ who came “that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness” (John 10:10, REB), through the Holy Spirit who affirms the vision of the reign of God, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth!” (Isaiah 65:17, KJV). We commit ourselves together in humility and hope to the mission of God, who recreates all and reconciles all. And we pray, “God of Life, lead us into justice and peace!”
Chapter 2

Introduction: Rethinking How We Live Ecumenically

Having introduced something of the recent history, dynamics, and theological insights of the ecumenical movement in the previous chapter, we turn now to the implications of these trends and dynamics for what it means in today’s world to live ecumenically, as Christians and as Christian churches.

In fact, Christians live between the larger horizon of their faith, captured in their ecclesial practices and beliefs and theological convictions, and the radically altered contemporary context of their everyday lives. The five documents in this chapter attempt to rethink that intersection of faith and the world.

Getting clarity about the current landscape of Christian living entails understanding the dynamics of the contemporary world. As the documents here make plain, it is marked by globalization, especially of capital and communications; by crises brought on by economic disparities and ecological and climate change; and by widespread violations of human rights, gender justice, and the right to live in peace. As Metropolitan Geevarghese Mor Coorilos says in the fourth selection here, “In today’s world, all life is imperiled.”

Such a situation invites and demands new thinking about Christian service (diakonia), and the 2012 document on diakonia attempts to resituate Christian service theologically, socio-economically, and institutionally. The document reframes diakonia in light of the current crises but also in light of Christian imperatives of discipleship and mission. One effect is to highlight the roles of individuals and local communities, rather than simply of large-scale organizations, in addressing these crises.

Likewise, Economy of Life tackles the enormous challenge of rethinking economic life in light of the shortcomings and distortions built into our current economic system and practices. Although utterly clear about the shortcomings of our current financial and economic systems, it is nonetheless driven not only by our “intertwined and urgent crises” but also by the deep well-springs of biblical spirituality, religious life, and theological insights into God’s promise of life for all.

“The mission of the ecumenical movement today is about transforming the world into a place of justice and peace for all of God’s creation,” says Rogate Mshana, a leader in the formulation of Economy of Life. In this light, the document affirms, “God calls us to a radical transformation.”

The transformational imperative is not just systemic but also personal and ecclesial. Creating an alternative to market values and dehumanization poses challenging questions to Christians themselves—whose lives are intertwined with market values—and to churches that must reexamine their own lives and practices. Rastko Jovic explores the mixed record of the Christian tradition and the churches in the realm of gender justice and offers very practical advice on advancing it. Metropolitan Geevarghese, especially in light of the recent mission statement Together towards Life, similarly calls for Christians to take on a different orientation entirely in their work in the world, one of learning from those they serve, rather than dictating to them or assuming superior knowledge.

In both practical and theoretical ways, then, selections in chapter 2 invite readers to analyze our contemporary world in its systems and effects and to marshal relevant insights from the tradition to frame their own commitments as Christians in the world. It calls for new thinking about what it means to be a person, about the sociopolitical implications of Jesus’ preaching of the realm of God, and even of God’s own being. Yet living
ecumenically today also has practical lifestyle implications. Theologian Elsa Tamez recounts her experience of living and teaching among diverse, not to say competing, theological traditions, both Christian and interreligious, and how overcoming one’s own prejudices and stereotypes and engaging in “day-to-day living and working together, particularly in social projects,” enhances the prospects for personal and ecclesial renewal and “the common struggle for life and justice.”
2.1. Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia* in the 21st Century

*From the conference jointly organized by the Justice and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programmes of the World Council of Churches in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2-6 June 2012*

This theological reflection is intentionally inductive—contextual and experiential. The 50 participants involved in various diaconal initiatives in about 25 countries brought with them some hard questions as well as insights on new possibilities, arising out of their engagement in the lives of marginalized people. They put forth some of the following challenges to be taken into account in this reflection on *Diakonia* in the Twenty-First Century. These were: The institutionalization of injustice, particularly in the present regime of neo-liberal economic globalization; the reality of climate change and its impact; wars and conflicts and the consequent destruction, trauma and broken relationships; the fragmentation of communities due to aggressive assertion of religious and ethnic identities; the dispossession and displacement of vulnerable people; the violence against many sections of society, especially of women, children, people with disabilities and the aged; malnutrition, disease and the HIV and Aids pandemic; and the marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous peoples, the Afro-descendent communities, the Dalits in South Asia and others experiencing discrimination for various reasons.

Sri Lanka, a nation ravaged by prolonged war and conflict, struggling to find possibilities for healing and hope, provided the context of this conference. The conference was hosted by the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka that represents the witness of churches—small, on the margins with limited space for public engagement, and each with a distinct identity, yet united in their witness to heal and reconcile. The conference, therefore, opted to look at *diakonia* from three specific vantage points as elaborated below:

First, it pursued its reflection by holding *diakonia* as a primary expression of the churches' participation in the ongoing mission of God. This option was chosen to assert that churches are not to be exclusive, inward-looking religious communities, but have a calling to be engaged with the world. The event also responded to the common tendency to view and pursue *diakonia* in institutional forms and to respond only to those challenges that these forms would allow.

Second, it attempted to re-imagine *diakonia* from the vantage point of those who are, in many cases, traditionally considered as recipients or objects of churches' *diakonia*—the vulnerable and marginalized communities. Besides the theological reasons, this option was taken to search for more people-based and less resource-intensive forms of *diakonia*, arising out of their aspirations, and in doing so to ensure their agency in redefining *diakonia* in today's world. It was also to suggest a possible shift from patronizing interventions to catalytic accompaniment.

And third, in view of the fact that many of the current models of *diakonia* were shaped by the perceptions and preferences of the churches in the geo-political North, the conference wanted to explore what *diakonia* would be if seen from the vantage point of the global South where the dynamics of life are radically different. Incidentally, more Christians live in the South than the North, mostly as fragmented minority communities, often in hostile contexts, as socially and economically marginalized, and amid intense struggles for life. This preference for the South does not imply that the global North lacks these same challenges or possibilities. Neither does it imply a rejection of the contributions of churches in the North to *diakonia* and this reflection. This choice was made deliberately, in view of the variety of life-expressions as well as Christian expressions that the South offers, and in an effort to address some of the complex questions arising there about the human predicament and the fate and future of the earth.

The following is a summary of reflections on the theme as seen from the vantage points mentioned above:

I. Church, Mission and *Diakonia*

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you…”  
*John 20:21*

1. God’s mission is about the realization of God’s vision for the world, a world in which “God rejoices because there shall no more be the sound of weeping, or the cry of distress, where people shall not die young, where people build houses and live in them and enjoy the fruits of their labour, where people will not die of calamities, and where the aggressors are transformed so that all shall live in peace.” (*Isaiah 65:17-25*) This eschatological hope of a “new heaven and earth” (*Revelation 21:1*) is not passive but constantly breaks into our present, inviting people to become co-workers with God by realizing it in every here and now. This mission of God is dynamic
and inclusive of all people and forces that uphold the sanctity and integrity of God’s creation.

2. The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in this mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diakonia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ.

3. Through its diakonia, the Church witnesses to God’s purpose in Jesus Christ and participates in God’s mission. In its diakonia, the Church follows the way of its Servant Lord who claimed that he came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45). In Christ, the Church is called to hold forth the power of service over the power of domination, so that life, in all its fullness, may be possible for all. Therefore, the Church presents itself not only as a sign of the coming reign of God but also as the way leading to it, Christ’s way.

4. As a diaconal community, the church is called to live out its Christian witness both at local and larger as well as personal and corporate levels. This is to be reflected in all the different expressions of being Church: in worship and proclamation, in practices of hospitality and visitation (Hebrews 13:1-3), in public witness and advocacy. As “liturgy after the Liturgy”—empowered by what faith celebrates—diakonia involves actions of care, relief and service, but goes further and addresses the root causes of injustice embedded in oppressive systems and structures. Sustained action for justice is upheld by our faith in and allegiance to the God of life when faced with the death-dealing powers of Empire.

5. Every Christian community in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to be a diaconal community, witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s reign. It heals relationships, and nurtures partnerships for the sake of God’s good creation. In bringing people and communities together around issues of life and of justice and peace, diakonia stands out as a reason for unity and as such also needs to be seen as its instrument. As an expression of participation in God’s mission in the world, diakonia is beyond all parochial interests or the agenda of religious propagation.

6. Some of the larger institutional expressions of diakonia must be affirmed for their role in enabling human resource development, meeting human need in crisis situations, and for advancing the causes of justice and economic development of the vulnerable people. Since some of these and other traditional forms of diakonia have tended to rely on infrastructure, institutions, expertise and resources, many Christian communities have come to see themselves either as supporters or as beneficiaries and rarely as participants in diakonia. Such specialized ministries do not replace the mandate of every Christian community to be diaconal.

7. As a response in faith to the hope of the coming reign of God, the signs of which are present in all experiences of hope amidst turmoil, in actions that heal and nurture people and relationships, in struggles that seek justice and affirm truth, diakonia has to be dynamic, contextual, and versatile. It must effect partnerships, not only at the level of global or larger church structures, but also among congregations, special ministries, and networks of people committed to values of justice, peace and human dignity at local, regional and national levels.

II. The Diakonia of the Marginalized People

“The stone that was rejected…”
(Psalm 118:22, Acts 4:11)

8. For many, diakonia is a Christian response to people in need and situations of crisis, and is characterized by actions of reaching out to them from locations of power and privilege with resources and infrastructure. Such an understanding has often resulted in viewing those in need as objects or recipients of diakonia. Many philanthropic or humanitarian initiatives are also guided by such attitudes. Such an understanding has not only failed to acknowledge the diakonia of the marginalized people but also treated them as mere objects and recipients. Some forms of diakonia have been pursued without attitudes of respect, awareness of the potential or a spirit of partnership with local communities.

9. Some diaconal initiatives which began with the intention of serving the weak and the vulnerable people, over the years have become instruments of service to the privileged and affluent sections of the society. Unfortunately, service to the poor is hardly the objective of some Christian educational and health institutions in many parts of the world today. Furthermore, the overwhelming culture of globalization with its accents on profit-making and consumerism has also introduced new meanings to service, resulting in the co-option of the traditional service structures into meeting the requirements of economic activity and interests. Because of this trend, reaching out to those disempowered by social and economic structures does not seem a priority for some churches anymore. Some other diaconal initiatives have
also been used as means of proselytism. Diakonia is integral to who we are as Christians, and diaconal initiatives should not be misused. Repenting for these and other ways in which the churches have deviated from the path of God’s mission is urgent and essential for their credibility and integrity.

10. Even if they do not have the material and financial resources to do diakonia in the way many churches are accustomed to, marginalized people, through their lives and everyday resistance, practise diakonia. They testify to the sinfulness of the world, holding it accountable for its complicity and silence. Therefore, God opts for the marginalized people not because they are weak by choice, nor because of paternalistic compassion, but primarily because their lives point towards the urgent need of social transformation.

11. The world may tend to see the margins as places of disgrace and powerlessness; however, the biblical witness points towards God who is always present in the struggles of those unjustly pushed to the margins of society. It gives several accounts of God’s attention and caring love to people in situations of oppression and consequent deprivation. God hears the cry of the oppressed and responds by sustaining and accompanying them in their journey towards liberation. (Exodus 3:7-8). This is the diakonia of God: A diakonia of liberation as well as of restoring dignity, and ensuring justice and peace.

12. “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46) This critical question indicates the decisive entry point that God made for this mission when sending the Son into the world. Jesus announces his diakonia as one that liberates the oppressed, opens the eyes that are blind, and heals the sick. (Luke 4: 16f) By asserting time and again that he has come to seek the lost and the least, Jesus constantly locates himself among the marginalized of his time. His diakonia rejects abusive power (Luke 4:1-12), refuses to be co-opted by the prevailing logic of power (Mark 10:45) and defies oppressive religious traditions (Luke 11:37-54). Instead, his diakonia opts to restore the ones who are denied life, even if these actions ultimately led him to the cross. [e.g. the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6)]. Through such an option, he exposes and confronts the forces of marginalization. To that extent, the margins are the privileged spaces for God’s compassion and justice and of God’s presence in vulnerability and resistance. Here the sick were healed, the domination of evil spirits broken, the dignity of the marginalized defended, and the disciples empowered with life-affirming values for ministry.

13. Furthermore, marginalized people are not to be seen always as those in need and despair. They resist injustice and oppression in their own ways and through their struggles for life, justice, dignity and rights for themselves and for all, unveil the presence and power of God in their lives. For example, people with disabilities are promoting the values of sensitivity and partnership; the Afro-descendent communities, the Dalits and other discriminated communities are calling churches and communities to resist and overcome cultures and practices that discriminate and dehumanize millions of people; the Indigenous peoples are advocating for the value of the interconnectedness of life, even as their own lives and lands are threatened; young people in disadvantaged situations are resisting policies that deprive them of opportunities for education and employment; and vulnerable migrant workers, through their struggles for human rights, dignity and justice, are challenging political systems that deny them basic human rights in the name of national interests. There are many such expressions in every part of the world, in the global south as well as in the global north. In all such expressions, in their actions and allegiances towards liberation and transformation, the churches today have new possibilities of diakonia as well as of new ecclesial self-discovery. Diakonia of the marginalized, then, is crucial for church’s engagement in realizing God’s oikoumene, the alternative vision of the world.

14. From a theological perspective the language of marginalized people may be conceived as a way of labelling or of reducing people to victims of systems and structures. Diakonia, however, must acknowledge the destructive and dehumanizing power of such structures, not only in order to point to the tragic effects of their reality, but also to the demands, legitimate rights and power of marginalized people to transform the world. In a world where people are treated as objects and commodities and are also mistreated on account of their identities such as gender, ethnicity, colour, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation and economic and cultural locations, diakonia must build persons and communities, affirm the dignity of all people, and transform cultures and practices that discriminate and abuse some people.

15. Marginalized people, through their yearnings for life with dignity and justice and through their participation in movements, are offering alternative visions of a world free of forces that deny justice, dignity and life for many. To many churches this is a demanding challenge but even more a liberating promise for renewing
traditional models of diaconal practice and theological reflection, towards new patterns of inclusiveness, sharing and transformative action. Jesus too found himself among the marginalized of his time as he began his ministry of announcing the coming reign of God. A majority of Christian congregations around the world are made up of people who are mostly poor and marginalized on account of several factors, and this reality needs to be seen as an opportunity and a resource for more authentic ecumenical engagement. Partnership and solidarity with the marginalized alone will ensure the credibility of the churches’ claim of their participation in the mission of God.

III. Diakonia for Transformation

“To do justice and to love kindness.” (Micah 6:8)

16. Diakonia, then, is service that makes the celebration of life possible for all. It is faith effecting change, transforming people and situations so that God’s reign may be real in the lives of all people, in every here and now.

17. The God of the Bible seeks and effects change in concrete situations of life, especially of those who are denied the same. Therefore, diakonia as an action in God’s love must strive to transform people, systems and cultures. God announces judgment upon those who abuse power and deny justice to the poor. Jesus too challenged unjust systems and practices and called the powerful and privileged who benefit from such, to repent and be transformed by the values of love, sharing, truthfulness and humility.

18. Diakonia is not limited to binding the wounds of the victims or doing acts of compassion. While such expressions of love and care are necessary, they do not preclude efforts aimed at confronting and transforming the forces and factors which cause suffering and deprivation. Diaconal ministry thus involves both comforting the victim and confronting “the powers and principalities” (Ephesians 6:12). It must heal the victim as well as the one who victimizes. It is a radical spirituality of struggle and commitment for transformation of sinful social structures and for the liberation of their victims. Without transformative work, diakonia would be a mere expression of service, subtly serving the interests of the oppressive and exploitative powers by covering up their complicity. If it does not challenge injustice and abuse of power, it ceases to be authentic diakonia.

19. Diakonia also does not settle for superficial expressions of peace and good will. Resonating with the indignation of prophet Jeremiah, “They have healed the brokenness of my people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace’, when there is no peace.” (Jer.6:14), diakonia exposes such attempts of the powerful and privileged, often done to sustain the unjust and oppressive status quo. Diakonia is prophetic action which also involves speaking truth to powers.

20. In today’s world, diakonia may also imply political action, confronting unjust military and economic powers; questioning the state policies that seem to invest more on defence rather than on people’s basic needs and human development; challenging anti-immigration laws that deny the dispossessed and the displaced their right to live; opposing development policies that destroy the earth and its people; and in working with and advocating for the rights of people who have been made vulnerable by social and economic structures.

21. Diakonia may also imply social action, aimed at dismantling oppressive cultures such as patriarchy, racism, casteism, xenophobia and other discriminatory and exclusionary practices. The churches too need to repent for the presence and practice of these cultures right within and for their derisive attitudes and theological constructions that stigmatize certain sections of society.

22. However, diakonia does not merely resist and confront evil but also proposes alternatives to the ways in which human beings relate with one another and with nature. To that extent, diakonia is transformative (Romans 12:2). Jesus, our Servant Lord, called those who followed him to be the salt of the earth, the light, and the leaven of the world (Matthew 5:13,14); in other words, to be agents of change and transformation. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the diakonia of the early Christian community resisted the power of the Empire by proposing alternative values and visions of the world. Diakonia, then, besides being an expression of support and help to those in need, is essentially a creative action meant to bring about the world God so desires.

IV. Challenges and Opportunities

“I am about to do a new thing!” (Isaiah 43:19)

21. In addition to the challenges, the context of the Twenty-First century presents numerous initiatives and struggles of people for freedom, justice, dignity and life in many parts of the world. Here lie new opportunities
for churches to attempt diakonia in many creative ways while rediscovering themselves afresh in the process. There may be many other opportunities and possibilities, specific to each context. The following insightful suggestions, shared during the conference, may be considered for further reflection and action:

a. Diakonia of the Local Congregations

1. Become aware of the social, political and economic realities of life and people within which they exist as diaconal communities. Christian education must aim at cultivating a sense of social responsibility.
2. Strive to recognize and affirm the theological significance of diakonia through worship and proclamation. Church needs to be a training ground for creative engagement with the world.
3. Initiate people-level action on environmental issues.
4. Firmly respond to the reality of abuse and violence against women at home, community and church.
5. Educate people against alcoholism and substance abuse, enabling the victims to overcome these conditions.
6. Be and become open, just, hospitable and inclusive communities. Churches must strive to become discrimination-free zones and sanctuaries of safety and hope.
7. Build capacities among members, especially in areas of counselling, de-addiction programmes, educational and employment opportunities, gender sensitivity etc.
8. Seek cooperation and collaboration with other churches, other faith communities, and people’s initiatives on relevant issues of people and life in each specific context. This may also include affirming diaconal actions as well as sharing resources.

b. Diakonia of the Larger Church Bodies

1. Encourage, support and accompany local churches as they respond to their own issues by developing and implementing diaconal work.
2. Encourage expressions of solidarity and mutual responsibility, especially by bridging the divide between urban and rural, affluent and poor, established and migrant congregations, among others.
3. Address issues of discrimination and exclusion within the church itself and launch campaigns to end the same, both within and outside.
4. Develop policies and programmes around issues of HIV/AIDS, disability, poverty, food security and environmental stewardship.
5. Recognize, strengthen and support prophetic voices and initiatives that strive to uphold the causes of human rights, justice and rights of the marginalized communities.
6. Build partnerships with regional and national level churches and organizations with a view to encourage grassroots, people-based initiatives.
7. Encourage theological institutions to introduce diakonia as a discipline wherever necessary, and also to initiate advanced study and research on relevant diaconal practices.
8. Develop easily readable Bible study materials on diakonia for pastors and lay people.
9. Engage in diaconal actions with people from different faith communities.

c. Diakonia of the WCC and Similar International Organizations

1. Recognize diakonia as an essential ecclesial expression, and that their organizations’ primary calling is not only to attempt certain diaconal actions on the behalf of churches but necessarily to accompany the initiatives of the churches. This may also include capacity-building, fostering partnerships, and mobilization of resources wherever necessary.
2. Journey with the people, communities and congregations in their struggles against discrimination and marginalization.
3. Advocate for the causes of justice, dignity and peace and for the victims of aggression, displacement and dispossession.
4. Support and accompany grassroots level people’s initiatives for change. Some of these may not have the needed visibility and infrastructural presence to attract support.
5. Facilitate dialogue with international diaconal agencies to encourage patterns of church cooperation and to foster mutual accountability.
6. Prepare resources and facilitate processes for interchurch exchange of theological support for creative diaconal engagement in different contexts.
7. Recognize the power of solidarity in struggle for transformation and therefore, enable, encourage and nurture such expressions of solidarity at all levels.
22. Understood this way at this moment in time, Dia-
konia may sometimes involve confrontation with
powers vested in the status quo. Risk may be inevi-
table at times, requiring an attitude of love, humility,
courage and commitment. Jesus insists that disci-
pleship seeks expression under the shadow of the
cross (Matthew 16: 24). Therefore, as communities
called together to a vocation of service in the way
of Christ, who laid down his life while serving, the
churches may encourage one another in the words
of the First Letter of Peter: “Now who will harm you
if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you
do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed.
Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimi-
dated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.
Always be ready to make the defence to anyone who
demands from you an accounting for the hope that
is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence”
(I Peter 3: 13-16).

2.2. Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for
All: A Call to Action
19 July 2012

As a follow-up to the Alternative Globalization
Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process which
concluded with the AGAPE Call presented at the 9th
General Assembly of the World Council of Churches
(WCC) in Porto Alegre in 2006, the WCC initiated
a program focused on eradicating poverty, challeng-
ing wealth accumulation, and safeguarding eco-
logical integrity based on the understanding that Poverty,
Wealth, and Ecology (PWE) are integrally related. The
PWE program engaged in on-going dialogue between
religious, economic, and political actors. Participants
included ecumenical leaders, representatives and leaders
of churches from all over the world, interfaith partners,
leaders of government, and social service organizations
and represented a rich variety of the world’s regions
and nations. Regional studies and consultations took
place in Africa (Dar es Salaam) in 2007, Latin America
and the Caribbean (Guatemala City) in 2008, Asia and
the Pacific (Chiang Mai) in 2009, Europe (Budapest)
in 2010, and North America (Calgary) in 2011. The
program culminated in a Global Forum and AGAPE
celebration in Bogor, Indonesia in 2012. The call to
action that follows is the result of a six-year process
of consultations and regional studies linking poverty,
wealth, and ecology.

Preamble

1. This call to action comes in a time of dire necessity. Peo-
ple and the Earth are in peril due to the over-consumption
of some, growing inequalities as evidenced in the persistent
poverty of many in contrast to the extravagant wealth of a
few, and intertwined global financial, socio-economic, eco-
logical, and climate crises. Throughout our dialogue, we, as
participants in consultations and regional studies expressed
differing, sometimes even contrasting, perspectives. We
also grew to share a common consciousness that life in the
global community as we know it today will come to an end
if we fail to confront the sins of egotism, callous disregard,
and greed which lie at the root of these crises. With a sense
of urgency, we bring this dialogue to the churches as a call
to action. This urgency is born of our profound hope and
belief: An Economy of Life is not only possible, it is in the
making—and God’s justice lies at its very foundation!

Theological and Spiritual Affirmations of Life

2. The belief that God created human beings as part of a
larger web of life and affirmed the goodness of the whole
creation (Genesis 1) lies at the heart of biblical faith. The
whole community of living organisms that grows and
flourishes is an expression of God’s will and works together
to bring life from and give life to the land, to connect one
generation to the next, and to sustain the abundance and
diversity of God’s household (oikos). Economy in God’s
household emerges from God’s gracious offering of abun-
dant life for all (John 10:10). We are inspired by Indig-
enous Peoples’ image of “Land is Life” (Macliing Dulag)
which recognizes that the lives of people and the land
are woven together in mutual interdependence. Thus, we
express our belief that the “creation’s life and God’s life are
intertwined” (Commission on World Mission and Evange-
lism) and that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

3. Christian and many other expressions of spirituality
teach us that the “good life” lies not in the competitive
quest for possessions, the accumulation of wealth, for-
tresses and stockpiles of armaments to provide for our
security, or by using our own power to lord it over others
(James 3: 13-18). We affirm the “good life” (Sumak Kausay
in Kichua language and the concept of Waniambi a Tobati
Engros from West Papua) modeled by the communion of
the Trinity in mutuality, shared partnership, reciprocity,
justice, and loving kindness.

4. The groaning of the Creation and the cries of people
in poverty (Jeremiah 14:2-7) alert us to just how much
our current social, political, economic, and ecological
state of emergency runs counter to God’s vision for life in abundance. Many of us too easily deceive ourselves into thinking that human desires stand at the center of God’s universe. We construct divisions, barriers, and boundaries to distance ourselves from neighbor, nature, and God’s justice. Communities are fragmented and relationships broken. Our greed and self-centeredness endanger both people and planet Earth.

5. We are called to turn away from works that bring death and to be transformed into a new life (metanoia). Jesus calls humanity to repent from our sins of greed and egotism, to renew our relationships with the others and creation, to restore the image of God, and to begin a new way of life as a partner of God’s life affirming mission. The call of the prophets is heard anew from and through people submerged into poverty by our current economic system and most affected by climate change: Do justice and bring a new Earth into being!

6. Our vision of justice is rooted in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ who drove money changers from the temples (Matthew 21:12), made the weak strong and strong weak (1 Corinthians 1:25-28), and redefined views of poverty and wealth (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus identified himself with the marginalized and excluded people not only out of compassion, but because their lives testified to the sinfulness of the systems and structures. Our faith compels us to seek justice, to witness to the presence of God, and to be part of the lives and struggles of people made weak and vulnerable by structures and cultures—women, children, people living in poverty in both urban and rural areas, Indigenous Peoples, racially oppressed communities, people with disabilities, Dalits, forced migrant workers, refugees, and religious ethnic minorities. Jesus says “Whatever you did to the least of these you did to me” (Matthew 25:40).

7. We must embody a “transformative spirituality” (Commission on World Mission and Evangelism) that re-connects us to others (Ubuntu and Sansaeng), motivates us to serve the common good, emboldens us to stand against all forms of marginalization, seeks the redemption of the whole Earth, resists life-destroying values, and inspires us to discover innovative alternatives. This spirituality provides the means to discover the grace to be satisfied with enough while sharing with any who have need (Acts 4:35).

8. Churches must be challenged to remember, hear, and heed Christ’s call today: “The time has come … The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). We are called to be transformed, to continue Christ’s acts of healing and reconciliation, and “to be what [we] have been sent to be—a people of God and a community in the world” (Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Africa). Therefore, the Church is God’s agent for transformation. The Church is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ who affirms the fullness of life for all, against any denial of life.

Intertwined and Urgent Crises

9. Our present stark global reality is so fraught with death and destruction that we will not have a future to speak of unless the prevailing development paradigm is radically transformed and justice and sustainability become the driving force for the economy, society, and the Earth. Time is running out.

10. We discern the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate, and ecological crises accompanied in many places of the world by the suffering of people and their struggle for life. Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation, and unrestrained privatization of goods and services are exploiting the whole Creation and dismantling social programs and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production. Uncontrolled financial flows destabilize the economies of an increasing number of countries all over the world. Various aspects of climate, ecological, financial, and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately anymore.

11. Climate change and threats to the integrity of creation have become the significant challenge of the multifaceted crises that we have to confront. Climate change directly impacts peoples’ livelihoods, endangers the existence of small island states, reduces the availability of fresh water, and diminishes Earth’s biodiversity. It has far reaching impacts on food security, the health of people, and the living habits of growing part of population. Due to climate change, life in its many forms as we know it can be irreversibly changed within the span of a few decades. Climate change leads to the displacement of people, to the increase of forced climate migration, and armed conflicts. Unprecedented challenges of climate change go hand-in-hand with the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and leads to the destruction of the Earth and to a substantial change of the habitat. Global warming and ecological destruction become more and more a question of life or death.
12. Our world has never been more prosperous, and, at the same time, more inequitable than it is today. Inequality has reached a level that we can no longer afford to ignore. People who have been submerged into poverty, driven into overwhelming debt, marginalised, and displaced are crying out with a greater sense of urgency and clarity than ever before. The global community must recognize the need for all of us to join hands together and to do justice in the face of unparalleled and catastrophic inequalities in the distribution of wealth.

13. Greed and injustice, seeking easy profit, unjust privileges, and short term advantages at the expense of long term and sustainable aims are root causes of the intertwined crises and cannot be overlooked. These life-destroying values have slowly crept in to dominate today’s structures and lead to lifestyles that fundamentally defy the regenerative limits of the Earth and the rights of human beings and other forms of life. Therefore, the crisis has deep moral and existential dimensions. The challenges that are posed are not first and foremost technological and financial, but ethical and spiritual.

14. Market fundamentalism, is more than an economic paradigm, it is a social and moral philosophy. During the last thirty years, market faith based on unbridled competition and expressed by calculating and monetizing all aspects of life has overwhelmed and determined the direction of our systems of knowledge, science, technology, public opinion, media, and even education. This dominating approach has funnelled wealth primarily toward those who are already rich and allowed humans to plunder resources of the natural world far beyond its limits to increase their own wealth. The neoliberal paradigm lacks the self-regulating mechanisms to deal with the chaos it creates with far-reaching impacts especially for impoverished and marginalised.

15. This ideology is permeating all features of life, destroying it from the inside as well as from the outside as it seeps into the lives of families and local communities, wreaks havoc upon the natural environment and traditional life-forms and cultures, and spoils the future of the Earth. The dominant global economic system in this way threatens to put an end to both the conditions for peaceful coexistence and life as we know it.

16. The one-sided belief that social benefits automatically follow from economic (GDP) growth is misguided. Economic growth without constraints strangles the flourishing of our own natural habitat: climate change, deforestation, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss, and so on. The ecological commons have been degraded and appropriated, through the use of military force, by the political and economic elite. Over-consumption based on the costs of uncovered debts generates massive social and ecological indebtedness, which are owed by the developed countries of global North to the global South, as well as indebtedness over against the Earth is unjust and creates enormous pressure on future generations. The notion that the Earth is the Lord’s and everything in it (Psalm 24: 1; 1 Corinthians 10: 26) has been dismissed.

**Well-Springs of Justice**

17. We confess that churches and church members are complicit in the unjust system when they partake in unsustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and remain entangled in the economy of greed. There are churches who continue to preach theologies of prosperity, self-righteousness, domination, individualism, and convenience. Some support theologies of charity rather than justice for the impoverished. Others fail to question and even legitimize systems and ideologies founded on unlimited growth and accumulation, and ignore the reality of ecological destruction and the plights of victims of globalization. Some focus on short-term, quantifiable results at the expense of deep-seated, qualitative changes. However, we are also aware that even when many fail to examine and change their own production, consumption, and investment behaviour, an increasing number of churches from all continents are stepping up their efforts and expressing their belief that transformation is possible.

18. Ultimately, our hope springs from Christ’s resurrection and promise of life for all. We see evidence of that resurrection hope in the churches and movements committed to making a better world. They are the light and salt of the Earth. We are profoundly inspired by numerous examples of transformation from within the family of churches and in growing movements of women, people in poverty, youth, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples who are building an Economy of Life and promoting a flourishing ecology.

19. People of faith, Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous leaders in the Philippines, have given their lives to maintain their connection to and to continue to sustain themselves from the land to which they belong. Churches in South America, Africa, and Asia are conducting audits of external debts and challenging mining and resource-extractive companies to be accountable for human rights violations and environmental damages. Churches in Latin America and
Europe are sharing and learning from differing experiences with globalization and working towards defining common but differentiated responsibilities, building solidarity, and strategic alliances. Christians are defining indicators of greed and conducting intentional dialogues with Buddhists and Muslims which discover common ground in the fight against greed. Churches in partnership with civil society are engaged in discussing the parameters of a new international financial and economic architecture, promoting life-giving agriculture and building economies of solidarity.

20. Women have been developing feminist theologies that challenge patriarchal systems of domination as well as feminist economics that embed the economy in society and society in ecology. Youth are in the forefront of campaigns for simple living and alternative lifestyles. Indigenous Peoples are demanding for holistic reparations and the recognition of Earth rights to address social and ecological debt.

**Commitments and Call**

21. The 10th General Assembly of the WCC is meeting at a time when the vibrant life of God’s whole creation may be extinguished by human methods of wealth creation. God calls us to a radical transformation. Transformation will not be without sacrifice and risk, but our faith in Christ demands that we commit ourselves to be transformative churches and transformative congregations. We must cultivate the moral courage necessary to witness to a spirituality of justice and sustainability and build a prophetic movement for an Economy of Life for all. This entails mobilizing people and communities, providing the required resources (funds, time and capacities), and developing more cohesive and coordinated programs geared toward transforming economic systems, production, distribution, and consumption patterns, cultures, and values.

22. The process of transformation must uphold human rights, human dignity, and [human accountability to all of God’s creation]. We have a responsibility that lies beyond our individual selves and national interests to create sustainable structures that will allow future generations to have enough. Transformation must embrace those who suffer the most from systemic marginalization, such as people in poverty, women, Indigenous Peoples, and persons living with disabilities. Nothing without them is for them. We must challenge ourselves and overcome structures and cultures of domination and self-destruction that are rending the social and ecological fabric of life. Transformation must be guided by the mission to heal and renew the whole creation.

23. Therefore, we call on the 10th General Assembly in Busan to commit to strengthening the role of the WCC in convening churches, building a common voice, fostering ecumenical cooperation, and ensuring greater coherence for the realization of an Economy of Life for all. In particular, the critical work on building a new international financial and economic architecture (WCC Statement on Just Finance and an Economy of Life), challenging wealth accumulation and systemic greed and promoting anti-greed measures (Report of the Greed Line Study Group), redressing ecological debt and advancing eco-justice (WCC Statement on Eco-justice and Ecological Debt) must be prioritized and further deepened in the coming years.

24. We further call on the 10th WCC General Assembly in Busan to set aside a period of time between now and the next General Assembly for churches to focus on faith commitments to an “Economy of Life—Living for God’s Justice in Creation [Justice and Peace for All].” The process will enable the fellowship of churches to derive fortitude and hope from each other, strengthen unity, and deepen common witness on critical issues that lie at the very core of our faith.

25. The statement on “Just Finance and an Economy of Life” calls for an ethical, just, and democratic international financial regime “grounded on a framework of common values: honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability, and ecological sustainability” (WCC Statement on Just Finance and an Economy of Life). We can and must shape an Economy of Life that engenders participation for all in decision-making processes that impact lives, provides for people’s basic needs through just livelihoods, values and supports social reproduction and care work done primarily by women, and protects and preserves the air, water, land, and energy sources that are necessary to sustain life (Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific). The realization of an Economy of Life will entail a range of strategies and methodologies, including, but not limited to: critical self-reflection and radical spiritual renewal; rights-based approaches; the creation and multiplication of spaces for the voices of the marginalised to be heard in as many arenas as possible; open dialogue between global North and global South, between churches, civil society and state actors, and among various disciplines and world faiths to build synergies for resistance to structures and cultures that deny life in dignity for many; taxation justice; and the organization of a broad platform for common witness and advocacy.
26. The process is envisioned as a flourishing space where churches can learn from each other and from other faith traditions and social movements about how a transformative spirituality can counter and resist life-destroying values and overcome complicity in the economy of greed. It will be a space to learn what an Economy of Life means, theologically and practically, by reflecting together and sharing what concrete changes are needed in various contexts. It will be a space to develop joint campaigns and advocacy activities at the national, regional, and global levels with a view to enabling policy and systemic changes leading to poverty eradication and wealth redistribution; ecologically-respectful production, consumption, and distribution; and, healthy, equitable, post-fossil fuel, and peace-loving societies.

God of Life calls us to justice and peace.
Come to God’s table of sharing!
Come to God’s table of life!
Come to God’s table of love!

2.3 Doing Gender Justice as a Mission Imperative
God’s Justice and Ours
Rastko Jovic

Announcement of the Kingdom of God


“Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (Luke 3: 11–14)

In other words, to prepare the path for God’s kingdom is to actively do justice and destroy the consequences of the sin. What we have in the words of John the Baptist is an expression of Christological eschatology, i.e. the kingdom of God is going to be given to us as a gift, but at the same time we have been called to “make the path smooth” in our acceptance of the gift. In that sense, eschaton is God–human endeavour, the kingdom that we’re awaiting from God is anticipated and expressed in history through the praxis of human beings that should iconize the new eon. In Gustavo Gutiérrez’s words, “The hope which overcomes death must be rooted in the heart of historical praxis; if this hope doesn’t take shape in the present to lead it forward, it will be only an evasion, a futuristic illusion.”

Christological eschatology means one important thing: it is divine–human synergy, just as Christ has divine–human nature as defined by the ecumenical council of Chalcedon. It isn’t a communist utopia in which heaven on earth will be brought about by the proletariat, or a utopia of Zealots during the time of Jesus that human will is capable of bringing kingdom of God. We sometimes forget this truth and make ourselves passive in history through the expectation that God will do everything exclusively. We forget sometimes that “from the very beginning Christianity was socially minded. The whole fabric of Christian existence is social and corporate. All Christian sacraments are intrinsically ‘social sacraments,’ i.e., sacraments of incorporation . . . To build up the church of Christ means, therefore, to build up a new society and, by implication, to re-build human society on a new basis.”

The New Testament reveals the kingdom of God as a new mode of relationship, a new quality of life. The kingdom is proclaimed when the sick and the poor are healed, when the dead are resurrected, when the disenfranchised are accepted, when abundance of food is offered to many, when justice, love, peace, harmony, and solidarity rule (Matt. 4:23, 5:10, 25:34; Luke 9:2, 9:12–18; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:9). Let’s look at the words from the beginning of the liturgy in the Orthodox Church: “Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Through these opening words, the liturgy is supposed to open up toward the eschatological kingdom, “a progressive movement towards the fullness of the kingdom of Christ, toward His cosmic and historical triumph.”

The kingdom of God should be manifested in all of its social implications through historical limitations. It means that the liturgy should not reflect a patriarchal mode of relationship, the degradation of women,” disregard of lay

4. At several conferences (Agapia 1976, Crete 1989, Rhodes 1988,
people, and inaccessibility for the sick and elderly. Primacy should be given to these issues that collide with the values of God’s kingdom. Genesis 3:16 argues that man should rule over woman, but this verse comes as a consequence of the sin – the fall. This verse only expresses how the male–female relationship has been lived or conducted in our communities where the ideology of men rules, and not God’s given/original order.

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)

In the eschatological community of the Holy Spirit we have been called to have dreams and visions of the world to come. The Holy Spirit is calling us not to deprive ourselves from dreams – the dreams that a just community of male and female is possible. With our dreams and visions we are able to witness the eschatological signs in history.

“But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). This is another example that signifies that kingdom of God should inspire us for today’s life. “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12). The “violent” signifies here those who fought in history through praxis so as to announce the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness. And eschatology doesn’t imply denial of the present, “because the eschaton does not destroy but rather transforms history, turning it into eschatological history and imbuing it with meaning and purpose.”

It is from within this framework – the framework of eschatology and kingdom for the whole of humanity – that I would like us to think about gender justice. In the following sections, I will discuss this concept of justice in two contexts: first, gender justice in the context of God’s justice; and second, gender justice in the context of kingdom of God. Within these two contexts and insisting that the search for gender justice is at the centre of our Christological and ecclesiological preoccupation, I further argue against the temptation of reducing this pilgrimage of justice and peace to a mere feminist agenda, nor just a matter of market ideology. All our theological undertakings, reflection, and praxis will be irrelevant if gender justice is not part of God’s justice agenda nor part of God’s kingdom values – if gender justice is not a mission imperative.

**Gender Justice in the Context of God’s Justice**

What is gender justice in the context of God’s justice? In Psalm 85:11–13, the Psalmist declares: “Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.”

God’s justice builds a road toward peace and happiness here on earth. In the Old Testament, before Israel became a kingdom, deeds of elected people were identified with deeds of God and God’s energies. Through his energies God expresses his own will constituting his justice in history.” Taking such a perspective of God’s justice we can come to the idea of gender justice as core to God’s justice and peace agenda. In this agenda, God’s justice aims at bringing the just order in the world. As a God of justice (Is. 30:18), God is interested in fairness as well as in what makes for right relationships. God’s actions and decisions are true and right (Job 34:12; Rev. 16:7) and the demands on individuals and nations to look after victims of oppression are just demands (Ps. 82). “As Lord and Judge, God brings justice to nations” (Ps. 67:4) and “sets things right” on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, and the victims of injustice (Ps. 103:6; 146:6–9).

“For the wicked, the unjust, and the oppressor, God as the supreme judge of the earth is a dreaded force of justice. But for all who are unjustly treated, God’s just action is a reason for hope.” Bringing justice to the world, according to our possibilities and our energies, is to bring God’s justice. Gender justice should be understood that way too – as part of God’s justice. Gender justice is not about women only, it’s about a just and better world in which all genders of all ages should benefit. In the face of the still existing gender injustice, we still need to allow more space for women, bringing their perspective, expertise, participation, and energies that enhance the work of bringing

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5. Division between clerics and lay persons is evident through the issue of the language usage in the liturgy. It is at this point that the criterion of the past has a primacy. Thanks to the Volos Academy for Theological Studies this question was raised again in 2012.


7. For more on God’s justice, see: Μαρία Ι. Παζαρσκή, «Η δικαιοσύνη του Θεού στην Παλαιά Διαθήκη απο την εποχή των Πατριαρχών με τη μεταμφιεσμένη προφητεία», Δελτίο Βιβλικού Μελετών 25, 2007, 9–15

justice to the world as a whole. Creating more space for women means making “the rough roads smooth” (Luke 3:5). Involvement of all of us in doing God’s justice leads to liberation of each in us. Liberation such that each uses their gifts and talents does not come through some kind of spiritual freedom, but through a framework in which each created being is free as *imago Dei*, “both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Philemon 16).

**Gender Justice in the Context of Kingdom of God**

In the context of kingdom of God, gender justice should not imply something negative, i.e., more rights for women, less for men. Gender justice is more positive and proactive in the framework of God’s justice and eschatology. Gender justice being God’s justice brings more energies and talents from which everyone can only benefit, bringing a new world in which both men and women can operate more freely knowing that what they do is “paving the road.” This theological construction for gender justice could be more plausible and acceptable for the Orthodox participants in WCC, testifying that issues of gender justice are not just imported problems from the world, but that they damage and blur the vision and hope that the church should bring to human beings. At the same time, the call of John the Baptist to prepare the way of God should still be echoing in our minds, because we are building that road toward the fulfillment and acceptance of God’s gift, i.e. his kingdom. This call is proactive.

Russian philosopher and theologian Soloviev emphasized that it is not possible for us to produce heaven on earth, but we also cannot allow that life on earth becomes hell. To this, John the Baptist would answer: “Not only should you work to stop the Earth from becoming a hell, even more you should work to iconize the kingdom that comes.” This proactive element has a strikingly important implication, namely, that denunciation of terrible things in the world concerning injustice to women isn’t enough. As Christians, we have been called to work proactively to give more possibilities to women, working together toward a new vision of equality and justice within humankind and wider creation – iconizing the kingdom of God.

**Gender Justice: Beyond Feminism in the World of Money**

In the global economic system we experience everyday, Michael Chossudovsky has shown how new policies affect women’s rights. In his book *Globalization of Poverty and the New World Order*, he argues that the new monetary system has shown intent to divide men and women in their struggle for rights, breaking the solidarity of men and women “against the new world order.” The World Bank advises countries to cut social spending, affecting women in the most negative way, while at the same time the Women in Development Program (a World Bank program) fosters women’s rights!

While recognizing the possibility of “market failure” (and consequently the need for state intervention to protect women’s rights), the World Bank contends that “free market” broadly supports the “empowerment of women” and the achievement of gender equality.

Chossudovsky finds economic reasons why the struggle between men and women only contributes further to the capitalistic system destroying solidarity between men and women, as each group fights for its own rights as if it were separate from and against the other.

As for Christians, there are at least two gods that we can discern in this world: the earthly god and the heavenly God. In some sense they’re both metaphysical. The first one is money, or the capitalist system, which many already define as a religion, or the “civil religion of global modernity.” The second one is the triune God for most Christians. The monetary system in which we live governs and, in many cases, directs human lives, directs our desires and the way we relate to each other. Multinational companies pressure countries to restructure their economies “to increase profit and maximize accumulation for the rich and the powerful owners of capital.” Almost “every aspect of social life is being brought under the direct control of the market.” Taking into account, for example, that on average women in the EU earn around 16 % less per hour than

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11. Ibid., 68.

12. Ibid., 64.


16. Ibid., 104.
men, we can better understand the injustice in this area. Pressure is even more evident in developing countries, with terrible consequences on the issues of gender justice. Free-market religion has its own market logic, serving to expand options for profit making. This logic is harmful to the liberation of people from hunger and poverty, increasing injustice and inequalities. In the end, the more free-market we become, the more inequalities we will have, increasing spiritual and emotional deprivation. Social cutting pushes everyone to think about every penny, governing their policies, and at the same time destroys the dignity of women by pushing them to the margins of society, leading to the risk of being trafficked as sexual and labour commodities – bonded slaves of the powerful exploiters.

Theological or Market Ideology Values

In the early history of Christianity, Augustus Caesar was concerned that the Roman Empire would vanish if the number of childbirths decreased. To increase birth rates, Augustus promulgated laws that supported traditional patriarchal values of male dominance. For example, he argued that even gods were married and that’s why men had to imitate gods (Dio Cassius 56.2.5.). In this case, stimulation and acceptance of the law was defended by a theological premise that gods marry. Having children was endorsed, and those who were childless risked punishment according to the law (Augustus 34.40.5). In his insistence on procreation and good marriage, Augustus Caesar employed both social and theological arguments.

The New Testament as a book written in this context reflects this situation within the primitive church, as it strove for physical survival. At the time, Christians used whatever means were at their disposal to theologically defend these values of patriarchy, which were not created by the Christian community but rather a consequence of the Roman policy and economic system of that era.

In the pastoral epistles of the New Testament, the male heads of households are urged to govern their households well – keeping their children, slaves, and women submissive as possessions rather than fellow human beings deserving of equality and justice. By exercising power over these within their households, then, they would qualify as potential leaders in the church itself (1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12–13). Often, the unjust relationships and the domination of life in community that result from egoistic accumulation of power and money have been defended theologically as a God-given order. Inversely, God through Jesus has clearly shown that just and right relationships, rather than domination and injustice, are the measure of participating in God’s reign.

Christ’s action in the Temple, whether historical or not, marks the path we should follow. In the “Temple action,” Christ tried symbolically to erase those forces that represent the earthly god of mammon. Obviously, this god is a destructive force not only in relations between humans, but also between God and humans. This cleansing of the Temple signifies our need to cleanse theology of earthly gods and their consequences. In other words, we shouldn’t theologically defend values that represent products of unjust economic structures and an oppressive monetary system – accumulation of money, consumerist desires, etc. These “market ideology values” should be deconstructed by theologians and Christian life instead of defended through the language of theology. In other words, churches should be aware finally that “market ideology” and its consequences cannot be identical to theology. In the future, we should be able to discern what in our tradition has been a result of theological mistakes and what has been the result of economic mistakes. Theology should struggle to liberate human beings from the tyranny of worldly gods, i.e., the free market and the hegemonic rulers of the modern world. In that sense, we could discern that we cannot defend the unjust treatment of women as a consequence of the social and economic system throughout history on the basis of theology.

The church requires a vision in which theology is able to translate the vision of the “different world” into everyday reality. With “gender justice” we’re paving the way for the coming inclusive kingdom of God, i.e., providing opportunities for women and men to reveal and use their energies, gifts, and uniqueness to make the road smoother.

23. For adultery Augustus prescribed punishment both for males and females: Grubbs, Women and the Law, 84.
24. Dio Cassius 56.2.5.
If we want to be authentic in our vision, iconizing eschatological hope here and now, it is necessary to provide enough inclusive space to allow everyone to realize their capacities and reach their highest potential in their service to creation and to God as their mission. This way, gender justice should not be identified as justice for only women – making more divisions in society – but rather is aimed at holistically building a just community of men and women, where every member of creation lives and flourishes to the glory of their creator.

If we understand gender justice in the structure of tension between history and eschatology, between our responsibilities as Christians to build the vision toward the coming kingdom and its fulfillment, then we could identify gender justice with the aspirations and struggles for God’s justice and his kingdom. Such a struggle for the fulfillment of the kingdom at the end would benefit the whole of humankind, enriching mutual understanding and mutual sharing of different dynamisms. This will not happen unless we operate within the scope of a history of open and shared space for men and women that builds up and realizes their diverse gifts.

Gender Justice: Christological Issues

Some theologians have Christologically implied that Christ had sexual urges because he took human nature, which they identify exclusively with “male” nature. Unfortunately, what they do not say is that Christ would have had sexual urges if he accepted only male nature in fullness. Yet reading the Christological decisions of Chalcedon (451 AD), it is obvious that Christ took all of humanity, i.e., in the fullness of male and female nature. In the famous Chalcedon definition of faith, it has been said that Christ is truly God and truly human, Θεόν αλήθείας και α´ νθρωπον αλήθειας.28 The word α´ νθρωπος suggests the whole of human being (male and female), and not male only. In other words, Christ could not have had sexual urges because he isn’t fully male only, but fully human, which is something completely different. But this question about Christ’s nature does not only address concerns about Christ’s sexuality, but also about our understanding of gender justice. In the context of Christology, it is Christ who lives life as fully human in his nature: one hundred percent male and one hundred percent female. To build his body, that is, the church, means to build on these foundations respecting his holistic humanity: fullness of male and female. Would we be authentic in our witnessing of Christ in history if we’re not ready to accept the full participation of male and female in his body? On the other hand, his fullness of humanity doesn’t repudiate our sexuality. On the contrary, our human sexuality has been preserved showing the longing to encompass the fullness of human nature. Through sexuality, men and women testify to the fullness of human nature; it is a sign of our longing for the fullness of being human.29

In that sense, Christology easily slips into ecclesiological questions. It is only in this context that we should realize that gender justice is not just a moral question or a question of human rights; it rather goes much deeper to the challenging of our theology and our understanding of all of the consequences of the Chalcedon faith. Our faithfulness to Chalcedon isn’t only a matter of our oral recognition of the letter of decision in 451AD, but rather, and especially, the practical acceptance of this decision and a true understanding of these consequences if we want to be authentic.

In Christ we have two wills, a fact that has been recognized in the long battle for Orthodoxy in the Sixth Ecumenical Synod (681 AD). Christ, against monothelitism, had two natures and two wills (δύο φυσικα´ς Θελη´σεις/δύο φυσικα´ς ζων)30 united through one person of Christ. His human will followed Christ’s divine will revealing the true humanity, revealing the true aim of humanity – what human beings (α´ νθρωπος) could be in its fullness. In that sense, humanity has been elevated to its full potential through unity with the divine will in the one person of Christ. It is the church’s call to elevate human potential – both male and female – in her (the church’s) body. These teachings of the church through the ecumenical synods (4th and 6th respectively) give a firm ground to understand that issues of gender justice are a matter of deep theological considerations and they are essential to our faith. Gender justice, understood as the possibility to elevate the human capacities of both male and female, has been an issue of our faithfulness to the church-revealed truth of Christ.

Conclusion

As theologians we could accept this analysis, adding that a breaking of the solidarity between men and women is a breaking of the road that we have been called upon to build in the process of anticipating the eschatological fulfillment. In essence, gender justice is not an issue about rights for or a fight against a group of people or someone. Gender justice is about God’s justice and our call to the struggle to fulfill as much as possible of that justice in the constraints of history. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa: “Woman is in the image of God equally with man. The sexes are of equal worth. Their virtues are equal, their struggles are equal . . . Would a man be able to compete with a woman who lives her life to the full?” Gender justice is therefore about whether we are able to iconize God’s kingdom in the best possible way with all the abilities that God gave us, otherwise we “hide our talents in the ground” (Matt. 25:25). Saint Maximos prophetically announced that the truth is matter of the eschatological state. This has a profound impact on our view of the present. We cannot be satisfied with the present because the present doesn’t express the truth; but we have been called to challenge every present reality on our way toward the truth, i.e., the eschatological state of the church.

Our sin is even greater than in the gospel story in which one man hid his own talent that he received from God – in the context of gender justice, men often “hide God’s talents that have been given to women.”

Woman has the same spiritual dignity as man. Both of them have the same God, the same Teacher, the same Church. They breathe, see, hear, know, hope and love in the same way. Beings who have the same life, grace and salvation are called . . . to the same manner of being.

Gender justice should be defined through the framework of eschatological hope for all humankind and our readiness to pave that road here and now, employing all our gifts. Gender justice should be defined through God’s justice; that is, to proclaim the values of God’s kingdom we need to engage all possible resources in all that kingdom’s diversity. Women’s energy and faculties are here to work for God’s justice – working for an alternative, more inclusive society that reflects God’s reign. In that sense, the church needs to become a society in which a person, as an individual, can be put in the service of God and be offered a cure to heal the whole human, spiritually and bodily.

In our dialogue in the WCC, we should avoid a globalist mentality that disrespects local contexts. In the same way that market ideology brings economic globalism, we should avoid theological globalism – imposing some issues on everyone. I would propose that our dialogue should be conducted in a proactive and positive manner. If some churches achieve more gender justice, those examples need to be accentuated in WCC, enriching our dialogue with positive models. Personally, I believe that gender justice in WCC shouldn’t be achieved through criticism and imposition of our own theological concepts on all church members and their contexts. Gender justice as criticism and theological globalism would only deepen the trenches and build walls between member churches. Providing positive examples in which gender justice benefits the church and society in general would be much more desirable. It would welcome all member churches to engage in gender justice as core to the nature and mission of the church, which is journeying together toward life.

God’s kingdom is inclusive and therefore gender justice becomes an expression of God’s reign as an inclusive concept, not as a concept that oppresses through theological globalism. Respecting such an inclusive concept, we learn to respect others. In this way, rather than developing a justice agenda in a polemical way, we will work together toward creating communities where women and men have the freedom to contribute to gender justice more positively – where gender justice is central to the church’s justice and peace agenda.

32. “Σκια τῆς Παλαιας Διαθήκης, ελκων τής της Νέας Διαθήκης, ἀλλὰ θέλει τήν μελλόντων καταστάσεως”, in Ιωαννίνης Ζηζίουλας, “Το Μυστήριο της Εκκλησίας και το Μυστήριο της Αγίας Τριάδος”, *Sabornost* 49, 43–52.
34. Orthodox participants often understood, justly or not, gender justice as a way of secular or Western globalism in the most aggressive and disrespectful way to Orthodox Church, see for example: “An Orthodox Statement on the Prague Consultation” in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, ed. Gennadios Limouris, 110–11 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994).
2.4 Mission toward Fullness of Life

Metropolitan Geevarghese Mor Coorilos

The World Council of Churches’ (WCC) new mission and evangelism statement, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, prepared by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), is about seeking “vision, concepts, and directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in the changing global landscape.” Given that there has been only one official WCC mission and evangelism affirmation since the historic integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the WCC in 1961 and that the global scenario has significantly changed since then, a fresh look at the world mission context and its ramifications for contemporary mission thinking and praxis was imperative.

Some of the contextual changes that are addressed in the new mission affirmation include the shift of the centre of gravity of global Christianity from global North to global South; the sweeping influence of neo-liberal economic ideologies across the world; the impact of migration; new forms of oppression of people and environment; novel ways of being churches; and the phenomenal rise of Pentecostal and charismatic movements. The new mission affirmation aims to stimulate creative mission reflection and encourage discernment of action by WCC member churches, affiliated bodies, and related agencies. It is also expected that the new mission affirmation will provide a renewed appreciation of the mission of the Holy Spirit, itself understood from a trinitarian perspective. It articulates a new understanding of a prophetic missiology—“mission from the margins”—that affirms life in its fullness vis-à-vis justice, inclusivity, and integrity of creation. This essay is an attempt to look at some of the key affirmations of the new WCC mission and evangelism statement.

Mission Is Affirmation of the Life of the Holy Trinity

According to the new mission statement, mission is essentially affirmation of trinitarian life. In this sense, what the document offers is *misso trinitatis*. It affirms that the triune God is the God of life and that we are called to participate in the life-affirming mission of the Holy Trinity, itself the source and fountain of mission. As the document itself puts it, “Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God and the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation.” Mission, in this sense, may be defined as the outpouring of love, justice, mutual sharing, and equality that characterize and bind together the Holy Trinity. The trinitarian life that is affirmed here is the result of *perichoresis*, the mutual indwelling and sharing of love, justice, and peace among the members of the divine trinitarian community. Trinitarian life or fullness of life, therefore, is in clear contradiction with “luxurious life,” which is being privatized and enjoyed by an elite minority, often at the expense of the vast majority. It does not view “goodness of life” in terms of greedy quest for accumulating wealth, possessions, armaments, and hegemonic power to exercise mastery over others. “Trinitarian life is derived from a trinitarian economy, which fosters sharing, justice, and fairness: fullness of life for all.

The act of the triune God is characterized by an egalitarian, interdependent, communitarian, and inclusive way of operation. However, economic globalization today has effectively supplanted the God of life with its own “ungod” of Mammon—the god of free market capitalism that propagates a “soteriology” of “saving” the world through creation of undue wealth and prosperity. Countering such idolatrous visions and denouncing the economy of greed in the strongest language possible, the new mission statement offers a counter-cultural missiology. The prophetic dimension of the new mission statement therefore also lies in its outright rejection of the idolatry of Mammon in a world of free-market economy.

It also affirms in no uncertain terms that “a denial of life is a rejection of the God of Life.” It implies that a trinitarian mission is one that affirms all life. Life is essentially a theological principle and an ethical postulate, as Paulos Mar Gregorios maintains. According to him, “All life is God’s gift. Recognizing our lives and those of others as a sacred gift from God will have crucial ramifications on how we make our moral choices (ethics) and also how we perceive witness in the world (mission).” Life is treated here in its holistic sense, inclusive of biological, human, non-human, and eternal dimensions of life. This is an inclusive

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3. TTL, 4, ¶2.
4. Quoted from “Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All: A Call to Action” (WCC, 2012) p. 1. This document is the result of a six-year process of consultations and regional studies linking poverty, wealth, and ecology.
5. TTL, 4, ¶1.
vision of mission that would challenge all forms of discrimination on any basis.

We affirm life with dignity and intrinsic worth when we confront those systems and structures that discriminate people on the basis of caste, race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, HIV status, sexual orientation, and so on and thereby deny dignified life to people. In other words, to affirm our faith in the triune God is to choose life in its fullness, and to do that is to participate in God’s mission of life affirmation. To use the words of the new mission affirmation, “God invites us into the life-giving mission of the Triune God and empowers us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life for all in the new heaven and earth.” As the book of Deuteronomy urges us: “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19). Mission, therefore, is to turn to the triune God of life.

**Mission as Transformative Spirituality**

The missiology of the new mission statement is Spirit-centred. A distinct focus on pneumatology is one of the salient features of the document. The Holy Spirit is discerned wherever life in fullness is affirmed; where the oppressed are liberated; where broken communities are reconciled and healed; and where creation is restored. Thus, the scope of the mission of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the ecclesial community alone, but is encountered outside the church as well, where struggles for fullness of life and justice take place. The economy of the Holy Spirit that is highlighted here is one that considers the Holy Spirit as the source of Jesus Christ and the church as the eschatological coming together (synaxis) of the people of God in the reign of God. “Mission as going forth is therefore the outcome, rather than the origin of the church, and is called ’liturgy after the liturgy’.”

Another major highlight of the mission statement is the specific accent on mission as spirituality. Spirituality is what accords our lives their deepest meaning and provides dynamism and energy. Christian witness is not only what we do in mission, but also how we live out mission. In other words, the being mode of mission is as important as the doing mode. Authentic mission is sustained by spiritualities that have deep roots in trinitarian community of love, justice, and integrity of creation. Put differently, mission as askesis, expressed in authentic Christian life styles, is what accords mission of the Spirit credibility. To the extent that our lives in the world around us match with that of Christ, we witness to Christ. In other words, when there is no mismatch between what we proclaim and how we live out the gospel, mission is authentically and powerfully exercised.

In our own times, the influential example of the present bishop of Rome, Pope Francis, is a great manifestation of mission as askesis—mission as spirituality. Transformative spirituality reconnects us to others. It is about following Jesus Christ who reveals life in full communion with God, with neighbour, and with creation. Our participation in the *missio Dei* is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (ruah).

The mission spirituality that the new mission affirmation articulates, as part of the mission of the Spirit, is transformative. Mission spirituality, therefore, would confront those systems and values that destroy life, wherever they are in operation, be it the realm of politics, economics, or even churches.

The mission statement reinforces this radical dimension of mission as transformative spirituality by echoing the similar challenge expressed in the Edinburgh 2010 common call: “Our faithfulness to God and God’s free gift of Life compels us to confront idolatrous assumptions, unjust systems, politics of domination and exploitation in our current world economic order.” This means, as already maintained, that mission of the Holy Spirit also necessarily entails discernment of evil spirits where forces of death and destruction of life prevail. Mission, therefore, is to turn to the Holy Spirit who transforms life.

**Mission Is Creation-Centred**

The new mission statement affirms a missiology that is creation-centred. It articulates a missiology that begins with creation. The belief that God created humanity as part of a larger web of life and that all life was given intrinsic worth by God is a fundamental assertion of the biblical faith. In fact, the very act of *missio Dei* begins with the act of creation. As Samuel Rayan opines, “The earth is God’s daughter and the creation accounts evoke in us the spirit of a birthday celebration.” Creation and celebration of all life is deemed a missionary activity of the triune God. The document affirms gospel as “the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society.”

God’s mission therefore is cosmic. When the planet is facing such serious threats as global warming, climate change, and the exploitation of nature due to excessive greed and undue profit motives, mission as quest for eco-justice is hugely important. Here again, the new mission affirmation breaks new grounds in that it goes beyond...
those understandings of mission that tend to understand and practice mission as something done by humanity to others. We tend to forget that in many ways creation is in mission to humanity. For instance, nature and its resources have the power to heal. In other words, the mission statement does not present creation as a mere object of human concern, but as an active agent of God’s mission that channels divine grace and blessing.

The life dictum of Indigenous peoples—land is life—(Macliing Dulag) represents a world view that recognizes the integral oneness of human life with nature. In the same vein, the mission statement here affirms that “the creation’s life and God’s life are intertwined” and that God will be in all (pan-en-theism) (1 Cor. 15:28). Thus the new mission affirmation overcomes the dualism of creation—history (nature– humanity) and adopts an approach that brings them together. This is also the biblical vision as there is a constant movement, back and forth, between the poles of history and creation. The mission statement, in much the same vein, would affirm that “mission begins with God’s act of creation and continues in re-creation, by the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit.” Mission, therefore, is to turn to God in creation.

Mission from the Margins

The section “Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins” figures at the very centre of the new mission statement. This is hugely important, as “mission from the margins” is indeed one of the defining features of the statement. What makes the new mission statement distinct is the affirmation of the agency of the marginalized in mission. This is a missiology where the hitherto “receivers” of mission reclaim their status as subjects and initiators of mission. In this sense, the delineation of the paradigm “mission from the margins” here is groundbreaking. In today’s world, all life is imperiled. The most crucial threats to life today are manifested in the form of social, economic, ecological, and nuclear injustice. Life is valued hierarchically in contexts where systems of social and economic hegemony are in control. This is where “mission from the margins” as an alternative missiological paradigm that “seeks to counteract injustice in life, church, and mission” assumes great pertinence.

It challenges the conventional missiological wisdom that mission is always done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, by the global North to the global South, and by the centre to the margins. As the mission statement would put it,

People on, the margins have agency and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view. People on the margins ... often know what exclusionary forces are threatening their survival and can best discern the urgency of their struggles ... Through struggles in and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.

Through the pain and pathos of daily experiences of life-denying forces, the marginalized came to know their God of life. This is the unique epistemological faculty of the marginalized that the mission statement considers as important in discerning the life-affirming Spirit in mission. To borrow the words of Gopal Guru, a leading Indian sociologist, only the marginalized have the moral stamina to effect social change and transformation. This is the dynamic agency of the marginalized that the mission text advocates through “mission from the margins.”

This is mission from the margins, not to the margins or even at the margins where the marginalized are treated as mere recipients of charity. Mission from the centre, motivated by paternalistic attitudes and superiority complex, has often been complicit with life-denying and oppressive systems. In its place, the alternative missionary movement of “mission from the margins” claims active agency of mission for the marginalized. God chooses the vulnerable and the marginalized—those at the margins—to fulfill God’s mission of establishing justice and peace. People at the margins are thus the primary agents of God’s mission, as Jesus said, “The last would be the first” (Matt. 20:16). The purpose of mission here is not simply to move people from the margins to the centre, but to challenge those (systems and people) who remain at the centre by keeping people on the margins. This has implications for churches, as they are challenged to transform their own power structures. This is an urgent challenge that the global church, mission agencies, and the ecumenical movement as a whole need to address urgently. Mission, therefore, is to turn to the margins.

Mission as Dialogue of Life

One of the areas where the new mission statement has not been able to focus sufficiently enough is that of interreligious dialogue and cooperation and their implications for mission. However, the life-centric, trinitarian

12. Ibid., 10, ¶22.
14. TTL, 37, ¶103.
15. Ibid., 15-16.
16. Ibid., 16, ¶41.
pneumatological framework of the mission statement opens up new vistas for meaningful encounters of inter-faith cooperation and dialogue, especially for “dialogue of life.” Much of what we call inter-religious dialogue in ecumenical theology has remained at the intellectual and academic level. To borrow the words of Stackhouse, the need of the hour is to explore the concerns of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation at the level of poiesis rather than theoria.17 Genuine dialogue between and among faiths should take place in meetings of hearts rather than minds. This is precisely the kind of dialogue that the new mission statement would enhance through its trinitarian pneumatology of life. The Holy Spirit, the wind of God, blows where it/she wills. This implies that we cannot confine the work (mission) of the Holy Spirit to certain realms alone. We cannot comprehend the mysterious ways in which the Holy Spirit operates in the world and therefore cannot set limits to the salvific work of God. God’s Spirit can be encountered in all cultures and faith traditions where life in its fullness is affirmed.

The mission statement therefore would acknowledge and value the spiritualities in every faith tradition as long as they are life enhancing and life affirming. Hence the statement would boldly maintain that “authentic mission makes the ‘other’ a partner in, not an ‘object’ of mission.”18 The mission affirmation tends to adopt a theocentric position in its approach to inter-religious encounters. It assumes that God is encountered in all faiths in some way or other. God is there before we come (Acts 17). Therefore, the mission challenge in a pluralistic context is not to bring God along, but “to witness to the God who is already there.” This would enable dialogue partners to hold honest encounters where everyone can share with one another in an open and mutually respectful manner.

This of course would raise the question of whether dialogue is an alternative to evangelism. The mission statement would answer the question by maintaining that evangelism and dialogue are distinct and interrelated. Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is done authentically when it is done in humility. Such authentic evangelism happens in the context of “dialogues of life and action.” Evangelism, in other words, would entail both “proclamation of our deepest convictions as well as listening to others and being challenged and enriched by others” (Acts 17).

Appreciating and sharing the divine in other faiths is a gift of God. This divine gift makes one’s religiosity and spirituality mature and genuine. The daily life encounters

of ordinary people, particularly those of the poor and the marginalized provide us with more meaningful starting points than abstract concepts of God for our common witness and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. As the author argues elsewhere, it is at the interjections of lived-out experiences of people of all faiths and no faith that one encounters religiosity and spirituality in their profound sense.

Our participation in the common struggles for human dignity and rights is therefore a genuine form of witness and dialogue. This is often called diapraxis—synthesis of dialogue and witness. No one is excluded from participating in God’s mission of affirming life. Hence the new mission statement would affirm: “Joining in with the Spirit we are enabled to cross cultural and religious barriers to work together towards life.”19

Conclusion

Churches are called to meet the triune God of life at the margins where the victims of oppressive and life denying forces have already taken over the agency of God’s life-affirming mission. This should also challenge the church to join civil society initiatives that are already engaged in struggles for human rights, justice, and fullness of life. What can and must challenge the ecumenical movement today is nothing but the cries of people at the margins for life. The new WCC mission affirmation will hopefully help member churches and related agencies to make meaningful sense of the global ecclesial and social milieu from a contemporary missiological perspective. The statement, being “life-centric,” will challenge churches to assume the role of a servant rather than master of God’s mission and not to conceive of mission in colonial, expansionist, and triumphalist terms. It will have implications for the way mission and evangelism are carried out by churches, as the new mission affirmation advocates authentic mission and evangelism that promote values of humility, hospitality, justice, inclusivity, integrity of creation, and dialogue of life.

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18. TTL, 34, ¶93.
19. Ibid., 40, ¶110.
2.5 Living Ecumenically: An Absolute Necessity

Reflections from Academic Experience

Elsa Tamez

My theological training and work experience have been based in ecumenical and theological Bible education environments, either in higher education or within the lay Christian community. The Latin American Biblical University (formerly the Latin American Bible Seminary) – where I studied and now teach – was founded by various evangelical denominations in 1923. Later it was opened to Pentecostals and Catholics and is now truly ecumenical in spirit, although it must be said, mainly Christian. It is from this ecumenical organization that I draw my experience as a teacher; it is in this theological education environment that I have learned to live ecumenically.

The lay Bible-reading network is the other area I work in as a teacher, particularly in workshops for small-group leaders. This is a new, mostly Catholic, area and presents many challenges for both Protestants and the majority Catholic population of Latin America. What is new in the area of lay Bible-reading, amongst other things, is its openness and the fact that it teaches a way to live ecumenism. In this article I will draw on these two sources to share my experiences of ecumenical education and its importance for churches and for society.

Ecumenical Challenges

In practice, there are two ecumenical challenges in Latin America: the first is amongst Christians from differing ecclesiastical traditions, mainly between Protestants and Catholics but also amongst Protestants (including Pentecostals). Over the years it has been necessary to un-learn many bad habits and theological misinterpretations in order to learn a new way of relating to Christians from different churches. The other challenge is a more recent one: between Christianity and indigenous and traditional African religions.

Ecumenism between Christians has come on in leaps and bounds; I have seen that with my own eyes. When I began studying at the Latin American Bible Seminary, which was rather conservative at the time, the students came from various Protestant or evangelical churches. We got on well and hardly ever talked about the differences between evangelical churches. This was because the teachers came from different churches and the school did not belong to any one particular church. So we had to respect each other. However, there were no Catholic students or teachers and hardly any Pentecostals. I have been told that before my arrival, there were even anti-Catholic courses and manuals on how to combat Jehovah’s Witnesses. Towards the end of the 1960s, the teaching staff and some students gradually began to meet with Catholics to discuss the social problems of the time. It was from that time that I have my first memories of nuns in habits sitting alongside me, something which was unheard-of a few years previously – me being an evangelical who had suffered discrimination from Catholics since childhood, simply for being an evangelical. Sitting alongside them, looking them in the eye and talking about fundamental questions affecting both of us, is much more effective than having classes on ecumenism where only people from one side are involved.

Today, 35 years on, things have totally changed. There are Protestants (including Pentecostals) and Catholics among the teaching staff, and the same is true among the student body. Since the 1990s, when it became the Biblical University, the intake has begun to include not only lay Catholics but also some nuns and priests. What is even more of a challenge is the growing involvement of Christian students and teachers who also have a form of traditional indigenous spirituality. As teachers at the university, we have had to work towards a better understanding of indigenous and traditional African religions to be able to mentor the students researching and practising this ancestral spirituality. It is a huge challenge, and I must admit that there is as yet no clear consensus on the Biblical/theological supervision of students from non-western cultures who have a non-Christian religious background. What is clear is that Christian views have been enriched by the views of indigenous and traditional African religions.

Ecumenical Living Is Something That Is Learned through Practice

I have learned that true ecumenism comes from practical experience in daily life. It does not come from courses on ecumenism, although these are very important for raising awareness. Neither does it come from services organized for special occasions, although this is also fundamental in witnessing to the world. It is from living day-to-day with people from a different religious denomination that you gradually learn to know, respect and understand other people.

In their final evaluations, many students at the Biblical University and participants in the workshops on
contextual Bible reading say that the ecumenism they have experienced during their course or in their workshop was something that profoundly affected their lives. For many of them, particularly for the Catholics and Pentecostals, it was a totally new experience. These courses and workshops are not about ecumenism, in fact there are hardly any classes on ecumenism; it is studying alongside people from other churches that has led them to look at themselves and re-evaluate their preconceptions and views of people from other denominations.

Specifically, what has helped to consolidate ecumenism at the Biblical University and in the workshops is the constant experience of it in different areas: in class, in theological research projects, in Bible study, in sharing or preparing liturgies, participating in debates, organizing and going to parties, working together to help solve some social problem in the community and, above all, for those students who live on campus or for the duration of a workshop, sharing the student residences on a daily basis.

These people’s reports are often surprising and very revealing. For example, one of my students, a Columbian nun, once said that it was a big step for her to speak of churches in the plural. As a Catholic, she had always been taught to use the singular: the church for her, as for most Catholics, was the Catholic Church. However, working alongside other Christians from different churches, persistently hearing the plural “churches”, she had learned that the Catholic Church was not the only church, and that the other churches are not sects, as the Catholics call them. This first step was a big one, because not only was it a step towards recognizing the right of others to belong to a church outside Catholicism, but also towards accepting that they can work and study together. It also helped the evangelical students to learn that ecumenism is not progressing evenly, as each church has a different tradition on the matter, and it is shaped by its history and context. Forcing rapid ecumenism is ineffective. Only if communities make conscious steps at their own pace will their progress be solid.

Another case from within Christianity is Pentecostalism. I have had many Pentecostal students. Amongst evangelical churches in Latin America, the majority are Pentecostal. Sharing with churches from different traditions, especially mixing with Catholic students, has been a great experience for these students as well. In many churches – not just Pentecostal churches – they are told that Catholics are not Christians and they should be converted; when they see with their own eyes Catholics behaving like true Christians, see that their spirituality is worthy of imitation and that they have an admirable commitment to solidarity, they change their view of Catholics. They become more understanding and less intolerant of those from other denominations.

As mentioned above, within this ecumenical experience, the recent and growing fellowship with indigenous and African students and teachers who practise Christianity alongside their ancestral religious traditions has further enriched the worldviews of students and staff. Studying alongside them, as a fellow teacher or student, has forced us to study these traditions more, to listen and get to know worlds that are completely different to Christianity and learn to be humble in the face of the enrichment that indigenous or African traditions can bring to Christianity. It has helped us to recognize the limitations of Christianity being caught up in the western view of the world, and to put a higher value on inter-religious dialogue. In class we no longer hear gratuitous declarations that the liturgies or symbols of indigenous or traditional African religions are things of the devil. And that is a big step.

I have said that these ecumenical experiences bring us closer to true ecumenism than classes about ecumenism. However, that does not mean that it is not important to explain ecumenism and ecclesiastical traditions. In my experience of (mostly Catholic) workshops on lay Bible-reading, sessions on Protestantism, its history and the different denominations are always requested by the students themselves, as this is a totally unknown subject amongst Catholics as well as for many evangelicals. Discussing the history of the various faith traditions is a good thing, as it aids better understanding of the ecclesiastical traditions which shape and define the views of the people sharing the class or workshop. This helps participants to understand one another better. On the other hand, the subject of real ecumenism and its importance today in light of the violence between nations with different religions is of course unavoidable. Inter-religious dialogue, amongst Christians as well as between Christianity and other religions, remains a delicate issue in spite of being worked on a lot at the moment; we have had painful experience of this in class as it brings to light negative and harmful stories of fanatics or fundamentalists who seek to destroy other expressions of faith and who see their own as the truth. From experience, I firmly believe that to be truthful and honest, inter-religious dialogue has to involve four elements: 1) an experience of dialogue itself; 2) coming together in the common struggle for life and justice, 3) learning about the various religious traditions so as to understand one another better, and 4) recognition of the vital importance of ecumenism today.
Ecumenical Living Helps Combat Violence and Discrimination

Anti-ecumenism leads to injustice. I am Mexican, and Mexico is a profoundly Catholic country. My family comes from the Reformed tradition: my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were Protestants. But in my region at the time, over fifty years ago, being an evangelical – belonging to a minority – was risky. As a child I was bullied by the other children at school, who were egged on by their parents. I am not bitter about the troubles I remember being taunted and punished purely for being an evangelical. This was not just in my northern home region; I remember times as a teenager living in Mexico City when fanatics threw stones at our church. I could not hide the fact that I was a Protestant because it was part of our family’s identity and because the Presbyterian church was a place where I felt comfortable and accepted. So, I had to learn to be an evangelical in a mainly Catholic country. Today I work side by side with Catholic theologians and colleagues and I must say that I work better with them than with many Protestants. I am not bitter about the troubles in my childhood and adolescence because I learned how to live ecumenically in the places of theological education that allowed it. We know that there are still parts of Mexico and other countries, particularly rural areas, where inter-religious conflict persists, because the advance of ecumenism in Latin America is not the same throughout the continent.

In Brazil, there was a famous incident where an evangelical preacher on a television programme took an image of the Virgin Mary, ripped it and trod on it, saying it was idolatry. This disrespectful action caused great uproar and reaction from Catholics. Such an attitude can easily cause tragedy.

And what about injustice towards the Latin American groups who profess non-Christian religions, like the traditional African or indigenous cultural religions? The injustice and disrespect towards them is well known.

We say that ecumenical living helps combat violence precisely because the injustices stemming from anti-ecumenical attitudes and actions are avoided. Also, when sharing a classroom with people from different churches, you subconsciously learn to respect the other person’s religion. There is more restraint in language when referring to other experiences of faith. Talking about another religion is not the same when none of its members are present. From my experience with students who had never experienced ecumenism before joining my classes, I can say that at the end of one or more courses, their attitudes change completely. This is for the simple reason that in the class or the teaching, there is always room to listen to what others have to say on a particular matter, especially since they have to work together on projects for general social well-being. For example, when one Pentecostal student first came to the university, he had decided to write his thesis on the drawbacks of ecumenism. It was less than a month before his outlook on other faiths changed completely: his favourite classmate was a habit-wearing nun.

In my experience of teaching lay Bible workshops, I have also seen a change in people’s views towards women after a few courses. The Roman Catholic Church and others, such as the Mexican Presbyterian Church, are very patriarchal and masculine churches. Members of these churches open up when they take part in courses where other faiths are present, either as students or teachers. My being Protestant and a frequent teacher of the lay Bible workshops means that priests and monks as well as pastors and laymen from churches that exclude women become accustomed to women leading and teaching the Word with the same authority as any man. There are many women from different churches who teach in educational institutions where several churches participate. In this way, training women in theological colleges or lay workshops helps ecumenism contribute to the reformulation of a new, more inclusive and less patriarchal form of church and Christianity.

One of the advantages of teaching in the Latin American workshops or the courses I lead at the Biblical University is that the people not only come from different churches, but from different countries. Because most of them are leaders, we know that this ecumenical experience will also be shared in other communities, regions and countries. This is not just through the necessary advances in ecumenism between Catholics, Pentecostals, Protestants and Latin American and Caribbean ancestral religions, but also within each faith, as other ways of being an ecumenical church are forged: there is a big difference between a Cuban Presbyterian and a Mexican Presbyterian. In a poor region with a high level of all kinds of violence, an ecumenical vision in theological training is vital to improving quality of life, avoiding violence and helping to create a culture of peace – which is one of the major concerns of the various religious and secular groups that deal with problems of violence.

This regional need to live ecumenically is also an international need. It is no coincidence that since the war in Iraq, the whole world is talking of inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. We have held courses on this macro-ecumenical dialogue, as it is so important for curbing violence. However, in Latin America, we will not be able to take real steps towards this without learning to live ecumenically with the other faiths around us, both Christian and non-Christian, as well as African religions.
and the indigenous spirituality we have inherited from our ancestors. One thing is certain: the more ecumenical living that there is amongst Christians from different churches as well as with the Jewish, African and indigenous religions that are represented here, the less violence there will be, and the more prepared, available and understanding people will be towards other religions that are not widely represented on this continent. Moreover, there will be greater criticism of the religious rhetoric commonly used in political discourse these days to justify war.

Conclusion

In this text I have shared my experience of ecumenism as a university teacher and lay theological educator. I have focused mainly on the relationships between the evangelical, Pentecostal and Catholic churches and also mentioned my experiences of ecumenism with students and teachers from indigenous or African traditions.

I have realized that living with people from other religious confessions is fundamental to achieving true ecumenism. Day-to-day living and working together, particularly on social projects, are much more effective than having classes on ecumenism or reading about it with people of the same religion. I have realized that ecumenical living helps to eradicate fundamentalist violence and also makes people open to understanding and getting to know others, respecting difference, looking at their own religion more critically, and this leads to mutual enrichment. Churches which exclude women can open up to their participation when they realize how much churches can be enriched by having women in full leadership roles. Lastly, I believe that this ecumenical experience within Christianity and with indigenous and African religions is the key to the churches and religions of Latin America and the Caribbean opening up to other world religions like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism. In this way, the reflections here on “macro-ecumenism” cannot be considered abstract or unimportant, as often happens in many parts of our continent. From the way we live in Latin America, I feel that we are still a long way from a true vision of ecumenism with the other great world religions. We can learn a lot from our Asian brothers and sisters, but from experience, I believe that alongside this international dialogue, we must live ecumenically here on our own continent, within the diversity of faiths and religions.
Chapter 3

World Christianity: Intercultural and Interreligious Theology

Introduction: Common Witness and the Mission of the Church
Stephen B. Bevans, SVD

Strictly speaking, the church does not have a mission. Rather, the mission—God’s mission—has a church. God’s mission began when, as a result of the Triune God’s overflowing love, God initiated the creation of the world. In contemporary understanding, the act of creation began some 13.7 billion years ago with what cosmologists call the “Big Bang,” and continues to develop in our own day as it moves to completion in unknown ways and at an unknown time. From the first nanosecond of creation, however, God has been present within this process through the particular power of the Holy Spirit, guiding, persuading, cajoling, healing, reconciling the vast and unimaginably slow processes of the formation of gasses and galaxies, atoms and molecules, the emergence of life of the smallest cells and the largest animals, the emergence of human consciousness, and the emergence of experiences of wonder and transcendence among women and men. From the beginning, God in God’s Spirit has acted within creation as a principle of its freedom, never forcing, never manipulating, always calling forth creation’s possibilities by the power of omnipotent love, gently leading it towards God’s dream of unity for all creation, reflecting the unity-in-diversity that is God’s very self.1

In our Christian tradition, we recognize God’s choice of Israel as God’s partner in witnessing to God’s unifying mission in the world, and so becoming a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:3). Indeed, in today’s consciousness, such blessing is to be extended to the entire created universe. We recognize the Spirit at work in the world’s and Israel’s history, imaged as a chaos-ordering wind, as life-giving breath, as oil that stirs up prophetic utterance and witness, as a life-restoring breeze, as refreshing and healing water, as the agent of forgiveness and new possibilities, as God’s very wisdom loose in the world.2 In what St. Paul called “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), that Spirit took on human flesh and a human face in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. At his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus was anointed with the same Spirit with which the prophets were anointed, and sent, like the Spirit, to continue God’s creation by his mission of healing, reconciliation, and heralding the Good News that God’s work of creation was about to be fulfilled. Imagine such a new world, Jesus demonstrated and proclaimed, and believe in its possibility! “The time is fulfilled, the Reign of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Good News” (Mk 1:16).

When this vision of a renewed Israel and a renewed world, entrusted by the Spirit to Jesus, was rejected, and Jesus was put to death, the Risen Christ entrusted it to his disciples through the anointing of the same Spirit by which he had been anointed. At and after Pentecost, these hesitant and imperfect disciples became transformed into disciples called to work with God in transforming the world according to God’s unifying vision. If we can speak of the church’s mission, therefore, it is precisely this: to work with God’s Spirit in continuing God’s work

in Jesus, begun at the first instant of creation and continuing in our own day as we cooperate in making God’s unifying vision a living reality.3

As participation with God in the completion of creation, the church’s mission is wide-ranging and comprehensive. Contemporary missiology speaks of mission as having various elements, and articulates these elements in various ways.4 Ultimately, however, mission is about the witnessing to and proclamation of God’s reconciling and creating love in Jesus of Nazareth; it is embodied as the church and individual Christians gather or lift up their hearts in prayer and contemplation; it is about seeking ways of expressing and living Christ’s message in culturally and contextually appropriate ways; it engages in works of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; it works for healing and reconciliation among all peoples and within creation; and—germane to our reflections here—it engages in a prophetic dialogue5 with other peoples of faith, with those who have no faith, and with those sisters and brothers who are sadly separated from one another, thereby causing scandal and disfiguring the work of mission by their disobedience to Christ’s wish that “all may be one.”

All of these “elements” or “aspects” of mission contribute to working with God in the completion of God’s creation, and all of them are constitutive of that work. Participating in the prophetic dialogue of ecumenism, therefore, is an essential part of participating in God’s mission, and is especially urgent as Christians try to witness by their lives together, their commitment to healing and liberating actions, and illuminating through words what God has in store for this world that is constantly being created anew. If Christians are not at least striving for unity among themselves, they offer a counter-witness to everything God’s mission calls them to be and do.

One major aspect of participation in the ecumenical movement is what has come to be called “Common Witness.” Studies on Common Witness have been undertaken and documents have appeared over the last half century. In 2015, Pope Francis sent a message to the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. During these fifty years, the pope pointed out, the Joint Working Group “has fostered the necessary conditions for a greater common witness” of these two ecclesial bodies.6 An early statement of this group appeared in 1970,7 and other studies and documents have appeared in the years since, culminating in the document “Towards Common Witness” in 1997.8 The 2013 Mission Statement of the WCC’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), “Together Towards Life” (TTL), calls for a Common Witness of the churches in mission “in a spirit of partnership and cooperation,” that includes “mutually respectful and responsible forms of evangelism.”


9. TTL, 63.
TTL’s call points to the twofold aspect of Common Witness as it has appeared in various WCC documents over the years, although the two are usually treated in reverse order. The first task of Common Witness is to engage in “respectful and responsible” forms of missionary activity. What this means is the avoidance of any kind of “proselytism,” a practice that the 1997 document defines as “the encouragement of Christians who belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance, through ways and means that ‘contradict the spirit of Christian love, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the church’.”

Proselytism, the 1997 document says, quoting a source from 1960, is “the corruption of witness.” Even though some missionaries might be motivated by a strong desire to bring people to Christ, their methods are that of proselytism when they misrepresent or demean the beliefs of another Christian community, contrast the “purity” of their churches to perceived imperfections in others, offer humanitarian aid or education as an incentive to join the church, use political or cultural pressure to persuade people to come into their church, or even use physical violence or psychological pressure to induce conversion. As the CWME Mission Conference at Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, in 1996 strongly put it: “We decry the practice of those who carry out their endeavours in mission and evangelism in ways which destroy the unity of the body of Christ, human dignity and the very lives and cultures of those being evangelized; we call on them to confess their participation in and to renounce proselytism.”

The second task of Common Witness is to constructively and creatively cooperate with other Christian churches and communities in missionary work wherever possible. The “Manila Manifesto” of the Second Lausanne Congress in 1989 put it succinctly and powerfully: “We affirm that cooperation in evangelism is indispensable, first because it is the will of God (Phil 1:3-5), but also because the gospel of reconciliation is discredited by our disunity (Eph 2:14-16; 4:16), and because, if the task of world evangelization is ever to be accomplished, we must engage in it together.” Some possibilities for cooperation would be in theological education, JPIC promotion, cultural orientation programs, clergy continuing education programs, art projects (exhibits, concerts, film-making), the development of healthcare facilities, websites and blogs, worship together on significant occasions, or the use of common buildings for worship or administration. In these ways, and perhaps many others, Christians show the world that, despite their differences and as they pilgrimage together on the way toward unity, they still strive with all their might to cooperate with God in the creation of the world where true unity and true freedom can flourish, and give life.

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13. Quoted in the Conclusion of “Towards Common Witness.”
3.1. Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct

Preamble

Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.

Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and, at the invitation of the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), met during a period of 5 years to reflect and produce this document to serve as a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness around the world. This document does not intend to be a theological statement on mission but to address practical issues associated with Christian witness in a multi-religious world.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion. It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.

A Basis for Christian Witness

1. For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

2. Jesus Christ is the supreme witness (cf. John 18:37). Christian witness is always a sharing in his witness, which takes the form of proclamation of the kingdom, service to neighbour and the total gift of self even if that act of giving leads to the cross. Just as the Father sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, so believers are sent in mission to witness in word and action to the love of the triune God.

3. The example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for Christian mission. For two millennia Christians have sought to follow Christ’s way by sharing the good news of God’s kingdom (cf. Luke 4:16-20).


5. In some contexts, living and proclaiming the gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to him (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

6. If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such departures call for repentance and remind us of our need for God’s continuing grace (cf. Romans 3:23).

7. Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). They recognize that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8).

Principles

Christians are called to adhere to the following principles as they seek to fulfil Christ’s commission in an appropriate manner, particularly within interreligious contexts.

1. Acting in God’s love. Christians believe that God is the source of all love and, accordingly, in their witness they are called to live lives of love and to love their neighbour as themselves (cf. Matthew 22:34-40; John 14:15).

2. Imitating Jesus Christ. In all aspects of life, and especially in their witness, Christians are called to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, sharing his love, giving glory and honour to God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:21-23).

3. Christian virtues. Christians are called to conduct themselves with integrity, charity, compassion and humility, and to overcome all arrogance, condescension and disparagement (cf. Galatians 5:22).

4. Acts of service and justice. Christians are called to act justly and to love tenderly (cf. Micah 6:8). They are further called to serve others and in so doing to recognize Christ in the least of their sisters and brothers (cf. Matthew 25:45).
Acts of service, such as providing education, health care, relief services and acts of justice and advocacy are an integral part of witnessing to the gospel. The exploitation of situations of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach. Christians should denounce and refrain from offering all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service.

5. Discernment in ministries of healing. As an integral part of their witness to the gospel, Christians exercise ministries of healing. They are called to exercise discernment as they carry out these ministries, fully respecting human dignity and ensuring that the vulnerability of people and their need for healing are not exploited.

6. Rejection of violence. Christians are called to reject all forms of violence, even psychological or social, including the abuse of power in their witness. They also reject violence, unjust discrimination or repression by any religious or secular authority, including the violation or destruction of places of worship, sacred symbols or texts.

7. Freedom of religion and belief. Religious freedom including the right to publicly profess, practice, propagate and change one’s religion flows from the very dignity of the human person which is grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26). Thus, all human beings have equal rights and responsibilities. Where any religion is instrumentalized for political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions.

8. Mutual respect and solidarity. Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect, promoting together justice, peace and the common good. Interreligious cooperation is an essential dimension of such commitment.

9. Respect for all people. Christians recognize that the gospel both challenges and enriches cultures. Even when the gospel challenges certain aspects of cultures, Christians are called to respect all people. Christians are also called to discern elements in their own cultures that are challenged by the gospel.

10. Renouncing false witness. Christians are to speak sincerely and respectfully; they are to listen in order to learn about and understand others’ beliefs and practices, and are encouraged to acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good in them. Any comment or critical approach should be made in a spirit of mutual respect, making sure not to bear false witness concerning other religions.

11. Ensuring personal discernment. Christians are to acknowledge that changing one’s religion is a decisive step that must be accompanied by sufficient time for adequate reflection and preparation, through a process ensuring full personal freedom.

12. Building interreligious relationships. Christians should continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

Recommendations

The Third Consultation organized by the World Council of Churches and the PCID of the Holy See in collaboration with World Evangelical Alliance with participation from the largest Christian families of faith (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal), having acted in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation to prepare this document for consideration by churches, national and regional confessional bodies and mission organizations, and especially those working in interreligious contexts, recommends that these bodies:

1. study the issues set out in this document and where appropriate formulate guidelines for conduct regarding Christian witness applicable to their particular contexts. Where possible this should be done ecumenically, and in consultation with representatives of other religions.

2. build relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions, in particular at institutional levels between churches and other religious communities, engaging in on-going interreligious dialogue as part of their Christian commitment. In certain contexts, where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of trust between and among communities, interreligious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing of memories, reconciliation and peace-building.

3. encourage Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith while deepening their knowledge and understanding of different religions, and to do so also taking into account the perspectives of the adherents of those religions. Christians should avoid misrepresenting the beliefs and practices of people of different religions.

4. cooperate with other religious communities engaging in interreligious advocacy towards justice and the common good and, wherever possible, standing together in solidarity with people who are in situations of conflict.
5. call on their governments to ensure that freedom of religion is properly and comprehensively respected, recognizing that in many countries religious institutions and persons are inhibited from exercising their mission.

6. pray for their neighbours and their well-being, recognizing that prayer is integral to who we are and what we do, as well as to Christ’s mission.

Appendix: Background to the Document

1. In today's world there is increasing collaboration among Christians and between Christians and followers of different religions. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) of the Holy See and the World Council of Churches’ Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Co-operation (WCCIRDC) have a history of such collaboration. Examples of themes on which the PCID/WCC-IRDC have collaborated in the past are: Interreligious Marriage (1994-1997), Interreligious Prayer (1997-1998) and African Religiosity (2000-2004). This document is a result of their work together.

2. There are increasing interreligious tensions in the world today, including violence and the loss of human life. Politics, economics and other factors play a role in these tensions. Christians too are sometimes involved in these conflicts, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, either as those who are persecuted or as those participating in violence. In response to this the PCID and WCC-IRDC decided to address the issues involved in a joint process towards producing shared recommendations for conduct on Christian witness. The WCC-IRDC invited the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to participate in this process, and they have gladly done so.

3. Initially two consultations were held: The first, in Lariano, Italy, in May 2006, was entitled “Assessing the Reality” where representatives of different religions shared their views and experiences on the question of conversion. A statement from the consultation reads in part: “We affirm that, while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others’ rights and religious sensibilities. Freedom of religion enjoins upon all of us the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith.”

4. The second, an inter-Christian consultation, was held in Toulouse, France, in August 2007, to reflect on these same issues. Questions on Family and Community, Respect for Others, Economy, Marketing and Competition, and Violence and Politics were thoroughly discussed. The pastoral and missionary issues around these topics became the background for theological reflection and for the principles developed in this document. Each issue is important in its own right and deserves more attention that can be given in these recommendations.


3.2 Mission’s Changing Landscape: Global Flows and Christian Movements

Kirsteen Kim

Since Christianity is a world religion, changes in worldwide Christianity both reflect and affect global affairs and transnational issues. From its inception the IRM has demonstrated this in its holistic approach and global scope. In its pages are developments in the global landscape over the last one hundred years, although with significant shifts in the contributors. These developments include the breakdown of imperial Christendom and the rise of the present world order, how the people of the world are described and relate to one another, and the configuration of religions. Three trends in world Christianity impinge on contemporary mission: the rise of independent Christian movements and the migration of Christians result in an ever-increasing plurality of Christian expression. In view of this, this article argues that mission should be contextual, mission theology expressed in pneumatological terms, and the church understood as a dynamic movement.

Christianity is and always has been a world religion – globally widespread, locally rooted and interconnected. Changes in worldwide Christianity, therefore, are often closely related to global affairs and transnational issues. The Christian movement sometimes follows and sometimes leads world developments but it is never separable from them. The IRM, by its nature as a world missionary journal, represents the interrelation of the Christian movement with global affairs. Preceding Edinburgh 1910 was a thorough research project, based on reports from all over the world, which described missionary activity and responses to it. It considered not only the numbers converting to Christianity and church life but also wider social changes and political trends. Over the last one hundred years the IRM has continued this holistic approach and global scope.

Global Developments 1910–2010

Around the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, the IRM carried preparatory articles related to a new study process, Edinburgh 2010, which produced a great deal of material relating to Christian mission around the world. It is helpful to compare and contrast these two moments, 1910 and 2010, in order to highlight three changes in the landscape. We then will examine some contemporary trends in world Christianity, and consider their interrelationship with Christian mission.

An important shift to notice is in those describing the landscape and recording their thinking. Edinburgh 1910 was overwhelmingly a gathering of Western missionaries, who looked at the world as divided into Christendom and the non-Western world. However, a few representative “natives from mission lands” were also invited and given a platform. Although these made up less than two percent of the delegates, they made a significant impact on the conference. Their inclusion signalled a trend toward recognition of the autonomy—and eventually equality—of the so-called “younger churches” and the breakdown of the Christendom paradigm. The Edinburgh 2010 project aimed to hear the voices of Christians from all over the world. The conference brought together representatives of 75 nations from all the continents of the world, and the study process was even more diverse.

The IRM has evolved in a similar way to be inclusive of people from all regions of the world. What was once largely the mouthpiece of Western missionaries, expressing their perspectives on the rest of the world, has now become an organ of global Christian perspectives. Contributors from around the world are free to comment, not only on their own context but on any other part of the globe. As a journal of the World Council of Churches (WCC), since the integration in 1961 of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the WCC, the IRM has become more diverse in other ways, too. For example, contributors previously were mostly, although never exclusively, representatives of mission organisations, but now they are more likely to identify themselves as members of churches: Orthodox, Catholic and Pentecostal (see below) as well as Protestant and Evangelical.

Different Globalizations

In view of this shift in the contributors over the past century, when examining the changing landscape of Christian mission in the IRM, bear in mind that this landscape not only changes objectively but also appears differently according to where we stand. Furthermore, where we stand depends on the global politics of the time. The first global development to note is the breakdown of imperial Christendom and the rise of the present world order.

Edinburgh 1910 and the first IRM were shaped to a great extent by their imperial context and the belief that they represented Christian nations or Christendom. So James Bryce, British Ambassador to the USA, contributed the first article in the newly founded IRM; he wrote about his travels among people he described as “uncivilised, non-Christian races” in a way that would be regarded as objectionable today. The IRM has its headquarters in Europe, which until that point was at the centre of global political and economic power. But Europe’s political position has changed significantly, and since the mid-20th century the centre of power has shifted across the Atlantic to the United States. Although it is still regarded as part of the dominant West, Europe no longer has the global supremacy it once enjoyed, and this has contributed to the breakdown of the Christendom paradigm. In 1951, the renowned US scholar of the expansion of Christianity, Kenneth Scott Latourette, forcefully reminded IRM readers that, whatever its achievements, Christendom had also been the source of the modern world’s evils of warfare, weapons and destructive ideologies. The IRM has included some criticism of

6. The first article I could find by an Orthodox was written by Eighomanos I. Luka (Coptic), “Christian Reunion,” in IRM 27/3 (1938), pp. 491–96.
colonial mission from post-colonial perspectives, including by those whose cultures were previously denigrated.10

The world of 1910–1912 was highly globalised, interconnected by trade and communications and in which the British Empire was dominant. This facilitated the outgoing missionary movements of the era, and made it possible for delegates at Edinburgh 1910 to contemplate “the evangelisation of the world in this generation.” The continuation committee reiterated the unity of purpose of the conference around this vision of the expansion of the kingdom of Christ – or Christendom – from the West.11 That plan was severely hampered by two world wars and then the cold war. However, since the fall of the communist world around 1990, we have been experiencing again a single world bound together by trade – but now driven by the United States.

The way in which the USA exercises global power differs from the British. Other people are not in a formal political relationship of dependence, as under colonialism, but they are bound even more tightly by economic links to the world’s largest economies through neo-colonialism. Furthermore, weapons of mass destruction, voyages into space, and ecological crises caused by exploitation of resources have created greater awareness of our interdependency on planet earth. Because the nature of global capitalism is to require economic growth, it is necessary for economic powers to have others as trading partners. For this reason, since World War II the US has pursued a policy of development. This began with the reconstruction of Europe and continued by getting developing countries to follow a similar economic trajectory.

Global Divisions and Local Identities

The way in which the people of the world are described and relate to one another is a second significant change since 1910. Race has been, at least formally, rejected as a category of differentiation, especially since the US Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. However, as Brian Stanley has pointed out, culture tends to be used instead – and in much the same way as race was in 1910 – to divide up peoples and global regions.12 In the 1980s and 1990s, Samuel P. Huntington influenced US foreign policy with his “clash of civilisations” theory, describing the world as divided into religio-cultural blocs – Western, Chinese, Indian and Islamic – with irreconcilable differences.13 Huntington’s view is undermined by the fact that world Christianity crosses these divides – except perhaps that between the West and Islamic countries.

Somewhat contrary to the cultural division, what Michael Polanyi described as “the great transformation” in society brought about by industrial revolution has also spread to more and more of the world. In this process of social change, in which goods become commoditized as money, people as labour, and nature as land, and social relations such as gender, urban/rural differences and nationality become embedded in economic relations.14 Thus, by means of wealth it is possible to transcend racial, cultural, gender and other social disadvantages. Conversely, poverty severely restricts one’s life-chances. The great divide in the world today is not between Christendom and the non-Christian world as perceived in 1910 but between North and South as global economic categories of national wealth and poverty. These correspond only roughly to geography, but do carry racial and cultural connotations.

The colonial belief that Europeans would always lead global development was challenged in the early 20th century by the military rise of Japan, and again after World War II by its economic miracle. The paradigm of global North-South, as it corresponded to colonising and formerly colonised nations, is also breaking down. First, the Gulf States gained economic and political power due to their oil reserves. Then the “tiger economies” of East Asia (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) broke away from the mould, and now the economies of China and India and several other populous formerly colonised nations (including Brazil and Nigeria) are growing rapidly. The growth of China and India especially has led to the relative decline of West and the widespread expectation that the era of global domination by the West may be coming to an end. However, this does not necessarily mean the end of the global influence of Christianity because of how it is growing in other continents and regions.

The fact that Christians outside the West outnumber those in the old Christendom, and that we are in an era of world Christianity was first brought to the attention of mission studies by Andrew F. Walls. For many years in the IRM, he documented the growing number of publications from Africa, Asia, Latin America and other regions outside the West. Walls also explored the missiological implications

of Christian history, and showed that the recent Western overseas missionary movement was merely an episode in a much longer story of Christianity in Africa and Asia, as well as in Europe.\(^\text{15}\) Changes in international relations have also come about due to population growth and movement. A century ago, international migration was primarily the movement of Europeans from their homelands to less densely populated land in other regions. Today people still move from densely populated to less populated areas, but since the 1960s, the direction of migration has been from the non-Western world to the West, and also to other economically powerful nations in West and East Asia.\(^\text{16}\) Although these countries depend on migration to sustain their economic growth, the arrival of substantial populations of people with cultural and religious backgrounds differing from the existing population, has posed challenges. This raises acute questions of national identity and results in differing policies of multiculturalism and integration. A particularly difficult question is how and to what extent to accommodate differing religious identities.

World Religions and Indigenous Spiritualities

The third change in the global landscape is in the configuration of religions. The early 20th century saw a decline in the power of religions worldwide. In part this was due to the continued rise of the public discourse of science and of secular ideologies, as recognised in the IRM in 1929–1930.\(^\text{17}\) Awareness of this led the 1932 Laymen’s Enquiry to suggest that Christians ought to see other religions as allies against “the spread of the secular spirit.”\(^\text{18}\) Religions had also declined because their political and social power was eroded by colonial structures. Asian nations, the home of all the main world religions, were reeling in 1910 under the impact of modernity and Western power. In particular, Islam was weakened politically by the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. As the century wore on, in Eastern Europe and in most of North and East Asia, religion was suppressed by communist governments.

In 1910, delegates in Edinburgh regarded Christianity as the world religion, or the universal religion to which the whole world was turning, and that fulfilled all other religions.\(^\text{19}\) In 1949 Laurence E. Browne, professor of theology at the University of Leeds, UK was still confidently predicting in the IRM that other religions were not sustainable and that in AD 3000 the religion of the world would be Christianity.\(^\text{20}\) However, as the century wore on, large scale conversion from other world religions to Christianity seemed less and less evident.

Ethically, conversion to Christianity from other religions, at one time the sine qua non of missions, was questioned especially in the Indian context where Indian Christians were facing strong pressure from Hindus.\(^\text{21}\) It was in India that the theology of inter-religious dialogue was first developed\(^\text{22}\) and this subcontinent prompted a rethinking of the meaning of conversion and its relationship to mission.\(^\text{23}\) So strong was the post-colonial reversal that the Danish missionary in India, Kaj Baago, expressed the controversial view that “The Christian religion [is] to a large extent a product of the West [and] cannot and shall not become the religion of all nations and races.”\(^\text{24}\)

In the late 20th century there was what was described as a resurgence of religions\(^\text{25}\) which came to the attention of

16. Jehu J. Hanciles, Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West, Orbis, Maryknoll (2008), p. 172. It should also be noted that during the imperial period many non-Western peoples were forcibly relocated – even across continents – by Britain and other powers, and that large numbers of migrants are internally displaced.
23. A whole issue of the IRM was devoted to the topic of conversion: IRM 72/287 (July 1983).
the West primarily because of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the subsequent rise of extremist and violent forms of Islam. Nationalist forms of Hinduism emerged with Indian independence movement, came to power in state governments, and eventually in 1997 in the national government. Buddhism gradually gained influence with the rise of Japanese power in the early 20th century, and again since the 1960s. It has grown in the West also by its association with peace movements led by figures such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. Chinese religions such as Confucianism and Taoism, long suppressed under communism, are also being renewed now that there are increased civil liberties in China. The resurgence of religion also includes Christianity, especially forms of Pentecostalism in the global South. Many of those who espoused the secularisation theory and the decline of religion with the rise of modernity have had to revise their work from the 1960s. It seems as though religion in many different forms is here to stay.

So today when the term world religion is applied to Christianity, the intention is the opposite of what it was in 1910. Rather than being absolutised, Christianity is relativised as a world religion, that is, one of a group of religions, all of which may be so designated. The difference was summed up by Dana Robert in her keynote address to the Edinburgh 2010 conference: “A century ago the participants at Edinburgh 1910 complained that only one-third of the world was Christian. Today we rejoice that one-third of the world are followers of Christ.”

In the 21st century what is recognised as religion has also changed. Most of those who have become Christians more recently have come from indigenous religions or spiritualities. In 1910 these were referred to as “animism” or more commonly as “heathenism,” as primitive superstitious forms of religion. In the first issue of the IRM, Johannes Warneck, son of the German Protestant founder of mission studies, described I.L. Nommensen’s struggle in Sumatra against the “obstinate... stubborn... animistic heathenism” of the Batak. In 1915, Nathan Söderblom wrote in the IRM that the gulf between “primitive heathenism” and “the more purer and elevated form of religion” represented by Christianity was very great indeed. During the 20th century, these terms with their imperialist tone were gradually dropped in the IRM; by 1958, heathenism was equally applied to the West.

Various forms of “primal religions” were studied during the 20th century and invested with a certain integrity by IRM contributors such as G.F.A. Baer, J.W.C. Dougall, Henri Junod, Geoffrey Parrinder and Alberto Rembao, and later by John Mbiti and Harold Turner. However, the number of articles was small until the emergence in the 1990s of more sympathetic interest in indigenous religions. This began with the 1991 assembly in Canberra, which realised the relevance of indigenous spiritualities in considering the integrity of creation. The 500th anniversary of the conquest of the Americas was also an occasion for reappraising indigenous beliefs and for acts of contrition for the Western desecration of the heritage of the pre-Columbian peoples.

Contemporary Trends in World Christianity

We have already noted that Christianity is increasingly widespread globally, and that churches in the West exist increasingly in a context of religious plurality. Alongside this are contemporary trends within Christianity itself. Three trends impinge particularly on mission.

Independent Christian movements

As in 1910, Christians still constitute about one third of the world’s population, of whom roughly half are Roman Catholic and 20–25% are Protestants and Anglicans. These proportions have changed little over the last century, although these Christians are increasingly located in the South. The relative number of Orthodox has declined significantly under the pressures of Islamic and also communist rule (see below). Another significant trend has been the

appearance and growth of churches that are independent of any of these global confessions, historic denominations or ancient churches. These now make up about a sixth of all Christians. Many, but not all of these, are part of the movement of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity that began in the early 20th century.

About one quarter of all Christians today are classified as Pentecostal or charismatic, and share the expectation of direct personal intervention of the Spirit of God in worship. Charismatic Christians share this Pentecostal experience but also are found across all the other strands of world Christianity. Pentecostalism also exists as a separate Christian family, including classical Pentecostal churches from the early 20th century and more recent neo-Pentecostal churches. The latter often are single mega-churches rather than structured into denominations. Partly because they have viewed these rapidly growing movements and churches as threats, mainline churches were slow to recognise them. The first WCC study of Pentecostal Movements appeared in 1980. But as far back as 1958, the IRM included an article by a Pentecostal, David du Plessis from South Africa, and an article in 1962 about a Pentecostal church. The latter was by a Lutheran, Augusto E. Fernández Arlt, who commented very positively on Latin American Pentecostalism on the occasion of the admission of a Pentecostal church – the Chilean Pentecostal Church – to the WCC.

According to the definition of the Atlas of Global Christianity, independent churches predominate in parts of Africa, in China and in India, but many would not want to be classified as Pentecostal or charismatic. The independent churches in Africa include the prophet movements begun early in the 20th century, when they asserted their distinctness from the mission-founded churches, and some neo-Pentecostal churches from the 1970s onwards. Because they expressed their faith in a characteristically African way, many viewed them as separatist. Because some of their practices resembled the reviled indigenous religious traditions, they were accused of syncretism. The Swedish missiologist Bengt Sundkler initially described one group as “a syncretistic sect” which “becomes the bridge over which Africans are brought back to heathenism.” This condemnation was quoted several times in the IRM – mainly to dispute it and in defence of indigenous forms of church.

Chinese independent churches include indigenous movements which first arose in the 1920s, and also the “underground” or “house” churches of the communist era. They were cut off from the rest of the world Christian community. Since the 1980s, many new indigenous movements have emerged in China, some of whom have grown rapidly. In India the census figures count mainly Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians but the Atlas reckons there are at least as many Christians in indigenous churches and Pentecostal movements, plus an estimated three million who worship Christ while remaining Hindus. Independent churches also are the majority form of church in parts of the US heartland of conservative evangelicalism, especially in the US South, where the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest. These have strong traditions of independency, so that the term church applies only to the “autonomous local congregation of baptised believers.”

The growth of independent churches means that world Christianity – at least the half which is not part of the Catholic Church – is increasingly fragmented. The World Council of Churches is made up mainly of historic Protestant and Orthodox churches. The independent churches by their nature are not inclined to join, so that constant efforts need to be made to remember that these are the most rapidly growing churches in the world; perhaps 37 percent of Christians in Asia, 31 percent in North America and 19 percent in Africa belong to them. The IRM includes recent articles about African independent churches and Indian Pentecostalism but very little about

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42. Atlas, p. 144. According to the Atlas, 4.8% of the population of India are Christian, compared with a 2001 census figure of 2.3%.


Chinese churches and nothing recently about the Southern Baptists.

**Christian migration**

The second notable contemporary trend in world Christianity is that millions of those moving across regions and continents are Christians. The majority move for economic reasons, and predominantly from parts of the global South to the North. Influxes of Christians from the global South into traditionally Christian countries, such as the USA, are changing the complexion of Christianity in those countries. These new arrivals partly offset the decline in Christian practice by those of European descent, leading to a “browning” or “de-Europeanization” of Christianity in the West.

Denominational balances are also changing as a result of migration. For example, since 1900 most migration into the USA has been from Latin America, which is predominantly Catholic; this has led to a large recent increase in the proportion of US Christians who are Catholic.46

Among those who migrate due to political pressures are Christians living under Islamic regimes. Over the 20th century, due to factors such as Western policies, internal injustices, and Islamic extremism, suppression of Christians under Islamic regimes intensified, leading to great suffering and increased Christian migration, particularly out of the Middle East or West Asia. The proportion of Christians in West Asia was 23 percent in 1910 but is now down to less than six percent.47

The migration of Christians from West Asia has led to a new situation of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Christianity becoming widely spread around the world. This brings new challenges for them48 but also increases their interaction with other churches.

Pressures of climate change and depletion of resources are also a reason for migration. The mainly Christian islanders of the Pacific are among the first and the most seriously affected by rising sea levels.49 Drought in East Africa, hurricanes in the Caribbean and floods in South East Asia are also forcing Christians to relocate. Hearing the mission priorities of indigenous peoples has resulted in the inclusion of the natural world in the concerns of mission. This was first discussed in the IRM around the assembly in Canberra in 1991,50 and it became a major concern of the 2011 international ecumenical peace convocation in Jamaica.51

Overseas or cross-cultural missionary work is also a form of migration. Indeed, contemporary theological reflection on migration suggests that, being in mission, all Christians are migrants and in some sense aliens and exiles from their true home.52 Several changes have taken place over the last century in the origin and direction of mission movements. In 1910, North American missionaries represented about a third of those sent out internationally, which is still the case,53 but over that period the type of churches they come from has changed. By 1968, the numbers of unaffiliated and evangelical missionaries from the USA had “surpassed those of the mainline churches that had led the Protestant movement since the 1800s.54 In other words, US missionaries are increasingly part of independent Christian movements. Their destinations have also changed. Post-War Europe, once the heart of Christendom, soon became regarded by US Americans as a mission field not only for reconstruction but also for evangelism, as the crusades conducted by US evangelist Billy Graham in Europe from the 1950s show. Eighteen percent of US missionaries are now working in Europe.55

Another noticeable change has been the shift of Western missionary attention from Asia to Africa. Edinburgh 1910 was preoccupied with developments in Asia and most of the discussion was in terms of West and East.56 At that time more than half of all European missionaries worked in Asia, and China was the largest single mission field. But although Asia has 60 percent of the world’s population, less than eight percent of Western missionaries go to Asia

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55. *Atlas*, p. 263.
today, while nearly 30 percent go to Africa. Thus, it is not surprising that Western missionary discussion today tends to be in terms of North-South rather than East-West relations. Europe’s share of international missionary sending has dropped from two-thirds in 1910 to one-third today, more than 40 percent of whom go to other parts of Europe. The other third of cross-cultural missionaries now is made up of new mission movements from South Korea, Brazil, Nigeria, India, the Philippines and other major centres of Christian population.60

The rise of missionary movements from the non-Western world was predicted by Walls in the IRM already in 1987,58 but this took many of the former colonial mission agencies by surprise. They were already engaged in restructuring their agencies on the basis that “the Church today is present in all parts of the world,” necessitating “the assumption of responsibility by Christian communities throughout the world for mission in their own societies.” As Emilio Castro saw it, such a situation presents only two possibilities for the missionary task: “either support for the local witness of Christian communities, or competition with them.”59 With the former option in mind, some in the early 1970s expressed the view that the best way Western mission agencies could support their local witness was by a moratorium on missionary sending from the West in order to allow them to develop themselves.60 Some mission agencies saw this not as a temporary but a permanent measure and dissolved themselves to create instead interchurch structures. In 1977 the London Missionary Society (Congregational) set a precedent by forming a council for world mission at which all the churches founded by the (Congregational) set a precedent by forming a council for world mission at which all the churches founded by the society were equally represented together with the founding body (now the United Reformed Church), and the funds of the society were managed by all.61 In contrast, evangelical mission agencies, for example at the first Lausanne congress in 1974, either saw no problem with competition between churches or argued for the continued existence of “unreached” peoples for whom new mission initiatives were needed.62 Others were unconscious of such debates but simply followed what they read in the New Testament about spreading the gospel to the whole world. Much mission activity – especially stemming from revival movements like Pentecostalism – is motivated by gratitude for salvation and desire to share the good news and the gifts God has given with others.63 Thus, if they find that other Christians are there already, rather than joining with them, they may wonder why these Christians do not join with their initiative.

**Christian plurality**

The emergence of independent movements combined with the migration of existing Christian churches results in an ever-increasing plurality of Christian expression. The traditional European pattern of one church for each sovereign territory, which was replicated in many parts of the world by practices of colonial mission societies, is eroding. Churches with national structures are not always known as the church of a particular territory but often as churches in that territory, suggesting they do not have a monopoly there.64 The denominational pluralism which this suggests is usually said to have originated in the USA. In situations where denominations are not identified ethnically, this leads to competition between churches to attract members. Some argue that denominational structures are a God-given expression of human creativity and diversity, but others see them as detrimental to ecumenical cooperation and contrary to the apostolic tradition.65

Not only is Christian plurality encouraged in many societies and in some churches, but it is also an inevitable result of migration movements. Christianity exists in diaspora communities around the world. Especially in multicultural megacities, different Christian communities rub up against one another while practising their faith in very different ways, even if formally they are part of the same family of churches. Music styles may differ greatly, along with ways of praying, prohibitions regarding use of alcohol

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64. E.g. The Church in Wales (Anglican), which was disestablished in 1920.
and sexual practices. In the early 1970s, John Mbiti called Christians to “know one another theologically,” but this is far from being realised. The present situation in many cities is like of second century Rome, when migrants from around the Roman Empire were practicing their different patterns of worship and offending one another: some were feasting and others fasting. Imposing uniformity, as did St Victor, the bishop of Rome, is not an option today. However, local ecumenical bodies have an important role in reaching out to all the different Christian communities, including the independent ones.

Increasing Christian plurality means that the reservoir of what Christians have in common is getting smaller. The pattern and significance of worship and sacraments varies widely, as does church polity, and the spiritualities of different churches are often foreign to one another. In the current context of world Christianity, the Bible is assuming greater importance as the only source of authority which Christians share, although methods of interpretation can vary greatly. Even the magisterium of the Catholic Church, which has centuries of teachings upon which to draw, cites the Bible when it wants to communicate or work with other Christians. Apart from designated ecumenical and interdenominational activity, much of it in the context of mission and development movements, churches are also connected at the level of popular culture through worship music and resources, popular Christian literature, and international personalities. These are important vehicles for bringing unity today.

Changing Mission

Global developments and contemporary trends in world Christianity lead to changes in how Christian mission is understood. Here we consider three important ones.

**Mission as contextual**

Fundamental to other changes in understanding mission is the perception that it is contextual: that is, mission is understood and practised according to local conditions. Those at Edinburgh in 1910 presumed that Christianity was being spread by top-down activity of European missionaries – educated elites like themselves, often with close relationships to colonial governments, who were “carrying the gospel to all the non-Christian world” in a one-way direction from what was seen as the centre to the periphery. There were exceptions who foresaw a reciprocal influence that Asia, Africa, and Oceania would have on the Western church, but most expected that mission would result in other people being conformed to Western standards of civilization. This perception was challenged during the post-war period by the emergence of the missio Dei paradigm of mission – a process charted magnificently by David J. Bosch.

**Missio Dei** begins from the realisation that mission belongs to God and is first and foremost God’s initiative, in which the churches participate. As early as 1928, at its meeting in Jerusalem, the IMC declared that the “older” and “younger” churches were in partnership with one another, which became practically necessary in the post-war era. The Christendom model was breaking down. But not until the 1952 IMC meeting at Willingen was this mission partnership of churches given the theological foundation of missio Dei: “The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself . . . ‘As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.’” As one observer there commented, there was “something emerging beyond partnership – oneness in the work.” This was particularly significant in the new European situation where Christians were now separated by the Iron Curtain that would severely inhibit missionary sending activity.

Because of missio Dei thinking, the title of the IRM was altered in 1969, by changing missions to mission (from International Review of Missions to International Review of Mission). This was very significant in stating that the journal’s concern was not primarily with the activities of missionary societies but with “the whole task of the whole church to bring the whole gospel to the whole world.”

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other words, mission is not only studied as practice and strategy but also as theology. Missions are not judged by whether the results are successful nor by conformity to a standard pattern, but by their obedience to the will of God. Since mission is from above, there is no earthly centre from which the gospel is universalised; it is polycentric. “Every group of Christians is sent as God’s ambassadors to the people in its immediate neighbourhood . . . [and also] to the uttermost parts of the earth.”

As a result of this new paradigm, mission practice is quite varied, reflecting the diversity of gifts and situations of churches around the world. Missio Dei gave the freedom to local churches to develop their own interpretation of the will of God and to determine the mission priorities for their context. The result is a variety of models of mission depending on the context, such as mission as liberation, as mediating salvation, as evangelism, and so on.

Recognizing the contextual nature of mission has several important consequences. For mission history, it places the emphasis not on how the church got to a particular place but on the local reception of the message. Mission history is no longer just the history of the Western missionary movement but includes the appropriation of the gospel by local Christians, through catechists, Bible women, lay evangelists, translators and interpreters, colporteurs, and so on. “The second consequence is for mission theology. Contextual theologies start from the assumption that God was already at work in some way before the gospel message was known and continuity is sought between local traditions and the Christian faith.” This enriches mission theology with insight from different cultures. The third consequence has been that mission studies have become less preoccupied with grand strategies and links with government, and more interested in grassroots missionary engagement.

In this sense, bottom-up Pentecostalism has become the primary vehicle of evangelization since 1910. Mission appears now to be coming from the periphery to the centre. A fourth consequence is the inclusion of a social and advocacy agenda. Liberation theologians have called attention to the fact that Christians today are either themselves poor or have a responsibility toward the poor. As a result, mission theology in the IRM has developed a more critical relationship to power. Mission theology pursued by and with the poor and marginalised is necessarily and rightly concerned with liberation, with hope for material blessing and well-being.

The pneumatological paradigm

Recently, mission theology has increasingly considered pneumatology. This could be attributed to a number of factors. One internal factor resulted from the integration in 1961 of the IMC and the WCC: ecumenical discussions about mission now included the Orthodox churches. Already the IMC mission theologians had moved some way toward the concerns of Orthodox theologians by developing a trinitarian missio Dei paradigm, and the link between mission and unity. The Orthodox, helped especially by the Romanian Ion Bria, then worked to articulate their mission theology in a way that Western Christians could understand. As a result, in 1982 the central committee of the WCC was able to adopt the statement “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation.” Orthodoxy influence in this document can be seen particularly in the emphasis on mission as witness and the recognition of the local church’s eucharistic celebration as the locus and source of mission. Also, the Orthodox understanding of how the Holy Spirit sanctifies the whole creation emerged in the rich discussions around the Canberra assembly of

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75. “Quarterly Notes, No. 16,” p. iii.

76. For an example of this, see Paul Jenkins, “The Scandal of Continuing Intercultural Blindness in Mission Historiography: The Case of Andreas Riis in Akwapim,” IRM 87/344 (Jan. 1998), pp. 67–76.

77. See Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, Orbis, Maryknoll (2002 rev.ed.).

78. See the issues of the IRM on the 1996 conference on world mission and evangelism at Salvador Bahia, which focused on gospel and cultures, especially 84/332–333 (Apr. 1995); 84/334 (July 1995); 84/335 (Oct. 1995); 85/336 (Jan. 1996); 85/337 (Apr. 1996).


The rise of Pentecostal-charismatic forms of Christianity was also a factor that raised interest in theology of the Holy Spirit. The first contributor to the IRM to draw attention to the significance for mission of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was Roland Allen, whose work was influential on later charismatic and Pentecostal leaders. His challenge to other mission theologians to develop a pneumatology that embraces the world seems to have fallen on deaf ears until after World War II. In 1958, David du Plessis marked the 50th anniversaries of some Pentecostal movements and pointed to their significance for mission both theologically and practically. In 1968, Melvin L. Hodges, an Assemblies of God missionary, was the first to explain a Pentecostal missiology to the readers of the IRM. Since then many Pentecostal and charismatic theologians have contributed, among them: Walter Hollenweger, Michael Cassidy, Norberto Saracco, Michael Harper, Juan Sepúlveda, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Hong Yong-Gi and Amos Yong. Since the 1990s all sorts of other contributors have begun to use the same pneumatological language.

Another strand of pneumatological thinking was among theologians who believed that the coming of the Holy Spirit had implications for the transformation of society. John Baillie pointed this out in the IRM in 1952. The New Delhi conference frequently mentioned the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about God’s purposes in Christ. Also, liberation theology presupposed the transforming power of the Spirit in liberation and justice. Similarly, feminist theology attention to pneumatology has affected mission theology, especially since the early 1990s. Women’s reflections emphasized the motives and spirituality of mission over against a goal-oriented approach which they saw as having oppressive tendencies. They insisted instead that mission must always be life-giving and life-affirming.

The first time pneumatological theme for a WCC assembly was in 1991 at Canberra: “Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation!” Here ecological concerns were emphasized, as well as learning from the land and nature spiritualities of indigenous people throughout the world. In the IRM, the themes of Canberra were discussed thoroughly in relation to those of the 1989 San Antonio mission conference. The first round of discussion centred on the wide scope of the Spirit’s work and the justification it gives to extending mission activity to caring for the creation, as well as how the Spirit overcomes dualisms of body-spirit, male-female, heaven and earth and leads to a holistic understanding of mission. The second round focused on the Spirit’s subversive activity in human society and role in bringing liberation. The third connected the Spirit with unity and reconciliation, and the fourth, the Spirit’s role in renewal, holy living and mission spirituality. It was clear that a coherent mission pneumatology was yet to emerge and that key issues needed to be resolved around the relationship of the work of the Holy Spirit and proclamation of Jesus Christ in mission. More work was also needed on the relationship of the Holy Spirit to human cultures and other religions.

Over the next few years, considerable progress was made. The theology of missio Dei was redefined along the lines that mission is “finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in.” In this way mission is understood to be as holistic, life-giving and liberating as the movement of the Spirit, and also affirming of the work of the Spirit in other communities, cultures and even religions.

However, not everything is mission. By the definition above, the first act of mission is discerning the work of the Holy Spirit among the many other spirits of this world. Here, the criterion for Christians must be Christ or Christ-likeness. The pneumatological paradigm necessitates interaction with grassroots activity and the recognition of movements from below. It can be seen as a theological consequence of the recognition of mission as contextual. Mission as joining in with the Spirit also shifts mission from...
the category of activism to that of spirituality. Mission is being truly alive to the work of God in the world by the grace of Jesus Christ, and being empowered and gifted to participate in it. It is invigorating and renewing because the Holy Spirit is “the Lord, the Giver of Life” (Nicene Creed) and compassionate because the Spirit is Love.

The external change that has made pneumatology a particularly appropriate language to express mission theology is the shift in models and theories of globalisation. Whereas Edinburgh 2010 could comfortably describe mission as “joining in with the Spirit,” such language was foreign to Edinburgh 1910, which definitely preferred “advancing the kingdom of Christ” (or Christendom). Whereas kingdom was an appropriate (although easily corrupted) metaphor in that imperial age, in the US-led globalisation of the 21st century, referring to the Spirit is more in keeping with the talk of global flows, inter connecting webs and cultural hegemony.99 While there is much to be gained from the contemporary pneumatological paradigm of mission, its parallels with the contemporary language of globalization also stand as a warning that mission today is just as easily co-opted by global powers as it was in the age of kingdoms.

**The church as dynamic**

The changing landscape of world Christianity, especially as Christians migrate and Christianity becomes increasingly diverse, suggests that the church needs to be understood in a more dynamic way. In the colonial period churches were the home base of missions or “mission fields” were the foundation for mission in a given region. Churches themselves did not move, but were “planted” in a particular location. Besides their buildings, many churches were and are rooted in particular landscapes by a parish system through which they minister to people in that locality, and are structured territorially. This expression of contextuality is appropriate, but there also is the need today to recognize that churches are also moving around the world in migration and in mission.

Accompanying – or as Bosch suggests – “driving” the realisation that mission is God’s initiative was a rethinking of the nature of the church. First, since the church is constituted to participate in the missio Dei, the church is missionary by its very nature. It is a sign, sacrament and instrument of mission.100 If the church is missionary, and if mission leads to the growth of the church, then separation of church and mission structures does not make sense

theologically and practically.101 Besides this, in the post-war period the IMC appeared as a colonial structure perpetuating mission from the West to the rest.102 For these and other reasons, following a decision made at the IMC meeting in 1957–1958, the two bodies were integrated at the 1961 New Delhi assembly of the WCC. However, not everyone was convinced that mission should lose its separate structural identity. Evangelical mission leaders argued that there were biblical precedents for mission agencies, that the new structures were not inclusive of new independent mission movements, that the WCC was withdrawing its interest in increasing the numbers of Christians, and even that the whole missio Dei paradigm watered down mission by equating it with church.103 At least one WCC representative saw other matters of church politics at play and rather disregarded the genuine questions.104

Whatever the arguments, the reality is that mission agencies continue to be founded, often today in the global South. Many of these new organisations are not part of the discussions within the WCC but do join mission forums such as the Lausanne movement. The Willingen statement recognised that local churches have a responsibility to “the uttermost parts of the earth” as well as to their immediate neighbour, whereas the missio Dei paradigm has tended to be interpreted in a way that discourages churches from crossing geographical boundaries, or to have a moratorium on mission “sending.”

Secondly, rethinking church was with the conviction that the authentic church is “the church-with-others.” In the 1960s, J.C. Hans Hoekendijk was an outspoken critic of the church’s self-centredness and refusal to see mission is its goal. The church, he argued, stands neither at the beginning nor the end of mission. It is the church only in so far as it participates in God’s mission to the world.105 A purely functional view of the church was understandably rejected. However, Hoekendijk’s insistence that mission is for the sake of the world, not the church, was a ver-

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100. Bosch, pp. 374–76.
sion of what came to be generally recognised in the post-war period: the church is the servant of the kingdom,\textsuperscript{106} following the example of Christ. This view was most fully expressed around the Melbourne mission conference.\textsuperscript{107} The church therefore exists for others, or with them.\textsuperscript{108} In all this there is an implicit pneumatological recognition that the church does not contain or circumscribe the work of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit authenticates the church, and not the other way around.

In the Roman Catholic Church’s discussions around Vatican II, the understanding of the church as “the people of God” came to the fore as a third aspect of rethinking church. As the people of God, the church is a community of disciples following the way of Christ, or a party of pilgrims recapitulating the life of Christ.\textsuperscript{109} This vision of the church on the way or road\textsuperscript{110} suggests that the church is a movement, a migration, which is particularly fitting for the church in mission. These three aspects present a more dynamic understanding of church, in keeping with current awareness of global mobility, migration and diaspora and, I suggest, biblical images of the church.\textsuperscript{111}

**Christian Influence and the Global Future**

In conclusion, we see that mission changes within the landscape of global flows. Setting the changes in mission in the context of global changes is not intended to suggest that the church always follows global developments. On the contrary, the Christian church, representing about a third of the world’s population, is a major global player, innovator and agent of change. The church has a global agenda, and Christian mission is an important means by which this is pursued. Missionary movements in history have irrevocably changed the world, not only through the number of Christians but also by way they have impacted society. Examples of this include the role of Bible women in the development of women’s education, for instance in Korea;\textsuperscript{112} the effect of knowledge of the life and work of Jesus Christ on the Indian renaissance, as shown by the Indian theologian and WCC moderator, Dr. M.M. Thomas;\textsuperscript{113} and the contribution of Catholic solidarity in bringing about democracy and human rights in many global contexts such as Poland, South Korea and much of Latin America.\textsuperscript{114} Although the churches worldwide may not be as close to the centres of political power as they were in 1910, as these examples show, this is not necessarily a barrier to influencing events.

We can only see the world from our own particular vantage point, and we may not rightly interpret the world or the will of God. Many of the predictions made in 1910 for the future of world Christianity were mistaken, for example, in the area of church growth. Conference reports expected that Japan and India would soon be Christian nations in the sense of mass conversions to Christian faith.\textsuperscript{115} In fact, the percentage of Christians in those nations has hardly changed in a century. The greatest growth in East Asia has occurred in Korea, whose annexation by the Japanese was condoned at Edinburgh 1910.\textsuperscript{116} The greatest church growth of all has been in what the leaders of 1910 regarded as the “darkest” and most heathen continent: sub-Saharan Africa received hardly any attention then.\textsuperscript{117} In 1910 the Pentecostal-charismatic movement was new and not represented at Edinburgh, but has been the fastest growing movement since then, transforming the worship life of many churches. Due to our limited understanding of the way in which the Holy Spirit is moving, we may invest our efforts in the wrong place or in the wrong way. Robertson points out the irony that, despite all the endeavours of the colonial missionary movement, churches in the former mission fields grew more rapidly after independence than they had done before.\textsuperscript{118}


118. Dana Robert, “Shifting southward: global Christianity since
We can only contribute significantly to the new creation by seeking to live in and by the Spirit — that is by conforming our mission to Christ’s. As Christians we have an obligation to the whole world, but in a changing landscape that mission can only be fulfilled, whether globally or locally, in so far as we are joining in with the Spirit.

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**3.3 Christ and the Other**

**Union Embracing Difference**

Fadi Daou

For the Christian, Christ cannot just be reduced to the status of the founder of a new religion called “Christianity.” Christ must be understood, in the fullness of his divine mystery, as providing the foundation for a new phase in human history. He is the new Adam, the human person restored, the author of a humanity renewed from within through his presence in the world. It follows, therefore, that while Christians acknowledge themselves as his disciples and members of his mystical body, the church, through faith, they also believe that through the free action of grace every human being is called into the saving mystery of Christ and united with him.

The Christ event — the incarnation of the eternal Word of God who dies and is raised to life — is the key by which we interpret Christianity, but it is more than that; for Christians it is the key to understanding all human existence. In order to look at the relationship between Christians and members of other religions, we have to address this fundamental reality. From the Christian perspective, even though this connection between religions has not been recognized in the history of our relationships, it has already been established through the bond which unites Christ with all humanity. Our true relationship with other religions can only be discovered through this fundamental perception that God is present in every interreligious encounter and interaction; in fact God is present in every human encounter. Christians cannot build a relationship with those of other beliefs except upon this foundation of their own relationship to God, and God’s relationship to others. And so, before exploring and analyzing the way Christians understand Christ as universal saviour, we should look at how Christ understood himself, and what kind of an attitude he showed toward others, particularly toward non-Jews, and people who were not among his followers.

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**Interreligious Experiences of Christ**

In the New Testament, the four evangelists show us Jesus as present and active mostly in the regions of Galilee and Judea. Even if during the missionary years of his life he is often on the move, the boundary of his activity corresponds to the territory where the Jewish people lived during that time. For example, there is a very clear contrast between the extent of his travels and those of the apostle Paul, who visited the whole of the East and North of the Mediterranean region. Christ shares this limited goal with his apostles when he sends them out on mission for the first time, saying: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6). However this Judeocentric aspect of Jesus’ mission contrasts strongly with his final instructions addressed to the apostles after his resurrection: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19); also: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Between these first and second missions came the confrontation opposing Jesus to the Jewish authorities of the time, culminating according to the account in Matthew's gospel in mutual condemnation. Jesus tells them, by means of the parable of the murderous vine-dressers: “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom” (Matt. 21:43). The chief priests with the Jewish Sanhedrin, for their part, accuse Jesus of blasphemy and decide he deserves to be put to death (cf. Matt. 26:57-66). However, I believe that the development in Jesus’ approach, and the gradual opening of his message to include a universal dimension cannot just be attributed to the obstinate rejection of his message by some of the Jews, as one might perhaps think from Paul’s letter to the Romans (cf. Rom. 11:11-15). It is equally the result of the true nature of his mission and of what he gained from his occasional contacts with non-Jews. I will give three examples.

The first is the encounter with the centurion, a person from a different religion and culture yet who was attracted and open to the spiritual riches of the Jewish religion. The second example takes us to an encounter with a person from a radically different religion, the religion of the Canaanites, which for the Jewish faith was traditionally castigated as a negative and even dangerous reality. Finally, the third encounter is with the Samaritan woman, who belongs to a schismatic version of Judaism. These three encounters represent different kinds of interreligious situations, and teach us about the experience of Jesus Christ in this context, and the conclusions he reached for himself and also for his disciples.
Jesus and the Roman Centurion

When a centurion meets him and asks Jesus to heal one of his servants, Jesus responds expressing admiration for the man’s faith in the presence of the crowd that gathers around. In Luke’s gospel, this centurion is described as being close to the Jews, and generous toward their community (cf. Luke 7:4-5). All the same, he still represents the Roman occupation and is an outsider. According to Matthew, Jesus uses this encounter to show publicly his appreciation of the faith of a non-Jew, and yet at the same time to deliver a warning to the Jews themselves. He says, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness” (Matt. 8:10-12).

Here Jesus reveals a fundamental element of “his theology” of religion; his recognition of the faith of the centurion is strong and straightforward. He makes it plain that it is not ethnic or religious identity that admits people to “the kingdom” (that is, to divine grace), but the authenticity and sincerity of personal faith. He then says to the Pharisees: “Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt. 3:9). “If you are Abraham’s children, then do what Abraham did” (John 8:39).

Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

Our second example of Jesus meeting strangers is his encounter with the Canaanite woman (cf. Matt. 15:21-28). He had come to the region of Tyre and Sidon in order to have some kind of “retreat” with his apostles, far from the crowds which followed him everywhere in Galilee. While he thought he would be unknown in a strange land, a Canaanite woman approached him and asked for healing for her daughter. Although at first Jesus tried to avoid contact with this woman, insisting harshly on his exclusive calling for mission to his own people, eventually he responded favourably, for he could not be indifferent to this woman’s faith. And so, after his initial response shaped by the difference which separated them: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (Matt. 15:26), Jesus moved on to commend the faith which he found in the Canaanite woman: “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish” (Matt. 15:28). This extraordinary encounter completely overturns the presuppositions and prejudices rooted in tradition which had resulted in Jews being very distrustful, even scornful, of the Canaanites and their religion.

It helped Jesus to see that difference—even religious difference—is not sufficient reason for mistrust. His own conduct shows that belonging to one or another religion is not the criterion of the authenticity and strength of a person’s faith.

Jesus, therefore, does not hesitate to criticize harshly the scribes and the Pharisees, those who sit in the seat of Moses, for they offer people the appearance of being righteous, while within they are full of hypocrisy and sin (cf. Matt. 23:28). But he praises the faith of the Canaanite woman though her own religious tradition was decried as the absolute opposite or threatening alternative to the purity and integrity of Judaism. For certain commentators, this encounter represents—in the gospel of Matthew—a turning point in Jesus’ understanding of his mission, which from this point expands to embrace a universal dimension.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

I conclude these examples with the dialogue between Christ and the Samaritan woman, as reported in the fourth chapter of John’s gospel (cf. John 4:1-42). As she tries to find out his viewpoint on their religious differences, this woman gives Christ the chance to reveal his own understanding of religion. Replying to her challenge, “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:20), Jesus affirms, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem…. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:21-23).

From this we can see that for Jesus Christ the adoration of God is not a matter of religious observance, where you know the best place in which to worship or the rules laid down by local culture as to how you must practice your religion. Rather, Jesus places worship at the highest level, where authenticity of faith and spiritual communion with God count above all else.

We find here certainly a “relativization” of religious practices and even of beliefs, but this does not mean the abolition of these, but rather giving priority to inner spiritual experience. Instead of pronouncing on the choice between the Jewish religion and that of the Samaritans, 

1. The Samaritan schism, resulting from a reaction against the rigorism of the Jewish reform movement that followed the exile (6th century BCE), led to an implacable opposition between the two groups. A religious Jew had to avoid all contact with Samaritans, who were considered ritually unclean.
Jesus puts forward a new approach. He provides a unique interpretation of religion that he calls all the world to follow. He teaches that it is not the diversity of understandings which creates a problem, but the superficiality of religious practices and theological debates which reflect the intriguers and selfish interests of human beings rather than to the will of God. In his response to the Samaritan woman, Jesus Christ invites us to an encounter with God, not on such or such a mountain, or according to such or such an observance, but in himself, in the heart of his interior life and in the truth of his own being.

Faith, the Way to Union in Love

Christ’s understanding of faith

The attitude of Jesus as he encounters people of other religious backgrounds provides us with three elements on which to reflect. First, Jesus is far from embracing a communitarian logic which would install a rigid separation between our own community and that of others. His attitude refutes and rejects a binary vision of the world that defines people as belonging to two separate groups: the believers on the one side, and the unbelievers on the other. The attention that he gives to the people whom he meets is free from feelings of mistrust or hostility which can arise from rejection and conscious or unconscious fear of the other. Ethnic or religious difference does not prevent him from being aware of the spiritual experience of each person in its originality and authenticity.

Second, we find with Jesus a recognition and admiration of the faith of those who are neither Jews nor his disciples. So, when Christ admires the faith of the centurion or of the Canaanite woman, he sees that God is at work in the life of people of all cultures and religions. Perhaps some may think when looking at these examples that the faith of these people was actually faith in the person of Jesus Christ and his divine power. Certainly this could be true. Nevertheless, the reaction of Jesus shows admiration for the trust these people have in God and his mercy, and this leads him to grant their request for transformation and healing. Beyond questions of religious identity, the encounter with Christ reveals the importance of an authentic relationship uniting the human person to God, regardless of the diversity of religious practices. Christians may, for their part, interpret the faith of others as being inwardly and implicitly guided by Christ, the Word of God, who, coming into the world, enlightens every human being (cf. John 1:9). Even so, they may not deny the existence of the gift of faith to others, even though these do not express it in Christian terminology. Finally, it is clear that Christ emphasizes the importance of the interior dimension of the faith and experience of each person rather than outward observances. It is sincere relationship with God and the commitment that flows from this which counts, rather than vain disputes with a view to a supposed religious purity or a righteousness based on observances, which ends by transforming religion into empty and self-regarding appearances. And so the attitude of Jesus Christ toward persons of other religions may find its echo in this word of the apostle Peter: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Some may challenge this understanding of the relation of Jesus to people of another faith by referring to verses or passages from the Bible that display a more exclusive dimension of the Christian faith. Certainly, Jesus often gave teaching marked by a radicalism that created separation, sometimes even within the same household. He proclaims: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household” (Matt.10:34-36). Jesus explains this sentence in terms of the total detachment required of those who commit to following him. Each disciple is called to carry his or her cross, following the example of Christ, the sign of universal love and self-offering.

In response to someone’s question about the number of those who will be saved, Jesus replies that salvation will be offered to those who strive to enter “by the narrow gate.” But even though it seems a paradox, Jesus makes it plain that those who have followed him will fare no better than “the others.” For the first may hear on judgment day, “I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!” (Luke 13:27); while others will come “from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29). So it will be that “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30).

To sum up, the radical nature of the gospel message is quite evident, and allows no one to believe that the way of salvation is easy and plain sailing. And yet the strongest demands are made on the followers of Christ, while at the same time the door of salvation is left open to others. It is very clear that just having a religious affiliation is no visa for heaven, and that surprises about the allocation of places in heaven are to be expected. At every opportunity Jesus reminds his followers that in his Father’s house, there are many rooms (cf. John 14:2).

Despite the fact that the church in the course of its history has sometimes interpreted the radical gospel message
too narrowly – we may recall the statement “outside the church, there is no salvation” – the interreligious experiences of Jesus given above must remain our guide. These gospel accounts show that when Jesus encountered others he did so with a sensitive and sincere attention to their needs and to their religious and spiritual experiences. In fact, Christ does not reject in principle any religion, but he criticizes vehemently religious hypocrisy that shows itself in legalistic formalism, and an exterior observance stripped of spirituality and sincere ethical engagement (cf. Matt. 23:1-36).

Above all, the gospels clearly witness to the fact that Jesus Christ considers himself the bearer of a unique and universal message of salvation. From this comes the mission command he gives to his apostles: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).

The apostles have indeed carried forward the message of their master with its double dynamic of oneness and universality. Paul expresses this well in his letter to Timothy, writing: “God our Saviour … desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:3-6). I will return later to the implications of this teaching for the recognition of other religions by Christianity, as well as the understanding of mission.

This dual reality of universality and oneness in the person and teaching of Christ is necessary both for faithfulness to the Christian message in its global witness and for its coherence. At the same time, this book does not seek in any way to obscure anything that does not suit its argument in order to show only evidence that supports an opening toward and a ready acceptance of religious plurality. While respecting the principle of the interrelatedness of every religion within the diverse and global spiritual experience of humanity, I seek to show here the hospitality of God acting upon the particular interior understanding and very conception of the Christian faith. And so after having seen the approach adopted by Jesus toward others, and before looking at the theological consequences of the Christ event for the view which Christians hold with regard to others, I wish to focus on the content of the message that Christ has sought to transmit and that his disciples have presented in the gospels.


### The universality of the spirituality of the gospels

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(Matt. 5:3–10)

This passage of the gospel, known as the Beatitudes, represents the heart of the message of Jesus Christ. Here we find in condensed form both the originality of the gospel message and the universality of human spiritual experience. As a result, this text has become a sort of universal spiritual resource in which people of different religious traditions find themselves at home, as it expresses a dimension of their own spiritual path.

In reality, the Sermon on the Mount, of which the Beatitudes form the kernel, is a teaching that Jesus has delivered as a testament for his disciples as well as for the whole of humanity. The importance of this passage is that it is not purely theoretical teaching but rather a picture that shows us how Christ himself has lived, and how those may live who accept the call of God to abandon a life centred egotistically on themselves, opening themselves instead to a life centred on the love of God and of others.

St John in his first epistle translates this message into words as simple as they are beautiful. He reminds us first of all that the life to which we are called is founded on the divine choice to love us freely and completely. “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). From which follows the appeal: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

This message has a double impact. First, it constitutes a measure of the authenticity of the faith of those who call themselves Christian. “Whoever does not love abides in death,” says St John (1 John 3:14).

And so to be Christian means to follow Christ on the path of love, a universal love which expresses itself not only in words but in deeds and in truth, even in the love of the
enemy. Christians cannot therefore consider their relation to people of other religious traditions except on the basis of this interior attitude, as fundamental as it is unconditional. Second, the gospel message throws open the boundaries of the Christian community and carries forward a truth—from the point of view of Christian faith—that is addressed to the whole of humanity. Truly, the love of God is a love that is universal and free. It does not depend on any predisposition or human response. Christians believe that every human person is enlightened by Christ, who has given his life for all: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

In a study on the Bible and believers from other religious, Sri Lankan pastor Wesley Ariarajah concludes that the biblical message insists above all on the priority of grace and on God’s acceptance of us rather than on our own acceptance of God. “The people whom we meet,” he writes, “no matter from what race, age or religion, are children of God. And this conviction that the other is truly a child of God in exactly the same way as you and me, this must be the basis of all dialogue with our neighbours.” God loves all human beings and considers them his children. Through his only Son, he makes us all his “adopted children.” But can that be true for those who have not explicitly recognized Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God, put to death and raised up for the salvation of the world?

**The human person, dwelling place of God**

Christ has a clear vision of his own person, and of his mission. He declares: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Furthermore, his relationship to the Father is unique and is founded on a unity within the very being of God. So, at the request of Philip, one of his apostles, “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied” (John 14:8), Jesus replies: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). And Jesus continues: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:11). It is these words, among others, that enable John, in the beginning of his gospel, to affirm at one and the same time the unity of the divine being and the divinity of Jesus Christ, as he writes: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

How may one reconcile a message of universal love with a theological affirmation which is so very particular? It is impossible to respond to this enigmatic question without considering the two dimensions of the mission of Jesus Christ. By the fact that he is the eternal Word of God, by whom all has been made, Christ is the foundation of the existence of every human being and is a stranger to no one. By his incarnation and his gift of himself through love for all, he is also a source of grace for all humankind. Further, beyond this universal dimension of his person and of his mission, Jesus Christ is, for those who believe in him and his word, a source of special grace so extraordinary that it turns upside down the logic of things and makes of the human person the host of God. Jesus teaches: “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23).

We can therefore say that the summit of divine hospitality is achieved by God coming to seek a place for himself in the heart of the human person whom he loves. The special calling of the Christian faith is to welcome this, and to invite others to this shared mutual indwelling and union between the human and the divine, which reflects the pattern of the perfect union of the two natures human and divine in the person of Jesus Christ. We must never forget that the ground of this union is love. St John recalls this very clearly in his epistle: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4:16). This proclaims the universality of the gift of union with God through Christ, and opens this possibility to those who do not confess the Christian faith.

As a result, we may speak of two forms of union between God and humanity. The first is an explicit union, in which a human being recognizes Christ, the eternal Word of God, through whom the union of humanity with the divine nature is achieved. Such a person lives out this union through sharing in the sacramental life of the church and by means of the sacrament of universal human solidarity in the context of the world around.

There is also a second form of union, which I call implicit, and which, like the first, is founded on the initiative of divine grace and applies to all those who do not recognize in the same way as Christians the Lordship of Christ. In this instance, we suggest that this union is accomplished and sustained through the mystery of the free gift of God’s love.

In the parable of the last judgment in Matthew’s gospel, Christ addresses those who are righteous, saying,
Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink... Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and you gave me food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?” ... And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (See: Matt. 25:31-46)

These righteous ones whom Christ calls “you that are blessed by my Father” are people from all nations and religions. Because they act prompted by love alone, without any calculation or hope of reward, they are drawn into this mystery of the implicit union that Christ achieves between God and humanity.

A question remains, does the religion of these persons share in the fulfilment of this union with God, as Christianity does by means of the sacramental life? Or is this union of non-Christians with God through Christ accomplished apart from or even despite the context of their own particular religious experience? Later on, when I come to speak of the Christian position on religious plurality, I will tackle these questions. For the moment, in the context of this chapter on the personal relationship of Christ with all people, I would like to conclude my thoughts by showing how, from the perspective of Christian theology, the grace of the incarnate Christ and the paschal mystery has an effect upon non-Christians.

**Humanity made new in Christ**

Thanks to the mystery of the incarnation, which signifies a total union between divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, the church has a particular vision of human nature, for we are called ourselves to enter into this divine communion. The church fathers expressed this by saying “the Son of God became human, so that humans might become children of God.” So by the revelation of God in a human person, according to the Second Vatican Council, human beings “through Christ the Word made flesh, partake in the Holy Spirit of one being with the Father, and are made participants of the divine nature” (*Dei Verbum: Constitution on Divine Revelation*, section 2.). Christian de Chergé eloquently interprets this fundamental truth of the mystery of Christ, saying, “The primary meaning of ‘the Incarnation’ is not that the Word becomes flesh, but that our flesh should be taken into the divine life [le milieu divin].”

The Catholic Church has clarified the meaning of this fundamental change brought about by Christ in the life of each human person in one of the most beautiful pages of the writings from the Second Vatican Council. My reflection which follows is, therefore, based on section 22 of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*. In the light of Christ, this text puts the human person at the heart of the whole universal history of salvation. “The other,” whether Muslim, Jew, or nonbeliever, is thus for the Christian the bearer of a grace originating from Christ, often not at the conscious level, but nevertheless effective.

**The union of Christ with all humanity**

The point of departure for Christian anthropology is surely the *imago Dei*: human beings created by God in God’s own image and according to God’s own likeness (cf. Gen. 1:26). This reality is nevertheless to be interpreted in the light of Christ. Adam was in reality the type of the one who was to come, Jesus Christ, who will be called the new Adam and who “fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling” (*Gaudium et spes* 22.1).

This conciliar text locates the foundation of our human dignity in the double victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death. The church considers that the divine likeness in human beings has been marred by sin and is therefore in need of being restored. Truly, the burden of suffering and death would be completely crushing for human beings if this condition were not to be given a new meaning, and transfigured by the grace of new life. Christians believe that, by their binding to Christ, they become conformed to his image and share in his victory over death, thanks to the paschal mystery and the action of the Holy Spirit, which enable them to partake already in the life of the resurrection (cf. *Gaudium et spes* 22.4). What then is Christ for the non-Christian?

The Council is clear on this point, establishing the foundations of Christian anthropology and of all Christian thinking concerning the other. The raising of human nature to a stature without equal, by the very fact that the eternal Word of God has fully assumed this nature, is, for Christians, a reality with universal significance. To put this in other words, “by his incarnation, he, the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with each individual. He worked with human hands, thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved” (*Gaudium et spes* 22.2).

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6. Christian de Chergé was a monk, and prior of the abbey of Notre Dame de l’Atlas at Tibhirine (Algeria), who was assassinated with six of his brethren in 1996; see *Sept vies pour Dieu et l’Algérie*, Bayard/Centurion, Paris, 1996.

The very fact of the incarnation constitutes therefore a kind of new creation, in which human nature itself receives a new dimension. From then on, all human beings, independently both of their own religious allegiance and of Christianity, are in relationship with Christ, because Christ Jesus is himself united to them.

The universal dynamic of the paschal mystery

This union of Christ with each human person obliges Christians to regard themselves and others with respect, even reverence. Furthermore, the other is not just raised in stature by the union of Christ with human nature, but also linked into the mystery of salvation, which renews humanity from within and opens for all humankind the gate to life and eternal bliss (cf. the Council's Lumen gentium: Constitution on the Church, 16). Speaking of the way in which the believer enters into the paschal mystery, the conciliar text puts this as follows: “All this holds true not only for Christians but for all people of good will, in whose heart grace is active invisibly” (Gaudium et spes 22.5). And the Council adds: “For since Christ died for everyone and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery (Gaudium et spes 22.5).

United with Christ and associated with his paschal mystery, by grace and according to the generosity and mysterious will of God, every human being is therefore included in the universal covenant accomplished by Jesus Christ. Such is then the stature and greatness of the mystery of the human person with regard to Christians, a mystery which is fundamentally associated with that of Christ. Also every human being is by grace a “Christ-like being.” But this profound reality with regard to human persons can only be perceived with the eyes of faith, or according to the Father's own vision. In his spiritual testament, Christian de Chergé sees his death as an opportunity to bring this vision into focus, and also this joy which allows him to see the transfiguration at work in the life of his friends, the Muslims. He says: “Here it is that I am able, if God so pleases, to steep my own vision in that of the Father in order to contemplate his children of Islam, wholly illuminated by the glory of Christ, fruits of his Passion, clothed in the gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to re-establish the likeness, while overcoming differences.”


The Christian Viewpoint

Two criticisms can be raised here. The first will accuse this approach of an inclusivism which consists in defining the good that one sees in others by using criteria which apply within Christianity. To appreciate the religious and spiritual wealth of others only in the measure where one is able to assimilate this to our Christian experience or associate this with the mystery of Christ does not satisfy my present theological enquiry. Also, I would ask the reader to have the patience to go further in reading this book in order to gain greater clarity in dealing with this question.

Nevertheless, I will add here two comments. First of all, the attitude of Jesus Christ toward others, outlined above, is larger than an inclusivist approach to religious diversity, and it represents a respect and admiration for the faith of others in its own right. Second, to speak of the universal effects of the grace of the two mysteries of the incarnation and redemption indicates note a patronizing or condescending approach on the part of the Christian toward people of other religious traditions, but on the contrary a recognition of the nonexclusivity of the mystery of Christ. This is more important for the Christian than for others. That is to say that Christians aware of this teaching cannot justify an attitude of religious discrimination toward others, for they realize that they are united with them by the one who is the centre and fundamental meaning of their lives: the Christ. To sum up, it is the transformation of the Christian, and of the view Christians have of others, that applies here, not the definition of the status of the religion of the other.

The second criticism or qualification is caused by the fact that this approach is inherently of relevance to the missionary dynamic of our faith. To believe in this union with Christ of all human beings must surely prompt Christians to reveal this truth to others and, in consequence, to invite them to recognize this grace, indeed real but unknown to them? This Christian anthropology therefore constitutes at one and the same time not only the basis of respect for the other but also a motivation for evangelization and the proclamation of Christ as universal saviour. Further on, I will take some space to analyze this question. But I want at this point to note that, thanks to this “theology of the other” in relationship to Christ, one may no longer start from “zero” in interreligious relations. Before even considering this relationship to others or starting a dialogue, we must be aware that we are already together on the way with, toward, and in God.

Encounter or dialogue must therefore take place in this spirit, rich in meaning and alive with potentiality. It is a question of observing, and of seeking to meditate together on the shared part of the route which God has
brought about for us, so as to face better the part which remains for us to travel in a diversity of journeyings, but in unity with regard to our goal. In his apostolic exhortation “A New Hope for Lebanon,” Pope John Paul II wrote:

From the point of view of faith and of charity, to go toward the other cannot be limited to communicating to him that which we ourselves have understood from the Lord, but consists also in receiving from him the treasure and the truth which he has already given to be discovered. We will go forward in this way in an ever greater knowledge of the one true God and of the One whom he has sent, his Son Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:3). For if “grace and truth are come [to us] by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17), the Spirit of God, which breathes in the Church, breathes also in the human community in its totality.

3.4 Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World

Foreword, by Clare Amos, Programme Executive, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation World Council of Churches

The title of this report deliberately echoes Jesus’ words to his disciples in the synoptic gospels: “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus’ question leads the disciples to a new step in their faith and their realization of Jesus’ identity.

Just as it was then with Jesus and his first friends, so it is today with us: Christian identity and self-understanding are realized not through assertions but through questions. It is our neighbours of other religions who can help us discover who we really are.

The report itself, *Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World*, is the result of considerable work and widespread collaboration over a period of more than twelve years, which has finally come to this fruition, having been received by the World Council of Churches central committee in July 2014.

The study process which eventually resulted in this document first started in 2002, with a recommendation by the WCC central committee to the three staff teams of Faith and Order, Inter-religious Relations, and Mission and Evangelism, and their respective commissions or advisory bodies. Around this time the substantial document *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions* was published. *Ecumenical Considerations* was seeking to ask questions about the rationale and parameters for dialogue with people of other religions; the present document is seeking to offer something rather different (though obviously related), namely, how the living reality of being a Christian in a multi-religious world may, and perhaps should, affect our understanding and perception of our own Christian faith. The premise that underlies the report is that through dialogue with people of other religions we can deepen our understanding of key tenets of our Christian faith, and discover new and fresh insights.

Back in 2003, while working for the Anglican Communion with responsibility for interreligious dialogue, I was invited to participate in the meetings that marked the beginnings of this process. It was the first occasion on which I myself worked with the World Council of Churches. Over the years since, I was also invited to contribute to a number of the “religion specific” consultations that also fed into the development of the present document. So it felt both an honour and a challenge that, when I started working at the WCC myself in 2011 as Programme Executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, I was asked by colleagues to draw the process to a conclusion. I am delighted to make it more widely available now in this trade edition.

Introduction

Human beings live in a world of many different faiths, many different religions. In truth, this has always been so, but developments throughout the 20th century and now into the 21st century facilitating speed of communication and travel, together with changes in the political order and large-scale migration, have brought home to many this reality in a way that they would not previously have imagined, or perhaps even desired. Such realization of the religious plurality of our world can provoke a variety of reactions among Christians. These can include wonder, challenge, hostility, embarrassment, puzzlement, self-questioning, and fear.

Jesus once asked his disciples the question: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29 and parallels). Today, mindful of the religiously plural contexts in which Christian life and witness are set within our world, we ask of ourselves: “Who do we say that we are?” Christians in every age have implicitly asked this question, for it is the point of deep self-reflection where, taking seriously the contemporary needs of witness and mission, we discover whose we are and whom we serve. Our answer to this question both
Chapter 3. World Christianity: Intercultural and Interreligious Theology

Christianity itself came to birth in a lived experience of a world of religious plurality. The very earliest expressions of Christian self-understanding emerged as Christians began consciously to define themselves first as a sect within Judaism and then, partly due to interaction with the pagan world, as distinct from the Jewish faith. “It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26). This primary and fundamental stage in the development of Christian self-identity undoubtedly took place partly because Antioch was a city both famous and infamous for the religious diversity it accommodated. Throughout the first four or five centuries of its life, the church continued to be shaped by its interaction with the Jewish and Hellenistic (Greek) religious traditions, as well as by religio-political concerns of the Roman Empire. The doctrinal developments during this period, culminating in the classic Christian understandings about the nature of God and the person of Christ as articulated in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, were influenced by a positive implied conversation with the Greek worlds of religion and philosophy. But during the lengthy following period of “Christendom,” particularly in parts of the world where Christianity was the dominant faith, politically and religiously, the focus was rather on intra-Christian discussion and argument, which, with occasional exceptions, did not overtly seek to take seriously the faiths and beliefs of others outside the Christian fold. Certainly these others were not normally perceived as influencing how Christians thought about themselves, even though in parts of the world, such as the Middle East, substantial Christian communities lived alongside adherents of another faith for many centuries. During the 19th and the earlier part of the 20th century, the Western missionary movement found itself in situations of engagement, and sometimes conflict, with other religions. Though there was a gradual shift in mission thinking, with many mission practitioners and thinkers becoming committed to constructive dialogue with followers of other religions, the awareness only gradually dawned that such engagement could even impinge upon Christian identity itself. It was only slowly that the insight expressed in the preface to the “Christian Presence” series of books began to filter consciously into the thinking of mainstream Christianity: “When we approach the man [sic] of another faith than our own it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understandings of the grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in this encounter.”

Over the last 25 years, and particularly since the beginning of the 21st century, political, ideological, and religious shifts have given a new edge to the need for Christians to engage appropriately with religious plurality. There are at least two complementary aspects to this engagement. One is the importance of enabling constructive dialogue with adherents of other religions. Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions, a document produced by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2004, expresses the parameters and principles for such dialogue. There is however another further aspect, perhaps even more urgent, foreshadowed in the “Christian Presence” series, and which the Christian churches and people can not avoid exploring more deeply today: namely, how a real awareness of this context of religious plurality may affect questions of Christian identity and self-understanding. It is this concern that the present document seeks to address.

These early years of the 21st century seem to be marked by a profound dialectic that is affecting the life of our globe. The increasing interaction brought about by travel, communications, and migration has led on the one hand to a deeper sense of shared humanity, and therefore of universal and world-wide concerns, but on the other has also provoked a greater insistence upon particularity and otherness. Religion is not vanishing, as had been suggested by modern predictions of secularization, but rather it remains a vibrant element shaping and influencing culture and civil society. However, religions seem to exemplify fundamental tension. There is both the recognition of the universality of religious experience and commitment, but also the establishment of more rigid boundaries between religions, in part influenced by long histories in which economic, political, and social factors; ethnicity; and demography have all played key roles. As a result, mutual perceptions and relations between religions are frequently dictated by preconceived ideas and a lack of mutual listening.

The identities of Christians across the world and their relationships with others are enormously varied as well. They have been shaped by long and diverse processes of interaction in which missionary work has played what sometimes seemed to be an ambiguous role. Many Christians acted out of their faithfulness to the gospel; struggled in humility to share the love, grace, and mercy of God in Christ with other people; and showed genuine solidarity with the marginalized. Yet Christians have often dismissed

1. The Christian Presence books were a series published by SCM in the 1950s and 1960s. Each book in the series reflected on Christian engagement with a specific religion. The preface (from which the quotation above comes) was written by Max Warren.
people belonging to other faiths as merely “heathen” and were far from taking seriously their religious and spiritual traditions. Though stemming from a sincerely held belief in the absolute and exclusive truth of the Christian faith, a pernicious attitude of cultural superiority had detrimental effects on those others and betrayed the core message of the gospel. Consequently, a critical reassessment of our understanding is badly needed. And, indeed, conscious efforts in interreligious dialogue, both locally as well as internationally, have given us a new awareness that relating inter-religiously may belong integrally to our Christian identity: it is a vital aspect of the boundary-crossing nature that is written in to the fabric of Christianity. In turn, this must entail an attentive and open listening to people of other faiths.

Our primary identity as Christians lies in the fact that we are “people of the resurrection.” Alongside the diversity that marks out Christians throughout the world, we must affirm that this is a common character that binds us together as Christians. From earliest times of Christian history, the followers of Jesus have seen their central role as being “witnesses of the resurrection” (Acts 1:22). It is only in the light of the resurrection that the whole of the Christian story can be fully understood: “He [Jesus] ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (Mark 9:9). The ecumenical movement is founded on the conviction that such a common identity exists within the undoubted diversity of our confessions and cultures. Yet the resurrection is not simply ours, as Christians, to possess. The resurrection of Christ is intimately connected to the resurrection of the whole of humanity. It is no accident that the resurrection accounts of the gospels have an elusive, mysterious quality to them, illustrative of God’s refusal to be trapped into particular religious systems or expectations. The resurrection ratifies the pre-Easter ministry of Jesus described in the gospels, and also throws it excitingly open to the whole of humanity. It is no accident that the resurrection of Christ is intimately connected to the resurrection of the whole of humanity, it is a perspective that depends on being where Jesus is, under his authority, sharing the “breath” of his life, seeing what he sees – God as Abba, Father, a God completely committed to the people in whose life he seeks to reproduce his own life.

If we assume our identity as Christians by seeking to stand where Jesus Christ himself stands, this has profound implications for our relationship with God, the world, and with the whole of humanity. It becomes intrinsic to our understanding of who we are to stand in solidarity “in Christ” with the marginalized and the stranger. The self-reflective question “Who do we say that we are?” cannot be separated from the existential question “What must we do?” In the parable of the great judgment in Matt. 25:31-46, Jesus reveals that he has identified himself with the hungry, the sick, the naked, the prisoner, and the stranger, and his resurrection has ratified that this is where we must stand with him now. As this parable makes clear, if we – and others – desire to share his company eternally, we must accept to be identified not only by doctrines or terminology but by the place where we choose to stand. Such a location is risky, and has porous borders that cannot be sealed.

How does this stance of Jesus affect the relationship of Christians to people of other religions? In 1989, a statement made at the San Antonio conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CMWE) said, “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God.” It is with such a “mind” as this, which draws together both faithful confidence and openness of vision, to belong in a place that Jesus defines for us in his very person. By living in that place, we come in some degree to share his identity, to bear his name and to be in the same relationships he has with God and with the world … Christian identity is a faithful identity, an identity marked by consistently being with both God and God’s world.

Paul introduces his hymn on the self-emptying of Christ (Phil. 2:5–12) with the exhortation, “Have the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Sharing his “mind” enables us to share in the same relationship he has with God and also with the world, a relationship characterized by Christ’s work and ministry of reconciliation.

To be a Christian is not to lay claim to absolute knowledge, but to lay claim to the perspective that will transform our most deeply rooted hurts and fears and so change the world at the most important level. It is a perspective that depends on being where Jesus is, under his authority, sharing the “breath” of his life, seeing what he sees – God as Abba, Father, a God completely committed to the people in whose life he seeks to reproduce his own life.

3. It is perhaps significant that in semitic languages the word for “stand” and the word for “resurrection” are closely linked.
that the deepening of our Christian self-understanding in this multi-religious world needs to be explored. Depending upon our specific contexts, such self-understanding may require of us repentance, or it may mean that we need to be prepared to offer a risky or prophetic challenge. But it is a “mind” in which humility is vital and that offers no resting place for arrogance. The word “deepening” is used deliberately because when we open ourselves to people of other religions, we may sometimes hear echoes of what we have come to believe on the basis of our experience of the life, the cross and the resurrection of Christ, and be given fresh insights into our own faith. The challenge for Christians in this world of religious plurality is perhaps to be “re-evangelised through a gracious encounter with other people … [so that] Christians have been evangelised by people of other faiths – not with another evangelum, but with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

So in responding to the challenges offered to us by other faiths and their peoples, Christians are not only answering queries and critiques posed by our religious interlocutors, we are also rethinking, re-interpreting, and reformulating the understanding of our own faith in a way that is congruent with the tradition of Christian self-reflection and theological development that has existed since the very beginnings of Christianity. This is, of course, a mutual process, and just as Christians may be transformed by their encounter with the religious other, so authentic interreligious engagement may also pose to such others challenges which can lead to transformation.

The following sections of this document explore some key aspects of how Christian identity has been challenged by religious diversity, and how Christian commitment may be nourished by encounters in dialogue with those who do not share our perspective and place as they have been defined for us by Jesus in his person. The reflections in these sections take account of the work done at a number of meetings and consultations organized by the WCC over the past decade that have explored Christian self-understanding in the context of a religiously plural world. A note of these meetings is given in the Appendix. The reflections offered are not seeking to collate the reports and findings of those meetings, but rather to use them, as far as appropriate, as a background resource for the current document. We have also drawn, where applicable, on two recent published major documents: Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes, produced by the CWME® and The Church: Towards a Common Vision, produced by the Commission on Faith and Order, believing that it is important that the interreligious insights offered by the WCC are congruent with recent work offered by these two commissions. As with the Document Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World, the current document is intended for a wide audience rather than aimed at specialists in interreligious concerns.

Running through this document, and mindful of the 10th Assembly of the WCC – with its prayer “God of life, lead us to justice and peace” – is the motif of “life.” Whatever else our Christian self-understanding in this world of many faiths requires of us, it surely demands that we see ourselves as people who are committed to fullness of life for all. We have become all too aware of the ability of religions, including our own, to become death-dealing rather than life-giving. The touchstone as to whether or not our self-understanding leads toward life is a vital one, and reiterated by Jesus himself on one of the few occasions in the synoptic gospels when he himself sought to define God: “He is God not of the dead, but the living” (Mark 12:27 and parallels).

A considerable number of Christians, both scholars and practitioners, have been involved in the process that led to this document, and it reflects their vision. All of them, whatever their specific backgrounds and contexts, would acknowledge the critical importance of serious engagement by Christians with people of other faiths. They would aver that it is through such long-term and patient exchange over a considerable period of time, giving to and receiving from people of other faiths, that their own self-understanding and sense of identity as Christians have been enriched and that they have felt able to proffer some questions, even “hard” ones, to their companions of different faiths. At a memorial service held in May 2013 for Bishop Kenneth Cragg, whose important role in the establishment in the 1970s of the WCC Programme for Dialogue with Other Living Faiths and Ideologies is widely acknowledged, it was suggested that Bishop Cragg’s life and work exemplified the story of the Emmaus road. It was through the willingness of the disciples to travel a considerable distance with a “stranger,” through their willingness to ask questions of him and to respond to those he asked, and finally through their willingness to offer hospitality, that “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (Luke 24:31) in a new light. Can the courtesy and challenge of the story of the Emmaus road and its crucial witness to the resurrection victory of life offer us a pattern in our quest for our own


Christian self-understanding in this world of many faiths? As the WCC shapes its work during the coming years as a “pilgrimage of justice and peace,” this journey to Emmaus may offer us a hint of how our vision can be enlarged by a willingness to travel alongside people of other faiths in our mutual human quest for peace and justice.

In the following sections we explore the theological understandings and affirmations that we share as an ecumenical community as we seek to elaborate an answer to that vital question, “Who do we say that we are?” We begin by affirming that our self-identity as Christians in the contemporary world is grounded in our understanding of God as Trinity. This leads us to explore first what it means to speak of God as the creator of all. Next we focus on our understanding of Jesus Christ, who for Christians represents the redemptive life of the world, and in turn then reflect on the life-giving Spirit of God. In each case we sketch our affirmation and note the deepening and discovery through dialogue that is evoked. Following the explication of these trinitarian affirmations, we touch on scripture, the church, and eschatology as leading elements in the quest to express our self-understanding as Christians set within a religiously plural world. The document is not simply linear, but revisits a number of key motifs during the course of our exploration, thus embedding the pattern of deepening through discovery into its own structure.

Our Trinitarian Frame

**Key aspects of Christian conviction**

“We believe in the Triune God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life.” These words, with which the 2012 WCC affirmation on mission and evangelism begins, make clear our Christian belief that God as Trinity is the source of life. This is the foundation stone of the Christian understanding of God and of God’s relation to the world. The basis of faith adopted by the WCC speaks of our “common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” We perceive God as Trinity through God’s actions in history and on the basis of God’s dealings with humanity. Our experience of God is in the richness of the unity of relational diversity.

In God the Father we see divine and caring creative activity and we affirm that God created the whole world and works constantly to affirm and safeguard its life. In God the Son, Jesus Christ, we find the incarnational expression of God’s love for the world (John 3:16). Affirming life in all its fullness is the ultimate concern and mission of Jesus, the Christ (John 10:10). In and through him we experience the redeeming activity of God. In God the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, we discover and experience the sustaining and empowering life that renews the whole creation (Gen. 2:7; John 3:8). A denial of life is a rejection of the God of life.

**Dialogue, deepening, and discovery**

Within the history of Christian encounter with other faiths, the Christian belief in God as Trinity has often appeared problematic, particularly in terms of Christian relationships with Islam and Judaism, where it is sometimes presented as a challenge to the unambiguous monotheism of these faiths. For example, the issue is expressed starkly in the Qur’an: “Believe in God and his messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’ – stop [this], that is better for you – God is only one God.” Within the Hebrew Bible, shared by both Jews and Christians, there are instances where monotheism is stated in similarly uncompromising language: “I am the first and I am the last: besides me there is no god” (Is. 44:6). Trinity has sometimes been misunderstood as tritheism, by a number of Christians as well as people of other faiths – or of none.

What should be the Christian response? Some have sought to downplay the understanding of God as Trinity. Even though they may be willing to speak of God as “Father” or “Creator,” Jesus Christ as “Son of God,” and of the “Spirit of God,” they resist emphasizing a sense of inner inter-relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. Perhaps, however, such questioning should instead compel Christians to dig deeper into the sources of our faith, both biblical and historical. We can then discover that, rather than being a hindrance for engagement with other religions, the Trinity, with its affirmation of the importance of diversity in unity and a communion that involves difference, can provide a model for apprehending the divine engagement with the diversity of our world. “The Trinity, far from being a skandalon [stumbling block] is rather the transcendental condition for interreligious dialogue, the ontological condition that permits us to take the other in all seriousness, without fear, and without violence.” The Ecumenical Conversation “Exploring Christian Self-identity in a World of Many Faiths” at the 10th Assembly of the WCC reflected on the Trinity as expressing both the “scandal of particularity” and the “gift of divine plenitude,” and suggested that Christo-centric biblical texts, which are often seen as problematic for interreligious dialogue, should be read in the light of the spaciousness offered by our trinitarian faith. For Christians to speak of God as Trinity can facilitate an understand-

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8. Sura 4:171.
ing, helpful for engaging with people of different religions, that “Jesus Christ cannot be an exhaustive or exclusive source for knowledge of God.”10 The trinitarian language of perichoresis – of the “Triune persons work[ing] in complex movements of dance: embracing creatures, yet letting them exist in their freedom”11 – offers an evocative image for inter-religious dialogue that is yet to be fully explored. Can we suggest, therefore, that through our engagement with other religions, Christians can both be encouraged to a richer and deeper understanding of our trinitarian faith and, through this understanding, discover a vital theological resource and framework for such engagement?

Creator of All

*Key aspects of Christian conviction*

We affirm our faith in the one God who creates and sustains all things; the living God, present and active in all creation from the beginning until the present. It is “vital to recognize God’s mission in a cosmic sense, and to affirm all life, the whole oikoumene, as being interconnected in God’s web of life.”12 With the psalmist we celebrate:

The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it;  
for God has founded it on the seas,  
and established it on the rivers. (Ps. 24:1–2)

Our affirmation has two distinct but also interconnected aspects to it. We are required to take seriously and honour the inter-relationship of the entire created realm, animate and inanimate. We also acknowledge that the Bible testifies to God as God of all nations and peoples, whose love and compassion extends to all humankind in its diversity, and this raises in an acute way questions concerning the relationship between God and all the peoples of the earth. This acknowledgment is grounded in the understanding that human beings are created in the image of God (imago dei). From this we can affirm the dignity and worth of every human being and ultimately our Christian understanding of the inherent relationality of the whole of creation (see Col. 1:15).

The importance of treasuring all creation is written into the biblical story. In the first chapter of the Bible it is underwritten by the repeated use of the word “good” to describe all the results of God’s creative handiwork. The intimacy of the connection between humanity and the earth is then underscored by the verbal link between ‘adam (= human being) and ‘adamah (= earth) that dominates Genesis 2–3. The covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:8–17) is portrayed as a covenant with all creation, making it clear that God’s care extends well beyond the realm of humanity. As this covenant with Noah was eventually interpreted, it also opened doors to seeing God’s “wisdom and justice extending to the ends of the earth as He guides the nations through their traditions of wisdom and understanding.” 13

Thus from biblical times the realization of God’s cosmic work in creation has also raised questions about God’s relationship to all humanity. As the people of biblical Israel moved from a tribal world view to a profoundly monotheistic conception of God as creator and Lord of past, present and future, so too they began to comprehend that God’s care could not exclude those who did not know him by name. The biblical wisdom tradition, a genre that the people of Israel shared with their neighbours in the ancient Middle East and that reflects biblical openness to the insights of other peoples, both draws extensively on the motifs of God’s work in creation and frequently addresses profound questions that confront all human beings. In the New Testament, Paul’s speech on the Aeropagus in Athens also testifies to the link between our acknowledgment that “God made the world and all that is in it” (Acts 17:24) and the religious longings of all humanity, expressed through the worship of the one whom the Athenians described as “the unknown God” (Acts 17:23).

*Dialogue, deepening and discovery*

Because we believe in God as the Creator of all, as the Word through which all came to be, as the Spirit that is the life of all, it is intrinsic to Christian identity to discern carefully whatever manifestations of the Word’s truth and the Spirit’s life there may be in creation, including in the diversity of human cultures and religions.

History and theology have meant that Christians have not always been aware of the full implications of their faith in God as creator. During the European colonial era in particular, there was both the rape of land and the refusal to value positively the reality of all human beings as created in the image of God. More recently, theologies that explore God’s revelation in history have sometimes neglected to understand how God’s revelation has been written in the book of creation as well as the book of scripture.

The globalized world in which we live today, our increasing recognition of human diversity and plurality, our concern for the fragility of creation, and the lived experience of climate change require us to dialogue with our religious neighbours to deepen our comprehension of what it means to call God creator of heaven and earth, the one responsible, indeed, for the oikoumene.

One important resource for this has been dialogue with the worldviews of indigenous peoples. With respect to the intimate relationship between God and the complex ecological inter-relationships we may call “creation/land/nature,” we are challenged by the awareness of indigenous peoples that the whole earth is God’s temple, and without the earth we are nothing. All sentient life exists in symbiotic relationship upon and within the earth, and the sharp distinction often made in Christian theology between human beings and animals is minimalised. In many communities of indigenous peoples when people want to get close to God they sit on the ground.14

In indigenous thinking, the earth is understood as a living body, and therefore a sacred place, often referred to as “Mother.” The ecological crisis of our time reminds us to take this notion of the earth seriously as we organize its use and economy. Thus indigenous worldviews are a challenge to Western science as well as to Christian thought and perspective. The understanding of the inherent relationship of people to land that has been a product of dialogue with indigenous peoples is a challenge to the Christian application of stewardship with respect to land. “Our overall moral and spiritual development cannot be separated from our attitude to land. It is essential for human beings to be in harmony with the land.”15

Dialogue between Christians and people of other religions has also shown us how human beings have at all times and in all places responded to the presence and activity of God among them and have given testimony to their encounters with the living God. We take this witness with the utmost seriousness and acknowledge that among all the nations and peoples, God has never been without witness (Acts 14:17). In this process of encounter with our neighbour of another faith we experience a common humanity before God who created us all.

In turn this affirmation of God as creator of all crystallizes the challenge posed by religious diversity. Some Christians would argue that since Christian monotheism denies that there can be many gods, then other religions must believe in something false, and therefore there can be no ground for proper dialogue. For others, it poses the challenge that these religions must have a relationship to God and a place in God’s providence and compels us to address what this might mean for our theological self-understanding as Christians. Equally, this may lead us to contest situations, such as in contemporary Malaysia, where, in the controversy relating to the use of the word “Allah,” adherents of another monotheistic religion insist on a privileged right to restrict to themselves traditional terminology and language for God.

That God is active as creator and sustainer in the life of all peoples leads to the conviction “that God as Creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions.” This makes it inconceivable … that God’s saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or group of people. A refusal to take seriously the many and diverse religious testimonies to be found among the nations and peoples of the whole world amounts to disowning the biblical testimony to God as Creator of all things and Father of humankind.16

Our understanding of humanity based firmly on the biblical insight that human beings are created in the image of God is widely recognized to have resourced international developments in the field of human rights. The givenness of human dignity implied by the concept of imago dei has encouraged the affirmation of the human rights of every person. In the present context it is especially appropriate to note that such rights include freedom of religion and belief:

Religious freedom including the right to publicly profess, propagate and change one’s religion flows from the very dignity of the human person which is grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26). Thus, all human beings have equal rights and responsibilities. Where any religion is instrumentalized for political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions.17

We are invited to view interreligious involvement, and our commitment to it, as expressing something that is intrinsic to our Christian identity. Such engagement can

15. Ibid.
16. Baar Statement, sect. II.
allow us to discover something new of God’s will and way for humanity created in the divine image.

**Jesus Christ, the Life of the World**

**Key aspects of Christian conviction**

We affirm that in Jesus Christ, Son of God and incarnate Word, the entire human family has been united to God in an irrevocable bond and covenant. The saving presence of God’s activity in all creation and human history comes to its focal point in the event of Christ. In Jesus’ words and action, in his proclamation, in his ministry of healing and service, in his death and resurrection, God reconciled the world to God’s self; a reconciliation which cannot be limited to any one community or culture or confined within Christian institutions.\(^\text{18}\)

We believe that the Word incarnate in Jesus is actively present in creation and manifest there. Though it may appear that “the saving power of the reign of God made present in Jesus during his earthly ministry was in some sense limited (cf. Matt. 10:23) through the event of his death and resurrection, the paschal mystery itself, these limits were transcended. The cross and the resurrection disclose for us the universal dimension of the saving mystery of God”\(^\text{19}\) and are imprinted on creation as the “watermark of divine love.”\(^\text{20}\)

Thus we believe that the risen and living Christ can move and be met beyond the bounds of the church’s institutions and proclamation. In these ways, our belief in Christ opens us to seek God’s presence through the Spirit within other traditions than our own. It is our commitment to the particularity of Christ that leads us to faith in the trinitarian God who is manifest in many ways in the world.

There are many aspects of Christ and Christ’s work, and we mention some important ones here, mindful that for each there may be specific points of connection with other religious traditions:

- **Christ as priest and reconciler.** By taking on our humanity and suffering in solidarity with us, above all in the cross, Christ overcomes the estrangement of our sin and evil. Language of sacrifice, shared especially with the Jewish scriptural tradition as well as some other religious traditions, is one of the ways in which this is expressed.

- **Christ as victor over death.** In his resurrection Christ opens up an eschatological hope and promise for new life. The messianic dimension to the work of Christ both connects with and challenges Jewish eschatology.

- **Christ as teacher.** Christ interprets and embodies the way that his disciples should follow. In this respect there are some similarities with the role of the Buddha.

- **Christ as one with God.** By virtue of Christ’s unity with God, the Christian who has communion with Christ shares in the intimacy of that love. In certain forms of Hinduism, an analogous union and intimacy with the divine is profoundly affirmed.

- **Christ as prophet.** As Word of God, Christ reveals God’s nature and will. Islam explicitly uses the language of prophecy to describe Christ’s work.

- **Christ as liberator and victim.** Christ’s identification with the location of the outcast and oppressed links him with those in such locations who struggle for justice, whatever their faith tradition.

The particular situations of Christians or Christian churches may affect the comparative weight they give to each of these affirmations as they seek to inculturate their Christian faith in their own contexts. These contexts may be geographical, social, and political: they can also include the contexts provided by proximity to people of another faith. One of the significant insights offered by ecumenical reflection on mission during the 20th century is the profound link between the incarnation of Christ and the dynamic ability, indeed need, for the Christian faith to inculturate itself in different ways in different places, reflecting our belief that the incarnation is rooted in the whole of life. Although such incarnational inculturation has normally been explored primarily in relation to varied Christian contexts, it is also appropriate to ask whether and how Christ can be inculturated in different interreligious contexts.

**Dialogue, deepening and discovery**

We know that affirmations such as those listed above about the person and role of Christ can become not only points of contact but also points of difficulty in our dialogue with neighbours of other faith traditions. Through such dialogue we experience a variety of challenges for understanding our own identity as Christians: challenges in which we see wisdom and truth in these traditions, from which we desire to learn, and challenges that invite us to ask very difficult questions about the basic understanding of our faith. We also acknowledge, however, that there may still

\(^{18}\) Baar Statement, Sect. III.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

be times when we feel that our Christian identity requires us to continue to challenge the beliefs and assumptions of other faith traditions, but through our dialogue we can discover the appropriate and gracious language to enable us to do so.

As there are many facets to Christ’s person and work, so too do many challenges arise to these in the substance of different religions. They are rooted in the positive statement of each religion’s own paths and teaching, reflections of the tradition’s own identities and practices. We do not suggest that any religion formulates its convictions in order to contradict Christian views. Some of these criticisms or conflicts have already been the subject of extensive discussion in interreligious dialogue, providing material that will be helpful for Christian reflection. On many of these questions we also find Christians themselves debating the most appropriate form for the theological convictions at issue. The examples below are only meant to be suggestive of challenges Christians can recognize as deserving their attention, while each could be stated with much more detail. In light of their own religious convictions, adherents of other religions may:

• question belief in Jesus’ oneness with God or belief in Jesus’ divinity (this is reflected for instance in Jewish and Muslim concerns that these Christian convictions violate the unity and transcendence of God);

• question the partiality and historical particularity of a single divine incarnation, or that Jesus is “the only way” (seen for instance in some Hindu perspectives on Christ);

• define the human condition and need differently than Christians do (seeing ignorance, for instance, rather than sin and estrangement from God as the fundamental problem), and thus viewing Christ’s saving work, as Christians understand it, as impossible or irrelevant (as is the case in some forms of Buddhism and Hinduism);

• question Jesus’ messianic role and the legitimacy of Christian interpretations of Hebrew scripture central to the Christian understanding of Christ (as is the case with Rabbinic Judaism);

• question the reality of Christ’s death or its link to salvation (as is the case with traditional views in the Islamic tradition);

• question the resurrection or its eschatological significance (as with Hindu and Buddhist traditions that understand Christ within the framework of a cycle of birth and rebirth, and different visions of nature and time).

Christians respond to these challenges from differing Christian perspectives on the meaning of Christ’s person and work, including the perspectives of different confessional families and of movements like liberation theology and feminist theology. Christians will also respond differently according to their contexts, for instance those who live as a minority among other faiths and those who live in a culturally dominant setting. The investment required in rethinking Christianity’s relation with other religions is higher for some than others. Yet taking seriously the insight that inculturation can be an expression of the meaning of incarnation can also deepen and expand the Christian understanding of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. “Christ’s completion ... comes from all humanity, from the translation of the life of Jesus into the life-ways of all the world’s cultures and subcultures through history.”

However Christian self-examination is also required in light of the testimony of people of different faiths around us. It is needed to distinguish an authentic understanding of Christ from the ways in which our theologies of Christ may have been made captive to cultural and colonial forces. This involves a constant return to Christian sources, re-reading them in light of the specific questions of a religiously diverse world. If Christ is God with us, then by that image we know that gracious care and self-giving love should be the terms in which we are to relate to our religious neighbours, even though Christians may struggle to attain such self-examination and such care. In particular the challenges to Christian understandings of Christ offered by our religious neighbours can remind Christians that our theologies and forms of proclamation have often blocked us from even considering the value and legitimacy of other religious traditions, and we can discover that the image of a conquering, dominant, and judging Christ has done much damage.

At the same time, our deepened understanding of the nature of Christ may also require us to challenge modalities of power and dominance and their abuse when we find them present in other religions. In contexts in which the Christian community is a vulnerable, and possibly impoverished, minority living precariously in the midst of powerful religious majority, it is important to speak of life and resurrection as well as crucifixion and suffering. Great wisdom is needed on the part of the Christian community in such situations to ensure that relations between different religions do not spiral into a vicious circle of increasing hostility and misunderstanding, while at the same time finding ways to speak with sensitivity about the liberating gospel of Christ.

Amid the multifaceted ways in which Christ and his ministry can be understood, the affirmation that Christ is “saviour of the world” (John 4:42) assumes particular weight for many Christians yet can also be particularly problematic for their religious neighbours, especially if there is the consequent perception that relationship to Christ will be the sole basis on which all people are judged by God. We indeed believe that the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Christ is the fundamental expression of the universal saving will of God. Yet we affirm again the mystery presented at the CWME meeting in San Antonio in 1989, “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God.

. . . We appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it.”22 We see Christ as a specific saving gift to all creation, not a replacement for or denial of God’s presence and power through many other means. Christ embodies God’s generosity toward humanity. Christians point toward this event as their hope, not toward Christianity as the source of salvation. Christians are called to testify to this hope.

We need to acknowledge that human limitations and limitations of language make it impossible for any community to have exhausted the mystery of the salvation God offers to humankind. . . . It is this humility that enables us to say that salvation belongs to God, God only. We do not possess salvation; we participate in it. We do not offer salvation; we witness to it. We do not decide who would be saved; we leave it to the providence of God. For our own salvation is an everlasting “hospitality” that God has extended to us. It is God who is the “host” of salvation.23

Through reflection on our identity in a multi-religious world we discover we need to clarify that testimony and ask: In what ways may we see religions as avenues of God’s authentic relation with humanity and as contributing to human salvation? We can also learn that salvation, in the terms that Christians understand it, is not necessarily a common point with those of other traditions. The religions testify to their own ideals and aims – nirvana, moksha, submission – and describe the paths to attain them.

Christian belief in the unique role and significance of Christ’s unique saving work, on the one hand, and the restriction of salvation to those within the church, on the other. In fact, among Christians there is a variety of views about whether and how God offers salvation through other religions. Our Christian engagement with our religious neighbours requires us to explore more profoundly what we as Christians make of the aims and achievements of the adherents of other traditions. How do we account for their moral and spiritual lives in relation to the triune God?

These challenges do not arise in the abstract but in daily encounter with those in various religious traditions. In turn, our reflection needs to engage the specific issues and sources of particular religions. For instance, when we hear Shi’a Muslims commemorating their martyrs, or hear stories of Bodhisattvas who give their lives for others, we may hear elements that resonate with and perhaps even enrich our understanding of the costliness of God’s love and of God’s vulnerability in love. We can discover how people of other faiths in some situations seem to arrive at a lively appreciation of their need for God’s forgiveness and of the richness of that forgiveness. We recognize that there are those elements in other traditions that immediately enhance or deepen our faith, yet there are others that we experience as critical, even threatening to convictions that we hold dear. An example of this would be the use of power and commitment to physical jihad in certain expressions of Islam, which conflicts with the Christian ideal of servant-hood. This kind of engagement with the religious others – and with the ways in which we figure as “other” to them – is both risk and vocation, as the WCC central committee noted in adopting the 1979 Guidelines on Dialogue.24

The importance of challenge as leading to potential discovery applies to all the themes we are exploring in this report. It is however a helpful insight to recall, especially as we explore how religious diversity challenges our understanding of Jesus Christ, the Life of the World, for it takes us deep into the pattern offered by Christ himself. It may be a risk to develop our self-understanding in partnership with our religious neighbours, in the sense that we cannot put limits in advance to the extent to which our understandings, or those of others, may be changed. But it is also a vocation, rooted in the very heart of our faith, by virtue of our confidence in the universality of Christ and our desire to emulate Christ’s openness and love.


Life-Giving Spirit of God

Key aspects of Christian conviction
We affirm that the life-giving Holy Spirit is believed to be active in the Church and the world. The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the whole of creation initiating signs and foretastes of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) affirms that the healing power of God transcends all limits of places and times and is at work inside as well as outside the Christian church transforming humanity and creation in the perspective of the world to come.25

Christians therefore have come to appreciate the manifold and mysterious ways in which God the Holy Spirit is at work in the world and among the peoples. This conviction leads to openness and to an honest dialogue with people of other faiths, cultures, and world views. More specifically we wish to state: “The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom (Is. 11:3; Eph. 1:17) and guides us into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit inspires human cultures and creativity, so it is part of our mission to acknowledge, respect and cooperate with life-giving wisdoms in every culture and context.”26

However, the ministry of God’s Spirit is related to the redemption of the whole creation, not to humanity alone (Rom. 8:19–22). Thus Christian spirituality and lifestyle must not be based on the idea of a separation of humanity and creation; humanity is part of creation, indeed a micro-cosm of it. God indeed seeks the redemption of both, perhaps in varied and mysterious ways.

Recent reflection on the theology of mission and interreligious dialogue has often emphasized the importance of the Spirit, because of the testimony offered by the Bible to the Spirit’s universal and unpredictable character, complementary to the particularity offered by the person of Christ. Yet it is also clear that in the New Testament the Holy Spirit can never be dissociated completely from Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified and resurrected, who breathes the Spirit (John 20:21f) on his disciples. It is in Jesus’ name that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, is sent (John 14:26). And Jesus’ birth (Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:35), Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:17), Jesus’ testing in the wilderness (Mark 1:12), and his ministry of healings, exorcisms, and other miracles (Matt. 12:28) are expressions of the Spirit. Indeed the terms Spirit of God/Spirit of Christ/Holy Spirit can apparently be used interchangeably (Acts 16:6–7; Rom. 8:9).

Dialogue, deepening, and discovery
The increased attention given to the Holy Spirit and the Trinity in ecumenical Christian theology over the past couple of decades has affected Christian engagement with other religions, both theologically and practically. We can think of it in circular terms: our deeper exploration of the Holy Spirit has opened new pathways with our religious neighbours that have circumvented what has been called the “Christological impasse in the theology of religions.”27

In turn, however, these new pathways have encouraged further Christian discovery of the treasures offered by the Holy Spirit and our affirmation of the trinitarian nature of God, and have brought together Christian scholars and practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds to their mutual enrichment. The phrase “the Go-Between God”28 used of the Holy Spirit may emphasize the Spirit’s role in mediating new relationships, not only between God and human beings but among the divinely cherished diversity of humanity, including its religious dimensions. The CWME meeting in San Antonio expressed it like this: “The Spirit of God is at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us at least are least expected. In entering into dialogue with others, therefore, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of Christ and the way God deals with humanity.”29 We see “the activity of the Spirit as beyond our definitions, descriptions and limitations, as ‘the wind blows where it wills.’”30

The Holy Spirit has been called “the mysterious one of the Godhead” or “the surprise of God”31 and can help us rediscover the importance of mystery both in Christian theology and in other religions. This mysterious aspect of the divine is a significant motif in a number of other religions – Islam and Buddhism, for example – and relationships between Christians and members of these religious communities have encouraged Christian awareness of the spiritual value of mystery.

Although we affirm that the Spirit blows where it wills, we would still confess the relationship of the Spirit with Christ. In this way,

a more inclusive understanding of God’s presence and activity in the whole world and among all people [is promoted], which implies that signs of God’s presence can be found even in unexpected places. On the other hand by clearly affirming that the Father and the Spirit

26. Together towards Life, para. 27.
30. Baar Statement, sect. IV.
are always and in all circumstances present and at work together with the Word, the temptation to separate the presence of God or the Spirit, from the Son of God, Jesus Christ, will be avoided.\(^{32}\)

Indeed, we might well say that whereas Christ is God incarnate, the Holy Spirit is God enspirited within the world of God’s creation.

Though the Spirit may not be directly knowable, the experience of the Spirit can be known. Looking for signs of the Spirit the report of the Athens CWME Conference distinguished in the Bible four criteria for discernment, although none of these leads to conclusive identification of the Spirit:

- **ecclesial**: confessing Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 John 4:2). The Spirit can be found wherever Jesus Christ is known and worshipped But it is the Spirit that defines the church and not the other way round.

- **personal and life-changing**: the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22). The Spirit changes our lives, producing Christlikeness. In other words: it is the heart and character that matters.

- **charismatic**: the practice of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11; Rom. 12:6-8). Where there is empowerment to prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, compassion, and so on, we have good reason to believe God is at work (by the Spirit). However exercise of a spiritual gift is not a sign of the Spirit’s presence if it lacks love (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

- **ethical**: being on the side of the poor. The effect of the Spirit’s anointing on Jesus Christ was that he preached good news to the poor (Luke 4:18) and this must be a touchstone for all claims to be filled with the Spirit. When discerning the Spirit in any Christian activity, we need to ask whose interests are being served; who is benefitting from this?\(^ {33}\)

The question remains open whether all of these criteria or any of them alone can be applicable to the discernment of the Spirit’s work in other religions. When applying any of these criteria we also have to ask the question of love that for Paul is the ultimate criterion (1 Cor. 13), even beyond faith and hope. Taking this list of criteria seriously, we see there is a double aspect: it offers us the possibility of positive discovery of the richness of the Spirit’s presence in and outside the church, including in creation. However, the second aspect is that the Spirit may be absent, whether from ourselves or from religious others, where we thought the Spirit would be present. The claim that the Spirit is with us is not ours to make; it is for our neighbours to recognize.

A further unresolved question is whether we understand the world as being moved by one spirit (of God), or whether we acknowledge the activity of multiple spirits – perhaps both good and evil. In the world view of many people of other religions and among some Christians, there is a belief in the reality, agency and presence of spiritual forces (“principalities and powers”), which affect humanity and the world in an essential way. These forces can have life-affirming or life-destroying power. Indeed, for many Christians the encounter with evil in the world is experienced as an encounter with spiritual powers. However, in the case of a world view with multiple spirits, we must not treat people of other religions as being necessarily moved by evil spirits.

Yet we need to ask: What is the relationship between such many spirits and the one Holy Spirit? What are the implications of the Holy Spirit in a world of violence, racism, exclusion, natural catastrophes, and other causes of major suffering or injustice? For the hope that is in us compels us to say that the Holy Spirit is no tranquilizer to give us peace that puts us to sleep\(^ {34}\): the Spirit comes to transform our world and enable a new creation.

### Scripture, Written That We May Have Life

**Key aspects of Christian conviction**

We seek to be a community living in obedience to Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God who is revealed through the words of Holy Scripture. We discern the voice of the living God in our scripture. In both Old and New Testaments we repeatedly find a link being drawn between God’s scriptural revelation and the sources of life (e.g., Ps. 19:7; Ps. 119:77, 93; John 20.31; Rev. 20:12). All Christian churches have a high regard for scripture, which is referred to as the foundational witness of God’s revelation. In its capacity as a normative guide and rule for the Christian faith community, the Bible has an enduring authority. In many Christian communities it also functions as an object of veneration in a liturgical context.

The Bible tells the unfolding story of God, creation, and humanity. It bears testimony to the universal nature

\(^{32}\) Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today, Preparatory Paper No. 1 for the Athens 2005 Conference organized by CWME, para. 12.


\(^{34}\) The image is drawn from Samuel Rayan, *Breath of Fire* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979).
of God’s love. Christians embrace the biblical story as their own, as being formative for their self-identity. In the light of a tradition they have received from the past, Christians not only interpret and give meaning to their present lives but also envision a future that finds its fulfillment in God.

The Bible is a library of books, containing a variety of genres: narratives, prophecies, wisdom literature, proverbs, legislative texts, parables, hymns, and so on. This inner diversity points to the diversified ways in which humans have experienced and expressed their relationship with God. The Bible has not only emerged but has also been received and interpreted differently in various social, historical, and cultural contexts. Therefore Christians struggle to negotiate the tension between the claim that the Bible has a universal and univocal scope and the recognition of the contextual specificity of both its origin and its ongoing interpretation. With regards to biblical interpretation, Western culture has in the past assumed that the historical-critical approach to interpretation should be normative for all Christians. This assumption is now rightly under critique.

The church submits itself to being interpreted by the ever-challenging revelatory word of God. At the same time, the church is also called to interpret anew the word of God in rapidly changing circumstances and in light of always new challenges and does so by using a variety of interpretative strategies. History testifies to the fact that this ongoing process of reinterpretation has given rise to many intra-Christian conflicts. So there is the task of overcoming misunderstandings, controversies, and divisions; identifying dangers; and resolving conflicts. The nature of the intricate relationship between the Bible and the church is a theme that many Christian confessions continue to wrestle with.

An issue that reveals divergence within the Christian community between different confessions is the question of precisely which biblical books should be regarded as canonical. In some cases this raises particular doctrinal challenges. What this means for Christian self-understanding as living under the authority of scripture is an issue in ecumenical dialogue. In terms of interreligious engagement it may, for example, raise issues for discussion about the nature and authority of the Christian canon.

**Dialogue, deepening, and discovery**

The contemporary experience of religious diversity challenges Christians to reflect upon their self-understanding as a community that needs to take seriously the interpretation of scripture.

Our presence in, and engagement with, multi-religious contexts lead us to read the Scriptures in new ways. We come to recognize that the people of God have already known and grappled with the challenges and opportunities of living amid religious plurality, and that those experiences have shaped the formative texts of Scripture.

... As the people of God today, we can find the biblical text coming to life in a new way as we engage in our discipleship with issues which raise questions similar to those they faced. For many [Christians] … the Bible speaks with immediacy and clarity into their contemporary situations of inter-religious encounter.35

This is a process that may involve both the encounter with the sacred scriptures of other religions and a re-engagement with the Bible and its interpretation.

“Almost all of the major religious traditions have scriptures either written down or transmitted in oral tradition. These scriptures are often seen as sources of their faith, and often as directly revealed by the Divine.”36 That is why they are not only regarded as authoritative, but also as sacred and holy. Because these scriptures are considered to be sacred, they are treated within their communities with the utmost respect and reverence. Sometimes they even function as objects of veneration. Often there are rules about who can read these scriptures and how these scriptures can be interpreted. For Christians, particularly from the Western world, the physical respect given to these scriptures can be an educative experience, which challenges us to consider, in turn, the care with which we should treat our own sacred texts.

In the case of a number of religions, their scriptures privilege the particular language in which they were originally written down or transmitted. In some cases this means that these scriptures are formally untranslatable — for example the Qur’an cannot be read in its fullness in any language other than Arabic. Although Christians consider the original biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek as being important for the study of scripture, there has normally been an acceptance of the validity of linguistic translation of the Bible. An awareness of this different attitude to text and translation can encourage Christians to explore more deeply what exactly is meant by biblical inspiration, and opens doors to potential reflection on the parallel between translation and incarnation that has been suggested by scholars and practitioners of mission, who have spoken of the “translation principle” being intrinsic.

to Christianity. 37 What does it mean to say that the Bible becomes the life-giving word of God because it is translated in many languages to be received by many people?

Though their adherents do not explicitly recognize it, the scriptures of many religions came to final form most usually as the result of long and often complex processes of formation. This process quite often also entailed borrowing from other religious wisdom traditions as well as polemical apologetics reacting against other religions. Realization of this can encourage Christians to re-read their own Bible and become more sensitive to similar interplays within it as well. Linked to this may be also the potential for further reflection on the relation between scripture, tradition, and the life of the community of faith. The reality that, unlike in Christianity, a number of other religious communities consider reading and studying the sacred scriptures a prerogative of the elite can constitute a challenge to Christians engaged in interreligious dialogue. It can also encourage them to look at the Bible with new eyes.

Of particular importance is the relationship between the Christian scriptures and those of Judaism and Islam, the other two so-called Abrahamic faiths. In the case of Judaism and Christianity, the two religions share part of their scripture. With regard to Islam and Christianity, the relationship is not so close, but the appearance of a number of the same figures in both the Bible and the Qur’an raises questions about the historical and theological relationship between the Christian and Muslim scriptures. The issue of supersessionism, particularly vis-à-vis Judaism and Christianity, is raised by the scriptural relationship between these two religious communities; the New Testament’s apparent suggestion that the Old Testament has now been fulfilled, or perhaps even superseded, challenges Christians to rethink anew the fraught history of their relationship with Judaism. But the implicit supersessionism of the Qur’an with regard to the “People of the Book” confronts Christians with similar questions, this time issued to them through the scripture of another religion. However, such scriptural overlapping offers possibilities as well as problems. The recent development of the process of scriptural (or textual) reasoning, in which Muslims, Jews, and Christians share together in the reading of each of their scriptures, offers participants the opportunity to deepen the knowledge of their own scriptural tradition as well as to be enriched by the interpretation of others. Christians who have participated in interreligious scriptural reasoning have witnessed how, through such rereading, they may discover their own faith through the eyes of another: one’s own faith loses its self-evidence and can be rediscovered anew.

The document A Common Word38 provides a significant illustration of the potential linkage between scripture and interreligious engagement. The authors argue that for both Muslims and Christians, love of God and love of neighbour are core beliefs, which can be used as a springboard for dialogue enabling Muslims and Christians to work together for the common good. The Christian text chosen to illustrate love of God and love of neighbour is Jesus’ discussion of the great commandment in the law (Matt. 22:34–40 and parallels), in which, of course, Jesus himself also expounds scripture. Thus, through A Common Word, an interreligious aim encourages Christians to reflect on a specific biblical passage with special seriousness, perhaps even inviting Christian readers to encounter the passage in a new light.

Although the Bible does not directly address interreligious dialogue as it is understood and practiced today, there are certainly passages in the Bible that can be read in ways which can provide positive resources for interreligious encounters. The idea that Christians can learn about God through the encounter with the religious other is not foreign to the Bible. As in the case of a number of other areas (gender, race, etc.), the urgency of interreligious encounter has provided the impetus to highlight particular threads within biblical material. The following examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive:

- The three magi from the East who made use of their own astronomy and religious insights to find the newborn baby Jesus and to worship him (Matt. 2:1–12).
- The encounter between the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24–30; see also Matt. 15:21–30) and Jesus. This woman demands that Jesus pay attention to her and that he not limit his mission to the Jews. As the story is told in the gospel of Mark, the woman seems to break through Jesus’ religious and cultural prejudices and make it clear to him that God’s love and care extend beyond those of Jesus’ own people. “The woman taught Jesus how to be Jesus” (Hisako Kinukawa). In the story, Jesus shows himself open to change. Such openness to change rests on a great trust in God. Jesus discovers, it seems, how God addresses him in a person who does not belong to his own faith community. God himself is at stake for Christians in interreligious dialogue. It is God who challenges us.


38. Issued in November 2007 as an invitation to Christian leaders and scholars by a group of Muslim scholars linked to the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute in Jordan.
The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman recorded in the gospel of John (John 4:5–42). This, the longest conversation Jesus has with any one individual in the gospels, is remarkable as an example of Jesus’ engagement with religious otherness in a variety of ways. In particular there is Jesus’ surprising response to the Samaritan woman’s religious question about the “right” place to worship: “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:20). If he had chosen to answer her question from within his own religious tradition, Jesus’ response would have been to assent that the temple in Jerusalem was the correct place for worship. But John surprises us by representing Jesus as someone who was well aware of his own tradition and yet was able to rise to a spirituality of religious awareness that was called for in that particular interreligious intercultural encounter. Jesus answers, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24). Not only is Jesus able to rise above the cultural and religious given of his own community, but it is especially significant that someone from outside that community appears to be the catalyst in this process. We thus get a glimpse within scripture of how interreligious engagement can be a source of rethinking self-understanding.

These three examples suggest that it is the content as well as the nature of the Bible that offers scope for deepening Christian self-understanding in the encounter with religious diversity. It is notable that these three examples each come from a different gospel (Matthew, Mark, John). In each case, and perhaps particularly in the final example from the John, we hear the distinctive note of the particular gospel-writer, who is seeking to share the story of Jesus in a way that meets the needs and concerns of his own specific readership. How far is this redactional process on the part of the gospel-writers helpfully illuminated by reading these stories in the context of interreligious diversity? What light does this shed on our understanding of the nature of scripture? In turn, how far can this redactional process itself offer insights for a religiously plural world? The writers of the patristic era considered it significant that there are four canonical gospels: Does this model of diversity in unity itself offer a resource for engagement with other religions?

One issue that cannot be forgotten when reflecting on the Bible in the context of religious diversity is that of “toxic texts”: passages that seem to promote violence or xenophobia as divinely sanctioned or encourage abusive attitudes to human beings on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, or social status. Interreligious engagement has forced us as Christians to become more aware of such passages and has made it more difficult for us to ignore them in a conspiracy of silence. (That is also true in relation to other religions and similarly difficult texts in their scriptures.) We have had to address some hard questions. However, as part of wrestling with these passages, awareness is increasing that the fundamental hermeneutical principle for scripture is to be life-affirming, taking seriously the purpose statement offered near the end of the gospel of John that “these things are written . . . that you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). This is the perspective from which our biblical interpretation needs to proceed.

The Church, Called Out for Life

Key aspects of Christian conviction

Within the ecumenical family we have a broad spectrum of church understanding: as a gathered community of the faithful (koinonia); prophetic, priestly, and royal people of God; body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit; etc. The church today acknowledges and honours the “people of Israel” (Rom. 9:4) as God’s chosen people from whom the church has derived elements of its self-understanding and “to whom God will always remain faithful.”

The church exists within the tension of universal and particular. The very idea of “church,” however theologically formulated, can be expressed in terms of a generic or universal concept on the one hand, and manifest as a concrete historical fact, bound by time and space, on the other. The concept of “church” presupposes the doctrine of “the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” The contemporary ecumenical context of church life challenges us to resolve the gulf between the manifest plurality of churches and the ideal, already proleptically realized, of oneness in Christ. Even so, we are aware this is an eschatological hope for which we work. The lived reality is in the tension between unity and diversity. Thus the ecumenical experience of being “church” provides a reference point for understanding, appreciating, and acting upon what it

40. The Church: Towards a Common Vision, para. 17. This text is extensively drawn on in this section even when it is not directly quoted.
means to be church in the context of religious plurality. In the encounter with other religions we need to be mindful of key aspects of self-understanding and consequent challenges. In the paragraphs below we draw attention to some significant aspects.

The church is understood as “elected” (Eph. 1:4), that is, chosen by God and assigned a divine purpose and identity. The church reflects the trinitarian life of God; it is a community grounded in love and expressing the relational nature of her creator. The church is itself a unity of diversity, the church of the triune God. The church is also a narrative community, that is, whatever our particular ecclesiology, in belonging to a church we locate our Christian identity within a set of narratives that include the Bible (and especially the passion narrative), church history and tradition, our local and particular stories of discipleship, and church life – and much more besides. The church includes saints and sinners. It is both a divinely created reality and a human organization whose members are all “saved sinners” engaging in God’s mission of love, charity, and sacrificial service. The church’s true life involves the proclamation of the good news of salvation, and thus evangelical activity, administration of sacraments, diaconal service, and mission in the way of Christ.

The church is the locus of Christian identity, both personal and communal. It is for some the means of salvation, for others, the setting for outwarding the life of discipleship. Either way, there is an intimate and necessary relationship between the life of faith as a personal concern and belonging to the church as communal expression and faithful responsibility. Furthermore, while Christ is the eternal head of the church, there are also various structures and systems of authority and accountability whereby order is maintained through which the life of the church is sustained.

The church is also the springboard for proclamation and evangelization, as an aspect of God’s mission in the world. Matthew 28:19–20 situates the resurrection commission of Jesus to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” in the life of the ecclesial community in which Jesus promises to be present with his followers “to the end of the age.” The church is called by Christ in the Holy Spirit to witness to the Father’s reconciliation, healing, and transformation of creation.

“Rooted in the plan of the Triune God for human-kind’s salvation”41 and brought to birth at Pentecost, ever enlivened and inspired by the Spirit, there is a broad spectrum of what it means to be church represented in the ecumenical family. Linked to our wide range of understandings of “church” are also diverse understandings of the kingdom of God – on the one hand seen as a description of church; on the other hand the realm of God’s activity that is other and greater than church. In this latter definition, the kingdom of God is the realm that the church is called to serve. Within the wide ecumenical range of church understanding and practice, the sacraments of baptism and eucharist serve as criteria for inclusion and exclusion, with varying emphasis within and between denominations.

Dialogue, deepening, and discovery
The interaction of the church with the plurality of religions raises a number of points for reflection. The church is not simply about doctrine and belief; it is about love in action and about relations of service and love in respect to ourselves and our neighbours. To the extent the church may be open toward the religious other, how are dialogical openness and proper identity as church kept in balance?

The presence of other religions challenges our Christian identity whenever the church portrays itself as an exclusive community in such a way that the exclusivity is perceived not as attractive uniqueness but rather as forbidding exclusion. The historic claim of the church that extra ecclesiam nulla salus (“there is no salvation outside the Church”) can constitute a “scandal” (stumbling block) for our religious neighbours. On the other hand, if we believe that where the Spirit is, there is the church of God, then if the Spirit appears outside what we understand as the boundaries of the church, we may need to reflect on whether the canonical and spiritual bounds of the church necessarily coincide. Religious diversity has encouraged Christians to explore more deeply the parameters of inclusivity and exclusivity in the life of the church. This can be expressed at a number of different levels, physical and practical as well as theological and spiritual.

Our understanding of “church” encompasses not only spiritual and relational or community meanings and aspects, the term “church” also refers to physical space, as itself both a real and a representative presence; the place not only of worship activities but also of hospitality and sanctuary. Thus a question arises: To what extent is the church a hospitable space? Is it a “barrier” or a “meeting ground”? How we conceive and construct our church buildings as places of exclusive or inclusive activity is also challenged by the presence of the religious other today. The high sacramental moments of baptism and eucharist, on the one hand so significant for Christian life and self-understanding, can on the other hand make clear for us our exclusion of the religious other. Similarly, other ritual practices, adorning art, and use of liturgical vestments can serve as markers

41. Ibid., para. 3.
of exclusive identity that are likewise challenged, especially in contexts of multi-faith cross-religious pastoral situations. The realm of hospitality offers one area where Christians can be “re-evangelized” by their religious neighbours: for example, the experience of hospitality received from others – a tradition of particular importance in the Sikh religion where the house of worship or _guru-dwara_ (literally “the door of God”) offers nourishment to all to demonstrate the abundant generosity of God – can help Christians come to understand more deeply the importance of hospitality as part of the church’s participation in God’s mission.

Today there are many new forms of being church, for the most part aimed at transcending traditional barriers and advocating the widest possible inclusion. This can extend into the interreligious arena as when people of other faiths may participate, or at least attend, various liturgies (marriage, baptism, and so on). The question is raised how far it is right to seek to be inclusive by modifying theological language and ritual practice. On the one hand, the church is challenged to meet real pastoral need and seeks to reach out, and accommodate, ever-greater diversity; on the other hand, the church needs to safeguard the essential integrity of the expressions of faith in language and liturgy. There are increasing signs in many parts of the world that people, otherwise members of or adherents to the church in its local context, may also find themselves engaging in the ritual and practical life of another religious tradition, by virtue perhaps of mixed-faith family circumstances, for example. The boundaries demarcating religious identity may be increasingly fluid. The phenomenon of Christians holding to some form of multiple, or at least dual, religious belonging and participation is not only a challenge for the mission of the church but also very much a challenge to Christian self-understanding of “church” in today’s religiously diverse world. If church authority is being challenged by signs of fluid religious boundaries, is the correct response to advocate a hardening of borders and an exclusionary withdrawal from an interfaith arena, or to deepen the relational engagement and reconsider what the Spirit is saying to the church in such situations?

Our varied interreligious contexts also invite us to reflect on the relationship between the church and evangelization, and that between evangelization and dialogue. “Sharing the joyful news of the truth revealed in the New Testament and inviting others to the fullness of life in Christ is an expression of respectful love,” which needs to be carried out respectfully. In certain interreligious situations, the saying traditionally ascribed to St Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary use words,” may become a vital maxim in the life of the church. Churches in some contexts may find themselves needing to address varied questions about the relationship between _diakonia_ and evangelization in their ecclesial lives. These might include to what extent acts of service and justice can appropriately replace evangelization as a focus in the life of the church, but also require questions to be asked to ensure that there are no inappropriate forms of allurement linking evangelization and _diakonia_. Additionally, if we believe that our Christian faith requires of us dialogue, engagement, and sensitive mutual witness with those of other faith traditions, then shaping the life of the church within wider society to facilitate this becomes important. What shape this might be varies from place to place: in countries with a Christian majority there may need to be overt expressions of hospitality toward other faiths; in countries in which Christians live as a minority, the role of the church to advocate courteously for its members may be required.

Religious diversity also compels us to wrestle seriously with the sometimes ambiguous relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. If the kingdom of God is other than the church, and is understood as the realm of God’s activity within the world to which the church is called to engage with and on God’s behalf, how then do we understand the role of the religious other within that world? How do we see God relating to the world? If, indeed, the church does not possess God (which it does not), then the prospect that God is at work in and through the religious other cannot be dismissed and must, instead, be a fulcrum point for Christian self-reflection on the nature of the church. Part of the tension within which the church stands today is the perennial issue of the right relationship between the church and the world – within which there are to be found our neighbours of other faiths and of none, all of whom are part of God’s creation and all of whom are loved by God. God does not only express love through the church and Christian salvation but rather acknowledges all truth, justice, value, and excellence, even in contexts that are not immediately within the realm of the Christian community (Phil. 4:8: “whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise”).

One aspect of the relationship between the church and the world that may be challenging in various situations of religious diversity is the link between religious communities and the state. In a number of countries where the population is predominantly Muslim, for example, there is a bond between the state and the religion of Islam, which means that the “world” represented by the state assumes a religious hue, though not a Christian one. In some cases,

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42. Ibid., para. 60.
this is directly linked to the self-understanding of Islam. Conversely in many countries of Europe, the historically privileged position of one or more of the Christian churches can also mean that that secular space has shrunk in other directions. Sometimes the church may need to ask hard questions of itself; sometimes it may also need to ask hard and challenging questions of its religious neighbours. The relationship between the church and the world and our aspiration for an inclusive and hospitable church can feel unrealistic in situations in which Christians are experiencing discrimination or even persecution from religious others. If positive interreligious engagement can affect our Christian theology, self-understanding, and sense of identity, the converse is also true.

The special relation between the church and the Jewish people from the beginning poses a particular theological challenge and raises the need for re-thinking our self-understanding. If the church has not replaced the “people of Israel,” what now is the proper link to them? Relations with the Jewish people constitute a very special and particular dimension of Christian interreligious engagement. The church has ever had to wrestle with the presence of Jewish people and the faith of Judaism, and has come to recognize that, in fact, the covenant made between God and Israel continues as much with the Jewish people as it does with those who follow Christ. In the out-working of the rethinking and new self-understanding that Christianity has engaged in, especially since the mid-20th century, there can be found paradigms and possibilities for Christian self-understanding in respect to the presence of, and engagement with, other faiths. The church’s relation with the Jews is not a problem; it is part of the answer of what it means for the church to co-exist in God’s diverse world with those not of our faith.

The church is one; it is also many. The historical reality of Christianity is to exist in many different forms of church. This is the reality that the ecumenical movement arose to address, wrestle with, and overcome. The horizon of ecumenicity is the eventual organic unity of all Christians in one holy catholic and apostolic church community. The lived reality of ecumenicity is the fostering and development of the ties of affection and bonds of mutual understanding and acceptance; we have learned to live, work, and worship together, even though we cannot yet gather around the same table. We are still challenged by our own diversity and what that means for our self-understanding as Christians. Yet the resources and lessons we have learned along the way may also provide resources and the basis for rethinking what the fact of wider religious diversity might mean for Christian self-understanding. Where previously we erected barriers of disavowal and mutual denial, we have found God working in and through each other and have been challenged to expand our horizons of theological self-understanding. The interreligious context is not the same as the inter-church one, but there are some parallels and similarities of relational dynamics and the challenge to understand the working of the God who is Lord of all in this, as much as it is the case to grasp what God is saying to us even in and through our Christian diversity. The ecumenical journey may itself encourage and inform us as we seek to reflect on the meaning of “church” in a context of religious plurality. Equally the need for Christians to engage with wider religious diversity may strengthen the ecumenical movement, for the task of such engagements perhaps too big for a divided church.

Eschatology, Hope for Life

Key aspects of Christian conviction

Eschatology, with its perception of God working out a purpose throughout time, is intrinsic to the Christian faith. A focus and concentration only on present realities, with no sense of future hope or judgment, ultimately diminishes the richness of Christianity. Eschatology, however, is frequently misunderstood or parodied as only focusing on the “four last things”: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Although eschatology certainly includes the exploration of these topics, it is much wider in scope, wrestling with the totality of God’s action in history and eternity. Eschatology in Christian terms has a personal, a communal, and a cosmic aspect. There is development within scripture about eschatology – both on a personal level (e.g., life after death) and on the cosmic level (the perfection of God’s purpose in creation). Even within the New Testament there is divergence in eschatological viewpoints (compare for example the apocalyptic millenarian vision of Revelation and the “realized eschatology” of John) – particularly in response to the question of the delay of the Parousia or Second Coming of Christ. This plurality of views in the New Testament is an important feature that it is important to allow to find expression also in post-biblical Christianity.

There is an interplay in eschatology between the material and spiritual as well as the present and the future. In Christian history sometimes one aspect is emphasized – sometimes the other. Both, however, need to be held in tension. In personal terms, overemphasizing the spiritual dimension can lead to a focus on “immortality” at the expense of “resurrection.” In communal and cosmic terms, focusing on certain aspects of eschatology can lead to down-playing the importance of issues such as well-being and justice in our world: because we are “looking for life after death” or “the end of the world,” we cease to care.
about well-being in the present. It is therefore important to hold onto the vision of the kingdom of God whichcharacteristically does not speak of present/future as either/or but as both/and, with a future continually becoming present. When we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come,” we are both offering ourselves to be agents of the coming of the kingdom and (in the doxology) acknowledging that God’s kingdom is “for ever and ever.”

In our religiously diverse world some aspects of eschatological faith appear particularly significant:

- We know that to contemplate the realization of God’s reign is to look “through a glass dimly” and that we cannot adequately conceive of the fullness of redemption. Faith kindles in us a recognition that this reality will be wider, deeper, and more wonderful than we can imagine. Therefore, in the area of eschatology we are particularly aware that we know only in part and look forward to the light to come.

- Though we cannot claim to understand God’s coming reign in all its fullness, we believe that whatever the dimensions of the new creation, it will always reflect the trinitarian revelation of God and the loving communion of God with creation that we know in Christ.

- Belief in the radical goodness of the eschatological future is the great reservoir for Christian visions of social change and justice. The contrast between the world as it ought to (and will) be and the world as it is provides us with the basis for critique, hope, and change. This faith in God’s future leads us to work against existing evil and commit ourselves to goods not yet present.

- In the eschatological fulfilment we will “know as we are known,” and have the deepest possible communion with the trinitarian God. In history we know God through the economy of God’s action, encountering God as creator, God in Christ, God through the Spirit. The economic activities of God are truly distinct, even though in each case it is the fullness of God in three persons who is manifest, even when humans perceive God in a limited perspective.

- There is a tension in Christian eschatological thinking between a belief in apokatastasis, the fulfilment of God’s purpose in all things, and a belief in consummation as involving judgment and division, heaven and hell. This can also be seen as a tension between hope for the salvation of all persons and the reality of the possibility of damnation or annihilation. Consummation will be like a great feast in which all the nations come from east, west, north, and south. It will also be like a judgment in which we are divided based on whether we served the “least of these” as Christ (Matt. 25:31–46). There are also varieties of views relating to possible intermediate states of human beings between death and their ultimate destinies (such as purgatory).

- We believe that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ mark a turning point in history, the decisive entry of God’s eschatological future into our human story. The salvation constituted by Christ is the same as the reign of God that is fulfilled at the end of days. That salvation has come in Christ and awaits its full consummation. It is already real and it is not yet completed. This is why Christians await Christ’s return. Salvation is a relation of communion with other creatures and with God through unity with Christ.

- The realization of the reign of God is fulfillment of God’s purpose for creation. Just as in the present time the faithful live by “remembering” this coming consummation and its character, so is the past renewed. The book of Revelation echoes the book of Genesis, and the Sabbath is both a recollection of God’s resting at the close of creation and foretaste of the life to come. Christ is a second Adam, and in him all past humanity is caught up. This is expressed in the confession that at the time of his death and resurrection, Christ descended to bring with him the faithful of prior ages.

Dialogue, deepening, and discovery

Some in other religions object to Christian eschatology because they see it as an arrogant and presumptuous claim to judge other peoples and religions and to determine their ultimate fates because of supposed absolute knowledge about God’s will and the future. It is important for Christians to remember that “Eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). Eschatology makes us keenly aware of the great scope of God’s new creation and of the limits of our perception. This suggests there is room for reflection with our religious neighbours: that our present differences and conflicts may be changed when what is hidden is revealed. This prompts humility and openness toward those of other faiths, and hesitancy to render final judgments.

Even the universalist strands of Christian eschatology could be said to be problematic: Is it a sort of arrogance to offer a universalistic vision centred on the cosmic Christ to those who may not wish to recognize Christ as Saviour? Are other traditions allowed their own integrity and treated in terms consistent with their own self-description? Is their clear witness to their own uniqueness, and their
considered rejection of Christian confession respected? Such challenges to Christians have in turn encouraged more profound reflection on the trinitarian nature of God, suggesting that eschatological fulfilment will encompass a unity in diversity of creatures, their proportionate participation in the life of God who is a communion of persons. All creatures will share in that communion through their own uniqueness. These different members of the body of Christ together share greater breadth of God’s glory than any could alone. This leads us to ask how the religious identities and particularities of humans might be brought into that communion. May the integrity of diverse faith backgrounds endure in varied forms of participation in this consummation? Will there be distinctive Jewish faith in heaven? Or is heaven beyond all faiths such as we know them?

Conversely, some religions also offer a challenge as to whether Christian eschatology downplays the goodness and importance of the present creation, over-emphasizes the spiritual at the expense of the material, flies from engagement with the world, focuses on the world to come or apocalyptic narratives rather than on human need, and encourages an attitude that does not take seriously enough questions of justice. However, the eschatological expectation of a “new creation” for all can be the ground for common cause with those of other religions in struggling against whatever threatens the well-being and flourishing of creation. It is also grounds for us to learn from other traditions about aspects of that goodness that we may miss.

In Christian iconography and religious art the most usual depiction of the “last things” portrays the last judgment in a manner recognizably linked to the parable of the sheep and the goats of Matthew 25:31–46. In this parable, the criterion for salvation and judgment is notably not linked to confessed faith but to actions of common humanity and justice. Yet the link made between the recipients of the actions and the figure of Christ also jars and unsettles the reader, whether professedly Christian or an adherent of another faith. Christians need to place themselves with the outsider in order to place themselves with Christ; for religious “others” there is Christological meaning imposed on their own acts of service. The parable is a paradigm of a discomfort that leaves no one unchallenged.

Some other religions differ explicitly over whether there is any ultimate being, over whether a personal God exists, and over the terms of human estrangement and fulfilment. Some, for instance, do not share the broadly linear concept of history that is part of the framework of the Abrahamic faiths and certainly Christianity. Rather, they have a more circular view. This leads (e.g., *karma*, *nirvana*) to a radically different understanding of life after death, resurrection/immortality, and the destiny of the world. The predicament of humanity and humanity’s solution are seen to have a timeless character; history itself is part of the problem, and the eschatological belief in the redemption of history is problematic. Once again, this may encourage us to find a resource in our trinitarian faith. Since this faith requires us to recognize that God is manifest in diverse ways—for instance in the call and word of God to Israel, in the incarnation in Christ, in the gifts of the Spirit—it may be possible to respect also the diversity of manifestations of God within other religions. Believing that these manifestations stem from the trinitarian God, Christians may see that they represent authentic contact with God for those in these traditions, and that other religions have much to teach us about specific dimensions of relations with God.

Eschatology focuses in an acute way the essential challenge of religious plurality to Christianity, namely the relationship between universalism and particularism, between the hope that God wills all to be saved and the possibility of eternal separation from God. Are other religions entirely occasions for judgment and division, or can they be instruments in God’s universal saving purpose? Is lack of faith in Christ cause for eternal punishment? Can those who maintain their devotion to other religions be saved? This tension between universalism and final division has long been perceived by many Christians, quite apart from the challenge offered today by our multi-religious world. Indeed, the modern reality of religious diversity requires us to more clearly address this ancient question, compelling us to contemplate whether religions play a role in God’s universal plan, and to consider the place of those who do not confess Christ yet serve him in their obedience to God’s will and their mercy toward their neighbours and the oppressed. We must avoid making belief in God’s justice and judgment an instrument in human conflict and religious polemics, or deploying the notion of judgment as a way of condemning our religious neighbours. We may also ask whether the various intermediate states after death (such as purgatory) described in some Christian traditions play any role in relation to other faiths or to the various post-mortem states envisioned in those traditions.

Christians focus their view of the world to come around Christ and the conviction that the reign of God has become real in Christ. Those practicing other religions challenge this connection because they fail to recognize it and reject the idea that the eschatological age has already begun with the incarnation. For instance, among the challenges presented to Christianity by Judaism is the Jewish concern that the messianic hopes for peace and justice, linked by Christians to the person of Christ, have not yet been fulfilled in Christ’s coming. Eschatology expresses our
recognition that the world is not yet transformed in such a way as to make salvation in Christ obvious. It enables us to join with those of other faiths in recognizing all that “groans in travail” in our world while awaiting redemption. Thus, for instance, it makes possible a convergence with the Jewish critique of absolute Christian claims of fulfilment. Those Jews who await a messiah and Christians who await the return of their messiah can agree on the gap between the present and the messianic kingdom.

For Christians, salvation is offered by the incarnation, which is the unique expression of God’s saving will and is realized in a life of unity with Christ. In respect of the testimony of our religious neighbours, and in faithfulness to our own witness, we acknowledge that salvation and the ultimate ends sought by other religions are not the same things. Interreligious dialogue makes clearer to us the specificity of the gospel we proclaim, and its hope of salvation. Such dialogue or mutual witness can likewise make us aware when the specific ends sought in other traditions diverge from salvation. Such ends (moksha, nirvana, emptiness) may be real possibilities. If so, how shall we understand them?

Conclusion

“Who do we say that we are?” The question of our Christian self-identity is related to the question of Jesus to his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” – which comes (quite literally) at the heart of the gospels. In particular, the exchange between Jesus and his disciples is located in the very middle of the gospel of Mark (Mark 8:29). It is preceded by a narrative that generates a sense of mystery and slowly builds up to Peter’s startled realization of Jesus’ messianic identity: it is followed by the second half of the gospel, which leads Jesus toward Jerusalem – city of suffering and glorification – but at the same time explores what this identity means for his disciples. And in terms both of what it meant for Jesus and what it means for his friends, it becomes clear that traditional understandings are being subverted. So when we ask the question, “Who do we say that we are?” as we “carry the name of Christ,” we find it becomes clear that traditional understandings are being subverted. So when we ask the question, “Who do we say that we are?” as we “carry the name of Christ,” we find subverted. So when we ask the question, “Who do we say that we are?” as we “carry the name of Christ,” we find subverted. So when we ask the question, “Who do we say that we are?” as we “carry the name of Christ,” we find subverted. So when we ask the question, “Who do we say that we are?” as we “carry the name of Christ,” we find.

“I am who I am” – the assertion through which God, in addressing Moses, offers a definition of the divine name, presenting us with revelation in apophatic terms, an enigmatic God who cannot be reduced to an object. “Revelational but not telling everything … disclosing intimacy, personal presence, but preserving mystery, forbidding possession and control?” And if this is true for the time of revelation in the Old Testament, might it also be true for the divine disclosure in the New?

It is well known that in the gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly claims for himself the divine title, “I am.” The moment in that gospel when the expression is first used, however, is not generally so well-known. It comes in John 4:26 – toward the end of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, when Jesus says to her, “I am, the one who is speaking to you.” It is notable that this occurs at the end of a fairly lengthy conversation in which, beginning with their discussion of the basic human need for water, the woman and Jesus, representing different religious communities, have covered the range of their respective religious particularities. In 4:23–25, Jesus’ language suggests that these differences – which had caused considerable hostility between Jewish and Samaritan religious communities – can now be overcome. Intriguingly, as he makes this point in the conversation, he refers to both “Father” and “Spirit” in terms that suggest that it is the nature of God as Trinity to transcend the causes of religious tension. And then, in response to the woman’s comment about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus goes on to claim identity not only with the promised Messiah but, through his use of the mysterious “I am,” with the God who has to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. We can genuinely say, therefore, that the initial divine disclosure of Jesus in the gospel of John is prompted by an interreligious conversation. We must also acknowledge, however, that this disclosure has an aspect of mystery.

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (Matt. 11:3–4; see Luke 7:20–22) Jesus answers this question, asked by the disciples of John the Baptist, with another question: “What do you see me do?” before going on to demonstrate that “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them.” Identity cannot be separated from action. Who we are is validated by what we do, no less for us than for Jesus himself.

45. NRSV translation, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you,” in Greek ego eimi.

“Who do we say that we are?” The multi-religious realities of our world today may seem to some Christians jarring and disorientating. Yet at the same time, such a conversation with our fellow human beings of other religious traditions can enable us to discover and disclose new insights into the nature of our ongoing Christian conversation with God. This is the God whose story is one of dialogue and engagement with human beings from the beginning of life and creation, and who has promised that space and eternity will never be able to separate us from the breadth of divine love.

Recommendations

Given the importance of an informed and appropriately confident understanding about Christian self-identity, particularly in contexts of religious plurality, those responsible for preparing this document for consideration by churches, national, and regional confessional bodies and mission organizations recommend that these bodies undertake the following:

Initiate study processes on the questions and issues raised in this document, taking specific account of their particular context and tradition, and share their responses with the WCC. Such exploration will involve reflecting on past and present understandings of our Christian identity, exploring how our identity has shaped, both positively and negatively, our actions and our engagement with our religious neighbours. Such articulation has the capacity to enliven and deepen our theological self-understanding.

Develop creative ways to introduce the material to a wide range of people, in particular those involved in teaching and training. This may involve cross-cultural and cross-regional ecumenical dialogue and exchange, so that individuals and communities can learn from a variety of different contexts.

Encourage their members to deepen their knowledge and understanding of different religions. Such education ideally includes the holistic dimension of meeting people, reading their holy texts, visiting their places of worship, and offering and receiving hospitality. It will be aimed at enabling Christians to be more sensitive to the internal diversity of other faiths and religions. It will also foster a spirit of honesty, so that people compare like with like, not judging the best in their own religion alongside the worst in the religion of another.

Explore ways to work together ecumenically to respond to initiatives from people of other faiths, drawing on what, as Christians, they are able to affirm in common.

Build links between people of different religions and faiths who share perspectives and interests in common. For example, groups of women from different religions might study together to deepen their critical understanding of the role of patriarchy in their respective faiths.

Cooperate with members of other faiths and religious communities in actions aimed at fostering justice and the common good, remembering always the biblical injunction to “seek the welfare of the city in which you are to be found” (Jer. 29:7). Such cooperation might lead to specific projects in which Christians and members of other religious communities work “side by side.”

Work together with members of other faiths and religious traditions to create a climate in which “face to face” dialogue is facilitated. What precisely this means may differ from context to context, but the encouragement of a spirituality of dialogue is normally an appropriate expression of Christian identity.

Pray for their neighbours and their well-being, recognizing that prayer is integral to our identity – to who we are and what we do.

Appendix – Background to the Document

Religious plurality, and its potential for contributing to both peace and hostility in our world, is an issue that has marked out the early years of the 21st century. Bearing this in mind, the central committee of the WCC, at its meeting in 2002, suggested that there should be a study process on the subject of religious plurality and Christian self-understanding, taking account of the experiences of churches all over the world living in varied contexts of religious plurality.

In order to address the different dimensions and aspects of the theme, the networks of the WCC’s departments of Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, and Inter-religious Dialogue engaged together over a period of two years (2003-2004), and at the end of this period scholars linked to these networks produced the document Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding. This document was discussed at a hearing session of the central committee in 2005, and at the World Mission Conference and at the Standing Commission of Faith and Order, both held in the same year. Though the document was welcomed by many, a number of the comments made confirmed the view that there needed to be further reflection on this theme. The document however served as a background resource at the 9th Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre in 2006, where the importance of the theme and the desirability for further work were confirmed.

This led to a number of “religion specific” consultations during the period 2008-2012 that explored Christian self-understanding in the context of one particular religion.
or religious tradition. These consultations focused respectively on Islam (2008), Buddhism (2009), Judaism (2009), Hinduism (2011), and Indigenous Religions (2012). These consultations were organized by the WCC’s Programme for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. The papers and discussions of these consultations have fed into the ongoing process. Additionally, the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,” published by the WCC, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance in June 2011, has been a resource for the process.

This document, “Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World,” therefore seeks to draw together the reflections and work of the last decade. It has been drafted as a result of a gathering of scholars held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, in March 2012, and a further meeting held at the Desmond Tutu Centre, Nairobi, Kenya, in February 2013. The meetings were held under the auspices of the WCC’s Programme for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, but intentionally also included individuals linked to the Faith and Order and Mission and Evangelism networks.

A draft of the document was then used as a background resource for the ecumenical conversation “Exploring Christian Self-Identity in a World of Many Faiths,” held during the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Korea, October 30 – November 8, 2013. Insights from that conversation fed into its final revision, which took place in March-April 2014. The document was presented to, and accepted by, the central committee of the WCC, which met in July 2014.

3.5 Ecofeminism

3.5 Ecofeminism: A Latin American Perspective

Ivone Gebara

In Christian churches in Brazil, while it is hard to be a feminist, it is harder to be an ecofeminist. I think that is the same in all Latin American countries. Our Latin Christian tradition stressed deeply not only the dependence of women on men but also the anthropological superiority of human beings. In our patriarchal culture, where the consequences of colonialist slavery are still present, power is a men’s issue, especially public power; because of this, God, considered as a super power, has a masculine face. In this cultural context of masculine and white domination, in Christian churches, feminism and ecofeminism are not well known and are sometimes considered a kind of heresy disturbing the community.

For instance the word ecofeminism is not in Brazilian dictionaries and in all Latin America only a small number of persons know its meaning. One day I was giving a lecture in Brazil about ecofeminism. At the end of my lecture someone asked me about the precise meaning of ecofeminism. I spent almost one hour trying to explain it; I gave examples of real situations from where we can make an ecofeminist analysis, but, it seems, it was still unclear to many in the audience.

The woman who raised the question and probably others in the auditorium didn’t understand me because this word is very unusual. And when she asked me to clarify, she was, in her way, trying to make me understand the meaning of her question. She said: “I understood ‘ecofeminism’ as a sort of echo of the feminism, a re-sounding, like a repetition of feminism in another way.” I found this idea witty and suggestive and I thanked her.

Now, at lectures, I begin explaining first feminism and then ecology. I try to be an ecologist in a feminist perspective and a feminist in an ecological perspective. I try to explain ecology as one of the deepest concerns of feminism and ecology as having a deep resonance or a political and anthropological consequence from a feminist perspective. Both feminism and ecology want to understand human beings as female and male living in a complex web of life inside different cultures and ecosystems.

From this perspective of the echo of feminism, let me share with you three points: 1) Ecofeminism as an echo of feminism; 2) Beyond Theology; 3) A new Utopia for our time.
Ecofeminism as an Echo of Feminism

Let me share some critical ideas about our present world especially about the discussion among feminists and ecofeminists. These ideas are not new but they will help me to put my reflection in the present historical context. In the Western capitalist world, we are always trying to apply to history concepts and analysis coming from a competitive world. Different feminist thinkers in Latin America try to discuss what perspective comes first: ecology or feminism. This discussion stresses the idea that some feminists believe that others appropriate ecological thoughts and integrate them into a feminist perspective. And by doing so, they are not faithful to feminism in its pure and exclusive struggle for women. Others feel that feminism is stealing a private property of the ecological struggle. Some think that feminism connects women to non-human nature and reduces women to an essence very close to nature. And finally, others work in a particular spirituality very connected to natural forces attributing them to a kind of women's nature or women's divinity. Each group claims its fidelity to the more coherent option for women.

While all these discussions are going on, the destruction of the Amazon forest, the rain forest, and others, continue. While this discussion is taking place, lots of paper is being used, lots of trees are being cut down and used by industries, polluting the rivers and the air. While these discussions are going on, lots of women and children are starving and dying with diseases produced by a capitalist system able to destroy lives and keep profit for only a few.

The challenging question for me is not the struggle among different ways of interpreting women's lives and the ecosystem, or the reductionism of theories, but the destruction of life while we are discussing the theories. No, I am not against theories but I suspect that some discussions are reinforcing more of the patriarchal logic of capitalism than a real alternative way of life. We discuss to understand or reinterpret life but sometimes we are not trying to find concrete ways to go beyond the ecological crisis that is killing millions of humans and other beings. It seems to me that feminism can't be tempted by masculine and competitive theories, which are in love with themselves, without searching for structural reform theories and actions towards justice. We need to go beyond competition in order to make possible another world.

An ecofeminism as an *echo of feminism* wants, in this perspective, to go beyond sterile discussions and go back to searching for concrete solutions to daily-life problems. Here is the place from which a reflection needs to begin. To talk about troubles in daily life invites us to ask *what* and whose daily life we are speaking. This question puts some limits to our thoughts and invites precision. Daily life is not just a place of routine, it is a place of everyday emotions: of happiness and tears, of humiliation, of social and economical contradictions as well as a place of love, tenderness, and solidarity. To begin by thinking about daily life is, as I said before, to choose what kind of daily life we are reflecting on.

I want to assume my analysis from the perspective of marginalized people, especially marginalized women suffering daily from the consequences of a patriarchal society with a capitalist dominion of nature and human relationship in a global system. This system makes slaves and hostages everywhere. Daily life for most poor women is like a jail. You have to live there as a prisoner without choosing alternatives for a better life. The horizon of daily life is monotonous and limited. It is more or less the same everywhere in the world. Women need to provide food, cleaning, healing for their families. The understanding of what is going on in our world overcomes most of them. They know how difficult their lives are but they have no real means to search for and experiment with new alternatives. The cycle begins early-when girls are thirteen or fourteen years old-with the process of adolescent pregnancies. They know how difficult their lives are but they have no real means to search for and experiment with new alternatives. The cycle begins early-when girls are thirteen or fourteen years old-with the process of adolescent pregnancies. They have no time to be educated thus limiting their choices in life. In a sense, it is the common life that chooses them and introduces them to the jail of women's daily life. What surprises me is that, on one side, statistics today in Latin America show a growing number of women who are well educated; but, on the other side, there are numbers that statistics can't afford-and these numbers are also growing. These numbers are the reality of female poverty. This is part of the contradictory system of social exclusion that is going on with the economic globalization of our world. Female poverty depends on female and male wealth. Female poverty depends on the destruction of ecosystems.

I have in mind a very poor neighborhood of Recife in the northeast of Brazil. People live along the border of a canal. The canal brings in its waters part of the garbage of other neighborhoods. These people never clean the canal but only add more and more garbage. They are always waiting for the officials of the city to send someone to clean the canal. Sometimes these cleaners come but by the next day the canal is dirty again. It is a kind of vicious circle. They know that they are dirtying the canal but they have not tried other alternatives to the garbage, nor have they developed a continuous behavior-they begin something today and tomorrow they are not able to follow their own good decisions. They are hostages of their own poverty and inconstancy. This is an example of daily life. Daily life is a plural expression because it refers to a plural experience of life.
Daily life for poor women is like a jail, as I said before. A new morning comes. We send children to school. We try to clean what is not possible to clean. Some women go to work. Most of them stay at home. They have nothing to cook. They wait for the children to return from school. They hope the children have already eaten, but they have not. Night arrives and brings back the men. Some of the men have something to offer to their families. Most of them have nothing. Often the men eat before returning home or only drink alcohol. The cycle of domestic jail finished today and now women wait to begin again tomorrow, probably with the bad news of a new pregnancy.

Feminist movements and some small groups of women trying to do something in this area believe that the solution of social and environmental problems and the oppression of women can’t come from this patriarchal structure of dependence. This structure has no way to overcome poverty because it is not rooted in egalitarian social principles. This structure reproduces the circle of dependence and violence. You can help some people but you can’t change a hierarchical structure that reproduces unfair situations. And what’s more, the ethical idea of public property is not developed for both the poor and the rich people. On one side, rich people believe that they have priority of everything and they can reduce politics to their own interests. On the other side, poor people feel that everything outside their own home is not their responsibility and so they continue to beg only for survival.

In more practical terms, middle-class people feel very sad seeing children living on the streets, and most of them are convinced they can do nothing. They are very busy with their own affairs and have no time to think about solutions. Of course the best solution would be to have the army and police in the streets keeping their lives safe. Rich people, those who are the elite that benefit from all the richness of the globalization of economy, live in a kind of separate city. They live in artificial fortresses that protect them from the real world.

In this situation, no movement, no science, no university, no group, and no feminism can or should struggle for its own survival. We need to understand that these different levels of one against the other will finally destroy all of us. The structure of violence over the world is growing and most government solutions seem to produce more violence. Violence to repress violence will be without end. Yet, there is hope.

In Latin America we want to be part of a national and international movement for the globalization of social justice. The old dream of humanity coming from the deepest of our hearts—the dream with a land where all can live with peace and dignity has taken new form—is of historical expression especially from different social forums as it has been in Porto Alegre, Brazil and before in Seattle, Prague, Quebec and other places. A new national and international order is our goal. An ecofeminism as an echo of feminism takes this as its goal without forgetting the special commitment for all women, without forgetting the importance of local education for a better world for everybody. It is the first time in our history that international civil society is uniting to form a new social and political order. It is the first time that together we are asking for a new qualitative daily life. In this perspective there is a new hope for all of us.

Beyond Theology

I have a hypothesis about the future of theologies. In my understanding, if theologies became only a system proposing ethical values for best relationships, they will have a future in the history of Justice and Peace over the world. They could be a source of dialogue trying to bridge the gap created by patriarchal religious systems. My hypothesis is based on the fact that most women in Latin America feel that traditional theology rooted in a patriarchal anthropology does not have a path for women’s emancipation and autonomy. In the same perspective, some women are searching for ways of emancipation like recovering feminine divinities from ancient Europe. They feel that the male-way seems very far from their reality and their present culture. In my way of understanding, this is a search for a full citizenship in our world: we need something different and because of that I am proposing to go beyond theology or theologies. The theoretical and practical schemes of traditional religions and Christian traditions are not able to open new possibilities for our struggle for justice and happiness. The traditions, of course, offer some personal change, which is good. My concern is that we can’t only be well inside our small world of friends. We need to act for a better world in its local, national, and international structures. This is the consequence of a new believing in connectedness as a political issue. We need to act individually and locally—but also internationally.

Theology is a cultural product. And official theologies are cultural products of our hierarchical and masculine philosophies and ideologies. They can give life and strength for a while but they need to be renewed. Today there is a new philosophy of history, a new understanding of human multiple cultural heritages, which is teaching the value of diversity in various places in the world. This new understanding applied to religious traditions invites us to go beyond cultural images, cosmologies, contents, and forms and tries to ask about values. Values have to do with the respect of
each person—woman and man, each group, each culture, each ecosystem. Because of that we need to ask: What value is present in this or that theological tradition? How can it help us toward more justice and solidarity? Values have more chance to go beyond dispute than a metaphysic or a mythic view of religion or theology. Because of that, some women are trying to deconstruct traditional theology and discover what values are present and are still able to support the effort of personal and social changing. Beyond theology in this perspective means beyond hierarchical and sexist structures present in patriarchal religions.

The question that lies at the heart of most of this is: why, having now conditions to be emancipated and freer, are we developing new forms of barbarism— including religious barbarism? We are highly developed in technology and highly regressive in humane ethics and values.

Christian traditional theology and also reformist feminist theologies seem a way without concrete ways and are not able to overcome injustices and alienation. Christian theology is submerged by hegemonic dehumanization and becomes a kind of provider of irrational stimulus to forget the unjust patriarchal order. There is a split between words and reality. Theological words are not able to awaken hope and new praxis for fair relationships in our world. Why not think in a human faith beyond traditional theologies?

Most Christian women are living outside churches or in the border of Christian Churches. They are convinced of the importance of faith, but not the model of community with Christian male hierarchical domination. They do not want to live this kind of illusion and dare go beyond this model. They dare accept a kind of institutional loneliness and have the control and the creativity of their own lives. The struggle against domination and repression is also a repudiation of the jail from where Christian values are presented. This is the work of deconstruction and new construction of meanings. The task of these different groups of Latin American women is to provide a new order of meaning including marginalized people.

The option for the poor is an option for life. Our goal should be to build a world where poor and marginalized people have a place to live with peace and dignity. We know that without this option we are not building a world with justice and love. The challenge is now a political challenge; it is a creative challenge for a new real order because there is no choice. We choose the life of the planet and the respect of all living beings or we choose to die by our own bad decisions.

A New Utopia for Our Time

Are women introducing a new utopia for our time? Are feminism and ecofeminism a new utopia or part of a common utopia? To answer these questions we need first of all to think again about the meaning of the word utopia. As we know all social movements and interpretations of human history have utopias or an orientation of the history for the present and future. This orientation is at the same time a critique of the present history and a dream for the future. The dream becomes a kind of line-driving history, giving direction and finality. The utopia is never realized totally. This is constitutive of human life. We need hope but our daily life never coincides with our hopes. Sometimes we can observe some feelings of utopia, but never as it was dreamed from the utopian perspective.

Feminism has its own utopia, which is in general the construction of new human relationship among women and men based on justice, equality, and solidarity. It is not simply a place for women in this same hierarchical and unfair social structure, but a place, a glimpse, of utopia, built on new relationship.

As feminism is plural in their theories and practices this utopia has similarities and differences among the different feminist currents. But today an only-feminist utopia is not enough. We are invited to keep our particular utopias and be open to others as ecological, social and political in order to build new models of living together. We are struggling for a new international order where people respect each other and their environments. We want to build a world where spiritual values are as important as material needs and we do not need patriarchal institutions to shape our lives. But we must allow room for our own theories and practices to eventually become incorporated into this existing model. This is one of the challenges of a new understanding of Utopia. The new understanding needs a critical analysis of what is going on in our world in order to clarify what could be a common utopia for us.

Today we are living multiple ideas of utopia. From the declaration of the end of utopias to the affirmation of the possible realization of Marxist utopia, we have a multiplicity of expressions and struggles of our dream. More than that, we have the possibility to have more and more people living without a social dream, without thinking and acting in a historical direction. They simply live and obey. They accept their lives as a decision from the will of others probably without knowing it. They work to distract themselves from reality. They are only workers and consumers of the system, players in the match of the system. They are from the establishment without knowing who they are. We do not know who we are. We live as we live without the radical or tedious questions coming from feminist philosophers.
Cultural and economic globalization invites us to forget these questions considered as questions from our pre-history, questions that do not fit in a world of globalization. We need the facade of happiness, casual relationships, virtual emotions, and dreams from drugs, values without ethical references, and political games to maintain the illusion of political participation in democracy. We need to believe that life is what the mass media controlled by capitalism says it is. And if we believe that we are not alienated, we are in the heart of capitalist life.

The word alienation as a separation from our own desire, our own production, our own creativity doesn’t exist in this global system. From the patriarchal global capitalist system, alienation is only alienation as consumers, alienation from the offers of the economic market. The unique rule of the market allows you to be always different, always free to do what you want to do following the insanity of the system. They spread the idea that this is freedom, freedom to buy what they want you to buy, freedom to move where they want you to move, freedom to love what they want you to love.

In this context freedom loses its deepest meaning because there is no reference to express freedom. We lost our own desire, our humanistic reference to be definitively without interiority, without personal desire. We are what the world wants us to be. Being this kind of Xerox of the system has a consequence of not being considered as a personality, as a citizen, as a valued life by itself and with social recognition. Because of that the webs that we are building are also webs of loneliness. Who cares about the death of women, of poor people, of civilians in unjust wars? Who cares about my personal sufferings and my search for happiness? If we are not giving money or profit to the system we have no value.

We lose the sovereignty and the power of Nations or the autonomy of each State. We do not know what democracy is, we forget its meaning and the inspiring source of its beginning. We live in great insecurity about everything. Life is vulgarized. Thought is superficial. Marginalized people are growing. The destruction of different species of plants and animals are growing too. The richness of the world is becoming more and more in the hands of a small elite. We are killing and we are cloning ourselves. Our body becomes merchandise without limits, without knowing who we are and where we are going. We are destroying ourselves as an interconnected body. In that destructive situation what could be the new understanding of utopia?

Utopia and utopias need to be rebuilt and reborn again. Without utopia, a form of hope—there are no human beings. Without hope there is not life. Each group needs to formulate their utopia and connect this utopia with a common one for the well being of humanity and of the earth. The new meaning of utopia is not a pre-definition but is a horizon of values that outside of them no life can be sustainable. Utopia is a common construction of meaning, of solidarity, of self-control—and common control for the well being of all. Feminism lies inside this common utopia with its own particular struggle and will also be a particular utopia for all women living in the hierarchical structures in different cultures. Feminism is a movement for a new humanity, for a new social and political order. Something in the world is better since feminist struggle in its various forms began. It is not enough, but it is something.

A new utopia is possible. A new utopia beyond patriarchal utopias is born in different groups. We have some national and international signs that can nourish our dream of a new earth, a new woman and a new man. These small signs can give us some certitude that life will not be destroyed by our bad competitive passions. Our struggle, the struggle for justice and solidarity of so many generations is still alive in our history.

The Echo of Rosemary’s Work

The three points that I developed have to do with the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether. They are, in a sense, an echo of her teaching meeting other ideas and experiences of life. It is an echo that enriches different people all over the world following the creative wisdom present in so many different cultures. From our Christian Tradition we learn that in spite of the strength of evil, in spite of its apparent victory, love and justice sustain the world, sustain our lives. Love and justice allow life to be alive. Love and justice nourish hope and are nourished by hope. I believe in that and it is because of this that I am speaking out. My personal commitment is also the possibility to struggle for a humanity that can live with more dignity and respect for all living beings. And in this struggle, I am living with what I call a “community of meaning,” a “community of solidarity” with different persons all over the world. Rosemary Radford Ruether is a leader in building this kind of community in different places of the world. She taught and committed solidarity with people in Latin America, with Palestinians and others, this allows our world to be alive. And more than that allows us to believe that we can still have hope about ourselves and about the possibilities of the healing of the earth.

Rosemary is my teacher in feminist, political, and theological issues. For this I owe her a debt of discipleship for she introduced me to feminist theology and ecofeminism. Now my debt is transformed also in friendship, mutual appreciation, and solidarity.
3.6 The Sources and Resources of Our Indigenous Theology

Dina Ludeña Cebrián

Latin America has been for some time a scene where voices are heard, people move freely to and fro, and colours like a rainbow are seen and appreciated by people near and far. Our Abya Yala are a wonderful people who have begun the process of deconstruction and construction of our own history, from its original inhabitants in some places. We are aware of the price paid, but hold the firm hope of continuing to build a society where our sons and daughters can live a life of happiness, prosperity and peace in the land that the God of life has given us to possess.

We are not triumphalist about what has been achieved up to now, but our martyred brothers and sisters deserve to be mentioned as signs of hope and optimism to encourage us to continue on this course without wavering or forgetting that it has only just begun. Similarly, we see clearly that the way ahead will not be simple or easy, because there persists in the colonial mentality the discredited idea that, when indigenous people stand up, raise their heads and become visible, they are a threat to the system and therefore must be suppressed, put down, so that they do not stand tall and become aware of who they are. Our history is full of such experiences, including recent events like the great massacre at Bagua in northern Peru in June 2009.1

That is the setting in which we have taken the resolve to express our theology. In this article, I shall examine our sources and reassess the resources available to us on this theological journey. By way of conclusion, I shall offer some pointers for the way ahead.

The Sources of Indigenous Theology

We consider that the root source of our theology is based on the actual presence, or revelation, of the God of life in our indigenous culture and history, which pre-date the introduction of Christianity. The subjects of this theology are the communities of indigenous people themselves. They are the bearers of a cry echoing through the centuries as they have sought life, leaning on and cooperating with the God of life. It is a search that is still incomplete, but is frequently taken up spontaneously, with honest hearts and with great hopes.

1. Massacre of indigenous communities in Bagua, reported in the newspapers La República, El Comercio, Correo, etc., 5 June 2009. DOI: 10.1111/j.1758-6623.2010.00076.x
These original peoples, our ancestors, were given the name of “indigenous peoples” by the conquistadores, and are now internationally recognized by this name. By so labeling them, the conquistadores were able to avoid the effort of regarding the peoples of Abya Yala as subjects of worth in their own right, with very different social, political and religious systems. Indians were thus ghost-like figures, invisible, characterless, marginalized, alcoholics, “the poorest of the poor”. In their writings and in their theologies, they treated us as minor, abstract figures, so insistently that even to the present day we practically believe them and undervalue our important and rich differences.

Indigenous theology is fully aware that it uses the pejorative adjectives “indigenous” or “Indian”, which have been in existence since 1492, not as proper names, but as a category, an indicator of our marginalized condition, evidence of what the rapacious conquest of our continent had been capable of, as López Hernández well describes it:

Being described as Indians, although insulting, places us among the other poor people in America and the world. We did not choose to be Indians, just as other exploited people did not choose to be that. It was the evil intent of some men that made us into Indians, made negroes into slaves, and all the poor into people who were exploited. Thus, as Indians, we have to fight for our liberation and for the liberation of all the poor of the earth. In that respect, Indian theology is part of Latin American theology, which is liberation theology. More than that, present-day Latin American theology is a continuation of the theology of resistance begun by our ancestors five hundred years ago.

The Struggles of Resistance

The sources of our theology also arise out of the context of concrete action to care for and defend life, the earth, forests and water: our people's whole life is able to become an experience of God, who is constantly creating and recreating. Out of that experience there also arise concrete actions portraying alternative visions of what humankind and the world could be. Such actions are a response in solidarity to common interests and take the form of alliances in favour of good life for all. The sources of our theology are thus to be found in the struggles for dignity and autonomy. It is resistance, not with the intention of defeating others, but in order to be and to exercise in practice the right to be different and autonomous. This struggle also includes gaining a place of dignity within the churches, with the recognition that to be Christian it is not necessary for us to renounce the basic features that make up our own identity.

We are, however, aware that this will be a long struggle, because there is as yet no clearly visible sign in the Protestant world of an ecumenism embracing indigenous spirituality and theology. Still, we are ready to continue with the task, although it does at times seem unachievable.

Living for the Day as Ideological Resistance

I describe this situation out of my experience as an indigenous woman and my experience of Andean and Amazonian communities.

The way in which indigenous peoples live for the day is one of the aspects most criticized by the capitalist system; many consider it to be the cause of our poverty. We live for the day without despairing or worrying about tomorrow. Many of our Andean and Amazonian communities maintain this practice of living for the day, sharing what has been obtained in the course of the day to feed themselves, without storing it for the future. That is a communal ideology. In the capitalist system, it is necessary to store food, and, above all, to accumulate wealth and money, because without them one's family does not have an assured future. That is an individualist ideology.

For centuries, indigenous communities have resisted the ideology of wealth accumulation and consumerism. Our indigenous brothers and sisters set out daily to find food: when they find it, they share it all with the whole community in joyful celebration. They know how to live each day as if it were their last, ensuring that none of their children go hungry. That is not having no vision of the future, nor is it indifference. Rather, it is supporting oneself and living by a different ideological system involving solidarity, detachment, responsibility and mutual dependence in the knowledge that how one acts and lives today has implications for tomorrow. We find a similar communal life-style in the system created by Yahweh in the desert.

The God of Israel, in the divine plan to organize the new communities in the Promised Land and in their desert wanderings, instructed the people in a new way or system for dealing with their goods. Exodus 16:1–30 tells of the manna in the desert and insists that it must not be kept for the following day. This narrative has a great significance.

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
among the people of Israel, accumulation of goods is forbidden. They must trust divine providence, which is historically worked out by egalitarian organization of the community’s life. Forbidding the accumulation of goods requires the people to have a different vision of tomorrow and to be aware of the present moment that is being lived, because it has implications for the future.

In this regard, we are also like the early Christian communities (Acts 2:44ff; 4:32ff and 5:1ff) where food was distributed according to people’s needs and no one held on to food while their neighbours went hungry. The apostles were the organizers of this new system, which was first planned and put into practice by Jesus (Mark 6:30–44) as one of the values of the kingdom of God. It later became a possibility, as we see in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11), who represented, as I see it, the system of accumulation, selfishness and falsehood. However, this alternative to the system of accumulation remained in the memory of Christianity as a “supernatural” demonstration of something ideal only to be achieved in another life and place. With our worldview as indigenous peoples, we place our vision of life alongside the biblical texts and find in them a meaningful confirmation of our economic and ideological beliefs. The indigenous living for the day takes on greater meaning today as a resource for our theological thinking, since it is an expression of our resistance and also provides for the possibility of change, of a life-style according to a different ideological system, in which life and the whole creation are being recreated.

Indigenous Wise Men and Women

Our wise men and women are also sources for our theology, because they are the guardians in their wisdom of the way we understand life, creation, time, etc. We do, however, acknowledge that these insights have in part been eroded and lost by the onslaught of the conquest, colonial society, prevailing modernity and the present-day neoliberalism, which does not take human values into account. However, the wisdom of our elders is still the point of reference required for reconstructing our present-day identity as indigenous peoples. Our ancestors in the past, as well as being experts with knowledge of the stars, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, meteorology and art, were experts in humankind and experience of the God of life. This wisdom, which does in part persist, has been refined by centuries of experience of life. Today, it continues to inspire the present journey of indigenous peoples, and can be shared with those who are not indigenous, because it is part of the spiritual richness of the whole of humankind.

This wisdom, partly lost to sight and eroded, continues to be maintained by our Yachaq Taitas, mamitas, Yatiris and po’nomesha eirotan. It is thanks to this wisdom that we are able today to describe and express what we call Indian or indigenous theology in its various forms: “. . . either in radical opposition to Christianity, or alongside it, or in syncretism with it. Something of that wisdom remains in us and we must accept it with delight. But we must also today seek out and reclaim the precious coins that that have been lost.”

In effect, our indigenous theological enterprise can be visualized as flowers of different colours, as a rainbow after early rainfall with the earth moist and ready to yield a crop and feed the multitudes who love life and hunger for it. However, we are deeply aware that it is not sufficient simply to produce a variety of indigenous theologies and to reach an understanding of God’s plan of life, which has also been revealed to our peoples. That is only the first step, a basic step, but the second decisive step must also be taken. I believe that we are now taking that step within the range of our possibilities. I refer here to the fact that we are organizing — that is, organizing this enterprise with hope and courage.

The Plan of Life, or Civilization from Pachamama, the Earth

Another source of our theology is mother earth herself, our beloved Pachamama or Pats. She is the mother of all life, having divine beauty and majesty. The vegetation is her skin, her clothing; the hills are her silhouette, her figure; and the flowing rivers are her veins. All parts of her serve as her arms, which caress us and protect us, because all living beings are her sons and daughters. Our relationship with


9. Elders or wise men and women in the Quechua, Aymara and Yanesha languages.


11. The Earth in the Yanesha language.
her is deeply spiritual. It is from her that we learn to love life, to love work, to respect all other living beings. From our birth we have a sense of her divinity, because, when we come out of our biological mother’s womb, Pachamama or Pats enfolds us in her bosom. From her we learn that we are all brothers and sisters, because we belong to her, come from her, the co-creator of life with God, and return to her – which demonstrates the greatness and the humbleness of humankind. We share life with the rocks, the plants, the birds and the animals, which exist in complementarity and not in solitude. Hence the importance of coming to know our causay or corramñats (life), to love it and respect it. The earth is the foundation for all that is human. It is sacred, it is our central point of reference, and all religious activities are concentrated on the earth. In our indigenous communities, the land is held in high regard, managed and shared out according to people’s needs, the number of children that they have, and so on. It is not inherited individually, passed on from owner to owner, but is redistributed and thus not regarded as private property.

This source and resource of our theological enterprise also enables us today to enter into dialogue with the text of the Bible, because the land is a common point of reference for both indigenous peoples and the Hebrew people. The land is vital for the Hebrews from their origin, constituting them as a people. In their search for their land, they undertook a dangerous journey. We well know that it is the land that confers life and identity on each human being and all peoples. To be on the earth and live at peace with it is the greatest blessing that God can bestow (Psalm 37:11). Being banished from the earth, being uprooted from one’s land, is the worst possible punishment. It results in a life without identity (Psalm 137:4). If we turn our attention to our situation, we have been living for over 500 years as aliens in our own land, with no identity, divided, surviving, as if we deserved to be punished for some offence we have committed. However, just as the blood of righteous Abel shed on the earth did not remain unpunished (Gen. 4:10), the blood of our ancestors shed yesterday and our own blood being shed today, in our reclaiming and seeking our life and identity, will not go unpunished, because our beloved Pachamama or Pats has never left unpunished in the bowels of the earth the shed blood of her innocent sons and daughters.

Today, what the author to Romans spoke of many centuries ago (Rom. 8:22) is becoming a reality. He spoke of the earth hurting, crying out and groaning – not only for the manifestation of the perfect human being, but also because the perfect human being is disappearing into the distance. What we see is tyrannous humans destructive of all that lives on earth. That is a text that recognizes Pachamama or Pats as a living being, capable of feeling pain and suffering. This text expresses this thought in language familiar to Pachamama’s sons and daughters. Our peoples have come to understand that life in its fullness is possible only when it is lived in harmony with the whole of creation.

When we read the Bible from our indigenous viewpoint, we see that its narratives also reflect the memories of the poor in their search for life and their giving concrete shape to that hope. The earth is in God’s plan from the beginning, in the promises made to Abraham and Sarah: “Go to the land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1) and “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). It is often repeated in the words “A land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). Those words are like a guiding star for the people of God. Also, for the prophets, the freedom of the earth continues to be one of the great objectives for the people of God. In the New Testament, the people of the land are given special attention: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). In the final pages of the Bible, the promises are again emphasized. The book of Revelation celebrates the coming of what is new: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). I unhesitatingly believe that the earth is one of the basic elements in the biblical hope. The earth is made for sowing and planting. To sow seed in the earth is, strictly speaking, not only our labour but collaboration, in order that the earth may provide us with food, as a mother does. Beings who breathe require food in order to live, and in the gospels they draw meaning and strength from being provided with bread. In the gospels, the earth and bread are the two great elements in the biblical hope.13 Perhaps in Christian language it is the plan of salvation. The earth is a meeting point for both traditions, the Hebrew/Jewish tradition and the indigenous tradition. In this context, mention should also be made of life: life lived in hope and freedom. For that reason, the Old Testament strongly condemns any form of oppression and is opposed to violence against women, as we see from the narrative concerning Hagar (Gen. 16:1–8, 21:1–21). The Old Testament also rejects the practice of forced labour, as evidenced in the freeing of the Hebrews (Ex. 1–15). The Old Testament defends life and celebrates it together with the trees that clap their hands and the mountains and hills that burst into song (Is. 55:12). All are like one great family. Here is another storehouse of meaning shared by both Hebrew culture and the indigenous worldview.


We should thus be able to state with confidence that life, bread and the earth are biblical hopes. These realities are historical, visible and tangible, and not up in the air or unachievable. And is that not our dream also?

If the biblical vision of hope and salvation has, from beginning to end, as its foundation the earth and bread as the concrete realization of the kingdom of God, this then is again a major point of convergence with indigenous peoples. In other words, the vision of life centred on the earth, a vision held by the original inhabitants before the conquest and the arrival of Christianity, had already been revealed by our gods, whether Apu Yaya, Wiraccocha, Qon Titi, Yompor, Pawa, or whatever they might be called: “Our experience of deprivation, exclusion and of cultures centred on the earth becomes the main source of our theological enterprise in the framework of the good life for all living beings and creatures.”

As indigenous sons and daughters of the earth from time immemorial, we have held to this vision of life for humankind, which is life in its fullness, in balance and harmony. I believe that in this respect, all indigenous peoples do not differ. This is the vision that we present to humankind and even to those Christians who have not understood the meaning of the kingdom of God as a vision of life but have tried to spiritualize it and treat it as an abstract reality.

Here is one of the sources for our theological enterprise: the vision of life, of humankind, of “civilization” – using if you wish to call it that the language of the colonizers – taking the earth as its foundation. In the vision you discern no line separating the divine and spiritual aspects from the human aspects. It begins with the indigenous people’s understanding of revelation and our experience of its appearance, and continues today in our full awareness of its meaning and importance and our being enabled to express it and propagate it.

Good Visions and Good Intentions Are Not Enough

When we take to the streets in demonstrations to claim respect for our rights as human beings, the politicians in power, time and time again, remind us that they do respect our rights, that there are international treaties, and so on. They all acknowledge that we have rights. However, in effect, the economy, the political structures and the system that they represent and manage is set up in a way that works against the rights of the poorest and the indigenous peoples, and restricts their access to bread, land, work and life. In such conditions it becomes complicated and difficult to give organizational form to the hope of the possibility of good life for all. But we know that organizing entails conflict, and that is certainly a serious situation involving confrontation and loss of life. Our fresh, bleeding wounds testify to that fact.

I believe that at this juncture we must hold on to our common values and sources. As Indians and indigenous peoples, fully brothers and sisters, we should engage in dialogue and produce strategies to move forward and to strengthen what has already been achieved, perhaps breaking away from familiar forms of struggle.

That is why, in this rethinking of strategies of resistance and producing alternative plans, we should not ignore scientific and technological advances but rather use them as tools that enable us to present our proposals in a wider and more inclusive setting. On this journey, as we weave our theology, we can ask ourselves some questions by way of markers or pointers.

Should we raise the banner of hope – which is the language of conflict, a category of which the system is ignorant – as a dynamic vision for change? Would it be valid to examine the vision of the apostle John in the book of Revelation on the ideological use of symbolic language in order to defeat the beast? Should we examine again the vision of the earth in Genesis? Should we take a fresh look at manna and the principle of non-accumulation in Exodus? Can we take on living for the day as an act of ideological resistance and so keep alive our vision of communal life and harmony with creation? Are we ready to place on the global agenda our ancestral insights, setting them alongside scientific and technological insights, on the principle of the need for a multi-disciplinary approach?

In short, many are the questions that assail us, great is the hope and faith that fills us, enabling us to continue deconstructing and reconstructing, until our dream that another world is possible becomes a reality.

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15. Ecclesiastical visions, op. cit.
16. In my reading of theological writings either by indigenous persons or indigenist professionals in our continent, I find in them many discrepancies as to who are truly indigenous. Whether the indigenous person is one who has not converted to Christianity, i.e. indigenous-indigenous, or one who has also accepted Christianity, i.e. indigenous-Christian, I consider that the discussion is limited to the way in which they view the situation, but the contents, the background and the essence of our presentation of a vision of life constrains all equally and puts us all on the same course.
A Song to Life

The melody of the original peoples has not been totally silenced. For many years their song was heard by the mountains, the valleys, the flowers, the birds, the rivers, the rocks and the fertile earth.

They were the silent witnesses of this message, sent out by our ancestors as they clung to life. Today we are reclaiming our speech. Our voices are crying out, “Here we are! We are still alive! We have survived the onslaught of our tormentors”.

We are crying out for humankind to be humanized, for we are all included in the song of life. Brothers and sisters, the legacy of the original peoples points us to a better way, the way of living together, of sharing, of detachment, of being responsible for caring holistically for this our dwelling place given us by the God of life. God has given us the divine gift of life, and so life must prevail over death.

The God of life continues to proclaim life, life in abundance, and God is its defender.

What is our message? Shall we keep on giving grand speeches? Shall we continue to write about our pain and our hopes?

I believe that now is the time to sing out a melody that proclaims life. Let the joy and enthusiasm of a new community arise! Let the spirit of conviviality and community be strengthened! It recreates the vision of life and health of humankind in balance in the great home that contains all other forms of life. In the silence of resistance, we await the conversion of humankind and religions to join together in the struggle to build the life in which we shall all be more human.

— Marco Antonio Quispe Rojas

17. Translated from the Spanish, Language Service, World Council of Churches
Chapter 4

African Theologies and the Realities of Mission Practice

Introduction: The Mission of the Church and Struggling for the Unity of Humanity

Esther Mombo

GETI 2018 is taking place in Tanzania, one of the countries in the continent of Africa—a continent that has gone through pain and trauma from the slave trade, colonialism, Christianization, structural adjustment programmes, the HIV pandemic, the Ebola epidemic, wars, and large-scale immigration, to name just a few. It is a continent that has been troubled but not destroyed (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

The theme of GETI 2018, “translating the word, transforming the world,” assumes several things. First, at the level of language, both translation and transformation have connotations of action, process, and change from one thing or state to another. Second, theologically the theme is an affirmation of incarnation and liberation, both rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that is, the “word made flesh” (John 1:1-14) and the “spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:17-19). Third, translation and transformation dictate to us a spirit of change and a hope to find a new social order different from the one we are in. This new social order is based on God’s mission through Christ that all may share in the joy and fullness of life (John 10:10).

But how will this social order be realized in a world that is broken and in humanity that refuses to live with difference? In this short essay, I wish to offer some reflections on the challenges and how the WCC’s Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace framework enhances the theme of GETI 2018 in general. Jenny Tepaa has described our world in the following poignant passage:

It is not a brave new world but an increasingly cowardly old world where greed trumps egalitarianism, where charity is contingent upon its tax advantages, where violence, public and private is endemic, where morality, let alone human decency appears now as untranslatable into the discourses and behaviours of the public square, where the milk of human kindness is daily soured by the unbidden human additives of prejudice and bigotry, of race and/or religious hatred.¹

Jenny Tepaa’s description brings to light issues of wealth and poverty, violence, exclusion, marginalization, and a refusal to embrace difference. These are reflected in different ways in the world today and experienced contextually. She points to the root causes. The theme of the CMWE conference and the location the conference is taking place provide the context for understanding and sharing these issues further.

The Challenge of Poverty

The ministry of Jesus began with his declaration of freedom from prison, disease and poverty. Poverty in our world is a root cause of many problems, be they social, spiritual or moral. Poverty has both internal and external international dynamics, and it is difficult to distinguish clearly between the problems, symptoms and causes. Poverty is manifest in different ways, including hunger, low income, disease, dehumanization, and injustice.

¹ Jenny Tepaa, chair of the Ecumenical Theological Education Working Group (ETE) for the WCC, 2000 to 2006, convocation address, May 2014.
Poverty has economic, social-cultural, and political dimensions. It has different causes and faces, depending on whether the poor live in the minority or the majority world, whether they live within extended family structures, in nuclear families or alone. Those who experience poverty can be divided into two categories—the marginalized and exploited. The marginalized are those who are outside the prevailing economic system, such as the unemployed, the homeless, migrants, abandoned children, outcasts, the handicapped, and the aged. The exploited are those who are treated unjustly by the social economic system.

The question or challenge for Christians with regard to holistic mission is how to eradicate poverty, so that people can live life in abundance. Central to the mission of the church is the moral and advocacy dimension, so that the Christian community not only become the conscience of society but also becomes a testimony and witness to the values and ethics of the kingdom of God. Justice, for instance, is at the centre of poverty eradication.

Lack of Ethical Leadership

The issues around leadership, both in the church and society, are perennial and have been named as a challenge to the growth and development of the church and society. There is a lack of ethical leadership that “allows democratic space for creativity and energy among citizens to flourish.” The leaders are those who have received education, skills and experiences to empower others. While leadership is important for the liberation of a people, and there are a few examples of good leadership, it appears that the mechanisms for choosing leaders have loopholes, which favor the election of unworthy leaders. Factors like ethnicity, nepotism, race, gender, class affect the choice of leaders in both the religious and political spheres. This is happening at a time when there are many opportunities for training for eldership at all levels of society. There seems to be a disconnect between the training of leaders and the realities in which they operate, both in the church and society. Poor and unethical leadership is source of many conflicts that have rendered many homeless and living in abject poverty

Mission in and for a Youthful People and World

According to statistics, the largest population in the world is youth, and many of them reside in the majority world. In the sub-Saharan continent almost 45 percent of the population is 15 years or under, meaning that more than half of the population is children of 18 or under years. The youth population is both a blessing and a challenge. In what ways do they figure in the mission of the church as it is carried out today? How do theological training incorporate and address the issues of the young? It is assumed that with this new wave of music, the youths will be retained in the church. In many parts of the world, the youth are facing numerous challenges of social stress, crime, radicalization, drugs, ethnic and racial tensions, political violence, high rates of unemployment and scarcity of resources. These young, energetic, and vibrant people are tired of waiting for a chance to pursue their destinies. Many young people are cut off from family, community and spiritual roots, even as they are absorbed in a search for values and opportunities which are not available.

The young people are also vulnerable to the whims of political and religious leaders who take advantage of their youthfulness and use them in conflict. Young people are vulnerable to the ills in society, and they are the most affected by disease, such as HIV/AIDS. Research on HIV infections reveals that “while major advances have been made in almost every area of the response to HIV, progress for adolescents is falling behind… AIDS has become the leading cause of death for adolescents in Africa.” The reasons for this are many, including the teaching

by the churches on sex and sexualities that is divorced from the realities of the youth. It was Franklin D. Roosevelt who said that “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.” The challenge of how to build the youth for the future is real for our church, and there is need to start listening and learning the language of the youth in order to equip and mentor them for the future.

Exclusion, Marginalization, and Sexual Violence against Women

With the ordination of women to ministry in the church and more women taking up public roles of leadership, it is has been assumed that issues of exclusion, marginalization and violence against women are a matter of the past. But reading any newspaper today reveals that the horrors of abuse and violence of women and their stories of pain and trauma are many. This is irrespective of who or where they are; in the centre or in the margins, they experience abuse. Denial of their full humanity, violation on all fronts of their lives, is a reality of women at all levels. Women continue to bear the brunt of disease, including HIV and AIDS and others. Women remain in the pews but are engaged in mission and ministries of care for the young, the aged, the disabled, the migrants and others. These groups provide support for those affected and infected by the HIV virus, and have borne the brunt of all health challenges. Reframing religion and theology is crucial, and groups such as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and other feminist theologies have been key in bringing to light the plight of women and demanding justice for all. Women’s theologies have discussed themes such as the Bible, culture, sexual and gender-based violence, health and healing, and dialogue and diapraxis on interfaith matters.

Translating and Transforming

The history of theology shows that, from the earliest times, the Christian tradition and its theologians have been translating and interpreting the gospel to the people in their context. Models and projects such as indigenization, inculturation, adaptation, contextualization, and in modern times communal or circle theology are all ways through which different individuals and communities endeavour to make the gospel relevant to their context. Making the gospel relevant calls for challenging and upsetting norms and values that render some voiceless. I observed that the theme of GETI 2018 “translating the word, transforming the world” is action-oriented, and I have shown the areas that are a challenge to the mission of the church. I wish to conclude by linking that action to the WCC’s framework, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, to challenge ourselves in the ministry. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace embodies a journey towards a goal. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is a journey not about wealth, power, and might, but a relationship with the other. A way to listen to and learn from the story of the other is important for solidarity, as in the proverb, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” The Pilgrimage is a framework for solidarity in ministry. The words of Cardinal Mercer voices that call for journeying together when he says:

In order to unite with one another
we must love one another

in order to love one another
we must know one another

in order to know one another
we must go and meet one another.

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Peace be with you. I greet you all as companions on the way – followers of Jesus, the crucified and risen one.

When I was first asked to preach this homily to you today – I felt deeply honoured – but that feeling soon gave way to fear, if not terror – how could I possibly have something worthwhile to say at the end of this great Assembly? Would God give me the words to say – words of Life – words that would indeed lead us towards Justice and Peace? Often, God’s Holy Spirit is the one who disturbs us when we are comfortable and comforts us when we are disturbed. Can I, too, disturb and comfort you in God’s name? After my fear subsided a little, I decided that I would do what I have done before, which was to write to all my friends – people of all faiths and no faith – including my Facebook friends, asking them to share with me their reflections on this passage from their own contexts across the world. God is not limited in the way wisdom is delivered to the human family. For example I regularly read my NRSV Bible downloaded free on my Samsung phone.

How has been your experience of this Assembly? We all came with our own expectations. How was your spiritual state as you arrived – what has happened to you in these days and how are you now? Was it a roller coaster or rather steady? Which stories have imprinted on your souls and pierced your heart? What made you angry? What will you never forget about the 10th Assembly? I pray that all of us will leave here inspired by God’s Holy Spirit to be Christ’s co-workers in the struggle for justice and peace.

How are things in your life, your family, your local church, your denomination, your society, your country? What is your gender? Do you come from a place of conflict? Do you see yourself as a member of a majority or a minority, tribally, racially, linguistically, sexually? Are Christians a minority or a majority in your land? Do you see yourself and your people as bystanders, victims or victimizers or would we dare to admit we could be all three at the same time, even if in very different measure?

We all come to Scripture from the context of our own lives, as well as the way we have heard passages of scripture interpreted in Bible studies and from preachers and, most importantly, from how the living God has spoken to us at different stages of our own lives. We began this Assembly with the account of the resurrection just before this passage from Luke. It was the first time in my life I heard the gospel sung in Aramaic – as the scholars tell us – the language that Jesus spoke. That passage set the tone for our journey during these days.

Now we continue looking at today’s passage: Luke 24: verses 36–49. One of the first things that struck me is how much emotion permeates the passage. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, they didn’t recognize him. They were blinded by their overwhelming grief. Any of us who have lost those we love dearly, know what it means to be overcome, even consumed by grief. Some never manage to pick up their lives again. I know for myself that losing a limb is like losing a loved one. Having lost both my hands, not to mention one eye, has meant that grief is a permanent dimension of my own life. On a lighter note, some of my friends told me I was always one-eyed.

Verse 37 says that the next time when Jesus appeared they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Interestingly, two of them had already seen the Risen Christ but it had not taken away their doubt. “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering . . .”

On our life journey, ambivalence, doubt and contradictions are not unusual experiences and exist within the journey of faith. Lord, I believe, help me my unbelief. Years ago, a friend said to me, “I can see contradictions in what you say!” “So?” I responded. Even as we grow in faith and confidence in God it is normal to have times of doubt and uncertainty. Personally, I worry about those who are totally certain about everything. . . . There seems to be little space for the Holy Spirit of God who leads us into all truth.

“Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Jesus points to his wounds as evidence of both who he is, but also of the resurrection. In this passage we see the body, mind and spirit coming together: “Touch me and see”– touch – something which I appreciate keenly in its absence. A number of the resurrection passages bear witness to the reality that the risen Christ was also the crucified Christ. But the wounds were no longer bleeding; they had healed. Jesus reminds his disciples of what he had told him before his death that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then enter into his glory.

Jesus identifies himself and his destiny with all that is written in the Hebrew Scriptures. Suddenly we are in a Bible Study with Jesus as the teacher. “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”

What about the broiled fish? I am not sure. But I am reminded of the words of a former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, that Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions. Our faith journey is not a spiritualized journey – which denies our physicality – nor are we called to escape from or deny the reality of creation.

1. Father Michael Lapsley is the Director, Institute for Healing of Memories, Cape Town, South Africa.
and our part in it. Rather, the spiritual infuses the physical and becomes way of viewing the whole.

Please allow me to bear witness to my own journey of crucifixion, death and resurrection – a journey we are all invited to participate in through and since our baptism. I appreciate that some of you will already know my story. I was born in New Zealand in a Christian family and brought up to follow Jesus for as long as I can remember. I was what some people in the United States call a cradle Anglican. That discipleship took me to the Priesthood of the Anglican Church and into the Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM), an Anglican religious order. SSM sent me to South Africa in 1973. It was there that I felt I had stopped being a human being and became a white man.

After being expelled from South Africa in 1976, I joined Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress and played a chaplaincy role in Lesotho and Zimbabwe. Living with a people in exile brought alive the exilic material in the Bible. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.”

Some of us will be forever grateful for the prophetic role of the World Council of Churches in setting up the Programme to Combat Racism and the Special Fund under the inspirational leadership of Drs Eugene Carson Blake and Philip Potter. No one should underestimate how much hope and encouragement that gave to all those in the front line of the fight against racism regardless of their faith journey. Indeed, God was on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

Allow me to fast forward to the events of 1990. Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years. In April of the same year, the apartheid state sent me a letter bomb hidden inside the pages of two religious magazines. As you can all see, I lost both of my hands, an eye and had damaged ear drums and . . . and . . . In the midst of great pain, I felt that God was with me. God had not stepped in and said it is a bomb, don’t open it. I opened it. To me the great promise of scripture had been kept – “Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age”. I felt that Mary who watched her son being crucified understood what it was that I was going through.

Excellent medical staff in Zimbabwe and Australia helped to heal my body – but it was the prayers and love of the ecumenical movement, together with those of many faiths, not to mention the atheists and agnostics who helped to heal my soul.

Today I stand before you all to say, Thank you: Your prayers, your love were the vehicle God used to help me make my bombing redemptive – to bring life out of death – good out of evil – to travel a journey from being a victim to being a survivor to being a victor.

Just as a rich cross section of the human family walked beside me on my journey of healing, so today I choose to walk beside others on their journey of healing – through the Institute for healing of memories. When I was in hospital coming to terms with the permanent character of my disability I remembered once seeing an icon which showed Christ with one leg shorter than the other. The icon picked up the Isaiah 52 and 53 passages that the Messiah was marred beyond human semblance – disfigured . . . that none would desire him.

Many of us with dramatic physical disabilities have had our own experiences of people looking at us with a mixture of horror and pity and then turning away. In reality those of us with the most visible disabilities – physical and mental – are icons for the whole human family. We illustrate dramatically what is true for all of us – that “messed-up-ness”, brokenness, imperfection and incompleteness is the human story – just as many of us cannot survive or manage without the compassion and helpfulness of other human beings, so it is true for all of us – that we need one another to be fully human.

When the disciples were on the road to Emmaus and Jesus appeared, the first thing he did was to listen to them, to their pain, grief, confusion and sadness before he began to help them make sense of their experience. Perhaps all of us, but especially we who are clergy, need to preach less and listen more. As the cliché goes, it is not accidental that God gave us two ears and one mouth. I have discovered as I am sure that many of you have, that pain is transcendent and that it can connect us to one another. Especially when we listen to one another.

Our opening worship began with words of lament from every continent – bearing witness to and downtrodden of every land. In the Pre-assemblies and in the ecumenical conversation and in the plenary sessions, as well as at the Madang we opened our hearts to hear each other’s pain – pain that imprinted on our souls – many bravely became vulnerable. We were also inspired by stories of courage, faith and compassion, not least by those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence – especially against women and children but we also heard about rape as a war crime, particularly of women but also of men.

In our context in South Africa when a black mother sits with a white mother and says that her child never returned from fighting apartheid, the white mother may reply, my child did return but is still damaged by what they experienced. Suddenly they are both mothers united by the pain they carry.

How many of us have been moved by the images of North and South Koreans meeting each other in the
demilitarized zone after decades of separation – the pain is palpable as well as the joy.

In response to my appeal for help with this sermon, a Jewish friend who lives in Israel wrote about the intergenerational pain that many Jewish people still feel which includes our failure as a Christian family to acknowledge our part in their suffering. As an Institute for Healing of Memories, we belong to an International Network for Peace which includes the Parents Circle – Palestinian and Jewish mothers united in the pain of having their children killed.

Often when we are able to listen to each other’s pain we can become committed to work together for an inclusive justice. Also when we listen to one another’s pain the division between “us” and “them” disappears and we all become just “us”. Our experience of a common humanity is profoundly deeper than all that divides us or makes us unique and different.

My friend Jane Alexander, the Anglican Bishop of Edmonton, put it this way. “I was just reflecting on a recent experience I had at a hearing for the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) here in Canada. I think what resonated with me as I read the reading was the reminder that for true peace and reconciliation even to have a chance you have to be physically present one with another. We had an opportunity to be in a church reflection circle with former residents and family members from the residential schools. In being close enough to one another to hear a breath, to share tears and to make space in the circle for the Spirit to come there is a sense of creating sacred space. It seems to me that Jesus comes to the ordinary place of the disciple’s lives and makes it holy, by his presence and by his words”.

Early in this Assembly, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, reminded us of the deep intergenerational pain caused both by the Armenian genocide and the failure of those responsible to fully acknowledge it. Your Holiness and All Armenians – may I today say from this place, we have heard what you said – your people did indeed suffer a great wrong. May the Great healer accompany you so those wounds may truly heal to enable all Armenians to also help others on their own journeys of healing.

I pray that the new central committee will recognize programmatically that healing of memories is something whose time has come in the human family.

Thank you, Your Holiness, for reminding us “to regard our fellow human beings, without exception, in the full dignity and holiness of their personhood.” In the last few years many of our faith communities, not least my own, have torn ourselves apart over issues of sexuality and in particular in relation to same gender loving persons, not to mention the gamut of other sexual minorities. Some would say this is a sideshow in the face of war and poverty. That is true if we focus on sex and blind ourselves to the elephants in the room. But if this is a matter that affects, according to the most conservative estimates, a minimum of 1% if not 4 or 5% of people living on the planet, can it really be a side show? Today I want to say as a Christian, as a priest, to all the LGBTI community, I am deeply sorry for our part as religious people, in the pain you have experienced across the ages. I have a dream that in my lifetime, I will hear all the leaders of all our great faith traditions making the same apology.

Some would say that it all comes down to the interpretation of God’s word. For me the question is: Do we believe that Revelation ended with the closing of the canon of Scripture or does the Holy Spirit of God continue to lead us into all truth?

Whilst we have been here in Busan it was decided in Germany that children could for the first time be registered as male, female OR the space could be left blank – an historic step towards relieving and acknowledging the pain for those who are born intersexed or find themselves to be transgendered. We know as St Paul taught us that in Christ there is neither male nor female.

In the 1970s, the cutting edge of the prophetic witness of the ecumenical movement was the Programme to Combat Racism which was not without controversy. Where is the cutting edge of the ecumenical movement going forward – however controversial it may be?

While there have been very significant victories, we all need to be seized with the on-going battle against racism, and the struggle for gender inequality and the end of gender-based violence and the violence against children. There can never be peace in the world whilst inequality increases within countries and between countries. Greed is killing us.

But what are the elephants in the room? We have come here to Asia to the continent where the great religious traditions of the East have much to teach us about the importance of the internal spiritual journey. Even as we celebrate our own spiritual treasures.

It should shame all religious people everywhere on the planet that a significant number, some would say a growing number, of conflicts in the world have a religious dimension. If we want the human family to live together in peace there is a great urgency for what some of my Latin American friends call “macro–ecumenism” that brings together not just Christians but all the world’s great faiths with a respect too for indigenous world views. Let our witness be through the depth of our compassion, our willingness to listen and learn, not simply to tolerate but to reverence and
respect. As John told us Jesus said: I have other sheep that are not of this fold.

Our leaders in the faith invited us here to the Korean peninsula where we have been showered by the kindness and moved by the faith of our Korean sisters and brothers. But we cannot be blind to the reality that the Korean peninsula is a giant armed camp with both sides possessing colossal weaponry. My dream is that this peninsula may become a zone of peace renowned by its commitment to negotiations and the healing of old wounds. I believe that the cutting edge of our prophetic witness must include lobbying against the arms trade. What a terrible irony that the five countries who are the largest suppliers of arms are the five permanent members of the security council, together with Germany, and the main recipients are developing countries. As Christians we are called to be unequivocal that armed conflict as a way of solving international disputes is incompatible with the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The crucified and risen one invites us to look at and touch one another’s wounds – to listen and to hear the pain of each other and so become one. But it is not just the human family that is riddled with pain – it is Mother earth herself that is crying out more and more desperately. How many more natural disasters have to happen before we realize that the future of human life on this planet is in jeopardy? Surely something which so many indigenous cultures always understood has to go, as fast as possible, to the top of the agenda for all of us on planet earth.

My dear Sisters and Brothers, I often ask myself: “Why did you survive a bomb that was supposed to kill you?” So many others deserved to live but did not. I think it was important that some of us survived to bear witness to what war and hatred does to the bodies and souls of people. Much more importantly, I hope that in my own tiny way, I can be a sign that stronger than evil and hatred and death are the forces of justice, kindness, gentleness and compassion – of peace – of life – of God.

And so as Benedictine Sr. Ruth Fox, OSB (1985) said:

May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really CAN make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God’s grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

God of Life, lead us to justice and peace. AMEN

4.2 “Get Up . . . Take the Child . . . and Escape to Egypt”: Transforming Christianity into a Non-Western Religion in Africa

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

This article examines some of the changes that have taken place within world Christianity in the last century, particularly in Africa, and as reflected in various articles of the International Review of Mission (IRM) over the past 100 years. These changes include a shift in the demographic centre of Christianity from the North to the South, and the rise and development of Pentecostalism. This relates to Africans becoming disenchanted with aspects of mission Christianity that were unable to work with indigenous enchanted worldviews.

In Africa, pneumatic forms of Christian expression like Pentecostalism and the various African Independent/Initiated Churches (AICs) have been enjoying considerable appeal, with their emphases on the reality of supernatural evil and the power of the Holy Spirit. This has been evident not only in the rise of independent churches outside the control of mission societies but also the formation of African immigrant churches in former heartlands of Christianity in the West.

For African Christianity, the past century has been one of religious innovations. Mission endeavours that translated the Bible into various vernacular languages helped to facilitate the process of the expansion, leading to what some have called “Africa’s Christian century.” These developments, it is important to say, did not escape the editors and contributors to the IRM. For interpreting Christianity in Africa from the viewpoint of mission, the IRM remains unparalleled. The journal used a combination of African and non-African voices in the discussion. Additionally, IRM has given space for both academics and practitioners in interpreting Christianity and mission in Africa. There have been articles on the encounter between Western mission Christianity and African culture, African initiated Christianity, translations of the Bible and its import for
Christian mission, and more recently, important articles on Pentecostalism (1986) and on African immigrant Christianity in the West (2000).

Africa in World Christianity Today

The articles that have appeared in IRM over the last century are best appreciated with the context of developments in world Christianity. In his book, *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins makes it clear that we are currently living through one of the most transforming moments of religion worldwide: “Whatever Europeans or North Americans may believe, Christianity is doing very well indeed in the global south – not just surviving but expanding. . . . The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning.”

The recession of Christianity in the global North, as Jenkins notes here, has coincided with its accession in the global South, with Africa emerging as one of its major heartlands. This 20th-century development defied the fears of Edinburgh 1910 that Africa was going to turn Islamic by the end of that century. That the continent emerged instead as a major Christian stronghold makes it important, as Kwame Bediako argues, that “one should seek to understand what this might mean for Africa and the world.” To this end Bediako very aptly titled one of his works, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion.* He did with the understanding that the prospects for Christian expansion and innovation in Africa were going to continue on a high note through the 21st century. In his book he goes on to identify some of the challenges a postmissionary Christian Africa may need to face, as “an important flag-bearer of Christianity in the new century.”

At the dawn of the 21st century, we could say that although Africa remains a religiously pluralistic continent, indeed, it has emerged as a major Christian heartland. This is at a time when the faith is clearly under siege, and in some cases, even being deliberately hounded out of public life in parts of the West. The decline of Christian presence in the former heartlands of the faith is a process that has been underway since the era of the Enlightenment, when rationality and science emerged as dominant, leading to a deliberate courting of secularism and the creation of a morally permissive society.

The process of secularization does not necessarily mean that religion ceased to matter for everybody. Western democracies and the liberalization of public and social institutions led to expanded meanings of human rights. There were calls for the separation of church and state, the promotion of alternative sexual lifestyles. Now it is impossible to talk about the life of the church in the West without theological debates on same-sex relationships. These developments, coupled with the pressure on the church to tolerate human activities that they previously considered to be at variance with evangelical Christian values, means Christianity is now a private matter and the church has lost its prophetic voice in public affairs. In the process of secularization, Christianity which was the bedrock of Western values and development has been put under siege. The rise in the numbers of alternative religions and religious values and the dwindling of the prophetic voice of the church in the state made it difficult for the church to function within what has become a very hostile environment for most missionary religions, and Christianity in particular.

Africa’s place as “an important flag-bearer of Christianity,” as Bediako describes it, therefore, brings to mind the historical biblical development in which the life of Jesus, due to Herod’s threats, had to be preserved in Egypt. Herod’s attitude and that of parts of the world today mirror the following verdict from John’s gospel:

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave them the right to become children of God. (John 1:10–12)

From this passage it would seem that the God of mission who revealed himself in Christ gravitates towards those who are open to his presence, a presence that is experienced in the activities of the Holy Spirit. The denunciation of Christianity in the secularizing West has brought the world to a point where the faith has ceased to be coterminous with the religious persuasion of these countries. By no means is secularization limited to the West, but developments there are important because the history of Christianity in the non-Western world is interwoven with that of 19th-century missionary enterprise. What is happening within the worldwide Anglican Communion, for example, is only symptomatic of current developments in world Christianity. Not only has the strength of that Communion shifted to the non-Western world, but the gap

4. Ibid., p. ix.
The Development of Christianity as an African Religion

The transformation process of Christianity from a Western to a non-Western religion has been gradual but certain. By confining the kingdom of God within what is conscious and rational, as John V. Taylor points out in *The Primal Vision*, this left untouched “the great deep of the subliminal, and unredeemed the glories of the elemental energies of man.” Enlightenment Christianity left out what is incalculable out of the faith and played down the supernatural, leaving non-Westerners with a religion that was too cerebral to touch people at deeper levels of spirituality. During the 20th century, African Christians had to take their spiritual destiny into their own hands; historic mission Christianity came under indigenous leadership. Vernacular translations of the Bible enabled people to understand and spread the message in local idioms. Lamin Sanneh notes how the process of translating scripture bypassed Europe’s Enlightenment prerequisites and connected with what he refers to as “the preindustrial sensibilities of hinterland populations . . . thereby allowing the Bible to speak with authority in its own original voice.”

During this time African initiated churches, including new forms of Pentecostalism, have burgeoned quickly, leading to a situation where it has become impossible to talk about Africa without Christianity or Christianity without Africa. *The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, the subtitle of Kwame Bediako’s book, was inspired by an article written for the *IRM* in 1970 by David B. Barrett. Barrett argued that, given its phenomenal growth, “African Christians might well tip the balance and transform Christianity permanently into a primarily non-Western religion.” During the 20th century, he surmised, the goal of world evangelization that Western churches had long espoused, receded from their grasp. In attempting to come to terms with this situation he notes how some Western theologians were developing a theology of secularization in which evangelism and conversion assumed lesser roles than they had previously. It is against this backdrop of the decline of Christianity in the West that I argue, albeit euphemistically, that the faith may have taken “refuge” in Africa because it is under siege in its former heartlands.

Many Africans have recently returned from visits to the West, Europe in particular, traumatized by the sight of cathedrals that have metamorphosed into restaurants and pubs. This decline of Christian presence in the modern West is one that, according to Sanneh, carries at its heart a moral relativism that discounts Christianity’s transcendent claims and resists that or any religion as a valid source of truth.

In addition to the above, the experiential dimension around which religion revolves is very important in primal thought or what Sanneh referred to as “preindustrial sensibilities.” The neglect of the experiential dimension of Christianity was therefore problematic for many African believers. Already in the early 1960s, Kofi A. Busia, the Ghanaian sociologist, Methodist lay preacher and later prime minister, had written for the *IRM* expressing grave disquiet with the manner in which Europe – the main geographical source of mission work in Africa – was consciously edging God out of public life:

> There is an even more serious problem that arises. It concerns the attitude of Europe to Christianity today. It is being seriously asserted that through the advances in science and technology, man has learnt to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis; that everything gets along without God, and that in scientific as well as human affairs generally, God has been edged out of life.

This observation, coming almost a decade prior to Barrett’s, was an indication of how the *IRM* served as the source of much knowledge on developments within world Christianity. Africa’s place within those developments has received good attention. In his article, Busia also spoke about how the dismissive European approach to the existence of God had affected theologies crafted in those contexts:

> Consequently, some eminent theologians are not only advocating a re-interpretation of Christianity to make intelligible to modern man, but also, it would appear from some of their writings, maintaining that the Christian image of God must be limited to the depths of human experience of modern self-sufficient man.

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8. Ibid., p. 52.
As if the Gospel was ever intended for those who felt themselves to be self-sufficient.11

These and other such factors contributed immensely to the decline of Christianity among Westerners. Today, in Europe and North America, African Christianity represented by immigrant churches contributes significantly to keeping the faith alive in people. This confirms John Mbiti’s observation that the centres of the church’s universality are no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London, and New York, but rather in, Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila.12 Much of the modern West seems to have opted for the privatization of faith, demystification of the supernatural and secularization in the process of development and the organization of public life. This means the moral imperatives of Christianity and the right to make moral judgments, for example, are now subordinated “to liberal concepts of personal rights.”13

Thus Africa, a continent that was minimally Christian by profession when the missionary movement began has moved virtually to a position where it may have more professing Christians than any other continent.14 That Africa has emerged from the margins to become a significant factor in world Christianity is the motivation for the title of this essay. If we take Egypt to be representative of Africa and African hospitality at the time of the birth of Jesus, then it might well be that God the Holy Spirit is preserving the faith by using the continent as a site for its preservation and re-launch. This was very much the thinking of Taylor, himself once a missionary to East Africa, when he observed the religious innovation championed by the AICs. Impressed with their innovation, spiritual dynamism and fervour he noted:

In Africa today it seems the incalculable Spirit has chosen to use the Independent Church Movement for another spectacular advance. This does not prove that their teaching is necessarily true but it shows they have the raw materials out of which a missionary church is made – spontaneity, total commitment, and the primitive responses that arise from the depths of life.15

In Pauline thought, the God of mission is said to call into being things that are not as if they were; God uses what is foolish and despised in the world to shame the wise. In choosing Africa, God seems to have been acting true to character by choosing “what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; . . . what is weak in the world to shame the strong; . . . what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:27–29). This does not mean that African Christians have gotten everything exactly right and that Christianity has so receded from the West that the faith there has ceased to matter. Nevertheless, the growth and dynamism of Christianity in Africa and among Africans in the diasporas seems to have given the faith some new lease on life that may ensure its survival as a world religion. The ultimate examples of this are signalled theologically by the incarnation and the cross. In the incarnation, the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt with humanity revealing his glory in the midst of weakness and failure (John 1:14). Also, the message of the cross of Christ, as Paul puts it, “is foolishness to those who are perishing” but “the power of God” for salvation (1 Cor. 1:18).

Africa and the Transformation of Christianity

The Eurocentric approach to world history missed developments such as Africa’s enhanced place in the modern transformation of Christianity in the world,16 as indicated in the title of the important book, African Christianity: It’s an African Story.17 For over five centuries the story of Christianity had been inextricably bound up with Western civilizations.

From the early decades of the 19th century, Western missionary enterprise in Africa culminated in the formation of historic mission churches. These missions prioritized formal education and provided health care and other social services as tools of evangelization.18 Pastoral ministries, theological education, religious services, liturgical orders, clerical accoutrements and the architectural designs of chapel buildings with high spires and stained-glass windows perpetuated models inherited from Western European Christendom traditions of the Victorian era. Missionaries had a double identity as representatives of Christ and also

11. Ibid.
as representatives of Westerners “shaped by Western history and conditions and values, and Western social networks and intellectual discourse.”

Vestiges of the European Christian heritage, still remain to some extent in Africa’s historical mission denominations, but African Christianity, with particular modes of religious expression and faith has changed seismically. In 1955, E.A. Asamoa wrote an IRM article entitled, “The Christian Church and African Heritage.” It appeared at a time when the church in Africa was still searching for relevance, more than a century after missionary work began. It had been struggling to make Christianity relevant within a culture, unlike European Enlightenment societies, in which supernatural realities remained real, active and significant. The clash of religious cultures generated a number of important responses among Christians in Africa.

The first response came towards the end of the 19th century when nationalist or “Ethiopianist” churches emerged under indigenous leadership. David Vincent Brown of the Niger Delta was representative of this development. He formed the Native Baptist Church. To give practical expression to the African repudiation of Christianity as a Western religion, in the late 1880s, he changed his name to Mojola Agbebi. Subsequently, several nationalist churches appeared across Africa. Although they did not become a mass movement, they were important indicators of the desire to express the Christian faith in ways that remained loyal both to the Bible and to indigenous religious sensibilities. The quest of these Christian nationalists was for an Africanization of the church that challenged white monopoly over ecclesial administrative structures and “countered the denigration of indigenous cultures with a nationalist anti-structure.”

Later (in the 1960s) this challenge led African academic theologians to begin to write theology that could authentically engage African concerns. These included John S. Mbeki, E. Bolaji Idowu, Kwesi A. Dickson, Jean Marc Ela, and Vincent Mulago. Mercy A. Oduyoye of Ghana later formed the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, who together reflected on religion in Africa from women’s perspectives.

The second response to mission Christianity came through the formation of the AICs. These blazed the trail in integrating traditional worldviews and charismatic renewal phenomena into Christian belief and practice. They also championed a gender perspective that supported ordaining women, and pursued practical forms of salvation that gave pastoral attention to what are traditional religious matters, such as healing and fertility. Unlike the nationalist churches, whose main agenda was administering and recognizing local cultural values and languages as important vehicles for Christian expression and practice, the AICs had a much more popular agenda of reform. Their key concern was how the Holy Spirit had been overlooked in church life. The situation that had given rise to the AICs and popularized their stream of Christianity is what Asamoa identified and criticized: the negative attitude of historic mission Christianity to traditional worldviews of supernatural causality and, in particular, the power of witch-craft. Witchcraft had been attacked in missionary preaching and teaching as a psychological delusion and figment of the African imagination.

In response, Asamoa articulated what the AICs had long integrated in Christian worship through their charismatic experiences and decisive prayers for health, wholeness, employment, marriage, business, and promotions. Their pneumatic approach to Christianity made them so popular that the nationalist churches started to slip into oblivion. The older denominations these churches had left, now started to lose large numbers of adherents. The AICs critiqued these older denominations for clutching at the Western European missionary theological heritage that had alienated traditional worldviews as nonsensical and superstitious, as having no contribution to make for appropriating the gospel. Asamoa wrote that the dismissive approach to African worldviews would not edge out such ideas from people’s imagination after they came to Christ.

Anybody who knows African Christians intimately will know that no amount of denial on the part of the Church will expel belief in supernatural powers from the minds of the African people. What often happens as a result of such denunciation is that a state of conflict is created in the mind of the Christian, as he becomes a hypocrite who in official church circles pretends to give the impression that he does not believe in these things, while in his own private life he resorts to practices which are the results of such beliefs.

These words pointed to the fact that African Christians, as beneficiaries of Western mission Christianity and theological education, had reservations about the type of Christianity they had been given. Mission Christianity had


20. It is important to add that the nationalist or Ethiopianist churches differ from later religious innovations in Africa who appeared as the Christian religious counterparts of local parties, such as the Aborigines Rights Protection Society that initiated the agitations leading to political independence beginning in the 1950s.


not engaged very constructively with the primal imagination, especially traditional notions of spiritual causality. To place this in perspective, Asamoa began with a statement made by the International Missionary Council meeting at Willingen in 1952 which read in part:

While the Church of Christ in any place and at any time must exhibit the marks without which it will not be a church, it has the responsibility to exhibit them in a distinctive way, incorporating into the service of Christ whatever heritage of cultural values it may have been given by God's grace. This is not being “rooted in the soil” but related to the soil. The Church can only be rooted in Christ. But the eternal Gospel must be so presented to men and women that its contemporary and compelling relevance is recognized. It cannot be recognized as long as it appears in a foreign guise, imitating and reproducing the characteristics of a church in some remote alien land.

In fact, the article came 50 years after the beginning of African-initiated Christianity. By 1926, when the World Missions Conference reconvened in Le Zoute, Belgium, indigenous charismatic prophets – Garrick Sokari Braide of the Niger Delta, Isaiah Sheme of South Africa, William Wade Harris of West Africa, and Simon Kimbangu of Central Africa – had already taken the process of evangelization to another level, drawing crowds and leading to the formation of AICs across Africa. Due to their disproportionate emphasis on the power of the Spirit and prayer, the new AICs became known as “Spiritual” churches (churches of the Spirit) in Ghana and “Aladura” churches (churches of prayer) in Nigeria.

In the process, West European Christianity gradually ceased to be paradigmatic for the faith on African soil. The AICs emerged as embodiments of Christianity that were acclaimed as thoroughly Christian and truly African. As Lamin Sanneh observes:

A process of internal change was thus initiated in which African Christians sought a distinctive way of life through mediation of the Spirit, a process that enhanced the importance of traditional religions for the deepening of Christian spirituality. The Charismatic Churches, therefore, combined the two fundamental elements of Christianity and African culture in a way that advertised their intentions without undervaluing their African credentials. Biblical material was submitted to the regenerative capacity of African perception, and the result would be Africa’s unique contribution to the story of Christianity.

The new African churches, inspired by what they had read in the translated scriptures and their own charismatic experiences, developed a strong interventionist theology. This helped followers make sense of the spiritually precarious African world and how the name of Jesus was able to deal with the fears and insecurities emanating from the African universe. After all, “belief in the supernatural was a prevalent feature of primal societies as it was, in the worldview of the societies of the Bible, including the Greek.”

As Emmanuel Lartey discussed in the IRM (1986), the pneumatic approach to Christianity helped Pentecostal churches, both culturally and religiously, to become amenable to the popular masses. They found in these churches a congeniality and familiarity that was absent from the staid, silent, orderly form of worship and liturgy in the Western mission churches, with their non-interventionist theology. If we accept Taylor’s point that the Holy Spirit is the chief actor in the historic mission of the church, directing the whole enterprise, then we realize that when Edinburgh 2010 was convened, the Spirit was already acting as the chief agent of mission in Africa through these indigenous renewal movements.

**Pentecostalism in African Christianity**

Leslie Newbigin in *The Household of God* refers to Pentecostalism as a third force within worldwide Christianity, after Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism. In Africa, contemporary expressions of Pentecostalism, with mega-size urban-centred congregations, youthful membership, and innovative uses of modern media technologies may be included in what we consider as the third response to missionary Christianity. While Ethiopianism appealed to the African Christian elite of the late 19th century, the new prophetic movements and AICs took on a very pneumatic character. In the processes they were able to create mass conversions that enlarged the frontiers of Christianity in Africa beyond those of the missionaries. The large urban African expressions of Pentecostalism have emerged in the quite different socio-economic context of globalization.

The prophetic movements out of which the AICs were born laid the foundations for the rise of contemporary Pentecostalism in modern Africa. Ogbu Kalu explains that the prophets tilled the soil in which contemporary Pentecostalism thrives. The prophets succeed because their version of Christianity was closer to the grain of African culture, and hence not engaged very constructively with the primal imagination, especially traditional notions of spiritual causality. To place this in perspective, Asamoa began with a statement made by the International Missionary Council meeting at Willingen in 1952 which read in part:

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because it resonated much more with indigenous worldviews than did the Christianity mediated through missionaries. Kalu thus concludes, for instance, with regard to the work of Prophet Harris that “the charismatic fire that he lit became more important for the future of Christianity in Africa than the grand Edinburgh Conference of 1910 that shut out African voices.”

Harold W. Turner summarizes the two main theological emphases of African Christianity that were mediated through the AICs. The first is a pneumatological emphasis in which God is envisaged as present and powerful through the Holy Spirit, who reveals the will of God and the destiny of the individual, guides through dangers and fills people with new powers of prophecy, utterance, prayer and healing. The second is a soteriological emphasis that calls people to turn away from the traditional spirits and deities and traditional medicine men and women, with their magical powers and techniques. They then turn towards the Christian God for their salvation, interpreted in very practical terms, including protection from the host of evil forces that inhabit the African universe.

Contemporary Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism in Africa has not developed monolithically, but is manifest today as mega-size urban-based independent churches; renewal movements within historic mission denominations; and as trans-denominational charismatic fellowships. The best known trans-denominational group is the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship International, originally from North America. Classical Pentecostal denominations of both Western missionary and indigenous origins begin in the late 1920s in sub-Saharan Africa, and developed alongside the AICs. Then in the late 1970s, new expressions of Pentecostalism began to appear in Africa, further transforming the contemporary African Christian religious landscape. The new mega-size churches, with their media technologies and worship style have especially appealed to African youth. Perhaps the best known theological orientation of this new wave is the prosperity gospel, which has received both affirmation and criticism.

These churches have grown both within and without Africa. With more than 10,000 worshippers attending its various weekly services in London alone, Pastor Ashimolowo’s Kingsway International Christian Centre has taken over the territory of the Church of England as a contemporary Pentecostal Church with the single largest active congregation in Western Europe. Pastor Ashimolowo, aided by a vibrant media ministry, addresses more people around the world than any Protestant leader in Western Europe. The same is true of Eastern Europe where another Nigerian, Pastor Sunday Adelaja, runs a 25,000 member Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations. A majority of its membership is white European and when it was begun 15 years ago, most of its members were converted drug addicts and alcoholics. It is the moving testimonies of conversion from drugs, alcohol and gangs, and their grateful family members, that have helped this church to grow. Their pastor has become a champion of Christian presence in formerly communist parts of Europe. This charismatic Pentecostal church has also become popular in territories that until recently the Eastern Orthodox Church simply took for granted.

These contemporary Pentecostals, together with their Africa-based compatriots – Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, David O. Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church Worldwide also known as Winners’ Chapel (both of Nigeria); Ezekiel Guti of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God; and Nicholas Duncan-Williams of the Christian Action Faith Ministries International and Mensa Otabil of the International Central Gospel Church both of Ghana and others – have within a generation, transformed the global Christian landscape, helping to make Christianity a primarily non-Western religion today. In the hands of contemporary Pentecostals, a new process of the “pentecostalization” of Christianity has been underway for some time now.

They have also raised up new champions of Christian mission who are challenging the old paradigms of inculturation associated with the leadership of the historic mission denominations. The theologies of liberation and inculturation remain relevant as far as non-Western Christianity is concerned. However the growing importance of Pentecostalism in the Southern continents invites us to interpret these older theological forms in the light of the renewal and dominion theologies that have proven popular with Africa’s upwardly mobile youth.

Pastor Eastwood Anaba of the Fountain Gate Chapel in Ghana, another important contemporary Pentecostal leader in Africa today, travels widely as a revivalist. In his first book, God’s End-time Militia – which is what for him the new movement is – he talks about the development of contemporary charismatic Christianity in terms of a religious change reminiscent of the political revolutions that occurred in Africa at the time the new movements were emerging. This was in the late 1970s and early 80s when Ghana and Nigeria witnessed the formation of charismatic churches out of the then conservative evangelical

non-denominational Town Fellowships and such youth musical groups as Calvary Road Incorporated. In the thought of Eastwood Anaba, the new churches were born to chart new paths in Christian mission:

Whilst there is nothing new under the sun, these [new Pentecostals] are born for modification, alteration, revolution, modulation and variation. . . . to resurrect great things long abandoned and forgotten. This is a revival and restoration. . . . You may not have an example to follow but you can create your own path.30

Eastwood Anaba’s use of the word revolution to describe the new Pentecostals is instructive. They constitute, in his understanding, God’s “end-time militia” brought into being by the Holy Spirit as movements of revival and restoration. They have been called to chart a new path for Christianity by democratizing ministry, a process made possible by individual and corporate experiences of the Spirit. He suggests that the work of ministry must never be abandoned to professional clergy; but each person must use the gifts and graces of the Spirit to the glory of God.31 The veracity of Anaba’s thoughts is seen not only in how Pentecostals have grown but also the influence they now exercise in African religious and public life.

The prosperity gospel associated with contemporary Pentecostalism has often been criticized for its promotion of materialism in the name of Christianity. That may well be the case if considered only against the backdrop of the flamboyant and materialistic lifestyles of some of its leaders. But that is just one side of the story. Prosperity gospel has a very important empowerment and motivational dimension that often gets lost in the discussion. With the difficult economic conditions and disappointing political leadership that young Africans face, the motivational messages of contemporary Pentecostalism have enabled them to take their destinies into their own hands through self-improvement. Testimonies abound of people who have returned to school to improve their job prospects, start their own businesses, or simply choose Jesus. In choosing Jesus Christ they also move away from gambling, drinking, drugs and womanizing into more constructive purposes.

In theological terms, contemporary Pentecostals have sustained those themes identified previously with the AICs. In the words of Emmanuel Lartey:

The success of charismatic Christianity in Africa has lain largely in its ability to propagate itself as ‘powerful and efficacious’ in enabling people to be set free from the dangers and troubles of life. The worship and teaching of these churches have by and large been geared towards the experiencing of the effective presence of the Holy Spirit. . . . The freedom to dance, sing, clap, drum and ecstatic in worship has served to release a spirit of freedom and participation which has proved very amenable to large sections of the African community.32

Thus the theological emphases first observed in the spiritual or Aladura churches or AICs have been sustained in the new Pentecostal/charismatic churches. In other words, through contemporary African Pentecostalism, which constitutes a third major response to missionary Christianity, we find the general theological orientation that Africans consider important in Christianity. Pentecostalism is a religion that values, affirms and consciously promotes the experience of the Holy Spirit as part of normal Christian life and worship. To that end, there is a clear continuity between the religious orientation of the AICs and that of the new Pentecostals, as the 1986 collection of articles in the IRM demonstrates. As Walter Hollenweger argues in his lead article there, Pentecostalism has proven successful in non-Western cultures such as those of Africa because of its black oral roots.33

The Transformation of Christianity

The process of transformation of Christianity into a non-Western religion, through the work of the Spirit, has been inspired by several factors. An important tool used by the Spirit was access to scripture in the vernaculars. Lamin Sanneh explains:

The fact that Bible translation adopted into its canon indigenous names for God implied at the minimum a tacit rejection of the standard monotheism-polytheism dichotomy of evolutionary thought and opened the way for indigenous innovation and motivation in the religious life. . . . Bible translation had thus helped to bring about a historic shift in Christianity’s theological centre of gravity by pioneering a strategic alliance with local conceptions of religion.34

In non-Western unlike Western Christianity, the Bible has largely continued to be greatly respected for its divinely inspired authority.\textsuperscript{35} In the hands of many Western theologians, on the other hand, it is now a mere textbook. In many cases the Bible seems to have lost its authority, holiness, and awe in church and family life.

I have argued elsewhere that if the Bible lost its place as the source of guidance for public life and morality in the West, it did so first by losing its status as a sacred book through a process of biblical relativism and gradual demystification.\textsuperscript{36} It may have been completely lost on many Western Christians that St Paul refers to “all Scripture” as “God breathed” as useful for “teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Vernacular translations of the Bible were generally received in African churches as inspired by the Spirit of God. With these translations came “cultural renewal” that “encouraged Africans to view Christianity in a favourable light.”\textsuperscript{37} Missionaries played lead roles in translating the Bible into the languages of these societies, and in so doing “became champions of non-Western cultures.”\textsuperscript{38} This buttresses my earlier observation that in the midst of the recession of the faith in its former Western heartlands and its accession in Africa, the major historical contributions of Christian missions needs to be upheld and commended.

The changes brought to bear on African Christianity by the various forms of pneumatic Christianity since the early 20th century, have been seismic.\textsuperscript{39} There is every indication that the Spirit of God has been at work in these changes. As Taylor has said, “The Spirit of Life is ever at work in nature, in history and in human living, and wherever there is a flagging or corruption or self-destruction in God’s handiwork, he is present to renew and energize and create again.”\textsuperscript{40}

Theologically, I interpret the success of contemporary Pentecostalism as God’s Spirit of renewal at work. The Spirit of God was at work in creation and in the prophets (Heb. 1:1–3), as the presence accompanying Moses as he led Israel (Ex. 33:14), as the one who restored dry bones to life (Ezek. 37), and as overshadowing Mary to conceive and bear the Christ (Luke 1).

The Spirit came upon Jesus Christ at his baptism and anointed him to “bring good news to the poor. . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18–19). At Pentecost the Spirit was there to reinvigorate Jesus’ despondent disciples by empowering them for witness (Acts 2), and the promise of the Holy Spirit was for all generations, including those ‘who are far away’ (Acts 2:38–39). Those who are far away are the outsiders, those from Gentile territories who came from every nation to receive the blessings of Pentecost.

These developments have great implications for how we talk about the church in Africa in terms of theological scholarship. In the past the emphasis was on cultural relevance but that does not seem to be of much interest any longer because in making their choices for the faith, African Christians have not sought to make traditional religion “Christian” but instead have sought for biblical Christianity to answer African questions.

### African Christian scholarship

The writings of scholars in African Christianity, through journals like the \textit{IRM}, demonstrate the extent to which the Christian tradition has become part of Africa, over the past century in particular. They indicate the distinctively African shape that Christianity is taking as a result being appropriated and integrated as an African religion. Christian scholarship follows and derives from Christian mission, and the need for scholarship arose as soon as the gospel crossed its first cultural frontier – that between Israel and the Hellenistic world.\textsuperscript{41} Thus from its inception, Christian mission has been a history of scholarship and documentation, which is also the case for its early planting in Africa. Early Ethiopian Christianity developed “its own distinctive literature and tradition of scholarship, using its own distinctive writing system,” which enabled Ethiopian Christianity to recover from near disaster.\textsuperscript{42}

The tradition of Christian scholarship continued with the modern missionary movement in Africa, which out of its central concern to communicate the gospel, was compelled to turn to “innovative scholarship.”\textsuperscript{43} As non-Western Christian theology, especially that focused on Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity is shifting gradually to the centre as mainstream theology, Christian scholarship

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Philip Jenkins, \textit{The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South}, Oxford University, Oxford (2006), p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Sanneh, \textit{Whose Religion is Christianity}, p. 18.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Lamin Sanneh, \textit{Translating the Message}, p. 30.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Paul Gifford, \textit{African Christianity: Its Public Role}, Hurst, London (1998).
\item \textsuperscript{40} Taylor, \textit{Go-Between God}, p. 27.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 46.
\end{itemize}
is called to realize the dawn of this new theological era and rise up to the occasion.

African theological scholarship will help determine the shape and quality of world Christianity, because through theological scholarship its leadership may shift into African hands. Authentic theological scholarship, Walls argues, must arise out of Christian mission and, therefore, from the principal theatres of mission like Africa. What this means is that if Africa and the other continents of the South fail to develop proper capacities for leadership in theological studies, for all practical purposes, no theological studies anywhere will be worth caring about.44 This is a challenge that the IRM must continue to take on in order to champion discussion on what the Holy Spirit may be doing through African Christianity in our age.

In conclusion, we began by observing that one of the surprises of the 21st century, as far as religion is concerned, is that Africa has emerged as an important mediator of Christianity to the world. This importance lies in the recognition that the faith has taken refuge in non-Western cultures of Africa because they remain open to a faith that seems to have lost much ground in its former heartlands. Following the articles written in various issues of the IRM on Africa or Pentecostalism enables us to come to terms with the current transformation of world Christianity and Africa’s role within that change. The type of Christianity and Christian theology coming from Africa is important in understanding the current shape of world Christianity.

To this end, Turner has pointed out that as a science, theology depends on access to appropriate data in their most authentic and vital forms. Such data, he suggests, “will be more evident and accessible in unsophisticated churches where the living God is taken seriously as present in the healing and conquering power of the Spirit, with gospel-oriented growth and a spiritual creativity and confidence.”45 Africa is very much a context that has been open to the work of the Spirit through various revivals, and where the Bible has kept its place as containing God’s prophetic voice and authority. In the end no serious study of Africa can ignore Christianity and the role it has come to play in Africa. To understand African Christianity however, significant attention must be given to the ways in which indigenous Christians have appropriated the faith and made sense of it against the backdrop of traditional religious and cultural worldviews. It is within these cultural worldviews that people find their identity and live in relation to the transcendent powers of the universe with God at the helm and very active in the power of the Holy Spirit.

44. Ibid., p. 47.

4.3 Assessing Christianity in Africa’s Transforming Context

Dyon B. Daughrity

The dramatic shift in the demographics of African Christianity in the last century necessitates new analysis of its present shape, multivalent relationship to its colonial past, relationship to the African Indigenous Churches, and likely major contribution to the shape and leadership of Christianity in the future.

Africa is the heartland of early as well as contemporary Christianity. Indeed, Africa contains some of the oldest forms of Christianity on earth. From Athanasius and Antony to Augustine, Africa helped to spawn the largest religion in human history.

African Christianity has come full circle. For the first several centuries of Christian faith, Africa was the hub. In the seventh and eighth centuries, however, Islam grew quickly and African Christians became a minority voice. The situation has changed again in recent years, and by 2030 Africa will surpass Latin America as having more Christians than any other continental block.1 With Africa’s fertility rate – the highest in the world – African Christianity is on pace to continue its impressive growth trajectory. From Ras ben Sakka in Tunisia to Cape Agulhas at the southern tip of the continent, half a billion Africans consider Christianity their religion. This is around half the continent’s population. Africa today has 59 countries and territories. In 31 of those, Christianity is the largest religion.2

This article analyzes the demography, history and geography of Africa’s changing religious context. It argues that Africa is the next Christendom, and this has broad implications for international politics, intercultural relations and world religion. The thesis of this paper is that Christianity, the world’s largest religion, is becoming more associated with Africa than with the West, and this development is shaping our understanding of world Christianity.

Christianity in Africa’s Transforming Context

Rarely do entire groups of people switch their religious affiliation. Normally, people believe what their parents believe. In Africa, something remarkable happened in the 20th century. It is one of those rare times in the history of humankind when entire families, ethnicities and even nations began practising a different religion. The statistics are breathtaking. Estimates are that in 1900, Africa had around 10 million Christians; by 1945, there were about 30 million Christians in Africa. In the second half of the 20th century, however, Africans began to convert to Christianity en masse. In 2008, Africa had around 500 million Christians – around 47 percent of the continent’s population. The African Christian population is now much larger than the African Islamic population, at around 40 percent. The remainder, approximately 13 percent, affiliate primarily with local indigenous religions.

Put another way, in 1900, only 2 percent of the world’s Christians lived in Africa. In 2005, nearly 20 percent of the world’s Christians lived there.4

What triggered this rapid conversion rate? It does not seem to be missionary or colonial driven. Indeed, once the European Christian governments left Africa, Christianity grew fantastically: “Africa’s most dramatic Christian growth . . . occurred after decolonization.”5 This is especially the case with Protestant/Independent churches, where growth rates are staggering. Harvey Cox writes, “In most areas . . . these independent churches are expanding faster than Islam, at about twice the rate of the Roman Catholic Church and at roughly three times that of other non-Catholic groups. There are now over 5000 independent Christian denominations, all born in the twentieth century.”6 It is counterintuitive that once Western powers receded from the African continent, Christianity received a new lease on life. However, the evidence seems to illustrate that Christianity’s greatest gains in sub-Saharan Africa occurred during and after the independence era – the 1950s and 1960s.

Africa is vast in both geography and people. There are approximately one billion people in Africa today speaking around 2,000 languages.7 While only one African nation today is in the top ten of the world’s most populated countries – Nigeria, with around 150 million people – there are several highly populated countries. Both Ethiopia and Egypt will reach the 100 million mark soon.

Additionally, Africa’s fertility rate is higher than anywhere else in the world. The world’s average fertility rate is 2.61 children born per woman. However, in Africa, the average woman will have five children during her lifetime.8

There are two more conspicuous data when looking at overall trends in Africa: median age and life expectancy. Africa has the highest fertility rate in the world, but it also has the lowest life expectancy. Africans, on average, barely reach the age of 50. Eastern Europeans, who have the second-lowest life expectancy in the world, live 20 years longer than Africans.9 The low life expectancy brings down the median age in Africa to less than 20 years – easily the lowest in the world.

Economically, Africa is in crisis. Of the world’s top 20 GDP countries, no African countries are represented.10 Many African economies seem hopelessly dependent on foreign aid, causing some to ask, “Is there life after debt?”11 Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye outlines a slew of problems, both historical and contemporary, that have contributed to the difficulties.12 She discusses low literacy rates,13 a pervasive fear of witchcraft,14 and perhaps most of all, Africa’s fertility rate, which is higher than anywhere else in the world.15

5. Ranger, ed., Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa, x.
12. In Otieno with McCullum, Journey of Hope, xix–xxii. Oduyoye’s “A Letter to My Ancestors” (xv–xxii) is essentially a conversation with the ancestors in which she vows to help change Africa’s trajectory through renewed spiritual commitment.
all, a colonial legacy with many residual effects of dependency, corruption and powerlessness. She argues that systemic racism toward Africans has taken a dehumanizing toll on the consciousness of a continent, and the trauma does not abate quickly.

However, African scholars have also been quick to point out frailties that come from within. Distinguished historian Lamin Sanneh writes, “Corruption and despotic rule despoiled countries, divided society, and failed the national cause.”

Perhaps some Africans would express gratefulness to the Western missionaries who attempted to bring good news, although missionaries are implicated in postcolonial critiques. The Mau Mau fighters of Kenyan independence in the 1950s may have been the first to utter that now-famous invective on imperial missions: “When the white man came, he had the Bible and we had the land. He told us to close our eyes and pray, and when we opened our eyes he had the land and we had the Bible.” This condemnation is not altogether justified, although it is not easily dismissed.

Missionaries came in all shades and sizes. Some were heralded as civilizing what many European writers described as the “Dark Continent”; most, however, lived meagerly, founding small churches and passing leadership to Africans within a short time. Many gave their truncated lives to an adopted African home, witnessing for Christ in an isolated corner of the world, dying young to malaria, among other diseases. Many did not count the cost; it made perfect sense to give one’s life to a greater commission. Today, however, in a context of Western secularization, missionaries become the objects of scorn – pompous brainwashers from a bygone era.

For better or for worse, Africa would not be half Christian today without that massive era of European missions. It was inconceivable in 1900 to predict that Africa would be the heartland of Christianity in a mere 100 years.

Background: Christianity in Africa

African Christianity has deep roots in Ethiopian Judaism. There was significant Ethiopian–Jewish contact many centuries before Jesus, documented in the King Solomon–Queen of Sheba relationship from 1 Kings 10. Presumably, the Ethiopian–Jewish relationship continued and expanded, since Africa plays a key role in several New Testament passages. For example, Jesus spent time living as a refugee in Egypt according to Matthew 2:13–14. Simon of Cyrene – modern-day Libya – was forced by the Romans to carry Jesus’ cross for him when Jesus became too weak to do it himself (Matt. 27:32). Thus, it was an African who first took up a cross and followed Jesus, up the hill to Golgotha. In Acts 2, on Pentecost Sunday, we read of Libyans and Egyptians at the birth of Christianity. In Acts 8, an Ethiopian eunuch, “... an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians,” had gone to Jerusalem to worship (v. 27). Africans were among the first to preach the gospel to non-Jews. For example, Acts 11:19 discusses evangelists from Cyrene preaching to Greeks in Antioch, and the Bible states, “the Lord’s hand was with them.” The apostle Paul was probably ordained for ministry by a group that included Africans (Acts 13:1–4). One of the great evangelists of the New Testament was Apollos, a native of Alexandria (Acts 18:24). Church tradition states that Mark evangelized Egypt in the 40s and became the first pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Africa’s extra-canonical pedigree is equally impressive. St Anthony the Great, the father of monasticism, was Egyptian. Several African church fathers defined the Christian faith for us as we understand it today: Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian and Tertullian. Indeed, Athanasius was the leading theologian in the trinitarian controversies as well as in the determination of the biblical canon. Athanasius’s home city, Alexandria, was well known as “the leading academic center of the ancient world.”

Alexandria and Carthage (Tunisia) were pivotal in shaping the earliest medieval Western universities. And perhaps the most important theologian in Christian history, Augustine (354–430), was an African Berber from Algeria.

One of the earliest Christian states on earth was Axum, in Ethiopia. Still today, Ethiopia is a proudly Christian country that remained isolated from Christendom for centuries. When contact with Ethiopia was restored in the 1400s, Portuguese Jesuit missionaries were appalled at the people’s arrogance, saying, “They are possessed with a strange notion that they are the only true Christians in the world; as for us, they shunned us as heretics.”

The Christianization of sub-Sahara Africa was complex. European missionaries are often associated with this era, but for every missionary there were dozens of African leaders. One indigenous movement in the Kongo was led by Kimpa Vita, also known as Dona Beatriz. She lived


16. This statement has been attributed to many African sources. See Nicholas Orieno with Hugh McCullum, Journey of Hope, 7.


20. See John K. Thornton, The Kongolese Saint Anthony
from 1684 to 1706 and became an important precedent for African Christianity. Baptized by Italian Capuchin missionaries, she forged an indigenous Christianity that became a fountainhead for the African indigenous churches. Burned at the stake as a witch when she was only 22 years old, Vita inspired scores of people who were sent as slaves to Brazil and South Carolina. Her legacy lived on and her rejection of colonial Christianity was ahead of its time.23 Philip Jenkins writes, "If the rising independent churches ever decide to identify a patron saint, they could do no better than to choose . . . Kimpa Vita."22

Kimpa Vita was only one of many. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who lived from 1806 to 1891 and was a native from Nigeria, was the first African bishop in the Anglican Church. William Wade Harris (c. 1865 to 1929) from Liberia is considered to be " . . . the most successful missionary in West Africa."23 Garrick Braide (late 1800s and early 1900s) was a well-known healer in Nigeria – people flocked to him as the second Elijah. John Chilembe preached armed resistance to the British in Malawi (Nyasaland) – in the name of Christ. Simon Kimbangu invoked the ancestors in his preaching, claiming that "God was changing the baton from whites to blacks."24 His church numbers in the millions. Zulu prophet Isaiah Shembe (1869–1935) was a messianic figure who led a Nazarite movement. He purportedly resurrected from the dead and changed the baton from whites to blacks." His church numbers in the millions. Zulu prophet Isaiah Shembe (1869–1935) was a messianic figure who led a Nazarite movement. He purportedly resurrected from the dead and appeared to his followers.25 Engenas Barnabas Lekganyane established the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in 1910. Each Easter it holds a huge gathering of members at Moria in South Africa; the ZCC’s Easter gathering is attended by over a million people and in 1992 featured Nelson Mandela as a speaker.26

The African Independent Church tradition continues to proliferate. John Mbiti once described the AIC movements as being "an African opportunity to mess up Christianity in our own way. For the past two thousand years, other continents, countries, nations and generations have had their chances to do with Christianity as they wished. And we know that they have not been idle! Now Africa has got its chance at last."27 Mbiti is part of a growing body of African scholars who claim Christianity as their own, and resent colonial charges that imply African Christianity may be less than authentic.

So convinced of this message, many Africans now missionize the West, former Christendom. In 2009, an intriguing, lengthy article in The New York Times proclaimed, "Pastor Daniel Ajayi-Adeniran is coming for your soul. . . . He is on a mission to save you from eternal damnation. He realizes you may be skeptical, put off by his exotic name – he’s from Nigeria . . . but he’s not deterred. He believes the Holy Spirit is working through him."28 The article goes on to discuss how the Lagos-based Redeemed Christian Church of God already has millions of members and continues to expand globally. It is a far cry from the declining memberships in mainline Protestant denominations in North America or the stale, empty churches in Europe.

**African Christianity Today**

Africa currently has 59 countries and territories. In 31 of those, Christianity is the largest religion. In 21 of them, Islam ranks first. In six of them, indigenous religions form the largest group. Mauritius is unique in that Hinduism ranks first there.29

The majority of Africa’s Christians are Protestant/Independent. The Roman Catholic Church claims almost exactly a third of the continent’s Christian population. The ancient Orthodox Christians of Africa – based mainly in the Nile Valley – account for one tenth of the Christian population on the continent.

No longer just a passive recipient of Western missionaries, Africa is today a major player in world Christianity. Two of the six general secretaries of the World Council of Churches (WCC, established in 1948) were African: Samuel Kobia of Kenya, and Philip Potter (of African descent, but from the West Indies). Another important African ecumenist was Akanu Ibiam, a medical missionary from Nigeria who became a political leader and one of the presidents of the WCC. Additionally, two of the nine general
assemblies of the WCC were held in Africa: in Kenya (1975) and in Zimbabwe (1998).

Africa has half a billion Christians and, within a generation or two, it will have more Christians than any other cultural block, surpassing Latin America and the Caribbean because of high fertility rates. The African diaspora is huge, and is changing world Christian demographics. Examples of these impacts are plentiful. For example, John Sentamu (Archbishop of York) – the Anglican Church’s second highest official – is from Uganda. Sunday Adelaja, pastor of Kiev’s megachurch Embassy of God, is Nigerian. That church holds 40 services weekly and has planted congregations in 45 countries.30

The Anglican communion is witnessing a shift in leverage as Africans are clearly taking the reins of leadership in that denomination. Unmistakably, the future of the Anglican Church is African. There are more Anglicans in Nigeria than in England.31 And there are over 40 million Anglicans in the African continent. Africa claims approximately 55 percent of the global Anglican communion, and that percentage is certain to rise.32

Perhaps the most important aspect of African Christianity is that it represents the turning over of a new leaf in world Christianity. While Christianity in the West declines, in Africa it grows in numbers, in strength and in energy. While Western societies deepen the divide between Christianity and culture, sub-Saharan Africa seems poised to become the new Christendom. While Western youth in the 20th century broke faith with Christianity, African youth turned to Christianity.

And what does this mean? It means Christianity is at a pivotal point in its history. Christianity is still the largest religion in the world, yet it will not be Western dominated, as it has been for centuries. It is likely that Christianity will be more identified with Africa than with any other place in the world. And the reverberations are already being felt. For centuries, the Christian narrative has been mainly told from a European perspective. But an African narrator is now settling in, and an African narrator has several important implications for telling the story of Christianity.

Scholars of Christianity are taking note of these changes, even if they are not widely known. In my own travels and research, it is clear that not only is African Christianity rising, but the African diaspora is making great gains in the West as well, impacting what has up to now been considered a Western religion. A few examples will illustrate. Recently I worshipped in a church in Dundee, Scotland. While the congregants were mainly white, the music was led by young men from Africa. They danced and held up their hands, with an unrestrained approach to worship. That is very different from the conservative approach to worship that dominated the Church of Scotland for centuries.

Gone are the days when Westerners “bring the gospel” to Africa. Christians now go to Africa for revival. Many of my American students go to Africa thinking they are on a mission trip, but when they get there, they realize that Christianity is far more robust in this context of mission than in their North American homeland. Indeed, Africans now regularly bring the gospel to places in the West where Christianity has disappeared or at least has been muted.33

Africans are impacting the way Christians read the Bible. Many Westerners studied F. C. Bauer, Rudolf Bultmann, Thomas Altizer and Paul Tillich. The future of biblical interpretation will not necessarily include those names. Africans offer a different set of biblical interpreters, who come to very different conclusions than the commentators of the last 200 years in the West, since the so-called Enlightenment.

Furthermore, African Christians bring confidence and come at Christianity from a very different cultural perspective. Christ represents victory and success in Africa, whereas in the West, many churches are now residential flats or carpet warehouses or pubs. I once saw a church in England that had been converted into a tire shop. In Europe, preachers of the gospel seem sheepish in their presentation of faith. Africans seem not to share that reticence. Africans offer a different set of biblical interpreters, who come to very different conclusions than the commentators of the last 200 years in the West, since the so-called Enlightenment.

33. The work of Afe Adogame comes to mind here. For several years now, he has been researching the concept of reverse mission and how it is impacting societies, religions and Christian discourse. A good place to start researching his ideas is a chapter he wrote in a book he co-edited: “Who Do They Think They Are? Mental Images and the Unfolding of an African Diaspora in Germany,” in Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff and Klaus Hock, eds., Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage (New York: Continuum, 2008).
34. When I refer to Christianity’s decline in the West, particularly in Western Europe, I have in mind the important work of Steve Bruce and those who have built upon his ideas. See, for example, Bruce’s God Is Dead: Secularization in the West (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).
African Christian Leadership

Indeed, if the new Christian narrator is an African one, then this will inevitably open up opportunities. It is a bit like having a new president. The people are in anticipation, not knowing how the new president will go about his task. No one knows if he will be able to achieve what he sets out to do. They do not know exactly what his priorities will be. What is known is that there is a new president, and most will cheer him on, hoping he can improve the condition of the country with his policies and decisions.

Similarly, an African-infused Christianity holds many possibilities. World Christianity waits in expectation for what new things will be revealed. No one knows precisely how African leadership will shape world Christianity, but what is known is that changes are coming. And since Christians in the Western world still have a disproportional amount of the world’s wealth, they will likely find themselves further partnering with African Christians and African institutions, a partnership that has existed for some time but that will likely increase. This may come from contributing to denominational coffers in the case of international fellowships; it may mean theological institutions offering full fellowships that enable Africans to study at Western schools. A rising cross-pollination process is taking place that will benefit both Africa and the West. And this is needed, because while African Christianity may be growing considerably, and making inroads through mission work, there is still a dearth of secular and theological education within Africa. New initiatives are needed to truly invest capital and resources into Africa, separate and apart from Western approaches to learning. And there is a good argument to be made that Western Christians should consider taking their tuition money to African institutions, and place themselves under the tutelage of African theologians and scholars. Otherwise, the relationship will continue to be one-way, perpetuating the paternalism of the past.

In other words, the answer will not always be to bring Africans to the West. Perhaps a better alternative is to encourage Westerners to adapt to the African educational context. This interplay would be dynamic and certainly more authentic for Westerners wanting to know more about how and why African Christianity is growing. It is somewhat common these days for Western seminarians to encounter African Christianity from an African professor who has relocated to the Western world. It would be far more lively and impactful, however, for the Western seminarian to take a degree in Africa. It would also open up countless avenues of contact that would enrich both sides.

There are several towering African scholars who have shaped or are shaping the discourse of African Christianity, and we would be remiss to neglect them here. Kwame Bediako, Ogbu Kalu, Mercy Oduyoye (cited above), John Mbiti (cited above), Jesse Mugambi and Lamin Sanneh are atop a long list of competent scholars who are alerting the wider scholarly community to the changes, and helping academicians to understand better their implications.

Bediako, a Ghanian theologian who died in 2008, was considered by Andrew Walls as “the outstanding African theologian of his generation.” In his masterful work Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion, Bediako asked whether Christianity is suitable to Africans. His ideas were sophisticated, but were predicated upon a renewed understanding of Jesus Christ – assimilated to an African context. This plea for a reconceived Christology is providing rich fodder for scholars of African Christianity. Enyi Ben Udoh, for example, argues that an African Christology brings Christ into its culture as a guest. And in Nigerian society as well as other African societies, a guest is “considered sacred . . . treated with respect and care.” Another model is contextualizing Christ as a chief ancestor, “a proto-ancestor.” This understanding may offer “the best theological meeting point for Christianity and African indigenous religions.” Perhaps Bediako’s most potent expression of how Christ relates to African society was in his image of Africa being confronted by Christ. He asked, “What is it that, in Christ, confronts us?” He answered by referencing Mark 15:39, when the centurion was confronted by a dying Jesus and declared, “Truly, this man was the Son of God.” In other words, Bediako and

35. A major research project funded by the World Council of Churches has recently culminated and will certainly add to the growing corpus of scholarship of African Christianity: Isabel Phiri and Dietrich Werner, eds., Handbook of Theological Education in Africa (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2013). This 1200-page work features many leading African scholars and is breathtaking in its scope.


other African theologians have created new categories of thought when it comes to understanding the figure of Jesus Christ, without abandoning the traditional conceptions of him. While Christ gets reinterpreted through African metaphors (a guest, a proto-ancestor), his impact as Son of God continues to resonate in more recently Christianized cultures, as it always has, through his suffering, his authority and his divine power.

Ogbu Kalu’s legacy is prolific, with many books and articles to his credit. His specialized studies on West African Christianity are a great gift to the scholarly community. However, his greatest legacies are found in two major works he published before his death in 2009: African Pentecostalism and African Christianity: An African Story.

There exists no better place for newcomers to the field to enter than with these two impressive works. Kalu’s work is important not only for its scope but also for its depth. For example, he draws a line of distinction between American Pentecostalism and African Pentecostalism:

Some scholars write about African Pentecostalism as if they were recounting the saga of 19th-century missionaries. The Pentecostal experience broke out without missionaries or any foreigners and often to the consternation of missionaries who deployed the colonial government’s clout to contain the flares. In many cases, the indigenes invited the foreigners. This means that we should pay attention to periodization because the patterns of relationship changed through time. African Pentecostalism did not originate from Azusa Street and is not an extension of the American electronic church.

Clearly, Kalu is pressing for complexity, historical nuance, and the cross-pollination manifested in studies of world Christianity.

Kalu’s studies on Ethiopianism are equally discerning. He discusses how the notion of “white man’s burden” is countered in Ethiopianism with the “black man’s burden” – that Africa will be redeemed through Christianity.

Rooted in an appropriation of Psalm 68:31 (“Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God”) by African Americans between 1870 and 1920, Ethiopianism became a clarion call for generations of African and diaspora Africans to take pride in their Christian roots and confront the stereotypes that had held them back. These thinkers challenged the idea that Africa was somehow a latecomer to the Christian table. Frequently citing the Old Testament as a nod to their Judeo-Christian pedigree, their revisionist history could have a confrontational edge to it, even fuelling black nationalism.

For decades, Jesse Mugambi has written widely on comparative religion, theology and culture, environmental ethics, and much more. However, his recent effort might become the most important in his illustrious career: to overcome the challenges of publishing high-quality scholarship in Africa. To this end, Mugambi founded Acton Publishers in 1992. The focus of the press is “academic and specialized publishing with a particular concern for African scholarship.”

Dozens of good theological books have already come out of this initiative, with many more in line. Mugambi’s decision to found a press that keeps costs down and generates pioneering information on African Christianity is admirable indeed. But there is a dilemma in scholarship today. Unless one is a recognized author, it is difficult to get a book published by the established presses. African scholars have few opportunities to catch the attention of editors, especially when dealing with topics that are little known or understood in the West. Compounding the problem is the cost of books in the West, where many scholars publish with companies like Ashgate, Palgrave, Brill and Peter Lang, to the tune of $75 (USD) per book, if not more. Mugambi has opened up major opportunities for African scholars who want to publish, but there remains the problem of getting African-produced books into the hands of Westerners.

Perhaps no other African scholar has captured the attention of Western scholars as much as Lamin Sanneh, co-founder with Andrew Walls of the Yale-Edinburgh Group on the Study of World Christianity. Sanneh has risen to the heights of Western scholarship during his


Chapter 4. African Theologies and the Realities of Mission Practice

4.4 Of Lions and Rabbits: The Role of the Church in Reconciliation in South Africa

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke

This essay uses an old African fable about lions and rabbits in order to launch, illustrate, probe and explore the role of the churches in the complex South African process of reconciliation since the end of apartheid, and the election, thirteen years ago, of Nelson Mandela as the first democratic president of the Republic of South Africa. It is argued that both the challenges encountered and the solutions sought in the search for reconciliation have been and remain far from simple. Nor has the role of the churches been simple and straightforward. The author thematically traces the complex role of the church in the equally complex processes that have catapulted South Africa from tyranny to democracy. He argues that the question of reconciliation has always been on the agenda of the South African church. Sometimes this has been overtly present,

1. Professor Ttizyiko Sam Maluleke is a missiologist and was executive director of research at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. Prof. Maluleka was a member of the World Council of Churches’ Decade to Overcome Violence reference group. This paper was originally given as the Alexander Duff Lecture, in Edinburgh, 27 April 2006 and Glasgow, 28 April 2006, and is published here with permission.
Introduction

Duped, once again
There is an African fable, which goes something like this:

Lion, fuming with murderous anger, went about in search of Rabbit. This time Lion meant business. Again and again, Rabbit had succeeded in making a big fool out of Lion – stripping him of all dignity and self-respect. After all, there was no comparison between Lion and Rabbit. Lion was big, visible and strong, while Rabbit was small and fragile, with no physical presence to speak of. This time around, Rabbit had gone too far and Lion was going for the final solution. He traversed the length and breadth of the land in search of Rabbit. Finally, one lucky day, after many kilometres of searching and after many moons, Lion ambushed the erstwhile elusive little Rabbit. In the cool of a deep cave, Rabbit sat enjoying a meal. By the time Rabbit saw the imposing frame of Lion at the mouth of the cave, it was too late. Stealthily, Lion closed in on Rabbit. Typically, Rabbit quickly hatched a plan. “Lion, Lion, the roof of this cave is about to collapse, and if it does, it will kill us both,” shouted Rabbit at the top of his voice, thus causing Lion to come to a sudden halt. “You are the strong one, won’t you help hold up the roof of the cave and save us both? Without thinking, Lion instinctively sprang up on to his hind legs, using his front legs to hold up the roof of the cave. “Hold on, I am off to seek help from the other animals,” said Rabbit as he ran through the hind legs of Lion. A day later, Lion realizes that he has been duped yet again. Distraught and humiliated, Lion sets off in search of Rabbit once again, twice as angry as he was before.

Rabbit analysis
What a bad character Rabbit is! He seems to derive pleasure in the shame of Lion. Instead of asking for forgiveness from Lion, he dupes him yet again. Would Lion have listened? Who knows? In short, there is neither remorse, nor the capacity for guilt, in the heart of Rabbit. But it is not only what Rabbit did that is of concern here. It is the way he did it. It is not merely what he says, but what he does not say that is particularly troublesome. Rabbit suggests that the roof of the cave is about to collapse, when he knew perfectly well that it was not. He thus persuades Lion to hold up a roof that was not collapsing. Cunningly, Rabbit uses this imagined occasion to run away and continue with his life of freedom, selfishness, cunning and perverted pleasure.

Lion analysis
Some sympathy might be in order for poor old Lion. He was, after all, the injured party in search of recompense for a series of calculated and devastating blows upon his personal dignity, intelligence and self-respect. Instinctively trusting – even trusting one who had repeatedly proved untrustworthy – Lion takes Rabbit at his word. Obligingly, Lion springs into action to save the two lives at stake. At that moment, Lion suspends his anger and claim for compensation, and voluntarily lays aside his wounded ego and insulted dignity all for the sake of what he supposed was the greater, more durable, and longer-term good. After all, had the roof actually collapsed, he would have walked out of the ruins of the cave a selfless and strong hero to be admired by all! Those who chose to hold up collapsing cave roofs, selflessly setting aside their own personal needs and ambitions, while others go on their merry playful way, ought to be applauded and not derided.

The Centrality of Reconciliation in the Psyche of the African Church
Reconciliation has been on the agenda of the Christian church in Africa from the first half of the 18th century. This was a time when Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, an African slave-turned-protestant-pastor in the Netherlands, was sent ‘back’ as pastor to Elmina Castle, the slave trade fortress built by the Portuguese off the Gold Coast of Ghana. It was also the time when Kimba Vita, a Congolese woman, baptized as Dona Beatrice, was crucified (in 1706). Her ‘crime’ was that she had dared to proclaim that Jesus, his mother and his disciples were black. She further said that Jesus could only be honoured through the removal of all white Christian art from the colonial church of the Congo, and the resuscitation of the ancient kingdom and traditions of the Congo.

From the time of the mid-19th century (1857), when the White Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape of Good Hope decided that due “to the weakness of some”, persons of colour and slaves should no longer be served Holy Communion with Dutch settlers, to the time when Nehemiah Tile, inspired by a biblical vision of a resurgent Ethiopia, walked out of a Westerinaugurated mission church

3. I here acknowledge Musa Dube for alerting me to this strong and fearless African martyr.
to form one of the first African Independent Churches, reconciliation has been at the heart of church witness in (South) Africa and the rest of the world.

At the heart of Zionist church ritual and practice is an attempt to restore that which the apartheid system and rapid urbanization had torn apart. In short, the reconciliation project was and is still at the heart of those who make up the Zionist church movement. Their vigorous, elaborate and dramatic rituals of worship were designed to bring life back into a body severely and constantly disempowered by the effects of a destructive system. Their uniforms, replete with symbols of differentiation, are meant to re-clothe the denuded and devalued body with dignity. The (dis)orderly stampede of “dances for Christ”, in which the members of these churches engage, are specifically ordered to put back the spirit into the body and vice versa. Similarly, the cacophony of impromptu singing, on the wings of which worshippers dance their way towards the podium, where they make their financial offerings in full view of one another, as well as the long and noisy prayers, and libations literally “poured over the offerings” afterwards, are intricate symbols designed to detoxify money from being a fetish of modernist society, where it operates as an evil commodity of control and abuse, and reinstate it to where it belongs, viz. in the service of God and humanity.

From the times of the great missionary conferences to the time of the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, reconciliation has always been on the church’s agenda. From the time of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to that of the 1960 Cottesloe consultation in South Africa, the question of reconciliation has both lurked and simmered. Indeed, this was the main business of the life and witness of those two significant African-American leaders, Martin Luther King Jnr and Malcolm X, who, in seeking to understand reconciliation in a context of violent racial segregation, sought to generate reconciliation and how best to live it. At the heart of the most radical of the theologies of the 20th century was the question of reconciliation. The concerned reconciliation between the first and the third world, between ‘ecumenicals and evangelicals,’ between men and women, between the cultures of ‘low civilization’ and the cultures of ‘high civilization,’ between the rich and the poor, between black and white, between humanity and creation, and ultimately between God and humans.

The items we invoke may not always have been neatly wrapped, tightly packaged and clearly marked and named reconciliation. Other words and accents may have been used in the debates that raged, the issues raised and the projects initiated around any and all of the events invoked above. Sometimes, reconciliation visited these debates and contexts by means of its blatant absence, i.e. it became present through its absence. It became present when individuals and churches pointed out its gaping absence and the implications of the same. At other times, reconciliation became present at moments when it was vehemently denounced, and in spaces from which it was constantly and frantically banned – both from the left and the right – as an unnecessary, premature and treacherous, if not dangerous, concept designed to dilute and to confuse. The more it was denounced, the more reconciliation became prominent.

I am thus submitting that reconciliation has lurked behind and hovered over the (South) African church for a very long time. Indeed, it is possible to argue that some of the main markers of today’s progressive languages of reconstruction, plurality, ecology, difference, race, class, gender and sexual orientation, are also ways of probing the possibilities and difficulties of reconciliation between humans, as well as between humans and the rest of creation, and, of course, between humans and God. The church, even the South African church, has been particularly and deeply affected by such debates.

South African Church Context in Perspective

Few contexts have had the question of reconciliation forced on them for so long and so intensely as that of the South African churches in particular and the South African people in general. As vicious and as stubborn as the apartheid system was, so has been the response of South Africans to the challenge of reconciliation. The neat, conceptual, physical and geographical divisions of apartheid begged the question of reconciliation, and did so in the unrighteousness of the divisions, neatness, and in the absence of logic in their supposed rationality. The very attempt to create a perfect system of “separate development” made people ask whether separateness was not antithetical to development. The very separation of people during the Sunday morning worship hour and their separation at the communion table caused people to ask questions regarding the implications of separation to the meaning and integrity of church, the meaning of Christian worship and the meaning of Holy Communion. The very artificiality of having clearly defined and separated spaces for Black and White people when in reality Blacks and Whites could not live totally apart from one another, exposed both the impossibility and the artificiality of the apartheid project. In this manner, the apartheid system was both an attempt to ward off reconciliation, i.e. to postpone it, and in some ways to redefine it. In this redefinition, reconciliation referred to the formation of neat racial lines, whereby ‘reconciled’ groups were economically reconciled only from within, thereby resulting in peoples being reconciled apart, the one from the other.
Church and Reconciliation

No less than the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of South Africa spearheaded the theological justification of apartheid. Such justifications included the argument that described the separation of races as a pragmatic enterprise designed to prevent “trouble” between the races. Other arguments justified such separations on theological and biblical grounds. It is ironic that the colonial project of Christian mission towards native peoples served the purpose of both marking them out as “different” and providing Christian service to the “lower” races. The result was that some of the most missionary minded South African Christian groupings were also the most racist in their understanding of acceptable social arrangements between Blacks and Whites. It is no surprise therefore that the DRC has been one of the most mission-minded church denominations in South(ern) Africa. Yet, the same church also championed the apartheid cause so that it made it seem as if the apartheid cause of separating people was aligned to the deepest objectives of Christian mission. This entanglement between mission and the politics of separation became a notable feature not only of the DRC in South Africa but also of the entire work of the Christian church in (South) Africa. The electoral triumph of white Afrikaner nationalism in 1948, which led to a government that legalized apartheid, was also the triumph of a theological view which sought to separate peoples.

Castle Christianity

During the early 17th century, Elmina Castle, in which Jacobus Capitein worked, was a self-contained home-away-from-home for Dutch soldiers and slave traders. This was a Christian enclave on the edge of an African village, with one foot in the sea and the other on the soil. There lived a ‘Christian’ community replete with chaplain and chapel. This was the community where Capitein was sent to serve as pastor. But this community was also a holding place for slaves, with several dark and despicable dungeons located literally below the chapel floors. The castle may have been situated within reach of an African village but it was completely separated from it. It seems that this model of Protestant Christianity, which I call “castle Christianity”, was to prove difficult to relinquish in the following two centuries. Many of the forms of existence that churches and missions assumed in South African contexts assumed the castle Christianity syndrome of becoming self-contained communities of homogeneous artificiality, whose impact in the larger community was minimal. This model of mission not only produced ‘exclusive’ mission stations but also a number of ethnically based missions and, later, churches. What I am suggesting is that apart from the grand separation of apartheid, the dominant models and methods of mission also operated on the principle of separation. It is little wonder then that many (South) African churches have found it hard to impose a strong, meaningful, deliberate and intended social impact upon society. For this reason, when we talk of the role of the church in reconciliation in South Africa, the initial role the church played was a negative one. It is also important to note that we are talking here not only of a divided church but also of a group of churches, whose main mission method and main mode of existence was that of dividing. Historically, the South African church has been comfortable with divisions along the lines I have alluded to, and to the separation of races. Indeed, the South African church of the early 20th century saw itself as an auxiliary of the colonial government in addressing the so-called “native question”. This the church did by keeping quiet when the government appropriated land from Africans through the 1913 Land Act. The church also kept quiet at the wanton murder of members of an African Independent Church during the Bulhoek massacre of May 1921, when Africans refused to move from an occupied piece of land they considered as sacred. Further, the church assisted the colonial government in its massive investigation of the Ethiopian churches in the 1920s.

Prophetic Witness

It has often taken great national catastrophes to shake the church from its slumber. This was the case when in 1959 apartheid police massacred in cold-blood over sixty Black people in a peaceful march against apartheid pass laws: the now infamous Sharpeville massacre. South African churches then organized the famous Cottesloe consultation in December 1960, at which they unequivocally condemned the action of the police and warned that the country was on a slippery slope. But even this was facilitated by the intervention of the World Council of Churches (WCC). From this time onwards, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) became more vociferous in its opposition to government policies, and produced several statements in this regard. The 1968 A Message to the People of South Africa is a famous statement from this era.

Yet, in order to appreciate the full extent of the South African churches’ role in reconciliation discourse, contestations and practices in South Africa, we must look beyond the SACC to the role of the worldwide church, as epitomized in, for example, the WCC Programme to Combat Racism, and the worldwide anti-apartheid movements.

The South African church leveraged itself against these commendable efforts of the world church and of world citizens in opposition to the racist policies of apartheid.

In this regard, the SACC often served not necessarily as the vanguard of the quest for a new South African society but as a support structure, as a space for social imagination and envisioning of a new South African society by several other entities inside and outside the church, as well as inside and outside South Africa. It is no surprise therefore that some of the most constructive and significant work of reconciliation occurred outside the four doors of the church, and outside Khotso House, where the SACC had its offices. But the church (and the SACC, together with similar organizations such as the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICC), the Black Theology Project and the Beyers Naude’s Christian Institute (CI) and its influential publication, *Pro Veritate*) nevertheless played a significant midwifery and behind-the-scenes role in the orchestration of radical notions of reconciliations on a variety of fronts by a variety of organizations.

But the apartheid government was not to be fooled. They knew the pivotal role which the SACC was playing in creating space for support, protest and envisioning of a new society. Although devastating in its consequence, it was no surprise when Khotso House in central Johannesburg was bombed in the early 1980s. However, it would be a mistake to suggest that the SACC and its sister organizations were the nerve centre of all efforts to imagine and bring about a reconciled South Africa. Nor would it be accurate to project a picture of unanimity and homogeneity in the pronouncements and actions of the SACC. Effectively, the SACC consisted of disparate churches whose willingness to be prophetic was uneven. At the most vicious of times during the years 1970-1990, the SACC was often reduced to effectively a small cohort of committed church leaders and individuals who enjoyed little, if any, material support from official church structures. It is an open secret that had it not been for the support of the international church community, the SACC could not have survived on the spiritual and material support of the local churches, and outside Khotso House, where the SACC consisted of disparate churches whose willingness to be prophetic was uneven. At the most vicious of times during the years 1970-1990, the SACC was often reduced to effectively a small cohort of committed church leaders and individuals who enjoyed little, if any, material support from official church structures. It is an open secret that had it not been for the support of the international church community, the SACC could not have survived on the spiritual and material support of the local churches, especially at a time when apartheid was at its most vicious.

Theologically, the SACC was, owing to its very nature, not able to become an effective home or engine for the meaningful development of radical theologies. As a result, such theologies as represented by South African Black theology, the Kairos document, African theology (of the type advocated by the late Gabriel Setiloane) and Women’s theology were developed outside the confines of the SACC and outside denominational confines. Indeed, formal South African church structures and processes were not ready for such radical theology even at the height of apartheid. Perhaps the point has to be conceded that formal church structures and Christian councils do not, as a matter of principle, easily subscribe to (radical) theological trends. However, there were several protest actions and initiatives (so-called mass actions) which were initiated and spearheaded by the SACC. Some of the most memorable of these were the 1982 World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declaration of apartheid as a heresy, the Standing for the Truth Campaign of the late 1980s, the National Peace Accord of the early 1990s, and, finally, the infamous call to prayer on 16 June 1985 for an end to the unjust rule of the white apartheid government.

**The Dramatis Personae**

The role of the church in national reconciliation in South Africa cannot really be appreciated outside specific characters and personalities.

**Missionary anthropologists.** In this regard, we must begin by acknowledging the initial role of some missionaries in challenging South African society to begin imagining a different society. The one hundred years between 1850 and 1950 could be characterized as a time during which certain missionaries probed the question of reconciliation mainly from the points of view of religious studies, anthropology and linguistics. I am thinking here of a whole range of missionaries from Henry Callaway in the mid 1800s to Bengt Sundkler in the 1940s. Their works were not always flattering towards the natives, and not necessarily accurate in every respect. But it is true that the body of literature produced by these anthropological missionaries, their critiques notwithstanding, became the basis not only for alternative views about native peoples in general but also for alternative views of the church and society in general. In these works is to be found what could be called the first and most primary data for later African theologies of inculturation. However, one must also concede that in these works is also to be found the primary data for the construction of an apartheid society. Insofar as they suggested that there was religion, system and structure to African society and African beliefs, these missionaries challenged their compatriots to countenance a different and more advanced relationship with Africans. Yet, insofar as their studies sought to explore the exotic and the primitive in contrast to the peoples of high civilization, these missionaries laid the basis

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for apartheid in the future. Indeed, in their ‘creation’ of clans and tribes by means of classification and ‘linearization’ of African peoples, they laid the foundation for future ethnicities, as well as the apartheid system itself.

**Early African lay and ordained leaders.** By the late 1800s, several Africans had been trained as teachers, evangelists and pastors. From among these emerged the first generation of African writers and intellectuals. Although constrained by missionary tutelage, this group created an important space for future generations of African priests and others to contest the type of church and society imagined by western missionaries. This is the contest in which we must place the work of Tengo Jabavu, Tiyo Soga, Mina Soga, Pambani Mzimba, Mangena Mokane and Nehemia Tile. Especially valuable in the contribution of these people was their vision for continuities between African culture and the Christian faith, as well as for those between the Christian faith and the socio-political life; these are nothing less than quests for reconciliation. Evidence abounds that western mission school-trained Africans, both lay and clergy, were heavily involved in the earliest political stirrings.

**The theological type.** A very influential group in terms of conceptualizing and analysing thinking around reconciliation in the church have been the local theologians. Another way of talking about them is to refer to the theologies they propounded. The quest for a reconciled African – reconciled within and without – was a central theme in African reconciliation. Simplistically, the matter was often coined in the language of how to become truly African and truly Christian at the same time. Another way of approaching this question has been that of the late Gabriel Setiloane: “If African religion is sufficient for some African theologians, why do they stay in the Christian fold? The comprehensive nature of the reconciliation and continuity that African theology sought has not always been appreciated. South African contextual theologians insisted that reconciliation be taken away from the dizzy heights of dogma, and suggested that context and not dogma should have the final say in the shape and nature of reconciliation. “How, then, can we insist that a raped woman must be reconciled with her rapist? How can we equate the feeble attempts at self-defence by a woman being raped to the violence of the racist?” asked the Kairos Document.8 Black theologians, for their part, not only insisted that reconciliation be “handled with care” but that it should not be restricted to reconciliation between Black and White. Instead, Blacks needed to be reconciled as much to one another, to their labour and to their land as they needed to be reconciled to other Blacks. In similar manner, women theologians insisted that unless and until issues of gender were addressed, the reconciliation agenda will not have been addressed.9

**The Tutu type.** No one epitomizes the role of the South African church in reconciliation like Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu. Special and unique as Tutu is, I would like to suggest that he be seen as archetypal of those church leaders who emerged in the 1960s as the apartheid system entrenched itself, and as other avenues of challenge and protest became closed. Within this type, I would include those like the late Beyers Naude, as well as Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane, Brigalia Barn and Stanley Mogoba. This type of church leader comes on to the scene at a time when all alternative political leaders are either in prison, gagged by banning orders, or have been forced into exile. The Tutu type assumes both an ecclesiastical and political leadership. For this reason, they took an important lead in such organizations as the SACC/WCC, WARC and the United Democratic Front (UDF). By so doing, they deliberately served South Africa beyond the confines of the church. Hence, we see them conducting funerals of people who might not have been ardent church goers, just as we see them intervening in preventing the burning to death of those accused of being “sell outs” to the apartheid regime.

The Tutu type is also well connected internationally, so that lobbying internationally for the South African cause with both church and political groupings became an essential part of their job description. Cautiously, they also liaise with the banned, exiled and imprisoned political leaders in various creative ways. They shuttle between the people’s political leaders and the people. The Tutu type succeeds in elevating the South African political crisis both to a theological level hitherto never reached, and to an international cause in a way not quite achieved before. Armed with international sympathy and standing, they openly engage the South African government, even resorting to the controversial disinvestment campaign of the 1980s. From this group of leaders we have produced several high ranking government officials, with some taking up key provincial cabinet positions in post-1994 South Africa. Indeed, it was from this group that the leadership of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was drawn. As a result, it seems that to this group the government of the new South Africa has entrusted the task of national therapy and religious diplomacy.

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Back to Lion and Rabbit: Towards a Conclusion

**Whites as Rabbit and Rabbit as villain**
In terms of the first interpretation of the fable with which the essay was opened, it is possible to suggest Rabbit as representative of Whites. These are the little people who wield economic, social and intellectual power, although they form only about four percent of the South African population. Like Rabbit, they have not responded positively to the extraordinary generosity of Lion, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu has recently noted. They do not feel that they did anything wrong and see nothing for which they ought to be thankful. Instead, they whinge and moan about “crime”, “corruption” and “falling standards”. With the advent of the new South Africa, they have thickened and increased the height of the walls surrounding their homes, both literally and metaphorically. If holding the allegedly about-to-collapse roof also symbolizes the doing of lower and dirtier jobs, then it matches the plight of the majority of Black peoples who, without skills, continue to slog it out doing menial jobs for meagre salaries. Government schemes such as the Employment Equity Bill are shipwrecked by the massive lack of skills among Blacks. Political freedom has, for the vast majority of Black people, not translated into economic freedom. Yet, our there Rabbit roams and frolics freely, wallowing in luxury and living in his world. It seems, therefore, at least to most Black people, that they have been cheated once again.

**Blacks as Lion and Lion as Hero**
In terms of this scenario, Lion stands for Blacks. Although cheated and duped many times before, Lion remains trusting and forgiving – always ready to sacrifice individual and temporary pleasures in favour of matters of national interest. Stripped of integrity and dignity, and fraught with poverty by the many years of apartheid misrule, Blacks are nevertheless prepared to throw their weight behind the project of the new democratic South Africa in terms of which both Blacks and Whites will be saved. Although the Blacks are, by and large, the aggrieved party, they have not made too big a fuss about compensation. Instead, they have responded with generosity, doing all they can to hold the national roof up while expressing tremendous hope for the future.

**Who Is Who?**
As with all fables and anecdotes, care must be taken not to impose an interpretation too rigidly. There is a limit to what an anecdote can do to clarify a real life situation. It may shed both light and darkness into our hermeneutical paths. However, the decision as to who between Rabbit and Lion would represent Whites and who would represent Blacks is an instructive one. It is thus important to refine the matter further as to the criteria we use to determine which aspects of the make-up of our two main characters pertains to Blacks and which to Whites. Have the Black Lions been duped once again by the White Rabbits? Or are the White Lions again at the mercy of the scathing and cunning sarcasm of the Black Rabbits? Other similar decisions will still need to be made. Would Lion and Rabbit resemble women and men in their troubled relations? What will it take for Lions and Rabbits to be reconciled?

**Challenge to the Church: Beyond Lions and Rabbits**
There are more fundamental issues beyond questions of who is smarter and who is “more culpable. Although not on talking terms, and although Rabbit is on the run from Lion, do they nevertheless not powerfully affect each other’s worlds and lifestyles? Can Lion ever walk freely – free of anger, shame, hatred, blood-thirstiness and self-loathing – in that land? Although having escaped the ravenous clutches of Lion once again, can Rabbit freely explore the land? Indeed, can Rabbit afford to leap, hop and frolic with real abandon on its lush plains? The chances are that the life of the one is heavily constrained by the other to the point of negative mutual dependence. The possibility exists that both Lion and Rabbit will end up defining their identities and life missions in terms of the other in the most negative
of ways. Although not in communication, each needs some reliable indication of what the other is up to. While on different and strange quests, each may ridicule, overestimate, underestimate, demonize and even end up mimicking one another. Worse still, they may, through their innate and mutual distrust, drive each other to death, even as they may force each other to the least habitable corners of the land they both share.

I want to suggest that this fable, and my attempt to elucidate it above, aptly captures the complexities and indignities of the South African social and economic arrangements, within which the call for reconciliation has been made. The very suggestion of lions and rabbits reconciling invokes a fanciful if not an impossible task. Lions eat Rabbits, and Rabbits escape Lions. They do not reconcile themselves with each other. The project of orchestrating reconciliation between them is a difficult one fraught with many dangers. This is precisely the path that I believe South Africa has chosen for itself: to reconcile Lions and Rabbits. To put it differently; it is to show Lions the Rabbits in the make-up of Lions, and to show Rabbits the Lions in the make up of Rabbits, with the hope that one day we will all realize that Rabbits and Lions are nothing but social and economic constructions we have invented as humans and, as such, how they can be deconstructed.

**Concluding Thoughts and Challenges**

In what I have sketched above, I am hopeful that it might assist in understanding the manner in which the South African churches have thus far engaged with the task of reconciliation. At times this has been deliberate, at other times somewhat haphazard. At times it has been conscious, at other times inadvertent, at times overt and other times covert, and at times excellent, at other times weak. In short, I have argued that from the earliest days of the presence of Christianity in South Africa, reconciliation has lurked and invariably been suggested in various and diverse ways.

In this manner, I have argued for an expanded view of reconciliation, beyond a mere word search for the term “reconciliation”. I have suggested that the engagement of South African churches with reconciliation has been complex and multifaceted, constructive and destruction, loud and silent. Hence my suggestion that African Independent Church rituals and practice are as much a quest for reconciliation as was the SACC’s series of public anti-apartheid practices.

The scandal of separation and division in the South African churches cries out for and invokes reconciliation. Because South African church divisions and separations were so blatant, and for the most part biblically and theologically justified, they inadvertently but most powerfully caused a reconciliation crisis in the body politic of the country, and fanned into flame a fierce debate about the meaning of reconciliation and the theological integrity of the church. Even before one considers the merits or demerits of their outcomes, these debates spilled out upon other civil bodies and society at large, and thus must be considered part of the basic contribution of the South African church towards reconciliation.

The challenge of deconstructing Lions and Rabbits is an immense one. We cannot be satisfied with limiting Lion and Rabbit to Black and White. The challenges faced by the churches in the new democratic South Africa are such that if it was once useful to regard the reconciliation challenge only and mainly as a matter of Black vs White, we can no longer do so today. Inasmuch as the new South Africa has made giant strides, through the introduction of a vibrant democracy, in the areas of economy, electrification, water supply, electronic and mobile communication, many problems still remain. Even though wonderful statistics abound concerning the vibrancy of the economy, the development of democracy and an ever-diminishing backlog in service delivery of essential services, this does not mean much to the majority, who remain poor, without jobs and without hope. As long as the poverty gap between rich and poor widens, even if some of the *nouveaux riches* are Black and some of the *nouveaux pauvres* are White, South Africa is not yet a reconciled nation. Indeed the local churches will have to dig deep into their own pockets if they are to attempt to address the question of reconciliation for our times.

In many respects there remains a strong sense that South Africa – even a democratic South Africa – cannot address the problem of poverty and disease by itself. The seeming dearth of international cooperation, epitomized in the rapid demise of the ecumenical movement, does not help this situation. There are signs that sections of South African society, especially the young, poor, and unemployed, are becoming nihilistic in their approach to life. This is both a result of the legacy of apartheid on the one hand and frustration with the new South Africa on the other. Such nihilism is nullifying many of the good initiatives meant to construct South Africa’s new society.

Could it be that part of what is often described as crime, wanton violence and lack of respect for human life are aspects of the nihilism of which I speak? An area that cries out for reconciliation in South Africa is the area of gender and sexual orientation. Regrettably here, it sometimes does seem that the government is ahead of the church. The many and extreme incidents of violence against women point to a situation where gender remains an unaddressed area. Equally, though challenged by a legislative framework...
that recognizes gay partnerships, churches refuse to explore more inclusive notions of sexuality and marriage.

Two forms of confusion appear to bedevil the South African church at the moment, and they arise from consideration of how the church can reshape its role and identity in the face of an ever-growing secular and pluralist South Africa – at least one that claims these values. First, how is the church to relate meaningfully and prophetically, yet cordially and with integrity, to a democratic government in such a way that it does not forget the poor and the marginalized? Second, the demise of international ecumenism appears to be challenging the churches to fashion a new form of local ecumenism. It seems that several churches find it easier to revert to denominational cocoons as a response to the demise of international ecumenism than to forge newer, more local forms of the same.

Finally, the HIV/AIDS pandemic presents the deepest and greatest challenge to reconciliation for South African churches today. The pandemic attacks the body in devastating ways, not only the individual’s body but the body of society and the Body of Christ. All over the world the church has been stunned into silence, fear and shame, or reduced to sporadic, incoherent utterances and actions, even as national governments huff and puff. The South African church is no exception. It has not been able to translate its memory of activist struggle, lament and protest into concerted praxis in the face of the pandemic. For some reason, the church seems stuck in the ministry of Simon of Cyrene and the ministry of Joseph of Aramathea, and without the ability to move to the kind of ministry epitomized by Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday.

4.5 Feminist Theologies in Africa

Sarojini Nadar

In 1997, while I was an Honours student in Hebrew Bible, my teacher of Hebrew at the University of Cape Town, Azila Reisenberger, invited me to a meeting at the home of Denise Ackermann. She told me that the group I was going to meet was called the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and that the “Cape Town Circle” was one chapter of a number of chapters or groups of this growing women’s movement on the continent of Africa. “What do they do?” I asked with curiosity. “They do feminist theology from the perspectives of African women,” she answered. “And how do they do this?” was my next question. “They do theology by beginning with their context and stories,” she answered and then urged me to attend the group meeting that night with the words, “We are just telling our stories at the moment.”

And so began my journey with feminist theologies in Africa – with this little group of women from different faiths – Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, African traditionalists, and Christian, all focusing on what it meant to reflect on our context, identity and spirituality as feminist theologians. These reflections were ultimately published in a book called Claiming Our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity and Spirituality, a book in which my attempt at writing my first article was published (see Nadar, 2000). It became clear to me that through this small group of women, who identified themselves with a continental-wide movement, feminist theology was being done in Africa. Hence, any attempt to consider the history and the development of feminist theologies in Africa must of necessity look to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle) as a chief source of information and guidance on this oft-contested subject.

In this survey article on feminist theologies in Africa, I wish to reflect on three areas within this topic: 1) the history and development of feminist theologies in Africa; 2) the methods and features of African feminist theologies1, and 3) the problems of and possibilities for the future of feminist theologies in Africa. Before beginning, it is important to note two things. Firstly, while feminist theologies are by no means restricted to the religion of Christianity in Africa, I wish to restrict my discussion in this chapter to the development within Christianity, given that this is where my expertise and training lie. Secondly, while I situate these reflections within the body of work which has already attempted to document the contours of African women’s theologies (Phiri, 1997; Oduyoye, 2001; Kanyoro, 2006;

1. I use the terms African women’s theologies and African feminist theologies or feminist theologies in Africa interchangeably.
Landman, 1995), I will also attempt here to raise some critiques of the discourse and note some potential areas for future development.

**The History and Development of Feminist Theologies in Africa**

If one wants to know the history of feminist theologies in Africa one must look to the history of the Circle, which is well documented in recent writings (see for example Kanyoro, 2006). It deserves some attention here, in at least three areas of the history and development of feminist theologies in Africa: 1) its relationship to the history of the global feminist movement; 2) the necessity of formulating African women’s theologies vis-à-vis African theology and its sub-disciplines; and 3) the distinctive face of African women’s theologies vis-à-vis their feminist counterparts in other parts of the world.

**Feminist Theologies in Africa and their Relationship to the Global Feminist Movement**

The rise of the feminist movement has usually been described as having occurred in “three waves.” The first wave focused on women’s political rights – the suffrage movement of the early 1920s in the US, and its counterpart movements in other parts of the world – for example in the early 1930s when white women first obtained the right to vote in South Africa. The second wave focused more on women’s civil rights in the domestic sphere, for example on issues of reproductive rights and household duties. The third wave is now commonly understood as the strand within feminism that recognizes that women are by no means a homogenous group and therefore any attempt at describing women’s experiences (women’s collective experiences being the chief cornerstone of feminist discourse) must essentially and inevitably consider that women’s experiences are indeed varied and different and hence the slogan that “we are not all sisters under the skin” must be taken seriously. It is within this third wave of feminist discourse that African women’s theologies find their expression most perceptibly. In other words, African women theologians have strived to carve a space for themselves which is both welcoming of, and takes seriously, their experiences from within varied African contexts– these experiences include among others, experiences of colonialism and apartheid (Dube, 2000), patriarchal oppression within culture (Kanyoro, 2002), the rise of the HIV pandemic particularly within the context of gender oppression (Phiri et al., 2003; Dube and Kanyoro, 2004) and the ever-increasing feminization of poverty (Haddad, 2000).

**African Women’s Theologies vis-à-vis African Theologies**

In addition to the space which African women’s theologies have carved for themselves within the global secular feminist movement, African women theologians have also sought to chart a separate space for themselves within the “irruption” (cf. Fabella and Torres, 11983) of varied liberation theologies into the classical western academy. One such liberation theology is what is now commonly known as African theologies, and these theologies are not only taught at theological institutions in Africa, but also the University of KwaZulu-Natal, for example, even boasts a chair in African Theologies. African Theologies, which began as a protest theology against the demonizing tendencies of colonial and missionary interpretations of the religion and culture in Africa, has evolved into an authentic discipline, and several scholars research and publish in the area of the intersection of African religion and cultures and Christianity. Scholars such as Setiloane (1980), Pobee (1978), Tutu (1979), and Mbeki (1979) were some of the first scholars to seriously engage and name this emerging theology in the 70s and 80s. African Theologies further broke down into several theological sub-disciplines.

Tinyiko Maluleke (1997:4-23) has argued that while the debates were on one level, between African theology and the classical theology of the west, there was also an “internal” debate going on too – this debate was about the differences between Black or Liberation Theologies and African Theologies – the proponents of the latter arguing that the cultures and experiences of the African people were not taken seriously by the former discourses. Hence, while they were keen to show the similarities between the discourses, they were also insistent on the differences. These debates were well captured in some of the titles of the papers and books which emerged, e.g. Josiah Young’s 1986 work *Black and African Theologies: Siblings or Distant Cousins?*, Desmond Tutu’s 1986 article *Black Theology and African Theology: Soulmates or Antagonists?* And Mokgethi Motlhabi’s article *Black or African Theology? Toward an Integral African Theology*.

While the proponents of African Theologies may have felt appropriated rather than included by Liberation or Black Theologies, another group emerged, who also felt appropriated by African Theology itself. This group is made up of African women theologians who have argued in different contexts that while it was noble that African Theology was protesting the non-inclusion of African culture in both classical and liberation discourses, African Theology nonetheless portrayed the African *male* experience of culture as the norm. In this respect African women felt that

1. This program was first coordinated by the immanent African theologian, Tinyiko Maluleke, and is currently occupied by the equally immanent theologian. Isabel Phiri.
their voices were not only excluded from this theologizing, but that their experiences of culture as negative forces within their lives were particularly being ignored. It is for this reason that the visionary Mercy Amba Oduyoye and others like her decided that if African women’s engagement with theology and culture were going to be taken seriously, then African women would have to construct this theology themselves (Oduyoye, 1995). As Brigalia Barn could assert: “If ever there was going to be a Theology of Liberation for women, women had to construct it. It would not come automatically even from the most radical of our theologies” (Barn, 2005:10). And so African women’s theologies of liberation, while finding continuity with African theologies, also pushed the boundaries and extended the discourses beyond the confines of male experiences as normative. Maluleke argued that African women’s theologies were charting a new way and accurately predicted that in the twenty-first century African women’s theologies would be a force to be reckoned with:

Whereas Black and African theologies have for the past half century argued for the validity of African Christianities and the legitimacy of African culture, African Feminist/Womanist theology is charting a new way. This theology is mounting a critique or both African culture and African Christianity in ways that previous African theologies have not been able to do. From these theologies, we may learn how to be truly African and yet be critical of aspects of African culture. African womanist theologians are teaching us how to criticise African culture without denigrating it, showing us that the one does not and should not necessarily lead to the other. My prediction is that the twenty-first century is going to produce an even more gendered African theology. All theologians and African churches will be well advised to begin to take heed. (Maluleke, 1997:21-22)

**African Women’s Theologies vis-à-vis Feminist Theologies**

In the same way that African women’s theologies found both continuity with, and were critical of, African Theology, they shared a similar view of feminist theologies of the west. While I have used the terms “African women’s theologies” and “feminist theologies in Africa” interchangeably thus far in this article, it must be noted that many African women theologians have problems identifying themselves as feminist. The challenges which they find with this term have been well documented in the article called *What’s in a Name? Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women’s Theologies*, written by Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. The main difference between African women’s theologies and feminist theologies, I would argue, lies in the emphasis each wishes to place on particular issues, rather than on an inherent difference in ideologies. In other words, each of the theologies, i.e. both western feminist and African feminist, are cut from the same cloth as it were, and the same adage that has been used by Alice Walker to describe the relationship between womanism and feminism can be used to describe African feminist theologies and western feminist theologies too – i.e. womanist is to feminist as the color purple is to the color lavender (Walker, 1983:xii). It is the emphasis of each theology which defines the contours; the defining focus of feminist theologies in Africa has been on culture. This focus on culture has not been in opposition to issues of gender, race, and class, but in addition or as complementary to these important factors. It is important, therefore, not to draw false dichotomies between feminist theologies in Africa and feminist theologies in the Global North, this false dichotomy usually being understood in terms of African feminist theologies being “softer” and more “conservative.” The innovative and bold methods which African women have developed within theology and biblical hermeneutics bear testimony to this.

**Methods and Features of Feminist Theologies in Africa**

For over two decades women theologians in Africa have been developing and sharpening their theological methods in order to both speak to the academy from which many of their theologies derive, and to also address their communities which inspire such theological reflections and analyses. These methods are characterised by five features – what I refer to in my teaching as “the five S’s of feminist theology in Africa,” namely Suspicion; Subjectivity; Story; Scrutiny and the “So-What?” question. Examples of African women’s theologies which illustrate a commitment to each of these characteristic features will be described and analysed in what follows.

**Suspicion – Christian Tradition and Theology Is Both Patriarchal and Imperial**

As already asserted, feminist theologies in Africa have maintained a critical solidarity with liberation theologies in general, which are suspicious of the imperial and patriarchal nature of Christian tradition and traditional forms of theologizing. These traditional or classical forms of theologizing have more often than not claimed to be universal and “objective.” Furthermore they have served to entrench western worldviews as normative. It is for this reason that African feminist theologians have sought indigenous forms of knowledge on which to base their theologies of liberation. The work of Rose Abbey (2001:140-59), the Ghanaian feminist theologian, is a good example of the search
for the feminist within local theologies. She finds and reclaims the indigenous names used for God within the Akan culture and shows how names that were traditionally feminine were translated as masculine within Christian western forms of theologizing. Her work has been significant in exposing the imperial and patriarchal tendencies of classical theologies. Her groundbreaking study proposes a systematic doctrine of God within the framework of both an African and feminist understanding; an approach that parallels feminist theologians in the west, such as Rosemary Radford Reuther (1983:47-71), who have sought to find, reclaim and reassert the feminine nature of the deities both as it is expressed in scripture and in traditional forms of religion. Rose Abbey’s theological method and insights therefore advance traditional systematic doctrine and traditional feminist doctrine, which are often steeped within western worldviews.

Subjectivity – The Specificity of Experience
While liberation theologies in general and feminist theologies in particular have stressed that experience is a legitimate starting point of theologizing, often liberation theologies have tended to use experience as a code word for poor or black and have therefore tended to generalize on the experiences of third-world subjects. Feminist theologies in Africa and the two-thirds world in general have been wary of this generalizing tendency to, as Mohanty (1988:63) declares, portray all third-world women as oppressed or paint all African women with the same brush. African feminist theologies have sought to specify their localities and hence their theological methods based on their specific locations. This has resulted in culturally specific theological and hermeneutical methods such as Bosadi (Masenya, 1996, 1997), Imbokodo (Nzimande, 2008) and Semoya (Dube 1996). They have also not been afraid to engage their own contexts in critical and affirming ways (see the work of Landman (1994) on Afrikaans women in South Africa for example). African women theologians have therefore not presumed that African culture is homogenous, and “unlike European imperial historians, explorers, and missionaries of the previous centuries, African [women] theologians have generally been wary of generalization’s about ‘Africa’ and Africa ‘culture’” (Maluleke, 1997:10). Maluleke further uses Mercy Oduyoye’s now classical book, Daughters of Anowa (1995), to show how serious attempts have been made to ensure that the terms “African culture” and “ATRs” have not been allowed to degenerate into meaningless generalizations and clichés (Maluleke, 1997:10-11).

Story – Narrative Theology is African Women’s Theology
Well before the term narrative theology (cf. Hauerwas and Jones, 1989) became popular in the academy, African schools of thought and philosophy embraced and celebrated the power of stories. African feminist theologies have been no different. The work of feminist theologians in Africa bears testimony to this respect for story as a legitimate method and source of theology, and therefore African women’s theologies has aptly been named “narrative theologies” (Landman, 1996:100). Hence there are numerous examples of research and publications in the area of narrative theology. One of the most celebrated Circle books to be published features the story of the daughter of Anowa (Oduyoye, 1995). In her book, Oduyoye tells the story of “Anowa,” a mythical woman belonging to various cultural traditions as a priest and a prophet. She uses Anowa’s story to create space to talk about African women and their participation in religion because she asserts that “she was the epitome of a woman participating fully in what is life-sustaining and life-protecting, someone worthy of being named an ancestress” (Oduyoye, 1995:7).

Further African women theologians have employed storytelling in their biblical hermeneutics. The collection of essays in the book Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible edited by Musa Dube in 2001 bears testimony to this. In fact the first section of the book is devoted to “Storytelling Methods and Interpretations.” In this section, Masenya’s article entitled Esther and Northern-Sotho Stories: An African–South African Woman’s Commentary is a good example of how African women combine the arts of storytelling and biblical interpretation. In the same section, Musa Dube also offers a reading of Mark 5:24-43 and parallels the woman with the hemorrhage to Africa as a bleeding mother trying to save her children from the ravages of colonialism.

Besides using storytelling as a method, African women have also told their own stories of pain and patriarchal oppression as a means to analyze and overcome such oppression (see for example Nadar, 2000; Phiri, 1996, 2000). While telling their stories places them in a position of vulnerability, the stories also become authoritative dialogical texts. As Oduyoye (2001: 10) has asserted, “African women accept story as a source of theology and so tell their stories as well as study the experiences of other women including those outside their own continent, but especially those in Africa whose stories remain unwritten.”
**Scrutiny – Not Just the Right Answers but the Right Questions**

While the works of African women theologians to a large extent have focused on a theology of hope as is evidenced with the near obsession with the phrase *Talitha Qumi – Daughter Arise* in the work of African women theologians, this is not to say that African women have not approached their contexts and theologies critically. While the over-use of the biblical phrase *Talitha Qumi* suggests an over-reliance on the Bible as a source of liberation, African feminist scholars have not been afraid to scrutinize the Bible from a critical perspective too. So, while in what can arguably be named *Talitha Qumi* theologies, culture is seen as oppressive and the gospel as liberating, African women have also offered alternatives to the Bible being used as only a source or liberation in African theology (contra Mbiti, 1979:90, who argued that “Any viable theology must and should have a biblical basis”).

In fact, it is not just culture that has been the focus in African women’s theologies but the interconnectedness of issues of race, class, and gender that have also been at the forefront of African women’s theologizing. This interconnectedness is worked out in many of the writings of Musa Dube, who names her methodology “postcolonial feminist hermeneutics.” In a context where the Bible is taken as almost sacrosanct, as is captured by Mbiti’s (1979:90) emphatic statement, “Nothing can substitute for the Bible”, Dube’s bold scrutiny of the oppressive nature of the Bible toward women, and the ways in which the Bible is not just patriarchal but imperial, is to be commended. While Dube’s work has taken a critical stance toward issues of race and class in the Bible, other South African women of the Circle have also taken on the issues of race and class in the South African context (Landman, 2002; Masenya, 1995, 2002).

**So What? – The Most Important Question We Can Ask Ourselves as Feminists is “So What?”**

The fifth feature of African feminist theologies is its focus on activism. Lillian Robinson has reminded us that “the most important question we can ask ourselves as feminists is ‘so what?’” (quoted in Newton and Rosenfelt, 1985:xv). Newton and Rosenfelt go on to argue that inherent in that question is a view that most of us as feminists share “that the point of our work is to change the world.” If there is one thing that does distinguish African women theologians from their sisters elsewhere, it is probably this “so what?” question. As with traditional liberation theologies, African women theologians have worked within the “see, judge, act” paradigm. There is a distinct focus of “act” in the work of African women theologians. They are interested not for its own sake, but for the ways in which it can change their lives and those of their sisters. It is for this reason that Teresa Okure (1993:77) points out, African women’s “primary consciousness in doing theology is not method, but life and life concerns – their own and those of their own peoples.”

Mercy Oduyoye (2001:16) further maintains that “Women do theology to undergird and nourish a spirituality for life. And so from the affirmations of faith, which they make . . . flows the praxis that gives birth to liberating and life-enhancing visions and further actions and reflections.” It is for this reason that many African women theologians are engaged in community Bible studies and other forms of engagement (Nadar, 2006; Dube, 1996; Kanyoro, 2001). African feminist theologians therefore do not find it helpful to draw harsh distinctions between activism and academia. These two areas in the life and work of African feminist theologians are not mutually exclusive – they are simply a continuous never-ending spiral of action and reflection.

**Problems with, and Possibilities for, the Future of Feminist Theologies in Africa**

Each of the five characteristic features of African women’s theologies, and the subsequent creation and development of innovative theological methods examined in the foregoing article, provide us with both challenges to and possibilities for the future of feminist theologies in Africa. How might these challenges be met, and the possibilities be taken up, in an increasing resurgence of conservative religion all over the world?

The first feature of African women’s theologies as described above was suspicion – the idea that one needs to be wary of the imperializing and less than life-giving theologies that emanate from the church and elsewhere. I would argue that in the context of a resurgence of conservative religion all over the world, particularly given that most churches in Africa have eschewed traditional forms of worship and spirituality for a more Americanized or European form of “globalized gospel,” a healthy dose of a hermeneutic of suspicion is exactly what is needed, and African feminist theologians would do well to pursue this hermeneutic in their work.

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The second feature of feminist theologies in Africa that was presented and analyzed was the notion of subjectivity and specificity in both the description of the contexts and the methods of theologizing that are employed in the work of African feminist theologians. While the use of subjective experiences and specific contexts are important, so that Africa is not presented as homogenous and clichéd, African feminist discourse should also be wary of using indigenous resources uncritically. For example, even the approach of Bosadi proposed by Madipoane Masenya has been critiqued as a patriarchal construct (Maluleke, 2001:243).

Thirdly, the focus on personal story and storytelling as a method in African women’s theologies is certainly a method that fits in with the more accessible forms of theologizing that African theology in general has become well known for. However, notwithstanding that stories might seem based more “on talent, intuition, or clinical experience [and] defies clear order and systematization” (Lieblich et al., 1998:1), it must be noted that stories must not naively be perceived as comprehensive and precise depictions of truth. In other words, we must recognize that all stories have a bias and an ideology embedded within. As Lieblich et al. have concluded through their study on narrative: “We believe that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these ‘remembered facts’” (1998:8). And so African women too have to be prepared to have their stories tested and contested, since their ability to convey “truth” is always dependent on the way in which such “truth” is presented – the “remembered facts.”

Fourthly I have shown that another feature of African feminist theologies is its ability to scrutinize existing “truths.” A significant source of “truth” in African theology and popular Christianity in Africa still remains the Bible. As Oduyoye (1995:174) has argued: “Throughout Africa, the Bible has been and continues to be absolutized: it is one of the oracles that we consult for instant solutions and responses.” In this increasingly globalized Christian context which we find ourselves in, the power of the Bible as authoritative, particularly when it comes to the oppression of women, is now more than ever a concern. It is for this reason that the scrutiny with which African women have started to look at the Bible has to be developed and encouraged. The Bible, like culture, cannot continue to be used uncritically as a source of African theology, when its authoritative effects are less than life-giving for African women.

Finally, I argued that an important feature of African feminist theology has been its focus on praxis – making a difference in the communities from which we come. I think theologians have something to learn from African women in this regard. Denise Ackermann, the “mother” of the Circle in Cape Town, the place at which this article began, has harsh words for those who do not follow the principles of theological praxis:

So much of our scholarly and intellectual work has little relevance for communities of faith, and it is not surprising that these communities themselves take little interest in it . . . The failure to speak theological words into the moment has been costly . . . We grapple with evil and suffering while we seek hope. In these circumstances the navel-gazing and in-house games of certain bourgeois theologies are irrelevant, even reprehensible. (Ackermann, 2003:37).

Conclusion

If we trace the history of feminist theologies in Africa back to the beginning of the formation of the Circle in 1989, then feminist theologies in Africa have been going strong for two decades. In this article I have attempted to show that their continuity with and distinction from African theology and western feminist theologies: have developed and pushed the boundaries of a hermeneutic of suspicion; have avoided the trap of the “third world difference” and spoken from their own positions of subjectivity and specific contexts; have broken through the barriers of traditional academic discourses with their own traditions of storytelling; have applied methods of scrutiny to the Bible and theology by not just providing the right answers but asking the right questions; and, finally, have constantly sought to answer that ever-important question – So what?
God of Life, Creation, and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Introduction: The Mission of the Church and Caring for Creation

Kwok Pui-lan

Because of climate change, the Java Sea is rising, causing storms and floods to wreak havoc on the livelihood of the 30 million residents of Jakarta, Indonesia. In the coming century, if the temperature rises several degrees Fahrenheit, the sea level will rise as much as three feet in the region. In the Caribbean, global warming will result in powerful hurricanes, severe storms, and rising sea temperatures that will decimate the islands. But, by far, Africa is one of the worst-affected regions of climate change, which has brought massive drought, flooding, unreliable crop yields, and waning ecosystems.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has linked peace and justice with the integrity of creation since the late 1980s. In the same vein, some theologians have begun using the term “earth community” instead of “human community” as a gesture to signal that humans belong to a wider web of creation. In the beginning God created a habitat suitable for humans to live, and saw creation as very good (Gen. 1: 31). Caring for creation is an integral part of the church’s mission. A document endorsed by many member churches of the WCC, *Together towards Life*, states that “the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is therefore vital to recognize God’s mission in a cosmic sense and to affirm all life, the whole oikoumene, as being interconnected in God’s web of life.”

This wholistic understanding of mission requires us to shift from an anthropocentric, hierarchal, and patriarchal theological model to an ecological one. In traditional theology, the relation between God, human beings, and creation is often depicted in hierarchical ways. This hierarchical model establishes a dualistic worldview that values the mind over the body, male over female, and humans over non-human. Human beings are seen as the center of the world because humans are created in the image of God and are given the power to dominate other created things, based on an anthropocentric interpretation of Genesis 1:28. In this worldview, nature has no intrinsic value, and exists only to serve humans.

In contrast, an ecological model regards God, human beings, and creation as interdependent and interrelated, just like the three interconnected arrows of the recycling symbol. This ecological model finds inspiration from the concept of Trinity, which points to the interrelatedness, reciprocity, and mutuality of the Triune God. God’s creating activity is not once for all, but a continuous and dynamic process. Women and men are partners in the global movement toward building an inclusive and sustainable community of all lives.

An ecological model of theology does not separate the salvation of humans from the rest of creation. The Hebrew prophets pointed out that the restoration of Israel will be accompanied by the blessings of the land. Second Isaiah described that mountains and hills will burst into songs and trees will clap their hands during the new Exodus ( Isa. 55:12). Paul spoke of the moaning and groaning of creation, and of its longing to be set free from its bondage (Rom. 8:21-22). The author of Revelation used the image of a new heaven and earth to project a hopeful future in which God’s Kingdom will be established (Rev. 21:1).

Introduction: The Mission of the Church and Caring for Creation

In the past, mission and evangelism have focused on the conversion of individuals and the salvation of souls. The concern for the environment has been either secondary or absent. Christian mission’s concern for spiritual but not material wellbeing has been used to justify the colonization of peoples and lands. Raw materials and resources from the global South have been systemically channeled northward for the economic development and modernization of the global North in what is called ecological imperialism. Colonization in the form of territorial expansion has been replaced by economic neocolonialism in the age of globalization and the neoliberal market.

In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis connects the plight of the earth with the plight of the poor: “We cannot combat environmental degradation unless we attend to the causes related to human and social degradation.” Climate change and environmental disasters have devastating impacts on the most vulnerable people, especially on women and children who live on a subsistence level. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened, with the richest 1 percent of the world holding more than half of the world’s wealth. The United States, with only 5 percent of the world’s population, consumes nearly 30 percent of the world’s resources. The church must denounce a global economy that allows a handful to accumulate such wealth and condemns a vast number of people to live in poverty and deteriorating living environments. The fight for social justice is inseparable from the pursuit of ecojustice.

Traditionally, mission has been seen as the rich reaching out to the poor or the powerful to the powerless; and today we must challenge such biases and offer an alternative interpretation. *Together towards Life* emphasizes mission from the margins, and “invites the church to re-imagine mission as a vocation from God’s Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all.” In the context of caring for creation, mission from the margins means that we pay attention to those whose lives are threatened by environmental degradation. They are best positioned to help us understand how global forces impact local habitats and environments. For example, in Jeju Island in South Korea, residents and environmentalists tried to stop the construction of a huge naval base. Protesters continue to be concerned about the base’s environmental impact, and see it as a US-driven project aimed at China, and not for South Korea’s defense. In the United States, Native Americans and activists in Standing Rock, North Dakota, protested against the building of a natural gas pipeline across Native lands and the destruction of sacred sites which the pipeline’s construction caused. These marginalized peoples exercised their moral agency and shared with us the wisdom of how their ancestors lived with, and protected, their local environment.

Mission from the margins also means learning from nature, which has been called by some the “new poor.” Nature has its own histories and stories. Many of these have been preserved in the myths and traditions of indigenous and tribal peoples, passed down from generation to generation. Learning from nature prompted a group of scholars to read the Bible not through an anthropocentric lens, but from the earth’s perspective. Norman Habel, for example, rereads Genesis 1 not as a story culminating in the creation of humans, but as a story of “geophany”—a manifestation or revelation of the earth. This image is in contrast to an anthropocentric interpretation, which places the story of humans subduing the earth over the story of a pristine earth of intrinsic worth.

Care for the earth and for God’s creation provides new impetus for interreligious dialogue and collaboration. Mary Evelyn Tucker, who has facilitated many dialogues on religion and ecology, says, “The environmental crisis

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calls the religions of the world to respond by finding their voice within the larger earth community. In so doing
the religions are entering their ecological phase and finding their planetary expression.8 In the past, the WCC has
promoted interreligious dialogue for the sake of promoting understanding and human unity. Today, the ecumeni-
cal vision for dialogue must include working toward the communion of all lives and ecological solidarity. This
vision is spelled out in the statement from the WCC’s Busan Assembly in 2013: “The unity of the Church, the
unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation are interconnected.”9

At a time when the planet is imperiled, earth care and earth keeping must be an integral part of the church’s
mission. Through working toward ecojustice and interreligious collaboration, the church can cultivate an inter-
faith spirituality for the flourishing of all God’s creation. Such a spirituality is important to sustaining the struggle
in the long run and to overcoming despair. The WCC has called upon Christians and people of good will to join
in a pilgrimage of peace and justice.10 A pilgrimage is a spiritual and transformative journey, in which we come to
closer relations with the divine and creation. Christians enter the pilgrimage with humility, knowing that we can
learn much from pilgrims from other traditions. Through witnessing to God’s love for creation, Christians can
bring healing, hope, and reconciliation to the broken world and contribute to our effort in renewing creation.

5.1 An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

Central Committee in Preparation for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, Kingston, 2011

“Guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79)

Preamble: This call is a concerted Christian voice addressed primarily to the worldwide Christian community. Inspired by the example of Jesus of Nazareth, it invites Christians to commit themselves to the Way of Just Peace. Aware that the promise of peace is a core value of all religions, it reaches out to all who seek peace according to their own religious traditions and commitments. The call is received by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and commended for study, reflection, collaboration and common action. It is issued in response to a WCC Assembly recommendation in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006, and builds on insights gained in the course of the ecumenical “Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace.”

Just Peace embodies a fundamental shift in ethical practice. It implies a different framework of analysis and criteria for action. This call signals the shift and indicates some of the implications for the life and witness of the churches. A resource document, the Just Peace Companion, presents more developed biblical, theological and ethical considerations, proposals for further exploration and examples of good practice. It is hoped that these materials, together with the commitments arising from the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011, under the theme “Glory to God and Peace on Earth,” will assist the forthcoming Assembly of the WCC to reach a new ecumenical consensus on justice and peace.

1. Justice embracing peace: Without peace, can there be justice? Without justice, can there be peace? Too often, we pursue justice at the expense of peace, and peace at the expense of justice. To conceive peace apart from justice is to compromise the hope that “justice and peace shall embrace” (Psalm 85:10). When justice and peace are lacking, or set in opposition, we need to reform our ways. Let us rise, therefore, and work together for peace and justice.

2. Let the Peoples speak: There are many stories to tell—stories soaked with violence, the violation of human dignity and the destruction of creation. If all ears would hear the cries, no place would be truly silent. Many continue to reel from the impact of wars; ethnic and religious animosity, discrimination based on race and caste mar the façade of nations and leave ugly scars. Thousands are dead, displaced, homeless, refugees within their own homeland. Women and children often bear the brunt of conflicts: many women are abused, trafficked, killed; children are separated from their parents, orphaned, recruited as soldiers, abused. Citizens in some countries face violence by occupation, paramilitaries, guerrillas, criminal cartels or government forces. Citizens of many nations suffer governments obsessed with national security and armed might; yet these fail to bring real security, year after year. Thousands of children die each day from inadequate nutrition while those in power continue to make economic and political decisions that favor a relative few.

3. Let the Scriptures speak: The Bible makes justice the inseparable companion of peace (Isaiah 32:17; James 3:18). Both point to right and sustainable relationships in human society, the vitality of our connections with the earth, the “wellbeing” and integrity of creation. Peace is God’s gift to a broken but beloved world, today as in the lifetime of Jesus Christ: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” (John 14:27). Through the life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we perceive peace as both promise and present—a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

4. Jesus told us to love our enemies, pray for our persecutors, and not to use deadly weapons. His peace is expressed by the spirit of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11). Despite persecution, he remains steadfast in his active non-violence, even to death. His life of commitment to justice ends on a cross, an instrument of torture and execution. With the resurrection of Jesus, God confirms that such steadfast love, such obedience, such trust, leads to life. This is true also for us.

5. Wherever there is forgiveness, respect for human dignity, generosity, and care for the weak in the common life of humanity, we catch a glimpse—no matter how dim—of the gift of peace. It follows therefore that peace is lost when injustice, poverty and disease—as well as armed conflict, violence, and war—inflict wounds on the bodies and souls of human beings, on society and on the earth.

6. Yet some texts in the Scriptures associate violence with the will of God. On the basis of these texts, sections of our Christian family have legitimized and continue to legitimize the use of violence by themselves and others. We can
no longer read such texts without calling attention to the human failure to answer the divine call to peace. Today, we must interrogate texts that speak of violence, hate and prejudice, or call for the wrath of God to annihilate another people. We must allow such texts to teach us to discern when, like the people in the Bible, our purposes, our schemes, our animosities, passions and habits reflect our desires rather than the will of God.

7. Let the Church speak: As the Body of Christ, the Church is called to be a place of peacemaking. In manifold ways, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, our liturgical traditions illustrate how God’s peace calls us to share peace with each other and with the world. Yet, more often than not, churches fail to live out their call. Christian disunity, which in many ways undermines the Churches’ credibility in terms of peacemaking, invites us to a continuous conversion of hearts and minds. Only when grounded in God’s peace can communities of faith be “agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic structures at the global level” (WCC Assembly, 1998). The church that lives the peace it proclaims is what Jesus called a city set on a hill for all to see (Matthew 5:14). Believers exercising the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to them by God in Christ point beyond the churches to what God is doing in the world (see 2 Corinthians 5:18).

The Way of Just Peace

8. There are many ways of responding to violence; many ways of practicing peace. As members of the community that proclaims Christ the embodiment of peace, we respond to the call to bring the divine gift of peace into contemporary contexts of violence and conflict. So we join the Way of Just Peace, which requires both movement towards the goal and commitment to the journey. We invite people of all worldviews and religious traditions to consider the goal and to share of their journeys. Just Peace invites all of us to testify with our lives. To pursue peace we must prevent and eliminate personal, structural and media violence, including violence against people because of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion. We must be responsible to those who have gone before us, living in ways that honor the wisdom of our ancestors and the witness of the saints in Christ. We also have a responsibility to those who are the future: our children, “tomorrow people.” Our children deserve to inherit a more just and peaceful world.

9. Non-violent resistance is central to the Way of Just Peace. Well-organized and peaceful resistance is active, tenacious and effective—whether in the face of governmental oppression and abuse or business practices which exploit vulnerable communities and creation. Recognizing that the strength of the powerful depends on the obedience and compliance of citizens, of soldiers and, increasingly, of consumers, non-violent strategies may include acts of civil disobedience and non-compliance.

10. On the Way of Just Peace the justifications of armed conflict and war become increasingly implausible and unacceptable. The churches have struggled with their disagreement on this matter for decades; however, the Way of Just Peace now compels us to move forward. Yet, to condemn war is not enough; we must do everything in our power to promote justice and peaceful cooperation among peoples and nations. The Way of Just Peace is fundamentally different from the concept of “just war” and much more than criteria for protecting people from the unjust use of force; in addition to silencing weapons it embraces social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and shared human security.

11. Within the limitations of tongue and intellect, we propose that Just Peace may be comprehended as a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.

Living the Journey

12. Just Peace is a journey into God’s purpose for humanity and all creation, trusting that God will “guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

13. The journey is difficult. We recognize that we must face up to truth along the way. We come to realize how often we deceive ourselves and are complicit with violence. We learn to give up looking for justifications of what we have done, and train ourselves in the practice of justice. This means confessing our wrong-doings, giving and receiving forgiveness and learning to reconcile with each other.

14. The sins of violence and war divide communities deeply. Those who have stereotyped and demonized their adversaries will need long-term support and accompaniment in order to work through their condition and be healed. To reconcile with enemies and to restore broken relationships is a lengthy process as well as a necessary goal. In a process
of reconciliation there are no longer powerful and powerless, superior and inferior, mighty and lowly. Both victims and victimizers are transformed.

15. Peace agreements are often fragile, temporary, and inadequate. Places where peace is declared may still be filled with hatred. Repairing the damage of war and violence may take longer than the conflict that caused it. But what exists of peace along the way, though imperfect, is a promise of greater things to come.

16. **We journey together.** The Church divided about peace, and churches torn by conflict, have little credibility as witnesses or workers for peace. The churches’ power to work for and witness to peace depends on finding a common purpose in the service of peace despite differences in ethnic and national identity, and even in doctrine and church order.

17. We travel as a community, sharing an ethic and practice of peace that includes forgiveness and love of enemies, active non-violence and respect for others, gentleness and mercy. We strive to give of our lives in solidarity with others and for the common good. We pursue peace in prayer, asking God for discernment as we go and for the fruits of the Spirit along the way.

18. In loving communities of faith that journey together, there are many hands to unburden the weary. One may have a witness of hope in the face of despair; another, a generous love for the needy. People who have suffered much find the courage to keep on living despite tragedy and loss. The power of the Gospel enables them to leave behind even the unimaginable burdens of personal and collective sin, of anger, bitterness and hatred, which are the legacy of violence and war. Forgiveness does not erase the past but when we look back we may well see that memories were healed, burdens were set aside and traumas were shared with others and with God. We are able to travel on.

19. **The journey is inviting.** With time and dedication to the cause, more and more people hear the call to become peacemakers. They come from wide circles within the church, from other communities of faith, and from society at large. They work to overcome divisions of race and religion, nation and class; learn to stand with the impoverished; or take up the difficult ministry of reconciliation. Many discover that peace cannot be sustained without caring for creation and cherishing God’s miraculous handiwork.

20. Sharing the road with our neighbors, we learn to move from defending what is ours towards living generous, open lives. We find our feet as peacemakers. We discover people from different walks of life. We gain strength in working with them, acknowledging our mutual vulnerability and affirming our common humanity. The other is no longer a stranger or an adversary but a fellow human being with whom we share both the road and the journey.

**Signposts on the Way of Just Peace**

21. **Just Peace and the transformation of conflict.** Transforming conflicts is an essential part of peacemaking. The process of transformation begins with unmasking violence and uncovering hidden conflict in order to make their consequences visible to victims and communities. Conflict transformation aims at challenging adversaries to redirect their conflicting interests towards the common good. It may have to disturb an artificial peace, expose structural violence or find ways to restore relationships without retribution. The vocation of churches and religious communities is to accompany the victims of violence and be their advocates. It also includes strengthening civic mechanisms for managing conflicts and holding public authorities and other perpetrators accountable—even perpetrators from within church communities. The ‘rule of law’ is a critical framework for all such efforts.

22. **Just Peace and the use of armed force.** Yet there are bound to be times when our commitment to Just Peace is put to a test, since peace is pursued in the midst of violence and under the threat of violent conflict. There are extreme circumstances where, as the last resort and the lesser evil, the lawful use of armed force may become necessary in order to protect vulnerable groups of people exposed to imminent lethal threats. Yet, even then we recognise the use of armed force in situations of conflict as both a sign of serious failure and a new obstacle on the Way of Just Peace.

23. While we acknowledge the authority of the United Nations under international law to respond to threats to world peace in the spirit and the letter of the UN Charter, including the use of military power within the constraints of international law, we feel obliged as Christians to go further—to challenge any theological or other justifications of the use of military power and to consider reliance on the concept of a “just war” and its customary use to be obsolete.

24. We acknowledge the moral dilemma inherent in these affirmations. The dilemma is partially resolved if
the criteria developed in the just war tradition may still serve as a framework for an ethic of the lawful use of force. That ethic would allow, for example, consideration of ‘just policing’, the emergence of a new norm in international law around the ‘responsibility to protect’ and the exercise in good faith of the peacemaking mechanisms enshrined in the UN Charter. Conscientious objection to service in armed forces should be recognized as a human right. Much else that is antithetical to peace and the international rule of law must be categorically and finally rejected, starting with the possession or use of all weapons of mass destruction. Our common life invites convergence in thought, action and law for the making and building of peace. As Christians we therefore commit to a transformed ethical discourse that guides the community in the praxis of nonviolent conflict transformation and in fostering conditions for progress toward peace.

25. **Just Peace and human dignity.** Our Scriptures teach us that humanity is created in the likeness of God and is graced with dignity and rights. The recognition of this dignity and these rights is central to our understanding of Just Peace. We affirm that universal human rights are the indispensable international legal instrument for protecting human dignity. To that end we hold states responsible for ensuring the rule of law and guaranteeing civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. However, we observe that abuse of human rights is rampant in many societies, in war and in peace, and that those who should be held accountable benefit from impunity. In response we must reach out in friendship and cooperation to all partners in civil society, including people of other religions, who seek to defend human rights and strengthen the international rule of law.

26. **Just Peace and caring for creation.** God made all things good and has entrusted humankind with the responsibility to care for creation (Genesis 2:4b-9). The exploitation of the natural world and the misuse of its finite resources disclose a pattern of violence that often benefits some people at the expense of many. We know that all creation groans to be set free, not least from the abusive actions of humans (Romans 8:22). As people of faith, we acknowledge our guilt for the damage we have done to creation and all living things, through action and our inaction. The vision of Just Peace is much more than the restoration of right relationships in community; it also compels human beings to care for the earth as our home. We must trust in God’s promise and strive for an equitable and just sharing of the earth’s resources.

### Building cultures of peace

27. **Building cultures of peace.** We are committed to building cultures of peace in cooperation with people of other religious traditions, convictions and worldviews. In this commitment we seek to respond to the Gospel imperatives of loving our neighbours, rejecting violence and seeking justice for the poor, the dispossessed and the oppressed (Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 4:18). The collective effort relies on the gifts of men and women, the young and the old, leaders and workers. We acknowledge and value women’s gifts for building peace. We recognize the unique role of religious leaders, their influence in societies and the potentially liberating power of religious wisdom and insight in promoting peace and human dignity. At the same time, we lament the cases where religious leaders have abused their power for selfish ends or where cultural and religious patterns have contributed to violence and oppression. We are especially concerned about aggressive rhetoric and teaching propagated under the guise of religion and amplified by the power of media. While we acknowledge with deep humility Christian complicity—past and present—in the manifestation of prejudice and other attitudes that fuel hate, we commit ourselves to build communities of reconciliation, acceptance and love.

### Education for peace

28. **Education for peace.** Education inspired by the vision of peace is more than instruction in the strategies of peace work. It is a profoundly spiritual formation of character that involves family, church, and society. Peace education teaches us to nurture the spirit of peace, instil respect for human rights, and imagine and adopt alternatives to violence. Peace education promotes active nonviolence as an unequalled power for change that is practiced and valued in different traditions and cultures. Education of character and conscience equips people to seek peace and pursue it.

### Seeking and Pursuing Just Peace Together

29. The Christian pilgrimage toward peace presents many opportunities to build visible and viable communities for peace. A church that prays for peace, serves its community, uses money ethically, cares for the environment and cultivates good relations with others can become an instrument for peace. Furthermore, when churches work in a united way for peace, their witness becomes more credible (John 17:21).

**For Peace in the Community**—so that all may live free from fear (Micah 4:4)

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness...?” ‘Love your neighbor
30. **Global challenges.** All too many communities are divided by economic class, by race, color and caste, by religion and gender. Homes and schools are plagued by violence and abuse. Women and children are violated physically, psychologically and by cultural practice. Drug and alcohol abuse and suicide are forms of self-destruction on a large scale. Workplaces and houses of worship are scarred by conflicts within the community. Prejudice and racism deny human dignity. Workers are exploited and industries pollute the environment. Health care is inaccessible for many and affordable for only a few. There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Traditions that bind communities together are weakened by commercial influences and imported lifestyles. Media, games and entertainment that promote violence, war and pornography distort community values and invite destructive behaviors. When violence occurs, young males will generally be perpetrators as well as victims and women and children will find themselves at greatest risk.

31. **Main directions.** Churches become builders of a culture of peace as they engage, cooperate and learn from one another. Members, families, parishes and communities will be involved. The tasks include learning to prevent conflicts and transform them; to protect and empower those who are marginalized; to affirm the role of women in resolving conflict and building peace and include them in all such initiatives; to support and participate in non-violent movements for justice and human rights; and to give peace education its rightful place in churches and schools. A culture of peace requires churches and other faith and community groups to challenge violence wherever it happens: this concerns structural and habitual violence as well as the violence that pervades media entertainment, games and music. Cultures of peace are realized when all, especially women and children, are safe from sexual violence and protected from armed conflict, when deadly weapons are banned and removed from communities, and domestic violence is addressed and stopped.

32. If churches are to be peacemakers, Christians must first strive for unity in action for peace. Congregations must unite to break the culture of silence about the violence within church life and unite to overcome habitual disunity in the face of the violence within our communities.

**For Peace with the Earth**—so that life is sustained

God created the world and made it whole, offering humanity life in all its fullness. Yet sin breaks relationships between people and with the created order. Creation longs for the children of God to be stewards of life, of justice and of love. (Genesis 2:1-3; John 10:10; Romans 8:20-22)

33. **Global challenges.** Human beings are to respect and protect creation. But greed at many levels, self-centeredness and a belief in unlimited growth have brought exploitation and destruction on the earth and its creatures. The cries of the poor and vulnerable echo in the groans of the earth. Excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other limited resources is doing violence to people and the planet. Climate change as a consequence of human lifestyles poses a global threat to just peace. Global warming, the rise of sea levels and the increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and floods affect especially the most vulnerable populations in the world. Indigenous people are exemplary in sustainable living and, along with inhabitants of coral atolls and impoverished coastal communities, they are among those who contribute the least to global warming. Yet they are the ones who will suffer the most.

34. **Main directions.** To care for God’s precious gift of creation and to strive for ecological justice are key principles of just peace. For Christians they are also an expression of the Gospel’s call to repent from wasteful use of natural resources and be converted daily. Churches and their members must be cautious with earth’s resources, especially with water. We must protect the populations most vulnerable to climate change and help to secure their rights.

35. Church members and parishes around the world must self-critically assess their environmental impact. Individually and in communities, Christians need to learn to live in ways that allow the entire earth to thrive. Many more “eco-congregations” and “green” churches are needed locally. Much ecumenical advocacy is needed globally for the implementation of international agreements and protocols among governments and businesses in order to ensure a more inhabitable earth not only for us but also for all creatures and for future generations.
For Peace in the Marketplace—so that all may live with dignity

In wondrously creating a world with more than enough natural riches to support countless generations of human beings and other living things, God makes manifest a vision for all people to live in fullness of life and with dignity, regardless of class, gender, religion, race or ethnicity. (Psalm 24:1; Psalm 145:15; Isaiah 65:17-23)

36. Global challenges. Even as tiny global elites accumulate unimaginable wealth, more than 1.4 billion humans subsist in extreme poverty. There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world’s three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world’s 48 poorest countries. Ineffective regulation, innovative but immoral financial instruments, distorted reward structures and other systemic factors exacerbated by greed trigger global financial crises that wipe out millions of jobs and impoverish tens of millions of people. The widening socio-economic chasms within and between nations raise serious questions about the effectiveness of market-oriented economic liberalization policies in eradicating poverty and challenge the pursuit of growth as an overriding objective for any society. Over-consumption and deprivation are forms of violence. Global military expenditures—now higher than during the Cold War—do little to enhance international peace and security and much to endanger it; weapons do not address the main threats to humanity but use vast resources that could be rededicated to that end. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

37. Main directions. Peace in the Marketplace is nurtured by creating “economies of life.” Their essential foundations are equitable socio-economic relationships, respect for workers rights, the just sharing and sustainable use of resources, healthy and affordable food for all, and broad participation in economic decision-making.

38. Churches and their partners in society must advocate for the full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. Churches must promote alternative economic policies for sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provisioning of clean water, clean air and other common goods. Regulatory structures and policies must reconnect finance not only to economic production but also to human need and ecological sustainability. Deep cuts in military spending should be made in order to fund programs that advance the goals of sufficient food, shelter, education and health for all people and that provide remedies for climate change. Human and ecological security must become a greater economic priority than national security.

For Peace among the Peoples—so that human lives are protected

We are made in the image of the Giver of Life, forbidden to take life, and charged to love even enemies. Judged with equity by a righteous God, nations are called to embrace truth in the public square, turn weapons into farm implements, and not learn war any more. (Exodus 20:17; Isaiah 2:1-4; Matthew 5:44)

39. Global challenges. Human history is illuminated by courageous pursuits of peace and the transformation of conflict, advances in the rule of law, new norms and treaties that govern the use of force, and now judicial recourse against abuses of power that involve even heads of state. History is stained, however, by the moral and political opposites of these—including xenophobia, inter-communal violence, hate crimes, war crimes, slavery, genocide and more. Although the spirit and logic of violence is deeply rooted in human history, the consequences of such sins have increased exponentially in recent times, amplified by violent applications of science, technology and wealth.

40. A new ecumenical agenda for peace today is even more urgent because of the nature and the scope of such dangers now. We are witnesses to prodigious increases in the human capacity to destroy life and its foundations. The scale of the threat, the collective human responsibility behind it, and the need for a concerted global response are without precedent. Two threats of this magnitude—nuclear holocaust and climate change—could destroy much life and all prospects for Just Peace. Both are violent misuses of the energy inherent in Creation. One catastrophe stems from the proliferation of weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction; the other threat may be understood as the proliferation of lifestyles of mass extinction. The international community struggles to gain control of both threats with little success.

41. Main directions. To respect the sanctity of life and build peace among peoples, churches must work to strengthen international human rights law as well as treaties and instruments of mutual accountability and conflict resolution. To
prevent deadly conflicts and mass killings, the proliferation of small arms and weapons of war must be stopped and reversed. Churches must build trust and collaborate with other communities of faith and people of different world-views to reduce national capacities for waging war, eliminate weapons that put humanity and the planet at unprecedented risk, and generally delegitimize the institution of war.

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42. A people born to longing. Our home is not what it might and will be. While life in God’s hands is irrepressible, peace does not yet reign. The principalities and powers, though not sovereign, still enjoy their victories, and we will be restless and broken until peace prevails. Thus our peace building will of necessity criticize, denounce, advocate, and resist as well as proclaim, empower, console, reconcile, and heal. Peacemakers will speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace.

Statement on the Way of Just Peace
08 November 2013
Adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly as part of the Report of the Public Issues Committee

Just peace is a journey into God’s purpose for humanity and all creation. It is rooted in the self-understanding of the churches, the hope of spiritual transformation and the call to seek justice and peace for all. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives.

Those who seek a just peace seek the common good. On the way of just peace, different disciplines find common ground, contending worldviews see complementary courses of action, and one faith stands in principled solidarity with another.

Social justice confronts privilege, economic justice confronts wealth, ecological justice confronts consumption, and political justice confronts power itself. Mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation become shared public experiences. The spirit, vocation and process of peace are transformed.

As the Ecumenical Call to Just Peace (ECJP) stated, to take the path of just peace is to enter a collective, dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.

1. TOGETHER WE BELIEVE

Together we believe in God, the Creator of all life. Therefore we acknowledge that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and we seek to be good stewards of creation. In wondrously creating a world with more than enough natural riches to support countless generations of human beings and other living things, God makes manifest a vision for all people to live in the fullness of life and with dignity, regardless of class, gender, religion, race or ethnicity.

Together we believe in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Therefore we acknowledge that humankind is reconciled with God, by grace, and we strive to live reconciled with one another. The life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, point toward the peaceable kingdom of God. Despite persecution and suffering, Jesus remains steadfast in his way of humility and active non-violence, even unto death. His life of commitment to justice leads to the cross, an instrument of torture and execution. With the resurrection of Jesus, God confirms that such steadfast love, such obedience, such trust, leads to life. By God’s grace we too are enabled to take the way of the cross, be disciples and bear the costs.

Together, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Giver and Sustainer of all life. Therefore we acknowledge the sanctifying presence of God in all of life, strive to protect life and to heal broken lives.

Based on the teaching of St Paul (Romans 8:22) “For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with pain together until now”, as explained by St Peter (2 Peter 3:13) “nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells”, we can state that: the Holy Spirit assures us that the Triune God will perfect and consummate all of creation at the end of time. In this we recognize justice and peace as both promise and present – a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

Together, we believe that the Church is called to unity. Therefore we acknowledge that churches are to be just and peaceful communities reconciled with other churches. Grounded in the peace of God and empowered through the reconciling work of Christ, we can be “agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic structures at the global level” (8th WCC Assembly, Harare, 1998).
2. TOGETHER WE CALL

The way of just peace provides a basic frame of reference for coherent ecumenical reflection, spirituality, engagement and active peacemaking.

For just peace in the community – so that all may live free from fear

Many communities are divided by economic class, race, colour, caste, gender and religion. Violence, intimidation, abuse and exploitation thrive in the shadows of division and inequality. Domestic violence is a hidden tragedy in societies everywhere.

To build peace in our communities, we must break the culture of silence about violence in the home, parish and society. Where religious groups are divided along with society, we must join with other faiths to teach and advocate for tolerance, non-violence and mutual respect, as Christian and Muslim leaders are doing in Nigeria with ecumenical support.

Local churches working for peace reinforce international church advocacy for peace, and vice versa. Ecumenical advocacy at the International Criminal Court is one reason why at least some war criminals today face justice in a court of law, a historic advance in the rule of law.

Churches can help build cultures of peace by learning to prevent and transform conflicts. In this way they may empower people on the margins of society, enable both women and men to be peacemakers, support non-violent movements for justice and human rights, support those who are persecuted for their refusal to bear arms for reasons of conscience, as well as offer support to those who have suffered in armed conflicts, and give peace education its rightful place in churches and schools.

For just peace with the earth – so that life is sustained

Human beings are to respect, protect and care for nature. Yet our excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other resources is doing great violence to people and the planet. Climate change, only one consequence of human lifestyles and national policies, poses a global threat to justice and peace.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was among the first to warn about the dangers of climate change. Now, after 20 years of advocacy, churches have helped bring ecological justice into the international debate on climate change. Concern for eco-justice is evident in the attention given to victims of climate change in international negotiations and at the United Nations Human Rights Council. The WCC 10th Assembly meeting in Busan strongly reiterated the ecumenical commitment to climate justice.

“Eco-congregations” and “green churches” are signs of hope. The churches and parishes of many countries around the world are linking faith and ecology – studying environmental issues, monitoring carbon output, and joining in WCC-led advocacy for governments to cut emissions of green-house gases. Some governments, such as the Seoul city government, are collaborating with local churches to help Korea’s sprawling capital conserve energy and recycle waste. In the wake of the Fukushima disaster, Christians and Buddhists already united against nuclear weapons are now united against nuclear power plants as well. They are raising a prophetic call for a nuclear-free world.

To care for God’s precious gift of creation, the reform of lifestyles and the pursuit of ecological justice are key elements of just peace. Concerted ecumenical advocacy is needed so that governments, businesses and consumers protect the environment and preserve it for future generations.

For just peace in the marketplace – so that all may live with dignity

There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world’s three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world’s 48 poorest countries. Such deep socio-economic injustice raises serious questions about economic growth which ignores social and environmental responsibility. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

Churches should be strongly committed to economic justice. The WCC and its member churches join with peoples’ movements and partners in civil society to challenge poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. The churches’ analysis of wealth and poverty has led to an ecumenical emphasis on sufficiency and to a strong critique of greed. Some churches have now developed indicators to test how well individuals, corporations and nations are sharing God’s abundant gifts.

Establishing “economies of life” is one key to building peace in the marketplace. Economies of life promote careful use of resources, sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, workers’ rights, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provision of clean water, clean air and other common goods. Regulatory structures must reconnect finance not only to economic production but also to human need and ecological sustainability. Responding equitably to the different dimensions of fair labour is increasingly important in our times.
For just peace among the nations – so that human lives are protected

History has seen great advances in the rule of law and other protections for humanity. Yet the present situation of the human race is in at least two ways quite unprecedented. Now as never before humanity is in a position to destroy much of the planet environmentally. A small number of decision makers are in a position to annihilate whole populations with nuclear weapons. Radical threats of ecocide and genocide demand of us an equally radical commitment to peace.

There is great potential for peacemaking in the nature of who we are. Churches together in the WCC are well-placed for collective action in a world where the major threats to peace can only be resolved transnationally.

On that basis, a diverse network of member churches and related ministries advocated with success for the first global Arms Trade Treaty. The witness of churches in war-torn communities was heard in high places. Churches from different regions pressed governments from those regions to agree on a treaty to regulate the international arms trade for the first time. A similar approach is now building inter-regional support to make nuclear weapons illegal, a goal consistent with the Vancouver Assembly’s indictment of the production, deployment and use of nuclear weapons as “a crime against humanity”, and its challenge that “the nuclear weapons issue is, in its import and threat to humanity, a question of Christian discipline and of a faithfulness to the Gospel”.

For peace among the nations, churches must work together to strengthen international human rights and humanitarian law, promote multilateral negotiations to resolve conflicts, hold governments responsible for ensuring treaty protections, help eliminate all weapons of mass destruction and press for reallocation of unnecessary military budgets to civilian needs. We must join other communities of faith and people of good will to reduce national military capacities and delegitimize the institution of war.

3. TOGETHER WE COMMIT

Peace constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God’s love for all creation.

Together we commit to share God’s love for the world by seeking peace and protecting life. We commit to transforming how we think about peace, how we pray for peace, how we teach peace to young and old and deepen our theological reflections on the promise and practice of peace.

Together we commit to building cultures of peace in families, the church and society. We commit to mobilize the gifts within our fellowship to raise our collective voice for peace across many countries.

Together we commit to protect human dignity, practice justice in our families and communities, transform conflicts without violence and ban all weapons of mass destruction.

We understand that the protection of life is a collective human obligation today as never before in history. We commit to turn away from planet-changing patterns of consumption as the engine of economic growth, and refuse to accept that any nation’s security requires the capacity to annihilate other nations or to strike alleged enemies at will anywhere on earth.

We reaffirm the Ecumenical Call to Just Peace which states “While life in God’s hands is irrepressible, peace does not yet reign. The principalities and powers, though not sovereign, still enjoy their victories, and we will be restless and broken until peace prevails. Peacemakers will speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace.”

4. TOGETHER WE RECOMMEND THAT THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

a. Undertake, in cooperation with member churches and specialized ministries, critical analysis of the “Responsibility to Prevent, React and Rebuild” and its relationship to just peace, and its misuse to justify armed interventions;

b. Lead and accompany ecumenical just peace ministries and networks in the practice of violence prevention, non-violence as a way of life, collective advocacy and the advancement of international norms, treaties and law;

c. Encourage its member churches to engage in cooperative interfaith programmes in order to address conflicts in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies;

d. Request its member churches and partners to develop communication strategies that advocate for justice and peace, proclaim the hope of transformation and speak truth to power;

e. Facilitate a programme of reflection and environmental action in member churches and related networks to build sustainable communities and bring about collective reductions in carbon emissions and energy use; promote the use of alternate, renewable, and clean energy;

f. Develop guidelines within the concept of “economies of life” for the right sharing of resources and the prevention
of structural violence, establishing useable indicators and benchmarks; and

g. **Convene** churches and related organizations to work for human rights protections through international treaty bodies and the United Nations Human Rights Council; to work for the elimination of nuclear and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction, cooperating with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; and to seek ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty by their respective governments and monitor its implementation.

h. **Reiterate** its existing policy (2009 study) and reaffirm its support for the human right of conscientious objection to military service for religious, moral or ethical reasons, as churches have an obligation to support those who are in prison because they object to military service.

5. WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS

a. **Adopt** by 2015 and begin implementing binding regulations with targets for lowering greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the recommendations in the 2013 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;

b. **Negotiate and establish** a ban on the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law;

c. **Ensure** that all remaining stocks of chemical weapons are destroyed under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention and cluster munitions are destroyed under the Convention on Cluster Munitions, at the earliest possible date;

d. **Declare** their support for a pre-emptive ban on drones and other robotic weapons systems that will select and strike targets without human intervention when operating in fully autonomous mode;

e. **Reallocate** national military budgets to humanitarian and developmental needs, conflict prevention and civilian peace-building initiatives amongst others; and

f. **Ratify and implement** the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by 2014 and on a voluntary basis include weapon types not covered by the ATT.

    God of life, guide our feet into the way of just peace!

5.2 The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace—

**An Ecumenical Paradigm for Our Times:**

**An Orthodox Viewpoint**

Fr Ioan Sauca

As in previous WCC assemblies, the 10th Assembly held in Busan, Republic of Korea, reaffirmed the constitutional basis of the WCC as a fellowship of churches, its theological vision and goals, and the renewed commitment to the ongoing search for visible unity. Yet these theological dimensions were articulated within the new context of our time and addressed within a paradigm and discourse that will be more meaningful for the people of today.

**From Staying Together to Moving Together**

The first WCC assembly in Amsterdam put forth the invitation “to stay together.” And that paradigm remained the major approach to ecumenical dialogues and encounters until recently. The main emphasis was on searching, finding, and agreeing on common theological statements with the hope that once such common basis was found, the churches could start moving together toward fuller or full communion. During that period, churches were involved in doing things together, but often those efforts were perceived as “Christian activism,” additional or parallel to theological concerns. Early WCC documents contain many instances when debates on the need for balance between vertical and horizontal, between theological and socio-political concerns, were often confrontational.

The difficult contextual situation of our times – which brings serious challenges not only to the witness of the churches but to their very existence – as well as the new perception of ecumenism and unity for the younger generation of Christians led the Busan assembly adopt a new profile, direction, paradigm, and discourse for and on ecumenical togetherness today – that is, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The churches, but also all people of good will, are invited to join the pilgrimage. And the main invitation, different from that which has been predominant from Amsterdam onward, states, “We intend to move together.”

This is a shift from static to dynamic, from a status quo stability based on solid theological agreement to a movement together forward.

The newness of the paradigm and its direction provoked discussion, questions, and debate. Some welcomed it with enthusiasm and committed themselves to embark
on the pilgrimage. Others, however, feel that the concept is still vague, unclear, and confusing and require more time for reflection. Others raised their voices against it, saying that the new concept lacks theological depth and voicing fear that by adopting the new paradigm and shift the WCC will lose its clear constitutional focus on theology and the search for the unity of the church.

In what follows, in the space given to me, I will contribute to this discussion with a short and succinct reflection from an Orthodox viewpoint on the new paradigm.

As a theological and ecumenical concept offered to the younger generations of our times, I find it meaningful, attractive, and clear, and carrying a message that can be understood and followed. I also find in it a deep theological meaning, arising from the very roots of our faith and our liturgical and spiritual tradition. It opens new ways of reflection and lays the basis for renewed possibilities of openness, dialogue, and cooperation with the world.

The Meaning and Content of the Concept

The first dilemma, as I see it, comes from the fact that different people understand the term “pilgrimage” in different ways, conditioned by the contexts in which they live and their historical connotations. For a Catholic and an Orthodox, it may immediately point to a trip one is making to a holy place. For a Protestant, while the term might be understood to have the same meaning, it remains problematic. The concept of travelling to a holy place with the expectation of receiving certain spiritual or even soteriological “benefits” can be theologically controversial. As a result, while many churches are eager to respond to the invitation and embark on the pilgrimage, there is still need to clarify and come to a better understanding of what are we about. Where are we to go? What is the final target and goal we envisage? And whom are we expecting to journey with?

As it is formulated, the concept qualifies itself, defined specifically as a pilgrimage “of justice and peace.” Others argue: Why cannot it be “toward justice and peace” or “for justice and peace”?

Such questions are also being asked by those in Roman Catholic and Orthodox circles. Yet it is interesting to note that the paradigm of “journeying together” was very strong in the common statement and in their individual affirmations during the recent historical meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.\(^1\)

If one analyzes more deeply the concept launched in Busan, it becomes clear that the word “pilgrimage” was chosen to convey that it is a journey together, but a journey with spiritual meaning and profound theological connotations and implications. It is not a journey toward a holy historical place. Nor is it an ethical journey through which to practice some “activism.” It is a journey that God has called us to undertake in doing his will for the final purpose he has for the world. The main purpose and goal of our common journey thus remains the search for the unity of Christians – in order that the world may believe in view of the unity of the whole cosmos as the reason and final goal of eschatological expectation.

The fundamental constitutional basis of the WCC, reiterated in the document on “The Common Understanding and Vision of WCC,” has thus not been altered. The difference that Busan has made is essential: we will no longer wait to agree on all details pertaining to our unity in theological statements and formulations before we start journeying together. Rather, we will discover our unity while walking side by side, with one another, doing and witnessing to the kingdom that is to come and to its signs manifested as a foretaste already here and now. In other words, the two signs identified as “justice and peace” lie at the heart of the beatitudes and of the gospels. Justice and peace are God-given gifts for the world. They are concrete signs of the kingdom that is to come, but they are also a foretaste of the kingdom that is to be incarnated and lived out in concrete ways in history – here and now. We are partakers of those gifts and struggle to implement them.

But it is God who finally brings his peace and justice, and not we alone without him. Our activism without God’s presence remains futile. In embarking on the journey of justice and peace, we become pilgrims toward God’s kingdom, living and accomplishing his will for the world. And we walk with one another in this journey, together with all people of good will and together with God, toward the final eschatological purpose he has prepared for his world. For this reason, the pilgrimage we are invited to embark on is “of justice and peace” and not for or to justice and peace.

Theological, Spiritual and Liturgical Bases of the New Paradigm

Looked at from an Orthodox point of view, the proposed paradigm has theological, spiritual, and liturgical aspects that are deeply rooted in the faith affirmations of the early church and in its living out throughout centuries. In their attempt to expose and explain the mystery of faith in a God that is trinitarian and is defined in his very existence as love, the early church Fathers, in particular St Gregory

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of Nazianzus and St John of Damascus, insisted on the fact that God is not static but dynamic. He has a perichoretic existence (in particular St Gregory of Nazianzus and St John of Damascus). This is expressed through an eternal intra-cohabitation, interrelation, and interpenetration within the one essence, a moving around but always together, metaphorically expressed even as an ongoing divine dance. This existence is a journeying and acting together in all manifestations of God’s oikonomia for the world, but always with kenotic humility, pointing to and affirming the other. Using the Christological/messianic hermeneutic, the early church Fathers have seen in many of the passages and events from the Old Testament images of the Trinity at work – acting, moving, and journeying always together. The Father is usually revealed and known as Creator, but in the act of creation, the Word, the eternal Logos, is present, as through him all has been created. And the eternal Spirit was present there as well, “hovering” on the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). The creation of the first humans is introduced by “Let us make” (Gen. 1:26). On their journey to Sodom and Gomorrah, the three “visitors” are hosted by Abraham and his wife Sara, and that event came to be understood in the Christian Tradition as another mystical image of the trinitarian God mystically revealed in the Old Testament. Advocating strongly in favour of the just, who may also suffer if the two cities were destroyed, Abraham addresses the three men as if one person – Lord, my Lord – and the answer came as “The Lord has said” (Gen. 18).

The Son is called the Saviour, but in the act of salvation, the Father and the Spirit, together with the Son, were equally present and active.

The event of the incarnation of the Son is depicted both in the biblical texts and in the liturgical hymnology as a visit, a movement, a coming down, a journey to the world. God was never absent from the world, but in the act of incarnation, without separating himself from the Father and the Spirit, the Word has come to his creation, becoming flesh and through flesh assuming the whole world in order to save it. The very act of salvation in and through Christ did not happen in an automatic, declarative, or static way, once and from outside. On the contrary, it has been achieved through the process of a “common journey” of fallen humanity and creation with God in the one person of Christ. In Christ and through Christ, fallen humanity and creation received healing and reconciliation on the cross of Golgotha and through the resurrection on the third day as the climax of the entire salvific journey.

The journeying together continued through the ascension, when the healed, reconciled, and transfigured humanity and creation, assumed in the body of Christ, were seated at the right hand of the Father, becoming thus the image of what humanity and creation are called to become. From that perspective, one can better understand how and why Christ is the mediator that continues to lead the way to salvation of the world, to the theosis of humanity and to a new heaven and a new earth.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit is also depicted as a movement, a coming down, an ongoing continuation of the soteriological journey. But the Spirit never comes alone. The incarnated, crucified, and risen Son and the Father are also present together with the Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, the trinitarian God is manifested and present in the world. Through the Holy Spirit, the church is “full of Trinity.” Through the Holy Spirit, the human person is to become a shelter of the Trinity (John 14:23) and together to advance on the way to sanctification toward the fullness of the eschatological kingdom. It is important to note that on the way to sanctification, we are not just following and imitating Christ who leads the way; rather, through the Holy Spirit we make the journey in and with Christ and in communion also with the Father. We are not alone. Our journey is not toward or for the kingdom that is manifested through the signs of justice and peace. Instead, our journey is of justice and peace because it is God who leads our way. It is God’s work and mission in and for the world. We are only God’s co-workers and co-journeymen.

The succinct theological exposure described above is made visible and lived out in the liturgical manifestations of the Orthodox Church. Both the hymns and the liturgical gestures speak abundantly about the theological insights presented.

For example, I will refer briefly to the eucharistic liturgy of St John Chrysostom. At the very beginning, the community is reminded of the final reason, goal, and destination of the spiritual journey they are to embark on. The liturgy starts with the blessing of the “kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Traditionally, the Orthodox faithful stand during the eucharistic liturgy; seats are available only for the sick and elderly. But even those sitting are often requested to “stand” at certain important moments, manifesting thus that it is a pilgrim community toward the kingdom. The image of the pilgrimage is manifested in many instances. The gospel is

2. Epistle 51, “To Caledonius the Priest against Apollinarius”; Oration 30.6; Oration 31.14.
5. For further details, see Alexander Schmemann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), p. 47. He entitled his book on the spiritual meaning of Lent The Great Lent: a Journey to Pascha and speaks about it as a pilgrimage, a journey, a spiritual advancement as we
being brought from the altar in procession within the community and then taken back to the altar, manifesting God’s journey to the world in Christ’s incarnation.

The gifts of creation represented by the bread and wine to be consecrated are brought to the altar in procession as well — from, within, on behalf of, and together with the gathered community. The procession with the elements of creation and the offering are undertaken by the celebrating clergy with the participation of the community. The liturgical prayers spoken at that moment state “that we may receive the King of all invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts.” In our liturgical pilgrimage toward God’s kingdom, we are not alone. God is with us in all we do.

The partaking of the eucharist is the climax of the liturgical journey. It is an intimate communion with the realities of the kingdom. Though the Orthodox Church has always confessed that the eucharist is the very body and blood of Christ, yet the prayers that accompany the sharing of eucharist refer to it as to a foretaste, leaving place for an even fuller communion with Christ in God’s eschatological kingdom: “O Christ! Great and most holy Paschal! O Wisdom, Word, and Power of God! Grant that we may more perfectly partake of You in the never-ending Day of Your Kingdom.”

This points to another important aspect specific to Patristic theology: the way to sanctity and communion with God does not have an end but is a continuous journey. Salvation and theosis is a process; it is not a static achievement, once and the same forever. It is a journey, a pilgrimage, and a growth in God and with God. The scriptures speak of being transformed from one degree of glory to another: “All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). In the Patristic literature, this ongoing and never-ending journey of advancement toward fuller communion with God is referred to as epektasis and has been developed in particular in the writing of St Gregory of Nyssa and St John Climacus.

The eucharistic liturgy ends with another movement and invitation to a continuation of the journey from the church to the world, bringing to the world the light and the experience of the foretaste of the kingdom. “Let us depart in peace. In the name of the Lord!”

The liturgical journey in the church has to be continued with the liturgical journey in the world and for the world. That is the pilgrimage on which we are invited to embark, and justice and peace are the signs of the kingdom that we expect to take shape in the world with and through our participation.

Lastly, the questions still remain to whom we supposed to embark on this journey of justice and peace, and how this relates to the final purpose and goal of the WCC as a fellowship of churches?

From the perspective of Orthodox theology, there are many layers and degrees of such participation. Strictly speaking, as a Christian community, only those baptized and who have confessed and live the apostolic faith can be fully part of the eucharistic community. However, those catechumens and the penitents who cannot take part in the liturgical offering of the gifts of bread and wine or in the partaking of the eucharist are accepted within the community and prayed for in the early part of the liturgy. These were also considered as co-journeymen in the liturgical pilgrimage.

Although the condition for full communion is often repeated as being the “unity in faith” and the “confession with one mouth and one heart,” yet the offering of the liturgy has a universal dimension — “for the union of all, for those who travel and the sick, for seasonable weather and the fruits of the earth.” Moreover, and even more clearly, after the offering and the consecration of the gifts of bread and wine, the priest mentions in one of the prayers the following: “We also offer to you this spiritual worship for the whole world” (υπὲρ της οἰκουμένης). In celebrating the liturgy, one is called to view the world with God’s eyes, and this excludes any temptations toward sectarianism or exclusivism.

The liturgy that is to continue in the world also has universal dimension. It is to the service of the whole world without any distinction. Yet, in that process, Christians are constantly called to discover their visible unity so that the world may believe and so that the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace that they speak about and struggle to implement may have an even stronger impact.

Secondly, the pilgrimage undertaken by Christians also includes creation. This aspect is very strongly emphasized in Orthodox theology and liturgy. In all events of the salvation history, creation has been actively present. Salvation of humanity in Christ has consequences for the

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7. The Ladder of Divine Ascent. The whole book is imagined as a ladder to be climbed toward sanctity, from glory to glory; see in particular steps 28 and 30.
8. See in particular the instructions found in Testamentum Domini, ch. 23 and St Hyppolytus: On the Apostolic Tradition 20,10.
9. The hymns of the Matins on the feasts of Nativity, Transfiguration of the Lord, Lamentations on Good Friday, and Resurrection are very relevant, showing how the whole creation participates in the salvific events.
liberation and transfiguration of creation as well. Humans and creation are interrelated. Even in the eschaton, creation will also experience the metamorphosis of new heavens and new earth together with the fully healed, reconciled, and transformed humanity (Rev. 21:1; Rom. 8:21–22). The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace undertaken by Christians must include creation as well.

Thirdly, Orthodox theology and its liturgical texts lead to an even wider participation and cooperation, including all people of good will, on the way toward the fulfillment of God’s plans for the world. The three kings/magi and astrologists from the East have journeyed with the star to Jesus the King (Kontakion of Nativity); a Samaritan and a Cannanean woman recognize Jesus as Messiah while others belonging to the followers of the Law, could not. For the achievement of his purpose for the world, God has worked with and through people who did not even acknowledge or believe in him but nonetheless worked on the signs of his plan. He could call Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon “my servant” (Jer. 27:6) and Cyrus, the king of Persia “my shepherd, anointed king” (Is. 45:1–6).

The early apologists and the church Fathers, having to speak on Christian identity as a minority in a multi-faith context, articulated the theology of God’s presence in the whole world and among all people through the concept logos spermatikos (Justin the Martyr),11 Clement of Alexandria,12 St Irinée,13 St Maximus the Confessor14) and logoi of creation. They identified the presence of the Spirit and of the signs of God’s kingdom in their writings and actions, and spoke about them as having been “pedagogues toward Christ.” For this reason, early Orthodox missionaries, when bringing the gospel to certain contexts, first looked for the signs of the kingdom in that place and culture.

They thus brought forth the good news of the gospel and built the church on the foundations that were already there. The message of the gospel came as a fulfilment, not as a radical replacement or as something brought into a spiritual vacuum. For this reason, Orthodox theology will insist that all people – believers and unbelievers, Christians and people of other faiths – are made in the image of God and to different degrees share the values of the kingdom. One has to see in every human being the face of Christ, and on the basis of this, one is called to walk and work together with all people of good will who make manifest their wish and determination to do justice and peace as signs of the kingdom. The early Orthodox mission history has many such examples.

God has a plan for the world, and with us or without us he will achieve his plan one day. Justice and peace are realities that will reign in the world he planned; people and creation will one day be brought into unity, when God in Christ will be all in all. We are invited to join him in the achievement and fulfillment of his plans and in the salvific and transformative journey toward the eschatological kingdom. This is a profound spiritual journey. On that way, together we may experience more fully both God’s wish and our internal longing for Christian unity. To answer his call is not a luxury or an option. Rather it is a condition that determines our very Christian identity.

5.3 Summary of the Encyclical Laudato Si’

Pope Francis

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160). This question is at the heart of Laudato si’ (May You be praised), the anticipated Encyclical on the care of the common home by Pope Francis. “This question does not have to do with the environment alone and in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal”. This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its values at the basis of social life: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” “Unless we struggle with these deeper issues – says the Pope – I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results”.

The Encyclical takes its name from the invocation of St. Francis, “Praise be to you, my Lord”, in his Canticle of the Creatures. It reminds us that the earth, our common home “is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us”. We have forgotten that “we ourselves are dust of the earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”

Now, this earth, mistreated and abused, is lamenting, and its groans join those of all the forsaken of the world.

1. This text from the Global Catholic Climate Movement offers an overview of the 191 pages of the Encyclical Laudato Si’ and its key points, along with a summary of each of its six chapters (prepared by the Vatican Information Service). The Encyclical concludes with an interreligious prayer for our earth and a Christian prayer for Creation. The full text is available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

10. First Apology, I.53-4; I.46, 2-4; I.44,9-10.
11. Paedagogos and Stromata.
13. In particular in his works Ambigua and Questions to Thalassium.
Pope Francis invites us to listen to them, urging each and every one – individuals, families, local communities, nations and the international community – to an “ecological conversion”, according to the expression of St. John Paul II. We are invited to “change direction” by taking on the beauty and responsibility of the task of “caring for our common home”. At the same time, Pope Francis recognises that “there is a growing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet”. A ray of hope flows through the entire Encyclical, which gives a clear message of hope. “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home”. “Men and women are still capable of intervening positively”. “All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start”.

Pope Francis certainly addresses the Catholic faithful, quoting St. John Paul II: “Christians in their turn “realise that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith””. Pope Francis proposes specially “to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home”. The dialogue runs throughout the text and in chapter 5 it becomes the instrument for addressing and solving problems. From the beginning, Pope Francis recalls that “other Churches and Christian communities – and other religions as well – have also expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections” on the theme of ecology. Indeed, such contributions expressly come in, starting with that of “the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew”, extensively cited in numbers 8-9. On several occasions, then, the Pope thanks the protagonists of this effort – individuals as well as associations and institutions. He acknowledges that “the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, all […] have enriched the Church’s thinking on these questions”. He invites everyone to recognize “the rich contribution which the religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full development of humanity”.

The itinerary of the Encyclical is mapped out in n. 15 and divided into six chapters. It starts by presenting the current situation based on the best scientific findings available today, next, there is a review of the Bible and Judeo-Christian tradition. The root of the problems in technocracy and in an excessive self-centredness of the human being are analysed. The Encyclical proposes an “integral ecology, which clearly respects its human and social dimensions”, inextricably linked to the environmental question. In this perspective, Pope Francis proposes to initiate an honest dialogue at every level of social, economic and political life, that builds transparent decision-making processes, and recalls that no project can be effective if it is not animated by a formed and responsible conscience. Ideas are put forth to aid growth in this direction at the educational, spiritual, ecclesial, political and theological levels. The text ends with two prayers; one offered for sharing with everyone who believes in “God who is the all-powerful Creator”, and the other to those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, punctuated by the refrain “Praise be to you!” which opens and closes the Encyclical.

Several main themes run through the text that are addressed from a variety of different perspectives, traversing and unifying the text: the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policies, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.

**Chapter One – WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMON HOME**

The chapter presents the most recent scientific findings on the environment as a way to listen to the cry of creation, “to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it”. It thus deals with “several aspects of the present ecological crisis”.

Pollution and climate change: “Climate change is a global problem with serious implications, environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods; it represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day”. If “the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all”, the greatest impact of this change falls on the poorest, but “many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms”. “Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded”.

The issue of water: the Pope clearly states that “access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights”. To deprive the poor of access to water means to deny “the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity”. 

5.3 Summary of the Encyclical Laudato Si’
Loss of biodiversity: “Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever”. They are not just any exploitable “resource”, but have a value in and of themselves. In this perspective “we must be grateful for the praiseworthy efforts being made by scientists and engineers dedicated to finding solutions to man-made problems”, but when human intervention is at the service of finance and consumerism, “it is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey”.

Decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society: in the framework of an ethics of international relationships, the Encyclical indicates how a “true ecological debt” exists in the world, with the North in debt to the South. In the face of climate change, there are “differentiated responsibilities”, and those of the developed countries are greater.

Aware of the profound differences over these issues, Pope Francis shows himself to be deeply affected by the “weak responses” in the face of the drama of many peoples and populations. Even though there is no lack of positive examples, there is “a complacency and a cheerful recklessness”. An adequate culture is lacking as well as a willingness to change life style, production and consumption, while there are efforts being made “to establish a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems”.

Chapter Two – THE GOSPEL OF CREATION

To face the problems illustrated in the previous chapter, Pope Francis selects Biblical accounts, offering a comprehensive view that comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition. With this he articulates the “tremendous responsibility” of humankind for creation, the intimate connection among all creatures and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone”.

In the Bible, “the God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected”. The story of creation is central for reflecting on the relationship between human beings and other creatures and how sin breaks the equilibrium of all creation in its entirety: “These accounts suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin”.

For this, even if “we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures”. Human beings have the responsibility to “‘till and keep” the garden of the world”, knowing that “the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward, with us and through us, towards a common point of arrival, which is God”.

That the human being is not the master of the universe “does not mean to put all living beings on the same level and to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails. Nor does it imply a divinisation of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility”. In this perspective, “every act of cruelty towards any creature is “contrary to human dignity”. However, “a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings”. What is needed is the awareness of a universal communion: “called into being by the one Father. All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect”.

The chapter concludes with the heart of Christian revelation: “The earthly Jesus” with “his tangible and loving relationship with the world” is “risen and glorious, and is present throughout creation by his universal Lordship”.

Chapter Three – THE HUMAN ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

This chapter gives an analysis of the current situation, “so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes”, in a dialogue with philosophy and the human sciences.

Reflections on technology are an initial focus of the chapter: the great contribution to the improvement of living conditions is acknowledged with gratitude. However it gives “those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world”. It is precisely the mentality of technocratic domination that leads to the destruction of nature and the exploitation of people and the most vulnerable populations. “The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economics and political life”, keeping us from recognising that “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion”.

210 Chapter 5. God of Life, Creation and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace
“Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism”: human beings no longer recognize their right place with respect to the world and take on a self-centred position, focused exclusively on themselves and on their own power. This results in a “use and throw away” logic that justifies every type of waste, environmental or human, that treats both the other and nature as simple objects and leads to a myriad of forms of domination. It is this mentality that leads to exploiting children, abandoning the elderly, forcing others into slavery and over-evaluating the capacity of the market to regulate itself, practising human trafficking, selling pelts of animals in danger of extinction and of “blood diamonds”. It is the same mentality as many mafias, of those involved in trafficking organs and drug trafficking and of throwing away unborn babies because they do not correspond to what the parents want.

In this light, the Encyclical addresses two crucial problems of today’s world. Above all work: “any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour”, because “to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society”.

The second problem regards the limitations of scientific progress, with clear reference to GMOs. This is a “complex environmental issue”. Even though “in some regions their use has brought about economic growth which has helped to resolve problems, there remain a number of significant difficulties which should not be underestimated”, starting from the “productive land being concentrated in the hands of a few owners”. Pope Francis thinks particularly of small producers and rural workers, of biodiversity, and the network of ecosystems. Therefore “a broad, responsible scientific and social debate needs to take place, one capable of considering all the available information and of calling things by their name” starting from “lines of independent, interdisciplinary research”.

Chapter Four – INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

The heart of what the Encyclical proposes is integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice; an ecology “which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings”. In fact, “nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live”. This is true as we are involved in various fields: in economy and politics, in different cultures particularly in those most threatened, and even in every moment of our daily lives.

The integral perspective also brings the ecology of institutions into play: “if everything is related, then the health of a society’s institutions affects the environment and the quality of human life. “Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment”.

With many concrete examples, Pope Francis confirms his thinking that “the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, and of how individuals relate to themselves”. “We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental”.

“Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good”, but is to be understood in a concrete way. In today’s context, in which, “injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable”, committing oneself to the common good means to make choices in solidarity based on “a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters”. This is also the best way to leave a sustainable world for future generations, not just by proclaiming, but by committing to care for the poor of today, as already emphasised by Benedict XVI: “In addition to a fairer sense of inter-generational solidarity there is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of intra-generational solidarity”.

Integral ecology also involves everyday life. The Encyclical gives specific attention to the urban environment. The human being has a great capacity for adaptation and “an admirable creativity and generosity is shown by persons and groups who respond to environmental limitations by alleviating the adverse effects of their surroundings and learning to live productively amid disorder and uncertainty”. Nevertheless, authentic development presupposes an integral improvement in the quality of human life: public space, housing, transport, etc.

Also “the acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation”.

Chapter Five – LINES OF APPROACH AND ACTION

This chapter addresses the question of what we can and must do. Analyses are not enough: we need proposals “for dialogue and action which would involve each of us individually no less than international policy”. They will “help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us”. For Pope Francis it is imperative that the developing real approaches is not done in an ideological, superficial or reductionist way. For this, dialogue is essential, a term present in the title of every section of this chapter.
“There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. [...] the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I want to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good”.

On this basis, Pope Francis is not afraid to judge international dynamics severely: “Recent World Summits on the environment have failed to live up to expectations because, due to lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment”. And he asks “What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”. Instead, what is needed, as the Popes have repeated several times, starting with Pacem in terris, are forms and instruments for global governance: “an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of the so-called “global commons””, seeing that “environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces” (190, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church).

In this fifth chapter, Pope Francis insists on development of honest and transparent decision-making processes, in order to “discern” which policies and business initiatives can bring about “genuine integral development”. In particular, a proper environmental impact study of new “business ventures and projects demands transparent political processes involving a free exchange of views. On the other hand, the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project in exchange for favours usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and do not allow for full debate”.

The most significant appeal is addressed to those who hold political office, so that they avoid “a mentality of “efficiency” and “immediacy” that is so prevalent today: “but if they are courageous, they will attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility”.

Chapter Six – ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

The starting point is “to aim for a new lifestyle”, which also opens the possibility of “bringing healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power”. This is what happens when consumer choices are able to “change the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production”.

The importance of environmental education cannot be underestimated. It is able to affect actions and daily habits, the reduction of water consumption, the sorting of waste and even “turning off unnecessary lights”: “An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness”. Everything will be easier starting with a contemplative outlook that comes from faith: “as believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us with all beings. By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm”.

As proposed in Evangelii Gaudium: “sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating”, just as “happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer”. In this way “we must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it”.

The saints accompany us on this journey. St. Francis, cited several times, is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically”. He is the model of “the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace”. The Encyclical also mentions St. Benedict, St. Teresa di Lisieux and Blessed Charles de Foucauld.

After Laudato si’, the regular practice of an examination of conscience, the means that the Church has always recommended to orient one’s life in light of the relationship with the Lord, should include a new dimension, considering not only how one has lived communion with God, with others and with oneself, but also with all creatures and with nature.
5.4 Saving the Soul of the Planet

Address of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., on November 4, 2009

Esteemed President Strobe Talbott, Distinguished Guests,

It is a pleasure and a privilege to address members and guests of this renowned center of political study and thought. At first glance, it may appear strange for the leader of a religious institution concerned with spiritual values to speak about the environment at a secular institution that deals with public policy. What exactly does preserving the planet or promoting democracy have to do with saving the soul or helping the poor? It is commonly assumed that ecological issues – global climate change and the exploitation of nature’s resources – are matters that concern politicians, scientists, technocrats, and interest groups.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is certainly no worldly institution. It wields no political authority; it leads by example and by persuasion. And so the preoccupation of the Orthodox Christian Church and, in particular, her highest spiritual authority, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, with the environmental crisis will probably come to many people as a surprise. But it is neither surprising nor unnatural within the context of Orthodox Christian spirituality.

Indeed, it is now exactly twenty years since our revered predecessor, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios, sparked the ecological initiatives of our Church by issuing the first encyclical encouraging our faithful throughout the world to pray for and preserve the natural environment. His exhortation was subsequently heeded by the member churches of the World Council of Churches.

What, then, does preserving the planet have to do with saving the soul? Let us begin to sketch an answer by quoting an Orthodox Christian literary giant, Fyodor Dostoevsky, echoing the profound mysticism of Isaac the Syrian in the seventh century through Staretz Zossima in The Brothers Karamazov:

Love all God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Everything is like an ocean, I tell you, flowing and coming into contact with everything else: touch it in one place and it reverberates at the other end of the world.

This passage illustrates why, with respect to the priority and urgency of environmental issues, we do not perceive any sharp line of distinction between the pulpit and this lectern. One of our greatest goals has always been to weave together the seemingly disparate threads of issues related to human life with those related to the natural environment and climate change. For as we read the mystical teachings of the Eastern Church, these form a single fabric, a seamless garment that connects every aspect and detail of this created world to the Creator God that we worship.

For how can we possibly separate the intellectual goals of this institution – namely, the advancement of democracy, the promotion of social welfare, and the security of international cooperation – from the inspirational purpose of the church to pray, as we do in every Orthodox service, “for the peace of the whole world,” “for favorable weather, an abundance of the fruit of the earth,” and “for the safety of all those who suffer”?

Over the past two decades of our ministry, we have come to appreciate that one of the most valuable lessons to be gained from the ecological crisis is neither the political implications nor the personal consequences. Rather, this crisis reminds us of the connections that we seem to have forgotten between previously unrelated areas of life.

It is a kind of miracle, really, and you don’t have to be a believer to acknowledge that. For, the environment unites us in ways that transcend religious and philosophical differences as well as political and cultural differences. Paradoxically, the more we harm the environment, the more the environment proves that we are all connected.

The global connections that we must inevitably recognize between previously unrelated areas of life include the need to discern connections between the faith communities. We must also perceive the connections between all diverse disciplines; climate change can only be overcome when scientists and activists cooperate for a common cause. And, finally, we can no longer ignore the connections in our hearts between the political and the personal; the survival of our planet depends largely on how we translate traditional faith into personal values and, by extension, into political action.

That is why the Orthodox Church has been a prime mover in a series of inter-disciplinary and interfaith ecological symposia held on the Adriatic, Aegean, Baltic, and Black Seas, along the Amazon and Danube Rivers, as well as on the Arctic Ocean. The last of these symposia concluded only a few days ago in New Orleans, seeking ways to restore the balance of the great Mississippi River.

The mention of New Orleans brings to mind another truth. Not only are we all connected in a seamless web of existence on this third planet from the Sun, but there are
profound analogies between the way we treat the earth’s natural resources and the attitude we have toward the dis-advantaged. Sadly, our willingness to exploit the one reflects our willingness to exploit the other. There cannot be distinct ways of looking at the environment, the poor, and God.

This is one of the reasons why we selected New Orleans as the site of our latest symposium; and this is why our visit there was in fact the second since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. There, images of poverty abound, too close for comfort. We witnessed them in August of 2005 on the Gulf of Mexico; they are still evident over four years later – not only sealed forever in our memory, but soiling the Ward 9 to this day! How could the most powerful nation on earth appear so powerless in the face of such catastrophe? Certainly not because of lack of resources. Perhaps because of what St. Seraphim of Sarov once called “lack of firm resolve.”

The truth is that we tend – somewhat conveniently – to forget situations of poverty and suffering. And yet, we must learn to open up our worldview; we must no longer remain trapped within our limited, restricted point of view; we must be susceptible to a fuller, global vision. Tragically, we appear to be caught up in selfish lifestyles that repeatedly ignore the constraints of nature, which are neither deniable nor negotiable. We must relearn the sense of connectedness. For we will ultimately be judged by the tenderness with which we respond to human beings and to nature.

Surely one area of common ground, where all people of good will – of all political persuasion and every social background – can agree is the need to respond to those who suffer. Even if we cannot – or refuse to – agree on the root causes and human impact on environmental degrada- tion; even if we cannot – or refuse to – agree about what would define success in sustainable development, no one would doubt that the consequences of climate change on the poor and disadvantaged is unacceptable. Such denial would be inhumane at the very least and politically disadvantageous at worst.

Of course, poverty is not merely a local phenomenon; it is also a global reality. It applies to the situation that has existed for so long in such countries as China, India, and Brazil? To put it simply, someone in the “third-world,” is the most impacted person on the planet; yet, that person’s responsibility is incomparably minute: what that person does for mere survival neither parallels nor rivals our actions in the “first-world.”

Many argue that the wealthy nations of the West became so by exploiting the environment – they polluted rivers and oceans, razed forests, destroyed habitats, and poisoned the atmosphere. But now that that the poorer nations are developing and improving the quality of life for their citizens – like the West did during the 19th and 20th centuries – all of a sudden the rules are being changed and developing nations are being asked to make sacrifices the nations of the West never made as they were developing. They are being asked to reduce their impact on the environ- ment – in other words, to curb their development. They are being asked to drive fewer cars, consume less oil, build fewer factories, razed fewer forests, and harm fewer habitats – all in the name of protecting the environment.

Brothers and sisters – this simply cannot be. Not only is it unfair to ask the developing nations to sacrifice when the West does not – it is futile. They care not what we say – they watch what we do. And if we are unwilling to make sacrifices, we have no moral authority to ask others, who have not tasted the fruits of development and wealth, to make sacrifices.

Fortunately, the West, and in particular America, is now showing that it recognizes this “inconvenient truth” – that if we are to save our planet, sacrifices must be made by all. The Obama administration, as you know, has been very active in this regard. The President has signed an Executive Order challenging government agencies to set 2020 greenhouse reduction goals, and using the government’s $500 billion per year in purchasing power to encourage development of energy-efficient products and services.

There are also many promising developments at the global level. Representatives of the 16 countries that emit the highest levels of greenhouse gases met recently in Lon-don to discuss the amount of aid they will give less-devel- oped nations to help them adopt cleaner energy technology. And there are growing expectations that meaningful progres- can be made as a result of the United Nations Climate Change Conference scheduled to take place in Copenha- gen next month.

Sacrifices will have to be made by all. Unfortunately, people normally perceive sacrifice as loss or surrender. Yet, the root meaning of the word has less to do with “going without” and more to do with “making sacred.” Just as pol- lution has profound spiritual connotations, related to the destruction of creation when disconnected from its Cre- ator, so too sacrifice is the necessary corrective for reducing the world to a commodity to be exploited by our selfish appetites. When we sacrifice, we render the world sacred, recognizing it as a gift from above to be shared with all humanity – if not equally, then at least justly. Sacrifice is ultimately an expression of gratitude (for what we enjoy) and humility (for what we must share).

For our part, in addition to our international ecologi- cal symposia, the Orthodox Church has decided to estab- lish a center for environment and peace. Hitherto, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has endeavored to raise regional
and global awareness on the urgency of preserving the natural environment and promoting inter-religious dialogue and understanding. Henceforth, the emphasis will be educational – on the regional and international levels.

The Center for Environment and Peace is planned to be housed in a historical orphanage, on Büyükada, one of the Princess Islands near Istanbul. The building was once the largest and most beautiful wooden edifice in Europe, and it will embody a new direction in the initiatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Whereas the orphanage was at one time forcibly closed by Turkish authorities in an act of religious intolerance, it is highly expected to be returned to the Ecumenical Patriarchate through a just process in the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled in favor of returning this historic property of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The purpose of the Center will be to translate theory into practice, providing educational resources to advance ecological transformation and interfaith tolerance.

The Center will focus on climate change and the related changes needed in human behavior and ethics. It will serve as a source of inspiration and awareness for resolving religious issues related to the environment and peace, in cooperation with universities, and policy centers on both local and international levels.

Dear friends, as we humbly learned very early on, and as we have repeatedly stressed throughout our ministry over the last twenty years, the environment is not only a political issue; it is also – indeed, it is primarily – a spiritual issue. Moreover, it directly affects all of us in the most personal and the most tangible manner. We can no longer afford to be passive observers in this crucial debate.

In 2002, at the conclusion of the Adriatic Symposium, together with His Holiness, the late Pope John Paul II, we signed a declaration in Venice that proclaimed in optimism and prayer. Our conclusion was that:

It is not too late. God’s world has incredible healing powers. Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children’s future. Let that generation start now.

Because – ΝΥΝ Ο ΚΑΙΡΟΣ – now is the kairos – the decisive moment in human history, when we can truly make a difference.

Because now is the kairos – when the consciousness of the world is rising to the challenge.

Because now is the kairos – for us to save the soul of our planet.

Because now is the kairos – there is no other day than this day, this time, this moment.

Indeed, let it start now.

May God bless all of us to bring our labors to fruition.

Thank you.


2. This observation is derived from Joseph Sittler. See Peter Bakken and Steven Bouma-Prediger (eds), Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 38–50.

3. For a discussion of the relationship between God’s work of creation and of salvation, see my Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on “Re-creation” (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013), 1–50.
psychological evidence on the reversibility of any sexual orientation.

- In Christian reflection on HIV/AIDS, the virus is sometimes regarded as God’s punishment for promiscuity, prompting the secular responses that all those infected are “purely innocent victims” of the pandemic. This response may address the problem of stigmatization but hardly answers the question of what such viruses are doing in God’s supposedly good creation.

- In contemporary discourse on science and theology, creation theology has once again moved to the centre of attention, sometimes with the result that the soteriological core of Christianity is underplayed, or undermined, if not replaced by attention to the theodicy problem.

- The search for cultural authenticity in various indigenous theologies poses this question: Is the God who created us the same as the God who saves us? Is culture a preparation for the gospel? Any answer to this question is subject to suspicion – of natural theology, cultural superiority or naivety.

- This raises some classic theological and hermeneutical questions: How is the gospel related to culture, text to context, church to society? How is the context to be understood in theological and not only secular terms? As God’s creation?

- Moreover, where does the plurality of religious traditions ultimately come from? How is the Christian confession related to other belief systems?

Without addressing any one of these questions, I trust that it is clear enough that in each case the need for an adequate creation theology is evident.

The State of Questioning

Ecumenical theology is characterized by a bewildering and conflicting plurality of discourses. The variety of perspectives should surely enrich the household of God in particular contexts, but given disciplinary fragmentation, the self-isolation of discourses, and underlying methodological disputes, this situation calls for ecumenical recognition of the authenticity of particular theologies. This situation also applies to creation theology. In general one may suggest that it is no longer quite clear what the question is that creation theology has to address. The question is this: What is the appropriate question? Consider the following:

The question whether the world was indeed created lies at the centre of ongoing philosophical debates on atheism and agnosticism. If all God-talk is socially constructed (which it necessarily is), does it make any sense to speak of a creator who existed prior to the world (interpreted as creation)? The question is a pertinent one: Are we created in God’s image or are we creating God in our image? Did God exist before God-talk emerged among humans? In ecumenical circles it is widely agreed that both creationism and self-explanatory evolutionism are to be avoided, but any deist, theist or panentheist notion of God raises the question of how God’s relationship with the world as such may be understood. This is a question that cannot be avoided since it is assumed wherever God is confessed to be the creator.

The question of how the world was created lies at the centre of contemporary discourse on science and theology. How may God’s actions in the history of the universe and in the evolutionary history of life on earth be understood? How does that make any difference to what happens in the material world? Can that be detected through scientific observation? Here, the plausibility of any Christian claims to discern God’s hand in history is subjected to fierce scrutiny. It is widely agreed that both interventionism (where the work of the Son and the Spirit interferes in the work of the Father) and reductionism (where God’s action makes no discernible difference to what happens in the world) are theologically problematic, but it is not clear what via media is to be followed. Some may dispute the theological legitimacy of the question or provide theological answers – sug-

4. This profound question was articulated by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000), 75.
6. For this line of argument, see Gordon D. Kaufman, In the Beginning . . . Creativity (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).
suggested that God created through Word and Spirit and is transforming the world through the witness of the church. However, such a theological shortcut comes at the cost of isolating the Christian witness from scientific knowledge of the world.

In order to move away from speculative questions about the origins of the world, others suggest that the question as to who created should be foregrounded. This is in line with the polemical and doxological nature of the biblical witnesses, where creation is said to give praise to its creator. The Barthian emphasis on Christ as the one through whom all things were made has now given way to a Nicene consensus on the identity of “the triune Creator.” However, the plausibility of this confession is undermined where there is a lack of attention to the logically prior question, namely whether the world was indeed created. At the same time, the polemical significance should not be underestimated: it offers a critique of imperial forces and their divinities.

Yet others focus on the question of why the world was created. This allows for a teleological and indeed an eschatological line of inquiry. The purpose of God’s work of creation can then be brought in line with God’s identity and character. A God of love would create an object to love, hence creatio ex amore Dei instead of creatio ex nihilo. This approach is also helpful to retain the soteriological thrust in the biblical roots of the Christian tradition. However, it raises the question of how such purpose would be known. Some may derive that from a cosmic design, but this would prompt critiques of natural theology. Others may call upon revealed knowledge of such purposes, but this is often claimed in isolation from what is known about the world from the various sciences and not subjected to further scrutiny.

Yet others reflect on the meaning of the activity of creating. What does that entail? What is the difference in using verbs such as manufacturing, shaping, birthing, separating, judging, procreating, becoming, creating, ordering, reproducing, blessing, developing, flourishing or simply a creative and motherly “letting be”? Where does the material come from that God is working with? Is God making creative use of the forces of chaos, or is God protecting people against such forces? What is the significance of the creation by God’s “word”? And of God’s assessment of creation? Does the real significance lie in God’s judgment, suggesting a critical creation theology that offers protest against any theology of blood and soil?

A more traditional approach is to focus on the question of what was created. This allows for a more graphic depicting of the beauty and magnificence of God’s work, enjoyed by children and grown-ups alike. Some would focus on the macroscopic world of galaxies, stars and planets (an activity described by Calvin as the “alphabet of theology”), or on the microscopic complexity of life. The interest in trees, flowers and animals is certainly in line with the doxological thrust of the Psalms and the wisdom literature. Many would concentrate all the attention on the human creature, prompting contemporary critiques of anthropocentrism. Yet others would be intrigued by the confession that God created the visible and the invisible – and focus on the category of heaven, or the world of angels, powers and even demons, or perhaps on the emergence of influential ideas and moral visions.

This emphasis on what God created is important in a number of theological discourses on human dignity, women’s bodies, homosexuality, environmental sustainability and ethnicity. Yet, it has to be admitted that the track record of theological reflection on what God has created has been disastrous, to say the least. Those who have claimed to know what God created have often derived oppressive consequences from it. It has been used to construct theological legitimation for domination in the name of differences of gender (and patriarchy); race, class and caste (allusions to the “children of Ham”); sexual orientation; and species (claims for human superiority). Neo-Calvinist apartheid

9. For a critique of Barth’s understanding of the relationship between God’s work of creation and salvation, see chapter 4 of my Saving the Earth? 121–74.
10. See, for example, Moltmann, God in Creation, 76.
12. This was proposed by Oepke Noordmans in his acclaimed work Herscheping (Utrecht: J. van Boekhoven, 1934). For a discussion, see my Saving the Earth? 175–216.
13. The reference is to Calvin’s commentaries on Psalm 148:3 and Jeremiah 10:1–2.
14. Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests that “creation comes to fulfillment in us and that the whole universe was created with a view to us.” See his Systematic Theology, Volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 136. Robert Jenson, in his Systematic Theology, Volume II: The Works of God (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) puts it bluntly: “Humanity is the reason for the rest of creation” (115) and adds: “They exist in that God wills there to be a stage for the story of the Son” (127). It is rather odd that Jenson, in a chapter on “The other creatures” (112–32), spends just three pages on the nonhuman earthly creation and eight pages on the angels.
15. This approach is typical of indigenous theologies, including African theologies. See also Michael Welker’s conclusion that “The heavens are a reality that is inaccessible to creaturely formative activity but that nevertheless can be perceived by the senses, a reality that is immune to manipulation but that determines life on this earth.” See his Creation and Reality (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 40.
theology in South Africa offers one notorious example. Since God presumably created different races “in the beginning,” racial integration goes against God’s creation ordinances. Christians should, therefore, call upon government to keep ethnic groups apart, if necessary through law and order – hence apartheid. It comes as no surprise that the prophetic critique of apartheid theology (as is the case in Latin American liberation theology) tends to be disinterested in the theme of creation since it served as the cornerstone for colonial theologies of superiority and oppression. Intractable and vehement ecclesial debates on homosexuality offer another example, also with devastating consequences. Ecofeminist theologies provide notable exceptions given the interest in that which is gendered, bodily, permissible and vulnerable so that the theme of creation returns to the centre of theological inquiry.

A Deeply Counter-intuitive Confession

The value of listing the questions around creation theology in this way does not lie only in methodological clarification. It may also help Christians to rediscover the deeply counter-intuitive tone of the Christian confession that God the Father is the “Maker of heaven and Earth,” that through Jesus Christ “all things were made” and that the Holy Spirit is the “Giver of life.” To say that the world is God’s creation is by no means self-evident, as if “creation” may be used as a rough synonym for “world” or “nature.” This confession cannot be offered in the form of an independent pre-amble or in terms of what various religious traditions have in common. It cannot be reduced to a statement on the world’s divine origin or dependence upon God, either. This is, in fact, a deeply counter-intuitive claim given the tension that we as humans experience between the grandeur and the misery of our existence.

I suggest that one can identify especially five reasons why the confession cannot be taken for granted and is indeed counter-intuitive. Consider the following:

16. For a discussion, see chapter 8 of my Saving the Earth? 321–58.
17. In an illuminating essay, Vitor Westhelle seeks to explain the apparent absence of creation theology in Latin American liberation theology. He suggests that creation faith presupposes a sense of belonging that is absent from the experiences of displaced and landless peasants faced with fences and walls. See his “Creation Motifs in the Search for a Vital Space: A Latin American Perspective,” in Susan Brooks Thistletwaite and Mary Engel Potter (eds), Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 146–58.
18. This is evident in almost every contribution to ecofeminist theology from around the world – there are far too many references to list here or to single out any ones in particular.
19. See Welker, Creation and Reality, 1–12.
20. See Hendrikus Berkhof, Christelijk Geloof: Een Inleiding tot de
One cannot one-sidedly focus on whatever is perceived to be beautiful or creative in order to affirm that this world is God’s good creation. The test case is to describe a malformed child, a villain like Adolf Hitler, fierce predators or a devastating tsunami as God’s own creatures.

(5) We really do not know what God created. Job 37–39 should remind us that we were not there in the beginning. The world as we know it has been subject to dramatic evolutionary changes throughout the history of the universe. To claim to know God’s original intention on the basis of what we see around us is therefore dangerous. The same applies to Aristotelian attempts to determine the telos of something. We can only speak about God’s original intentions on the basis of contemporary theological constructs (not theological or scientific reconstructions of the inherent design of the world). Moreover, according to Christianity’s own confession, the world as we know it has been shaped, always already, by the destructive impact of what Christians call sin, but also by the history of salvation, including the ambiguous influence of Christianity itself. Likewise, our attempts to gain knowledge of the world is influenced by the social construction of reality but also by the distortion brought about by the many faces of sin.

In short, it is impossible and indeed dangerous to claim to know what God created. We do tend to distinguish between what God created, what subsequently evolved, what we created, and what we messed up, but on what basis these distinctions are made is typically not clear.

One may conclude that the Christian confession of faith in the triune creator is deeply counter-intuitive – as much as the confession that the creator of the entire universe became incarnate in a carpenter (who died poor, young and without descendants, leaving nothing behind, deserted by even his closest followers) from an obscure Roman province just about 2000 years ago, or the message that this God would give his only Son as a ransom for the worst perpetrators in history, that this Father abandoned his Son to die on a cross, and that this instrument of torture provides the key to overcome all evil in history, that the power of death and destruction can, indeed has been overcome through the “bodily” resurrection of this Son, that the church as the body of Christ is actually one, holy, universal and indeed Christian, and that we are still after some 2000 years to expect something dramatically new from this God.

A Constructive Thesis: Creation as Critical Redescription of the World

This recognition of the counter-intuitive nature of the Christian confession may help to see its polemic intent and its social significance afresh. It may help to start with an apparent paradox: To say in one breath that we do not know what God created and that this is the world that God created. To affirm the one side of this paradox without the other would be disastrous. Those who think they know what God created without realizing how counter-intuitive it is are dangerous and may use that to make deductions from “nature” as to how God’s work of re-creation may then be understood. Those who are hesitant to affirm the second part often do so because they eschew that which is material, bodily, vulnerable, perishable and earthly. Others seek to accentuate the tension between God and world, faith and science, gospel and culture, church and society (which is often needed), but this would leave the rest of us wondering how these are then connected. If this remains unresolved, the transforming impact of the gospel in this world would be undermined. If the finite and the infinite are treated as opposites, it becomes difficult to reconnect them. This would also not do justice to the second and third articles of the Christian creed, namely the incarnation of the Logos and the inhabitation of the Spirit.

My thesis is that the Christian confession of faith in the triune creator is best understood as a critical redescription and ascription of this world as we now experience it. The Christian faith offers a way of perceiving the world, a way of seeing by seeing as, a cosmological and liturgical vision, an interpretative framework, a way of making sense of reality around us. In short, it confesses that the world as we know it – in all its grandeur and misery, its ironies and ambiguities, its delights and its distress, its panache and its pain, its inadequacies and injustices, the ecstatic dance of creatures amidst death and destruction – belongs to the triune God.

Accordingly, the world is not an autonomous entity that has its origin, existence and destiny in itself. It is God’s own creation and beloved by God. It is nothing but the household (oikos) of the triune God. This suggests that

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21. In Saving the Earth? I explained the polemic significance of this paradox in the context of reformed theology. The problem I have with neo-Calvinists is that they affirm the first part of the confession too quickly without realizing that this is a counter-intuitive claim – and then make deductions from “nature” as to how God’s work of re-creation may be understood. The problem I have with some followers of Barth and Noordmans is that they are too hesitant in coming to the second part of the confession – so that the critical power of the gospel can no longer be related to the materiality of God’s creation (see 354).

in God’s eyes, that which is material, bodily and earthly is precious to the Father, is worth dying for,\(^2^3\) and is being sanctified by the Spirit.

This thesis requires some further unpacking:

1. **To redescribe and ascribe the world as God’s beloved creation is to offer one interpretation alongside many others.** Together with other persons seeking for truth, Christians seek to fathom the ultimate mystery of the universe. They do not know that the triune God created the world; they only confess that. The origin, destiny and ultimate meaning of the existence of the universe entail a mystery that is not in our possession. If what Christians confess is true, this truth will look after itself; it cannot be protected by us. Christians are witnesses, not bulldozers.\(^2^4\) This allows and in fact invites interdisciplinary collaboration and common attempts to make sense of the world around us. Christians may therefore welcome the contributions of the sciences, philosophy and the arts and may find joy in interfaith dialogue on such ultimate questions. They do have something to contribute to such interdisciplinary conversations, as will become evident below.

2. **To redescribe the world as God’s creation implies a particular way of seeing.** Multiple levels of seeing are required here, namely seeing and appreciating forms at the surface level, perceiving (seeing an object as something else by filling in some missing details), seeing connections between events (as in seeing a movie, not only a series of frames), developing deeper insight (not what is seen but what is seen in), and having some foresight. One has to see, but not with one’s eyes only. This is the difference between observing data, gathering information, gaining knowledge, developing insight and finding wisdom. To see the invisible is widely appreciated: for example, in the Hebrew, Patristic and African imagination alike. It is also part of common human experience. After all, one cannot see someone’s personality, friendship, love, a university, a church, a city, a country, or indeed the world as such. One may watch soccer but one cannot see “soccer.” One may adopt a worldview, but one cannot view the world. Each of these aspects of seeing assumes the role of the human imagination so that faith cannot be reduced to intellect, emotion or commitment (guarding against distortions in each case) but transcends all three in imagining and hopefully imaginative ways.

Since we participate in that which we seek to interpret, such a vision cannot emerge, as it were, from a distance, but only from within. We cannot see the world; there is no


view from nowhere. Moreover, the world in which we find ourselves is in flux due to geological, biological and social evolution. When the word “world” is used, it has to be interpreted in historical terms as embedded in the history of the universe, including the evolution of life on earth. This common knowledge is redescribed as the history of God’s economy (householding), including God’s work of creation, salvation and consummation. It may therefore be better to understand this vision as a dynamic system of sensory coordinates required for orientation and navigation on a journey through an uncharted landscape (or seascape), where at least some sense of direction is required.

The vision expressed in the Christian confession is not merely of an object but a story, an episode embedded in a narrative, a motion picture not a snapshot. Through mimesis (and thus redescription), a story uses the contradictions and tensions between images by placing them within a narrative sequence and a particular plot. In order to gather the meaning of such images and to detect the direction of the plot, we are aided by words, thus implying a dialectic between image and word. These words may be in the form of subtitles but may also develop a life of their own without the images, for example in a narrated story or in a text. A narrative thus transforms our experiences of time. This suggests a complex theological interplay between image and word, between word and sacrament, between the word and the Word that became flesh. This emphasis on seeing the direction of movements implies another level of seeing as discernment. This is the complex task of discerning the signs of the times, of detecting the “finger of God” in history, of following the movement of the Spirit.

3. **Moreover, there is a tension between seeing what something is and sensing what it should be (e.g., knowing God’s will).** In English this ambiguity is embedded in the word “vision”: it captures the tension between what is visible (seeing that in a wider perspective) and an attractive moral vision for the future, of seeing what has never been. While almost every institution may talk about its vision and mission statement, an encompassing moral vision is scarce. Those who have been able to articulate such a vision, also helping people to imagine the first necessary steps towards that vision, have become justly famous for that (e.g., Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu).

Likewise, there may well be a tension between seeing reality from different perspectives. There is a world of difference between seeing someone as a hardened gangster and as a child loved by his parents,\(^2^5\) between seeing a piece

25. Desmond Tutu comments: “People really are wonderful. This does not mean that people cannot be awful and do real evil. They can. Yet as you begin to see with the eyes of God, you start to realize that people’s anger and hatred and cruelty come from
of land as nothing but a toxic rubbish dump or seeing it nevertheless as God’s own garden. One may say that the Christian confession is called forth by such tensions. It enables us to see that the seeing can be blind and the blind may be able to see. I suggest that the core Christian confession may therefore be understood as a way of seeing the world, a cosmological and liturgical vision, if such connotations are kept in mind.

(4) This confession cannot be domesticated because it creates an intolerable tension, given our experiences of pain, suffering, injustices, and the many manifestations of evil in the world around us. Again, how could this world be ascribed to such a God of love, known for characteristics such as loyalty, compassion, mercy and justice? With respect to human creatures, this confession implies that the rapist and his victim, the slave owner and the enslaved, the murderer and the healer, the ruthless producer and the relentless consumer, the industrial developer and the destroyed habitat, the predator and the prey are part of God’s household. In the midst of the many faces of violence, domination and injustices, this confession appears to be intolerable and unwelcome.

The deeply polemical nature of the confession of faith in the triune creator is perhaps best expressed in the ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu. His affirmation of human dignity on the basis of being created in the image of God is never merely an expression of creation theology but has a polemic and indeed a soteriological intent, namely to affirm the dignity of those whose dignity has been violated – and of those who have violated the dignity of others.26 To say that we belong to God’s family (as Tutu never tires of reminding us27), that this world is the household of God, that the story of the universe is the story of God’s economy (householding) is therefore to offer an alternative, polemic way of seeing the world, a quite distinct cosmological vision.

Such an affirmation of the creature is therefore not merely to be understood in terms of the contemporary psychological jargon of self-affirmation – whether on the basis of a common notion of human dignity, African notions of ubuntu, Abrahamic views on being created in God’s image, liberal assumptions about inherent human benevolence, or in the categories of black consciousness. It maintains the paradox that the one who is affirmed may well be deformed, violated, victimized and guilty all at once (and then there is no need to claim innocence for the poor and oppressed), but is either way beloved, especially by God, simply because that one remains part of God’s household.

Or better: God does not love us because we are lovable; we become lovable precisely because God loves us.28

The simple affirmation of something as God’s beloved creature may therefore be affirmed with respect to all creatures, but it has profoundly different implications. To discern such implications requires a sophisticated theological understanding of the doctrine of human sin – one that resists an easy classification of humanity into perpetrators and their innocent victims (on the one hand) and an equally easy universalizing assessment that we are all sinners before God (on the other). It also requires clarification of all the various sources of suffering, including natural suffering, being sinned against, and structural violence.

(5) The polemical nature of the confession immediately prompts the need for further elaboration, precisely because it is so counter-intuitive given our experiences of pain, suffering, injustices and evil. This would not be evident if only an idealized picture of what God created is portrayed, where only what is deemed beautiful and acceptable is ascribed to God. Instead, the Christian confession is that this is the world that God created, with its many manifestations of destruction and death. This confession creates an almost unbearable tension. If the confession of God as creator is indeed counter-intuitive yet profound and polemic, it can never stand on its own. To make sense of the claim that the victim and the perpetrator are God’s creatures, one simply has to tell the rest of the story of God’s work: God created the world, we messed it up, God made a plan in response, and the story of God’s work is not yet completed. Or, in short, the confession that this world is God’s creation is inseparable from the confession that this (human) creature is a forgiven and sanctified sinner. God has not left the world to its misery. In Jesus Christ we discover that from God’s point of view the world is worth dying for (John 3:16). Moreover, through the Spirit, the world is being transformed toward, God’s vision for it. The core content of this cosmological vision as expressed in the Christian confession is indeed three-fold.

(6) Revelation enables this way of seeing the world in a different light. What is needed here is clearly not merely good eyesight, instruments for seeing better (glasses or microscopes), or the inherent intelligence and wisdom to see deeper. What is needed to see what others cannot see – even though something may be right in front of our eyes – is, in Christian terms, a form of revelation. Revelation is not so much an aid for seeing or a spotlight on a

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26. See the study by Michael Battle, Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997).

27. Among very many other examples, see Tutu, God Has a Dream, 23.

28. See Tutu, God Has a Dream, 31–41.
dark object. It is the luminosity of something that glows from God’s presence. As Desmond Tutu adds, “The divine shines through material that was thoroughly unpromising, unlikely, improbable.”

In order to do that, more than good eyesight is required. The illuminating inhabitation of God’s Spirit is needed. This does not provide new light like a limelight, but it warms the heart and allows the broken figure to glow with God’s presence. Retrospectively, one may say that such luminosity is possible because God created light in the very beginning (Gen. 1:3). Christological transfiguration is therefore inextricably linked with pneumatological transformation. More importantly (as Protestants would insist), what is needed is that the illusions and systematic distortions of reality (in the form of seduction or deceit) be removed in order to see through God’s eyes, to recognize in scoundrels other than oneself nothing but the image of God. Our problem is not merely bad eyesight or limited insight, but that we do not really want to see what is so evident. The blindness of our eyes is not the problem; the blindness of our protest against God’s grace is. The problem is not that we have been born blind or that we suffer from optic delusion, but that we have become blindfolded.

What, then, can enable us to see? The answer may be found in the Christian liturgy, which offers an opportunity for reorientation – to learn to see the world through God’s eyes, with delight, mercy and compassion, in a new light, in the light of the Light of the world.

The Polemical Dimension in Ecotheology

The polemical dimension of creation theology is highly significant in the context of ecotheology. To see the world as the triune God’s beloved creation is very different from seeing it in a number of other ways:

• Nature is sometimes regarded as something that is essentially inferior and to which value must be added, as something in need of being elevated or spiritualized. Accordingly, nature is good, but culture is better. The body is good, but the soul is better. Gay is good, straight is better.

• Nature is often viewed in a romanticized way as “oh so beautiful.” In this way, the shadow side of God’s creation is avoided. The pain, suffering and death due to natural causes are not noticed. This position seems to be possible only from the perspective of the relatively leisured middle class that regards wildlife primarily in aesthetic terms and not as a threat or a source of food.

• By contrast, nature may be viewed in a crudely Darwinian way, in terms of a bloody struggle where the motto of the survival of the fittest reigns. Accordingly, nature is “red in tooth and claw.” In this way, the role of cooperation within a species and the peaceful co-existence between species is underplayed. At worst, this approach allows for a form of social Darwinism that may legitimize a sense of cultural superiority, elitism, economic imperialism and political control.

• In a capitalist mode, nature is regarded in terms of “natural resources” that are available for excavation for the sake of economic development. Accordingly, land is nothing but real estate, while property is the right of the powerful to do with as it may please them, irrespective of economic inequalities and injustices, or ecological destruction.

• In yet other contexts, nature is regarded as something so sublime that it ought to be treated with reverence, if not worshipped. This may support an environmental ethos on the basis of treating nature as sacred, leading to some much-needed restraint. However, all too often humans are then not treated as an integral part of nature. If they are, such a way of seeing the world needs to come to terms with how evil has become embedded in social structures. Where does such evil come from? Where would the power to overcome evil then come from? Often it is assumed that nature will heal itself through recycling over a longer or shorter term. Even climate change may disturb a few ice age cycles, but eventually life on the planet will continue to flourish – so it is assumed.

Compared to such alternatives, the way of seeing the world in terms of the Christian confession is highly attractive, at least from an ecological perspective. The ecological significance of the Christian confession is best expressed through a number of models and images, each with biblical roots, with some considerable strengths but also some dangers. Consider the following:


• The world may be regarded as a fountain of life flowing forth from God. This may draw on the New Testament image of Jesus as the fountain of living water running through us (John 4:14). However, this image harbours the danger of an emanationist view of creation. If interpreted in neo-Platonic terms, this could support an eschewing of that which is material, bodily and earthly.

• The world may be regarded as God’s clay pot. If so, even if it may become a botched job, the potter would remould the world with infinite patience to become what it was intended to be. The world, including humanity, is a work in progress. The image of fabrication may be resisted in some circles, but economic production need not be destructive.

• The world may also be regarded as God’s work of art. The painter does not gaze upon a world that is finite and complete and proceed to produce a representation of it. Instead, the relationship is one of continued giving birth. Every moment the painter opens her eyes to see the world for the first time.

• Perhaps the world is like God’s novel, including a variety of human characters who are allowed a certain independence and develop a life of their own. Alternatively, the world may be regarded as God’s composition, so that God may be portrayed as an improviser with unsurpassed ingenuity, engaged in composing, directing and performing an opera.32

• Perhaps one may also portray the world as God’s gift to humans – as long as the anthropocentric connotations of such a statement can be qualified. Accordingly, God’s mission does not only entail using human agents as instruments to “care for creation.” Nature is also and perhaps more fundamentally God’s instrument in caring for humans. The earthkeeping imperative follows from the indicative of God’s grace. This may be developed further with regard to God’s providential care in terms of fertility, rain and abundant natural resources; of the therapeutic value for humans of spending time in the wilderness; of the ability of ecosystems to recycle human waste products; and of the gifts of medicine (the leaves of the trees bring healing to the nations, according to Rev. 22:2). However, it is best associated by the sacramental gifts of water, bread and wine, which may be received in gratitude (in the eucharist).

• In ecofeminist contributions, the world is often described as God’s body, thus suggesting intimacy rather than an alienating distance.33

• The world may also be portrayed as God’s household. This is perhaps the dominant image in ecumenical circles, thus linking inhabitation, political economy and ecology through the common root of oikos, suggesting rights and responsibilities for all the members of this household. For humans, this way of seeing the world implies attachment rather than ownership, a sense of belonging and participation that addresses any form of alienation and exclusion. However, the image of household also encompasses other animals, gardens, buildings and infrastructure.34

• The world may also be viewed as God’s child. Christians are used to thinking about themselves as God’s children. But what if the universe itself is God’s child – which requires nourishment, formation, education, respect and wonder from the parent? Consider the agony of a parent over a sick, injured or lost child and the cry of Genesis 3: “Adam, where are you?”

One may add the images of play, perichoretic dance, composition, directing a symphony orchestra, staging a drama or choreographing an opera to capture the creative interaction between God and the world (opera trinitatis). There is no need here to indicate the ecological significance of each of these images. Suffice it to say that seeing the world through God’s eyes as God’s own beloved creation is very, very different from other ways of seeing it.

The Temporal Dimensions of God’s Economy

The redescription of the world as God’s creation must be understood in dynamic rather than static terms. The images of the creation as fountain, clay pot, body, artwork, household or child may therefore be somewhat deceptive. The world itself is, of course, highly dynamic. It is thus more appropriate to redescribe the history of the universe as God’s creation. The value of the image of God’s household is that it can draw on the classic notion of God’s economy for humans, this way of seeing the world implies attachment rather than ownership, a sense of belonging and participation that addresses any form of alienation and exclusion. However, the image of household also encompasses other animals, gardens, buildings and infrastructure.34

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(or householding— oikoumēnia tou theou), including God's work of creation, ongoing creation, providence (including governance in history), salvation, the formation of the church, and eschatological consummation. While the term "creation" as an act of God (creatio) refers properly only to God's work of creation "in the beginning" (perhaps including the notion of becoming or ongoing creation), the term "creation" as creatura is not restricted in the same way. What is material, bodily and earthly is deeply intertwined with the whole of God's work. This allows for discerning different temporal dimensions of the product of God's work.

Following the pattern adopted by Duchrow and Liedke,36 one may speak of at least three such perspectives to indicate that the origin, history and destiny of the world are in God's hands:

1. To say that the world is God's creation (creatura) is a comment on God's steadfast loyalty to that which is material, bodily and earthly. It affirms that God has not dropped us because we belong to God. The focus here is on the present, but then typically the unacceptable present. This affirmation comes amid much suffering and destructive chaos. Precisely in such a context, creation theology rediscovers the world by insisting that we need to look at the world through God's eyes, in the light of the Light of the world, with mercy and compassion.

This is certainly in line with the historical roots of Genesis 1, written in the context of the Babylonian exile to people who have lost hope since the city Jerusalem was ransacked and destroyed. The temple as a sign of God's presence was in ruins and the stable Davidic dynasty had come to an end. To follow the gods of the Babylonians appeared to be the only way forward. In this context, symbolized by the alluvial waters of chaos, Genesis 1 offers pastoral support to such exiles. In doxological language, it affirms that the destructive forces of chaos do not have the last word. God plays with it! It is a prophetic and polemic statement against imperial forces and their divinities. Nevertheless, it puts the finger where it really hurts: the exile is Israel's own fault. However, this (fallen) world is and remains God's beloved world.

The plausibility of the message that the world remains in God's hands depends on the explanation that God has been holding the "whole world in his hands" from the very beginning. The reason why the triune God can respond to present suffering is because this God is also the creator. Creation theology therefore has to probe back from the present (we were not there in the beginning) to the ultimate origins of the universe. This remains the intuition behind insisting on creatio ex nihilo, albeit that the very beginning, if one does dare to see through God's eyes, has more to do with God's love, loyalty and lure than with a primordial nihil.

As indicated above, this is also the intuition followed in the ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu. It offers an affirmation that the human creature is God's child, belonging to God's family. This is best illustrated in the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where it was hard to imagine how both the victims and especially the perpetrators of gross violations can be God's children. Why would a father or a mother allow that to happen to his or her own children? The answer requires a theology of the cross, but it is quite evident that the rest of the story of the triune God's work needs to be told if this affirmation is to be plausible.

In the present context of ecological destruction, and precisely where the environment is most polluted and degraded, an affirmation of God's loyalty to creation implies resistance against the destructive forces of evil. God has not abandoned this earth, this moment in history, this mutilated body, this planet with its runaway climate change, despite appearances to the contrary.

2. To say that the world is God's creation involves at the same a dangerous recollection of God's original goal for creation. Amid present suffering, injustices and overwhelming evil, it offers a form of resistance by insisting that the world need not be like this. This constitutes another form of protest against an unacceptable present. It introduces a moral vision by distinguishing between what reality is experienced to be and what it should have been and actually is.

The core of this affirmation is that this is not how God intended things to be. This world belongs and belonged to God from the very beginning. The current predicament is not God's fault since God declared the beginning to be "very good," whatever that may mean. If not Platonic perfection, it seems to be the comment of a parent over a newly born child, a parent who sees much beauty in the newly born child, a parent who sees much beauty in the promise that is there nine months (or "six days") after "the beginning."

One may add that affirming the goodness of God's creation from within the present may well be to speak about a world that has never been. It is born from a moral vision for the future that is retrojected into the distant past. This applies to the ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu (traditional village life in Africa was never perfectly humane) and the biblical myth of paradise alike. It does not offer an accurate description of the past but articulates a dangerous recollection of God's original goal for creation. It is dangerous because it contradicts present power structures.

Indeed, Genesis 1 is not a scientific description of the origins of the world. It is always already the articulation of a moral vision. However, if it is a moral vision that would make a difference in this world (not just dreaming that “a different world is possible”), it needs to do justice to what this world is like. One may argue that the priestly authors of Genesis 1 made use of the best available “science” of their day to construct a pastoral but also deeply polemic story to affirm that this world belongs to Elohim (not Marduk), who is able as creator to direct the forces of chaos (as experienced in the time of the Babylonian exile).

The challenge today amid ecological destruction is more or less similar, namely to make use of the best available science of our day to tell the story of the universe in such a way that we can again live by this story. The plausibility of the claim that the world is God’s own creation depends on the use of the best available knowledge (scientific and otherwise) of our day. However, the message cannot be derived from that. It is a message that should, in our context, inspire resistance against capitalist exploitation, consumerist greed, cultural alienation, and domination in the name of differences of gender, race, class, species and kind.

(3) To affirm that the world is God’s creation also entails an inspiring but dangerous promise that God is not finished with us yet. Creation has a future. From a Christian reading of history, evil has already been conquered in Jesus Christ. Creation has been liberated in Christ. Not only the decisive battle in the war against evil, but also the victory itself have been achieved (to radicalize the contrast between D-day and V-day famously proposed by Oscar Cullmann). Peace has been established, on earth, as it is in heaven, on Golgotha, if not already in Bethlehem. The problem is that the world seems unaware of that. The good news has not reached the ends of the earth. Thus the war continues unabated, leading to injustice, conflict and destruction – instead of justice, peace and sustainability.

To affirm that the world belongs to God in the face of such destruction (sub contrario, as Luther would say) is to put one’s trust and hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome evil through the route of the cross. It is to insist that this is not how the story will end because (as it is maintained through the eyes of faith) the God of Life has a different future in mind. This hope is based on the reception of the unexpected promises of God, promises that create a different future.

God’s vision for the future implies that the rulers of the world stand judged by God. To speak about a good king, a new king, a coming messiah, a new dispensation and even a renewed creation is to offer a critique of this dispensation. For the rulers of the world, that should be unmistakable. Nevertheless, the judgment may be quite unexpected because it is rooted in the liberating message of forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration (giving back what can be given back), restitution (addressing the deficit between what can be given back and what cannot be given back) and flourishing on the basis of a sense of mutual respect and reciprocity. This promise provides the source of inspiration to resist present manifestations of evil. Such inspiration introduces amid the chaos of the present a creative element, bringing renewal, reformation, resurrection, rehabilitation, restoration, regeneration, recapitulation and, in short, recreation.

5.6 Falling in Love with God and the World: Some Reflections on the Doctrine of God
Sallie McFague

A Biographical Introduction

I have been asked to write an essay on the doctrine of God and ecology. It is a monumental task; it is also one that could be done in a number of different ways. But since I am almost eighty years old and my horizon is shrinking, I have decided to use my own story as the context of how the standard doctrine of God has changed into an ecological one over the last seventy or so years. My story and the rising up of the “ecological God” cover approximately the same time frame; hence, sketching the journey of the big story within my small one may provide a few modest but hopefully honest insights.

Seventy-three years ago I was seven years old and experienced God for the first time. Coming home from school one day, I suddenly realized that some day I would not “be here” for Christmas, and even more shocking, I would not be here for my birthday. I was becoming conscious that I was contingent, that I did not create myself, that I would not live forever, and that I was dependent on something
else. I believe now that such a radical sense of non-being with the accompanying gratitude and awe at what did create me – and sustains me in life – is one of the quintessential religious emotions. It underlies a profound sense of radical transcendence and radical immanence that has been the theme of my religious journey and I believe is the central issue facing any Christian doctrine of God.

For me and for most of my cohort seventy years ago, it was the transcendent dimension that dominated our view of God and did so in a comfortably personal and often individualistic way, with a picture of God as a supernatural father who both judged and forgave his wayward children. My “theology” and the implicit theology of this era, the forties and fifties in the Western, Christian world, was unapologetically anthropocentric and anthropomorphic. God was the God of human beings, and especially individual human beings in their personal and public joys and woes. “Human beings” were essentially all the same under the skin, as the National Geographic instructed us, and loving your neighbor was practised by charity and the social gospel.

At about the same time as my first experience of transcendence, I was also opening up to the natural world. My family owned a one-room cabin without running water or electricity on Cape Cod and I was free to run wild all day in the woods as long as I turned up for dinner. I fell in love with the world in a way similar to Annie Dillard’s description of her waking up to it: “Children ten years old wake up and find themselves here, discover themselves to have been here all along . . . They wake like sleepwalkers, in full stride; they wake like people brought back from cardiac arrest or from drowning.”¹ Such an awakening to the world was a conversion of equal strength and importance to my sense of radical contingency. Simultaneously, I was waking up to experiences of transcendence and immanence, but they were not connected. Years later when I read that Pierre Teilhard de Chardin at seven years old wrote that he had a passion for God and a passion for the world and could not give up either; in fact, as I experimented with the model of transcendence, I discovered that I did not have to give up either; in fact, as I experimented with the model of transcendence and immanence I came to see how loving the world – that wonderful feel of earth on my bare feet as I ran in the woods, hunted turtles from a tipping canoe, and had close encounters with caterpillars and pine trees? What of my other love? There was no connection. Soon, however, with the help of my undergraduate degree in literature, I began to question the type of language that we were using to talk about God. It sounded like description, but I began to suspect it was metaphorical.

And it has been a long journey for me (and for many others over the last fifty years) to move toward an understanding of God and the world in which one’s passion for the world and passion for God can come together. Like Teilhard de Chardin, I discovered that I did not have to give up either; in fact, as I experimented with the model of the world as God’s body I came to see how loving the world is loving God. As a Christian, I no longer see God off in the sky (or even as an infinite abstraction), but as the spirit of the body we call the earth. God is always everywhere with each and every smidge of creation as the loving power of life to all in their sufferings and joys.

The world as God’s body is a “panentheistic” understanding of God, in contrast to both theism (deism) and pantheism. In theism (and deism) God and the world are separate, abiding in different places (heaven and earth); in pantheism, God and the world are the same, without distinction. But in a panentheistic view, the world lives “within” God, insisting on the most radical transcendence and the most radical immanence. Teilhard’s passions (and mine) are one, as expressed in the lovely prayer he wrote while contemplating his own death:

After having perceived You as He who is “a greater myself,” grant, when my hour comes, that I may recognize You under the species of such alien or hostile force that seems bent upon destroying or supplanting me. When the signs of age begin to mark my body (and still more when they touch my mind); when the ill that is to diminish me or carry me off strikes from without

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or is born within me; when the painful moment comes in which I suddenly awaken to the fact that I am ill or growing old; and above all at that last moment when I feel I am losing hold of myself and am absolutely passive within the hands of the great unknown forces that have formed me; in all those dark moments, O God, grant that I may understand it is You (provided only my faith is strong enough) who are painfully parting the fibres of my being in order to penetrate to the very marrow of my substance and bear me away within Yourself.  

When I first read that prayer I realized that it not only brought God and the world together in the most intimate and total way – taking my “matter” into God’s own self – but it also “solved” the eternal life problem in a satisfactory way (at least for me). If we live within God now, then surely when we die we will simply live more fully in God, as God “bears me away within Yourself.” What we cherish now – the God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves here on earth – will be even closer when we die. What more could we ask for or imagine? And what could convey better the passion for the world (in the form of one’s own precious body) and the passion for God that is, I believe, the litmus test of a Christian doctrine of God? It is, in a nutshell, what the “incarnation,” the central faith of Christianity, is all about. So: How does this religious journey translate theologically, and what pertinence might it have for ecology and climate change?

The Task of Theology

I propose now that we back up and ask the central question regarding a doctrine of God in and for our time. Whose responsibility is it to attend to such a task and what would a sketch of such an understanding of God look like? These two issues will occupy us for the rest of this essay. I will suggest a few preliminary comments. First, while the understanding of God in a culture comes about in a vast number of ways, I will take a narrow focus: what is the responsibility of a theologian in this task? I want to suggest that theology at a time of deterioration due to climate change and financial inequality must focus on deconstructing and reconstructing the doctrine of God. If theologians, who are some of the keepers and interpreters of this deep knowledge, allow false, inappropriate, unhelpful, and dangerous notions of God to continue as our society’s assumptions, we are not doing our job. A primary task of theologians is to guard and encourage right thinking and talking about God and ourselves. This, of course, is but one small task needed for the planetary agenda to change. Other people – doctors, car manufacturers, teachers, parents, corporate leaders, lawyers, politicians, agriculturalists, and so on – also have important offerings to make in our struggle against climate change. The particular task of theologians is prior to our action; it is at its roots. It is a limited task and mainly a linguistic one: suggesting different language for talking about God and ourselves – with the hope that different action might follow. The limitations and possibilities of this task are perhaps best seen in the negative: If we do not change our basic assumptions about God and ourselves from one in which God and the world are separate and distant, can we expect people to change their behaviour? If we know nothing else, do we have a choice?

Deep down, beneath all our concepts and ideas about ourselves, is a sense, a feeling, an assumption about “who we are.” This is not a question people commonly ask of each other – or of themselves – anymore than they ask one another, “Who is God?” These questions are seen as too personal or too abstract or too intimidating for civil conversation. Nonetheless, they are the deepest questions of human existence and lie uneasily beneath any glib answers we might give, were we to be asked. However, we act all the time on the basis of these deep assumptions of who we are and who God is, even while not acknowledging that we even have such assumptions. When we respond with approval to an advertisement for an expensive car telling us that “we deserve the very best,” we are implicitly acknowledging that privileged individualism is our assumption about human nature. When we say that God is interested in spiritual not secular matters (and therefore not in cars), we are implicitly confessing that we believe in a distant, uninvolved God.

Who I am and who God is are taken for granted in a culture: the answer lies with the unacknowledged and accepted conventions of what is meant by “I” (a human person) and “God.” But it is the false conventional views of God and human beings that permit the continuing destruction of our planet and its inhabitants. The environmental crisis is a theological problem, a problem coming from views of God and ourselves that encourage and permit our destructive, unjust actions. For example, if I see myself (deep down) as superior to other animals and life-forms – a privileged individual (Western, white, educated, etc.) – then of course I will act in ways that support my continuation in this position. If, as a human being, I am basically “on my own,” then it is also “up to me” to maintain my superiority. This sense or feeling of separate and responsible individualism need not be conscious; in fact, it usually is not. Rather, it is considered by most privileged

Western human beings to simply be the way things are. It is seen as “natural” rather than as a personal belief.

Likewise, if I imagine God (deep down) to be a super-being, residing somewhere above and apart from the world, who created and judges the world but otherwise is absent from it, then I will conduct my affairs largely without day-to-day concern about God. If the God I believe in is supernatural, transcendent, and only intermittently interested in the world, then this God is not a factor in my daily actions. Whether or not I treat myself to that expensive car is certainly not relevant to such a God.

So, we are suggesting that who God is and who we are must be central questions if we hope to change our actions in the direction of just, sustainable planetary living. It is useless to censure people for their actions when the roots of those actions lie in deep, unexamined assumptions. The problem lies in our theologies and our anthropologies. The problem, as many have pointed out, is a “spiritual” one, having to do with our will to change. We already know more than enough about the disaster ahead of us – having more knowledge (or technology) will not solve the problem. Only changing human wills can do so.

But is this possible? It is not sufficient “to know the good” in order “to do the good.” While the Greeks believed this, St Paul knew better, and most of us think Paul is the better realist. So why bother with new theologies and anthropologies? Aren’t they just more “knowledge”? Yes and No. Yes, because obviously they fall into the category of knowledge, but No, because it is a peculiar kind of knowledge, the deepest possible kind – who we are and who God is. If we change these basic assumptions, our behavior may change as well. To be sure, it will not happen necessarily, easily, or universally, but it can and might happen. Or to put it negatively, unless another option becomes available to us, we have nothing to choose but the conventional view of God and ourselves, a view that is destructive of ourselves and our planet.

Who Is God?

If we are in agreement that the understanding of God is not a description but an interpretation and that interpretations can influence our behaviour, then let us look at a major model of the relationship between God and the world that has been traditional and is still current in much Western theology. We recall that the task in this essay is to trace the movement over the past century toward a model of God that expresses both divine immanence and divine transcendence in the most radical way. Such an understanding of God would encourage us to love both the world and God, or more accurately, to love the world in God. We are reaching for a doctrine of God that tells us that loving the world is loving God.

The traditional doctrine of God

The classical view certainly does not do this. The First Vatican Council (1869–70) expresses the God–world relationship that, with some variations, is a common one in major creeds of various Christian churches since the Reformation and which lies behind the traditional creation story.

The Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church believes and confesses that there is one true and living God, Creator and Lord of Heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in intelligence, in will, and in all perfection, who, although He is one, singular, altogether simple and unchangeable spiritual substance, must be pure and distinct in reality and essence from the world, most Blessed in Himself and of Himself, and ineffably most high above all things which are or can be conceived outside Himself.\(^5\)

Given this view of the God–world relationship – one of total distance and difference – the story of creation and providence follows. That story, in its simplest form, claims that an absolute, all-powerful, transcendent God created the world (universe) from nothing for entirely gratuitous reasons. God did not need creation nor is God internally related to it: it was created solely for God’s glory. Unfortunately, creation “fell” through the pride of one of its creatures – human beings – making it necessary for God to initiate a reversal of creation’s downfall through Jesus Christ, who atones for the sins of all human beings. In this story creation and providence are part of one coherent, historical, all-inclusive drama in which God is in charge from beginning to end, creating all things and saving them through the atoning blood of his own Son.

This mythic story focuses on God’s actions – God is the protagonist of the world drama – and its purpose is to answer Why, not Where, questions. The story speaks to our concerns about why the world was made, who is in charge of it, why it is no longer harmonious, and how it is made “right” again. This story does not speak to our interest in the world or how we should act toward our neighbours. Human beings are, in fact, minor players in the classic Christian story of creation and providence. Moreover, the action does not occur in our physical neighbourhoods, the actual spaces and places we inhabit, but over our heads, as it were, in the vast panoramic historical sweep of time, with its beginning (creation), middle (redemption), and

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end (eschatology). In each of these events God is totally in charge; we, at most, like good children are grateful to our all-mighty, all-loving Father and try to follow his will. Even when sin and evil divert the drama from its triumphant course (and cause us to lose faith and hope), the lord of history will prevail, the king will be victorious.

What is left out of this story of creation is creation itself, that is, “the neighbourhood,” the lowly, concrete, particular – and fascinating, wonderful – details of physical reality. It is about history, not geography: about God’s action through the sweep of time, not about our life on planet earth. In fact, the story does not seem to be about creation, but about a God whose “spiritual substance . . . is to be declared really and essentially distinct from the world.” This God does not inhabit creation; in fact, the assumption behind this creation story is that spirit and matter are entirely distinct and in a dualistic, hierarchical relationship. God, and all things spiritual, heavenly, and eternal, are perfect and exalted above all things material, earthly, and mortal, with the latter being entirely different from the former and inferior to it. It is difficult to overstare the importance of this assumption – the dualistic, hierarchical relationship of God and the world – for it encourages not only an understanding of salvation as the escape of individuals to the spiritual world, but also justifies lack of attention to the flourishing of this world. If God is spirit and creation is matter, then God does not occupy the earth and we need not attend to it either. But what if spirit and matter were not entirely different; what if all life – God’s and ours, as well as that of all others on earth – was seen to be on a continuum, more like a circle or a recycle symbol, than like a dualistic hierarchy? What if spirit and matter were intrinsically related, rather than diametrically opposed? Would not this make a difference in how we thought of where God is and where we should be? Would it not turn our eyes to the earth, whether we were searching for God or trying to understand where we belong?

The traditional model of God and the world does have the advantage of underscoring divine transcendence. It sees the relationship between God and the world as one in which the divine, all-powerful king controls his subjects and they in turn offer him loyal obedience. It underscores the “godness” of God, for the monarchical imagery calls forth awe and reverence, as well as vocational meaningfulness, since membership in the kingdom entails service to the divine Lord. The continuing power of this model is curious since contemporary members of royalty scarcely call up responses of awe, reverence, and obedience, but its nostalgic appeal, as evidenced in the gusto with which we all sing Christmas carols that are rife with this imagery, cannot be underestimated. Any model that would attempt to criticize it ought to look carefully at the main reason for its attraction: it underscores and dramatizes divine transcendence. In other words, it accomplishes one of the tasks of a model of the God–world relationship: it emphasizes the power and glory of God.

Nonetheless, this model has several problems, the first being that the model of God as king is “domesticated” transcendence, for a king rules only over human beings, a minute fraction of created reality. The king-realm model is neither genuinely transcendent (God is king over one species recently arrived on a minor planet in an ordinary galaxy) nor genuinely immanent (God as king is an external super-person, not the source, power, and goal of the entire universe). Moreover, a king is both distant from the natural world and indifferent to it, for as a political model, it is limited to human beings. At most, nature enters this model only as the king’s “realm” or “dominion,” not with all the complexity, richness, and attention-grabbing qualities of the living, mysterious creation of which we are a part. Moreover, the hierarchical nature of the model encourages human beings to act like kings in relation to the rest of creation: we are to subdue and dominate it.

The king-realm model would not be so harmful if it were not also hegemonic; that is, for many Christians it (along with the father-child model) literally describes the divine–world relationship. It is for them not a model – that is, one good, useful way of talking about the God–world relationship (while admitting there are other ways) – but the one and only way. Both of these favourites, the king-realm and the father-child model, exclude the natural world: they exclude the neighbourhood we need to pay attention to. Models are dangerous as well as helpful and necessary, for they only allow us to see what they want us to. If the God–world relationship is not expressed in models that include the natural world – God’s love for it and our responsibility for it – then, we ignore it: the “world” will mean the human world, either personally or politically. What model of God and the world might help us to see loving God and the world together?

The world as God’s body

We take as our text Augustine’s words expressing his sense of the God–world relationship.

Since nothing that is could exist without You, You must in some way be in all that is; [therefore also in me, since I am]. And if You are already in me, since otherwise I should not be, why do I cry to You to enter into me? . . . I should be nothing, utterly nothing, unless You were in me – or rather unless I were in You “of Whom and by Whom and in Whom are all things.” So it is, Lord. So it is. Where do I call You to come to, since I am in
You? Or where else are You that You can come to me?
Where shall I go, beyond the bounds of heaven and earth, that God may come to me, since He has said:
“Heaven and earth do I fill.” 6

If God is always incarnate – if God is always in us and we in God – then Christians should attend to the model of the world as God’s body. 7 For Christians, God did not become human on a whim; rather, it is God’s nature to be embodied, to be the One in whom we live and move and have our being. In Christianity, the God–world relationship is understood in light of the incarnation; hence, creation is “like” the incarnation. Jesus Christ is the lens, the model, through whom Christians interpret God, world, and themselves. The doctrine of creation for Christians, then, is not different in kind from the doctrine of the incarnation: in both God is the source of all existence, the One in whom we are born and re-born. In this view, the world is not just matter while God is spirit; rather, there is a continuity (though not an identity) between God and the world. The world is flesh of God’s “flesh”; the God who took our flesh in one person, Jesus of Nazareth, has always done so. God is incarnate, not secondarily but primarily. Therefore, an appropriate Christian model for understanding creation is the world as God’s body. This is not a description of creation (there are no descriptions); neither is it necessarily the only model; it is, however, one model that is commensurate with the central Christian affirmation that God is with us in the flesh in Jesus Christ and it is a model that is particularly appropriate for interpreting the Christian doctrine of creation in our time of climate change. Its merits and limitations should be considered in relation to other major models of the God–world relationship.

The world as God’s body is appropriate for our time (as well as being in continuity with the Christian incarnational tradition) because it encourages us to focus on the neighbourhood. It understands the doctrine of creation not to be primarily about God’s power, but about God’s love: how we can live together, all of us, within and for God’s body. It focuses attention on the near, on the neighbour, on the earth, on meeting God not later in heaven but here and now. We meet God in the world and especially in the flesh of the world: in feeding the hungry, healing the sick – and in reducing greenhouse gases. An incarnational understanding of creation says nothing is too lowly, too physical, too mean a labour if it helps creation to flourish. We find God in caring for the garden, in loving the earth well: this becomes our vocation, our central task. Climate change, then, becomes a major religious, a major Christian, issue. To be a Christian in our time, one must respond to the consequences of global warming.

Another implication of the model of creation as God’s body is that it radicalizes both God’s transcendence and God’s immanence. This model has been criticized by some as pantheistic, as identifying God and the world. I do not believe it is. If God is to the universe as each of us is to our bodies, then God and the world are not identical. They are, however, intimate, close, and internally related in ways that can make Christianity uncomfortable, when it forgets its incarnationalism. But we Christians should not shy away from a model that radically underscores both divine transcendence and divine immanence. How does it do so?

In the world as God’s body, God is the source, the centre, the spring, the spirit of all that lives and loves, all that is beautiful and true. When we say “God,” that is what we mean: we mean the power and source of all reality. We are not the source of our own being; hence, we acknowledge the radical dependence of all that is on God. This is true transcendence: being the source of everything that is. Our universe, the body of God, is the reflection of God’s being, God’s glory; it is the sacrament of God’s presence with us. The most radically transcendent understanding of God is, then, at the same time the most radically immanent understanding. Because God is always incarnational, always embodied, we can see God’s transcendence immemorially. Meeting God is not a momentary “spiritual” affair; rather, God is the ether, the reality, the body, the garden in which we live. God is never absent; God is reality (being); everything that has being derives it from God (we are born of God and re-born by God). The entire cosmos is born of God, as is each and every creature. We depend on this source of life and its renewal absolutely. We could not live a moment without the gifts of God’s body – air, food, water, land, and other creatures. To realize this is an overwhelming experience of God’s transcendence; it calls forth awe and immense gratitude. Yet, at the same time, as Augustine puts it, God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Where can we go where God is not, since God fills heaven and earth: “I should be nothing, utterly nothing, unless You were in me – or rather unless I were in You...” The God whom we meet through the earth is not only the source of my being, but of all being. We see glimmers of God in creation (God’s body) and we see the same God more clearly in Jesus Christ, the major model of God for Christians.

7. See my book, The Body of God: An Ecological Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) for an interpretation of this model. For a comparable development of the economic as well as the science/cosmological sides of the issue, see other of my books, especially Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) and Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).
A further implication of our model, then, is that is allows us to meet God in the garden, on the earth, at home. We do not have to go elsewhere or wait until we die or even be “religious.” We meet God in the nitty-gritty of our regular lives, for God is always present in every here and now. This implication underscores that since God is here in our world, then surely it is indeed our neighborhood, our planet and its creatures, that we should be caring for. The significance that the transcendent God is with us cannot be overestimated as we struggle to care for the earth. It means that we are not alone as we face the despair that creeps over us when at last we acknowledge our responsibility for climate change. We do not face this overwhelming problem on our own: God is with us as the source and power of all our efforts to live differently.

**The incarnate God**

At the outset of this essay I mentioned that a passion for the world and a passion for God is the litmus test of a Christian doctrine of God. The reason this is so is that Christians do not start talking about who God is “in general,” but always in relationship to the message, life, and death of Jesus of Nazareth. What does the story of Jesus tell us about God? Most essentially, it tells us that God does not “exist” in another world; rather, “God” is what/who makes this world go round. “God” is knowing that I owe my life to Someone, Someone other than myself. What we learn from the life and witness of Jesus is that the questions “Where is God?” “How great is God?” and “Is God with us here on earth?” are not abstract, useless questions, but lie at the heart of what Jesus tells us of God. “God” is not, on this reading a distant, minimal, supernatural being, but rather God is another name for “reality,” for the reality that actually creates, fuels, sustains, and saves all life. The lives of saints witness to this God at both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic levels. At the macrocosmic level God is the Yes that the scientific story does not give us — God is not only the source of life but its direction toward flourishing. At the microcosmic level God is also the Yes that helps each of us get out of bed in the morning and keep going.

“God” is the plus in life, the “extra” that makes life worth living. “God” is why the earth is not flat and sterile, why it shines with glory. “God” is that specific Someone/Something that keeps us from sinking every day, who lifts us out of the pit of despair. “God” is everything and anything that is good, true, and beautiful. Does this mean that God is everything and therefore the world is nothing? No, but God is the Yes (however small) to all the big No’s — the No to slavery, to starvation, to market capitalism, to war, and to climate change. Is God, then, merely human hopefulness? No, because folks who protest these No’s do not believe that hope comes from themselves, no matter how dedicated their efforts. Rather, hope comes to us. We are not the source or strength of any of our efforts toward justice and sustainability. At most, we can try to move our narrow egos out of the way so that we can become channels of God's loving power for saying “No” to all that diminishes life and “Yes” to all that promotes it. We are the receivers, the listeners, the admirers, the grateful ones. We live within a world “cupped” within the hands of God, who is all things good, true, and beautiful. We did not create any of this and we cannot live apart from What/Who did.

Starting with the most immediate, personal, and daily experiences of that Something/Someone beyond us but within whom we live from breath to breath — what I read as the story of Jesus and the experience of our saints (and know from my own spiritual journey) — embraces both the beauty and the suffering of the world. These experiences are not a “foundation,” a claim to truth about the theology that follows. On the contrary, they are a recognition that all statements about God rest on the shaky sands of human experience, but nonetheless, such experiences are intimations of God. Neither beauty nor suffering is sufficient alone: beauty and suffering are both routes to God, the beauty of the world that causes us to exclaim with wonder and gratitude just for another day in this glorious place, and the suffering of millions of individuals and species, human and non-human, both by accident and by intention that likewise causes us to exclaim, but now in horror and unbelievable, that such waste and cruelty are possible. “God,” then, is first of all not a “being” (no matter how great) but the slow (or sudden) experience that makes us aware that we are not alone — and that we are living in world of Yes. Julian of Norwich’s enigmatic words reach out trying to express this: All will be well. The Christian Easter attempts to say the same thing: all it says is that while we do not know how or what will be “well,” we know that it will be. It simply says that a “Yes” rather than a “No” rules and empowers the universe. This is all we need to know: it is the witness against our deepest fear — that despair, hatred, indifference, and malevolence is at the heart of things. We see glimmers of the Yes in the tiniest forget-me-not flower hidden under a mountain rock as well as in a piece of bread shared with a hungry person. This, not a “being” of any sort, is “God.”

**The kenotic God**

So we begin our sketch of a Christian doctrine of God not with the creation of a world separate from God, but with the history — the “face” of Jesus of Nazareth, his message, actions, and especially his cross. Here, Christians, those who base their lives on faith in Jesus as a limited but persuasive revelation of God, claim that the first thing
to say about God is self-emptying love. Jesus’ whole life was a lead-up of total giving to others, culminating in the cross where he sacrificed his life, not for the atonement of humanity’s sins, but as a witness to the totally unexpected and overwhelming gift of God’s own self as the answer to our questions about who we are and how we should live. The cross of Jesus tells us that God’s own life is also our life (for we were made in the “image of God” to live as God lives). And the most important characteristic of God’s life is “love.” Here, we have the one word that we use to talk about God that is not a metaphor; that is, every other word we use to express the divine reality is something drawn from our world and used – stretched – to function somehow for God. Thus, when we call God Father or Mother or the body of the world, etc., we are taking meanings that we understand and substituting them for the silence that inhabits God-talk. We do not know how to talk about God, so we use metaphors from ordinary life. But with this one word – love – we make a statement that is open, blank, unfilled: we need God to define what “love” means. And this, I believe, is where “faith” enters: “faith” is not belief that God “exists,” that God is a “being” (even of the highest sort). Rather, “faith” is the willingness to turn to the “face” of Jesus of Nazareth for intimations of what “love” means.

And here we find a strange thing. Rather than the traditional story of an absolute, all-powerful God who relates to the world by controlling and demanding its allegiance, we see God as the one who relates to the world in a new and astounding way: as self-giving love for the well-being of all creatures. The Christian tradition has called such total self-sacrificing love “kenotic” (after the Greek word for “emptying”). We have hints of this kind of love in the saints, sometimes in a mother’s love, and here and there even in the biological world where give and take, reciprocity, sacrifice, and even hints of altruism emerge (as we have seen). But it is in the story of Jesus that Christians find both the fulfillment and the paradigmatic expression of this counter-cultural love.

But the kenotic theological story does not stop with Jesus – it points to God in God’s self. The doctrine of the Trinity – that seemingly abstract and often irrelevant notion that God is “three in one” – becomes central at this point. This is the case because Christianity is not Jesus-worship; it is not about him, but about God, and not just about how God relates to the world, but how God is in God’s self. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity – a subject that has often been used to illustrate the esoteric irrelevance of the Christian view of God: How can “one” be “three”? Do Christians believe in three gods? Such questions become the centre of a profoundly immanent understanding of divine transcendence. That is to say, rather than a conundrum to baffle people about who God is, the doctrine of the Trinity clarifies and deepens our understanding of God if it is seen as the “face” of Jesus, as we have suggested.

A wide range of theologians agree. Julian of Norwich, writing in the Middle Ages, does not mince words concerning this connection: “Jesus himself, as she sees him bleeding on the cross, is the source of her understanding of the Trinity.” Centuries later, John Haught, an evolutionary theologian, claims, “At the center of Christian faith lies a trust that in the passion and crucifixion of Jesus we are presented with the mystery of God who pours the divine self-hood into the world in an act of unreserved self-abandonment.” And Jürgen Moltmann adds, “The content of the doctrine of the Trinity is the real cross of Christ himself. The form of the crucified Christ is the Trinity.”

This is the first and most important point to make about a kenotic theology: our understanding of who God is comes not from “above,” from an external or general source, from the common misunderstanding that “everyone knows who God is,” which is often the opening comment of conversations about the nature of God. For instance, when scientists and theologians gather to discuss “God,” an assumed generic view often prevails on the side of the scientists: God is a static, transcendent, distant, all-powerful super-being dwelling in another world. If, however, the question of who God is starts with what Jesus did in his life, teachings, and death, we have a very different view, one in which, as Grace Jantzen says of Julian’s view, “since the revelation of God in Jesus is a manifestation of the totally self-giving suffering of love, this is also the most important fact about the Trinity.” Hence, it makes all the difference “where we start” to talk about God.

Moreover, it also makes a difference what we understand the work of Jesus to be. If it is primarily a sacrificial atonement on the part of an all-powerful God, then the Trinity is likely to be seen as the mechanism for this transaction: thus, as in Anselm’s view, the Son, the “second person of the trinity,” sacrifices himself for the sins of his brothers and sisters in order to save them from divine punishment by the “first person,” with the Spirit, the “third person” conveying the benefits to the faithful. Here the focus tends to be on the “persons” of the Trinity and their connecting tasks or functions. Thus, the Western understanding of the Trinity, deeply influenced by Augustine, underscores

the “oneness” of God, with the three “persona” (traditionally called the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as functions, aspects, or modes of the divine oneness. The tendency is to see the Trinity as one substance with three natures in contrast to the Eastern view which claims that outside of the Trinity there is no God, no divine substance. The Eastern Christian view underscores the “threeness” of the divine, and in particularly, the relationality of the three.12 The result of these different emphases is that the Western understanding of God verges on an “individualism” for both God and humanity, while the Eastern view focuses on the process of giving and receiving. The first sees both God and humanity as “substances,” separate beings, while the second sees them as “relationships,” reciprocal processes of give and take. In other words, the Western view of the Trinity supports a paradigm of God and the world as both characterized by static, individual substances or essences while the Eastern view assumes that life – for both God and the world – is a process in which relations are more important than entities.

The implications of such a process view are significant. Here, “love” is not a property or characteristic of God, some attribute added on to God, but “love is the supreme ontological predicate” of both God and of us human beings, who are made “in the image of God.”13 In other words, we choose self-emptying love or nothing; we are not created beings who then choose love, even as God is not “God” who then decides to love. Rather, who God is and who we are is defined by love, by the self-emptying action of one into the other, of God into the world and of all parts of the world into each other. What it means to be a human being is simply to choose to be what one is: a participant in the God’s very own life of love. Thus, poetically, the Eastern view sees the inner life of God as an “eternal divine round dance” in which there is no inferior or superior, no first or second, but an eternal self-emptying and re-filling of each by each. Here we see the glimmers of mutual reciprocity evident at all levels of evolution epitomized in the

Godhead itself, now understood (for Christians who see God in the cross of Jesus of Nazareth) as the very nature of reality. The Eastern view of the Trinity is more suited to the task of conveying an immanent understanding of transcendence – that is, radical self-emptying love as the heart of the divine – than is the Western view, although many, including Augustine with his view of that God as lover, beloved, and love itself, have attempted to emphasize kenotic love.

A second implication of starting with the incarnate self-emptying love of Jesus, epitomized in the cross, is a different view of divine power. The tendency of monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) to provide support for the current radical individualism of Western culture, a view that as we have seen undergirds human domination of nature among other things, is aided by unqualified monotheism: as God dominates the world, so human beings, made in the image of God, should dominate the natural world. This view has supported centuries of human exploitation of nature culminating in our current human-induced global warming from excess greenhouse gas emissions. It is impossible to overemphasize the significance of monotheism’s contribution to this customary stance of human beings, as it is often the unspoken assumptions of “who we are in the scheme of things” that has more influence than any explicit statements of “who we should be in the scheme of things.” Thus, a radically different understanding of divine power – one in which “God” epitomizes total self-emptying openness to others, all others – is not only an indictment of the common view of power as control, but also a paradigm of “letting be” so profound and so inclusive that we are speechless to suggest what it means.

Buddhism’s sunyata, the “God” beyond God; the mystic’s prayer to free us from our desire to possess God; the statement by a Christian theologian that “the Godhead is profound and utter claimlessness;” and Meister Eckhart’s suggestion that there is no God beyond the distinctions of the Trinity are all attempts to address this speechlessness. In this understanding, God “gives up” all names and properties, wary of all attempts to reach to the “emptiness” of God, acknowledging the breakdown of all human attempts to say what cannot be said – that “God” is God. Ursula LeGuin, the science-fiction novelist, published a nice piece in The New Yorker magazine some years ago in which she imagined Eve deciding to “unname” the animals, a first-step toward overturning the exceptionalism of human beings in “naming” others, from the yak to God. LeGuin notes that “Most of them [the animals] accepted namelessness with the perfect indifference with which they had so long accepted and ignored their names.” As she leaves


13. See Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 46.
Adam (who is wondering where his dinner is) to join the other animals, Eve notes how difficult it is to name (and thus possess others): “My words must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining.”14 May our words, before all else, “unnamed” those, including God, whom we have so glibly named and thus sought to control.

Thus, in summary, in the kenotic theological paradigm, there is continuity all the way from evolution to God and vice versa: one “reality” that is characterized at all levels by various forms and expressions of self-emptying. Hence, beginning with the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, Christians believe that we have a paradigm of God, humanity, and the world that does not validate raw unilateral, absolute power at any stage or level of reality; rather, the inverse is the case. For, “what makes the world go round” is mutual, interdependent sacrifice and self-emptying. Thus, one moves from this reading of the incarnation to an understanding of the creation of the world as God’s gift of pulling back and giving space to others that they might live (but as the “body” of God, not as separate beings) and an understanding of human life as itself part of the divine life, but as its “image.” We live by participating in God’s very own life (since this is the only reality there is), but not simply as parts of God; rather, human life is learning to live into the relationality of God’s own life, which is one of self-emptying love for others. Such a theology is not panentheistic (the identification of God and the world), but pantheistic (the world as living – finding its source and fulfillment – within God’s very self, the dance of self-emptying love that desires the flourishing of all life). It is a sacramental vision, in which the world is a reflection of the divine in all its trillions of individual life-forms and species; thus, as Gerald Manley Hopkins reminds us, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” not as one shining explosion, but in all its tiniest parts, even the intricate workings of a mosquito’s eye. The motto here is “Vive la difference.” We human beings are the one life-form that does not fulfill its role as being a bit of God’s grandeur simply by existing; rather, we, made in the image of God, must grow into the fullness of that reflection of God by willing to do so. And, according to the kenotic paradigm, this is what “salvation” is: not release from punishment for our sins, but a call to relate to all others (from God to homeless persons and drought-ridden trees) as God would and does.

Some Concluding Thoughts

What have I learned in the seventy or so years since I first “woke up” at seven years old? First of all, I have learned to slow down and pay attention. In Jericho Park where I walk every morning I often stop and take in the sights, sounds, and smells of the trail, rejoicing in the present moment. I have learned to appreciate the sacrament of the present moment, how every bit of creation mirrors and indeed “rings out” that unique aspect of the divine that one is. What I have learned and rejoice in is that we do not live in two worlds, but in one: we live here and so does God! The world lives within, for, from, and toward God every minute of every day. Hence, we do not live now on earth away from God, but always, whether in life or death, we all live within God. Death is not to be feared nor is it the only time we meet God. God is the milieu of earthly existence and “heaven” is here and now. To live in heaven, one must practice the presence of God, but that is not impossible since we are constantly, everywhere and always, surrounded by God in our earth, God’s body. Whether in pain or beauty, backache or a walk in Jericho, I live within God. My death will be a seamless transition to living more fully within God.

Let me reflect on this statement more fully. It began when I was seven years old and “woke up” for the first time. All my life since then I have been going in and out of being awake. Sometimes I was not able to stand the terror of it, and escaped as many others have into unconsciousness. Being truly awake means being objective, realistic, “facing the music.” That is, it means facing death – one’s own and the death of everyone and everything else. “Not being here” is the first revelation of being awake: everything one cherishes (including oneself) will not be here some day. No matter how powerful, how beautiful, how important, how noble, it will all pass away – and the question haunting the awakened ones is, where does it all go? Does it slide into nothingness, into non-being, or is there an alternative: namely, that everything lives forever within God, within love, within the mutual cosmic dance of self-emptying give and take?

To say “Yes” to this alternative is, I think, what “believing in God” means. It means that waking up, acknowledging one’s radical contingency, is not just a cruel joke but an invitation to participate consciously in the cosmic dance of self-giving love one to another, of accepting life as a gift, living that gift joyfully and gratefully, and then passing it along to others. One goes from the active to the passive stage of this dance. This means one must “let go” of the active phase, be willing to step back and let other dancers lead. However, one still plays a part – a part similar to a “nurse log,” a tree that has fallen down and now allows

Itself to serve as nutrients for others to have their turn to
grow in the sun. As Teilhard says in his prayer on death, in
the passive stage one allows God to part the fibres of one's
being so as to bear each of us away within the divine self.
So, “waking up,” becoming a conscious human being, is an
experience of both terror and beauty. One experiences the
astonishing beauty of the world (from plankton to pen-
guins, including human beings) along with the horror of
losing it all. However, “believing in God” means that we
all continue as a part, a nurse log, in the cosmic dance of
self-giving love.

5.7 The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church
of All and for All
2016

Introduction
1. In 2003 the World Council of Churches (WCC) pub-
lished the document *A Church of All and for All* prepared
by EDAN (Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network),
which argued for the inclusion of persons with disabili-
ties in their respective churches and societies. With the
publication of this document, WCC aligned itself with
a broader global development toward a human rights
approach to disability that had already been underway
for some time.

2. Change is indicated in particular by the paradigm shift
that appears in WHO and UN documents such as the
International Classification of Functioning, Disability and
Health (ICF), and the Convention of the Rights of People
with Disabilities (CRPD). Known as the “social model” of
disability, the changing views are reflected in the distinc-
tion between “impairment” and “disability.” This distinc-
tion marks the difference between impairing physical and
mental conditions on the one hand, and the social and
cultural responses to these conditions on the other.

3. Historically, “disability” has often been regarded from
a negative perspective. Persons with impairments were
ridiculed and bullied, and even without such degrading
responses they were treated as incapable of living a fully
human life. Overall they were excluded from interacting
with other people on equal terms, even in their churches.

4. In this respect, things are beginning to change also in the
context of Christian communities. The notion that disab-
ility is a punishment for a person’s sins no longer finds
support in theological texts and ecclesial documents.

This is not to say that such notions have lost their grip
on people’s minds. The belief that disability marks a lack
of faith that prevents God from performing a healing
miracle is still alive. The same is true of the belief that
disability is a sign of being possessed by demons that
calls for exorcism.

5. By contrast, the notion of persons with impairments
as human beings equal in worth and dignity is now
firmly entrenched in official documents such as ICF
and CRPD, which in many parts of the world are used
as leverage for inclusive policies and practices in both
church and society. These developments change the
perception of persons with impairments from being
the objects of pity to being respected as citizens in their
capacity as bearers of human rights.

6. Christian communities participate in this global shift
toward a human rights approach. At the same time, their
theological reflection on what it means to be church,
on its nature and mission in the world, leads to new
understandings of disability. Religious understandings
of disability in terms of divine punishment or demonic
activity are abandoned. Churches are learning to see that
persons with impairments have much to give to their
communities, and are to be recognized as part of the life
and the witness of the church.

7. Seeing the beginnings of change, EDAN started a
process of reviewing its first document, which led it
to conclude that while many of its observations and
assumptions remain valid, the signs of change open up
new perspectives. In many ways, persons with impair-
ments and their families are still marginalized, but the
burden of proof has shifted.

8. This means that where the previous document aimed at
theological arguments in support of inclusion, the pres-
tent document expresses the view that inclusion does not
need an argument. Our Creator made all human beings
after God’s image and likeness, not only some human
beings. From the perspective of the church it is exclu-
sion, not inclusion, that requires an argument.

9. Opening up a new perspective has implications for the
use of inclusive language. The document *A Church of
All and for All* used first-person-plural language – “we,”
“us,” “our”—primarily to refer to EDAN’s members as
self-advocates. We wanted that document to be recog-
nized as testimony of the importance of speaking with
our own voice. It sent the message that it should no lon-
ger be valid for Christians to speak about persons with
disabilities as if we weren’t already present in the church
to speak up for ourselves. At the time, it was important
to underline that as members of EDAN we had become the agents of change.

10. Speaking of the burden of proof that has shifted, however, has enabled us to turn the issue of inclusive language upside down. The present document uses first-person language in inclusive ways to invite all Christian churches to join us in listening to and reflecting upon the experience of members with impairments in their midst. Since we have all been created as finite beings, we all live with limitations of various kinds.

11. With this new document, EDAN hopes to assist the ecumenical family in learning to see the unholy consequences of maintaining segregating distinctions in the way that we shape our practices and institutions. As we all know, our churches still have a long way to go before they can truly claim to be a church of all and for all.

I. VALUING HUMAN DIVERSITY

Being Created in the Image of God

12. We acknowledge that some theological viewpoints interpret human createdness in ways that are not favourable to persons with impairments, particularly cognitive impairments. Looking for ‘the seat’ of the image, some theologians asked wherein, the divine the image was to be found. The notion of being created in the image of God in terms of the human intellect came with considerable costs. It implied that human beings with profound intellectual and developmental impairments were not recognisable as truly human.

13. As life expectancy is increasing in many parts of the world, our churches and societies find themselves increasingly challenged by growing numbers of persons in advanced stages of dementia. Decline of their “powers of the rational soul” puts these persons at risk of being regarded as people for whom the notion of being created in God’s image has lost its meaning. In many ways, this notion appears to be appropriated by the temporarily abled-bodied.

14. Looking at the biblical evidence in both the Old and the New Testament, attempts to identify where the image is “seated” remain highly speculative. Following the New Testament, there is a clear view of whom the notion of the divine image applies. For Paul, only Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col.1:15). It is only through him that sinful human beings are restored in their relationship with God the Father, because “they are now justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24).

15. Thinking about the image along Pauline lines, we discover that the question is not where but how the image is found, which in the letter to the Colossians is answered by referring us to God’s saving grace. “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col.1:13-14). If Christ is the true image of God, then what is imaged in each of us is the fact of being constituted, and then restored, in the relationship with our maker.

16. Thus understood, the image is not an intrinsic quality of human beings, but is a quality of the relationship that is inaugurated by God’s act of creation. It transcends the meaning of all other facts about our actual existence as the particular human beings that we are. God’s relationship with human beings is grounded in the act of creation. As we all are created in God’s image and likeness (Gen.1:26-27), there is no difference in view of the relationship that God the Creator maintains with each of us.

17. This biblical view warrants the unity of humankind. It allows for the celebration of the widest possible diversity among human beings because in the eyes of God there are no human beings of a lesser kind. Differences between God’s creatures have no distinctive significance in the eyes of God, including the differences between kinds of abilities and disabilities. All human beings are created equal in view of God’s loving kindness, no matter what differences their bodies and minds may exhibit.

The Value of Life

18. With regard to the value of life, it is decisive for Christians that human life is created as part of the economy of grace. Life is not valuable because it enables the pursuit of happiness, or freedom, or even virtue. That is to say, the value of life is not dependent on particular goals that it enables us to pursue. In this connection, the notion of “quality of life” (to which we will return more extensively later in this document – see §§58 ff) has been presented as criterion to determine which lives are “truly” human. From a Christian perspective, however, human life derives its value from the fact that it is God’s gift.

19. From the perspective of the gospel, therefore, there are no human beings whose lives are of lesser value, because God’s purpose for earthly creatures does not
depend on their capacities and abilities. The gospel proclaims that Christ fulfils God’s purpose for his creatures. In Jesus’ own words: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Whatever incapacities and inabilities we may have, they will never eliminate the relationship that our Creator maintains with us. Being the fountain of all that is good, God does not abandon the work that his hand began.

20. The theological reason for affirming the value of life, then, lies in its creatureliness. The Christian faith affirms the value of life independently of its state or condition. It does not distinguish between human lives that do and human lives that don’t measure up against a prevailing account of “quality.” God created human beings in his image; he did not create only some human beings in his image. Nor did God divide humanity in distinct categories. In God there is diversity, but no division.

21. We conclude that grounding the value of life in an account of the quality of human lives is invalid, theologically speaking. Regardless of the state or condition of our bodies and minds, we live in the economy of grace. God does not abandon human beings when their human faculties are diminished, not even when they appear virtually extinct. As God’s creatures, we will always be valuable in the eyes of our maker.

The Language of “Disability”

22. Human diversity is constituted by, among other things, both talents and limitations. These conditions are part of how we are created. Recognizing limitation as part of creation has important implications for how we speak about “disability” in the church. It means we cannot speak indiscriminately about “the disabled” as if the individuals identified by this label are all alike in this one respect.

23. When persons with different impairments are lumped together as “the disabled,” as if they were a homogeneous group, we disrespect differences. Even when we lump together persons with the same impairment as a homogeneous group, we disrespect individual differences. Persons with impairments differ from one another as much as people in any other segment of society differ from one another.

24. It is important to expose the political nature of disability discourse. This discourse shapes a category of people whom society considers to be in need of help because of a particular condition. Speaking indiscriminately about “the disabled” is a strategy that society uses to control its fear of facing the limitations that living with impairments entails. People being labelled as “disabled” are set apart from mainstream society as people with “special needs.” To “take care” of their special needs, they are referred to all kinds of “special” arrangements, such as special institutions, hospitals, and schools. This strategy has marked the lives of persons with impairments at least since the late nineteenth century.

25. As a result, these persons have one experience in common that most other people are not familiar with, which is the experience of being set apart from other people. In this way their existence has been marginalized because of their impairments. This is the one condition that changes “impairment” into “disability.” Unsurprisingly, persons with impairments of various kinds have organized themselves in many countries into powerful advocacy groups that work together for the equal rights of all.

26. Criticizing the language that lumps them together as “the disabled,” disability advocates have coined their slogan, “Nothing about us without us,” claiming the right to tell their own stories rather than being told by others what their disability “means.” Telling one’s own story is the appropriate way for a person to account for what they are capable of doing, rather than having others identify them through what they cannot do. In this connection, it is often said that dividing human beings into distinct categories fails to recognize their personhood, as well as their individual identities. It fails to recognize the fact that they, no less than other persons, are the “authors” of their own lives.

27. There are two sides to this. From the perspective of the church, the notion of human persons being the authors of their own lives appears at best to be only partially true. From a theological perspective, the question “Who am I?” cannot be separated from the question “Whose am I?” Knowing that God creates all human beings, Christians believe that human beings do not possess the authorship of their own lives.

28. But there is another side to this as well. When the question “Who am I?” cannot be separated from the question “Whose am I?”, theologically speaking, this also implies that other people cannot speak definitive words about our lives. This is very important for persons with impairments. Where others frequently present the view of disability as a tragedy, it is crucial that each and every one has the right to tell the story of their journey in life from their own perspective.
29. Herein lays the partial truth, then, of the claim that we are the authors of our own lives. It marks the authority to speak in our own voice over against other people who are imposing their views upon us. It is important to oppose generalizing and degrading language in how we think and speak about the meaning of impaired or limited conditions of human existence. In determining what such conditions mean, we can only say that they mean many different things to many different people. In this respect, the task in life is the same for everyone, which is to find our ways in view of our possibilities and limitations.

Supporting People
30. Sometimes human limitation – such as caused by physical or cognitive impairments – affects our enjoyment of our talents, sometimes it stimulates the development of them. Whatever the case may be, there is ample reason for recognizing individual support needs, particularly within church communities. The way supports are shaped to address categorical needs, however, has often lead to segregation. Many instances of ignorance, neglect, and abuse have been part of this history, which is not to deny that many instances of positive dedication and commitment can also be found in places of segregation.

31. At the same time, we recognize that while the principle of segregation of persons with impairments should always be questioned, segregated settings may have different functions in different societies, depending upon their socio-economic and cultural circumstances. In any circumstances, though, churches cannot evade the question of appropriate supports. There must always be ample room for church members with impairments to come forward and tell their own stories. This is the least we can expect from Christian communities: that they create space for each and every one of their members.

32. As Paul’s image of the members of the church (1 Cor.12) has taught us: within the sacramental unity of the body of Christ, no one can say, “I have no need of you.” As there are no members of this body without gifts, there is also no one who is not in need of others.

33. In the context of socio-economic policy, however, things are oftentimes less clear. The level of support that different people need varies significantly. As a result, the question of how they are best served depends upon the context. Socio-economic and cultural differences can lead to different assessments of what society should provide. As far as the church is concerned, however, there can be little doubt about its vocation, which is to be a community with its members with impairment, acknowledging the gift that each member has to contribute.

II. CREATION AS AN ACT OF LOVE

Being God’s Creatures
34. When God looked upon creation, God saw that it was good, an affirmation that is repeated throughout the creation story in the book of Genesis. Therefore, it is befitting to start our reflections on disability with the same affirmation. Creation is an expression of God’s love. The goodness of being God’s creature lies in the relationship with each of us that is inaugurated by the triune God. Herein lies the foundation for the unity of humankind. It exists in the fact that we are all God’s creatures. In reflecting on disability, this affirmation lays the ground for anything else that can be said.

35. The Christian tradition confesses that creation is a willful act of love. God calls each and every one of us into being. The purpose of our being is to respond to the loving relationship that God offers to each of us, which is best expressed in the biblical notion of communion.

36. Affirming that being created is an expression of God’s love means that in the eyes of a loving God there are no categories of human beings divided according to status, race, gender, age, or ability. There are only human beings who are God’s children. To be God’s creature, then, entails being offered the loving kindness of our maker. This is the gift of being. It is offered to anyone, whether black or white, male or female, young or old, with or without impairment. The first act toward each of God’s creatures is this gift.

37. As it was recognized in A Church of All and for All, a powerful image in this connection is Paul’s message to the Ephesians that Christ has come to tear down the walls (Eph.2:14). Divisions between “us” and “them” are the mark that such walls continue to exist. Although persons living with impairments are less and less kept behind walls in segregated places, the walls of fear and prejudice remain, even within the church.

38. Particularly in the church, other people’s stares are often more painful than inaccessible stairs. Looking at others as though they are not part of “us” conflicts with the fact that God has called them to be faithful children as well. It also contradicts Christ’s ministry of restoring all of us in God’s communion. Therefore the community of the church is called upon especially to
tear down walls of prejudice and fear that maintain the division between “us” and “them.”

39. As a document addressing the family of ecumenical churches, the present document seeks to be in dialogue with the WCC’s *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, with its emphasis on the notion of communion as a central image.1

As a divinely established communion, the Church belongs to God and does not exist for itself. It is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom. (§13)

40. Viewing limitation as part of the world that God created, the church has every reason not to exempt living with these conditions from its mission. This conviction was already expressed in *A Church of All and for All* in the words, “The Church is by definition a place and a process of communion, open to all and inviting all people without discrimination. It is a place of hospitality and of welcome” (§85). This inclusive understanding of the church’s nature and mission points to the main thrust of the present document.

41. The affirmation of limitation as part of the world that God created does not deny that the experience of limitation shares in the ambiguity that is part of our existence. But it is to deny that it is peculiar to the existence of only some human beings. As Paul puts it: “The whole of creation is groaning in labour” (Rom. 8:23). To be human is to live a life that is marked by the brokenness that is part of our limited existence. Like all human beings, persons with impairments experience both sides of life: the sorrow, loss, and grief as well as the joy, the happiness, and the blessings. In the eyes of a loving God, the categorical distinction between human beings with and those without impairments is irrelevant.

42. Our aim in this respect is to assist the ecumenical family in learning to see the unholy consequences of maintaining this distinction in how we shape our practices and institutions. As we all know, our churches still have a long way to go, notwithstanding some inspiring initiatives. Much remains to be done with respect to working toward a church of all and for all.

Community and Communion

43. All things are created in Christ, and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16). This confession provides the context for determining what it means to say that the church is called to be a community of all and for all. As it is stated in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*: “Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (§1).

44. This gift of communion is anticipated when the church confesses that we are created in Christ. Being thus created does not only imply that God wants us to be for the purpose of responding to his love; it also implies that God fulfils this purpose through Christ’s work, as the church confesses it. This is the heart of the gospel on which the church is grounded.

45. Having been offered the gift of being, we are asked to respond to God’s invitation, which is “to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27). Our journey in life is to seek to live in responsible obedience toward this purpose. Often it is a journey with conflicting tasks arising from the fact that we are finite beings: the tasks of both accepting and resisting; the tasks of both learning and teaching; the tasks of both reconciling and struggling. We know that community of human beings is often disrupted amidst these ambiguities, which frequently results in the exclusion of particular people.

46. The church knows that God persists in faithfulness despite human disobedience. When human beings disrupt community, God calls upon the church to restore it by offering the church the gift of the Holy Spirit. We appreciate that the church, in finding its way in restoring community, has learned that much is to be gained by listening to marginalized voices in its midst. This wisdom also pertains to the voice of persons with impairments in their respective church communities.

47. Once churches learn to listen to this voice, they will discover the many gifts these persons have to offer, some of which have emerged from the experience of living with impairment. They include talents and skills developed through education and training, in various academic disciplines, business, as well as the arts. Other gifts are also offered, for example, of persons with profound intellectual or developmental impairments who bring the gift of attachment and presence to those
provide care and support. As disability advocates, we hold the presence of these persons in particular to be a gift that is crucial to the life and communion of the church.

**The Body of Christ**

48. God’s gifts to the church include each and every one of its members, then, even though some of its members may appear to be insignificant in the eyes of others. We already referred to the meditation on the church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. As a body, the church is made up of many members, all of whom bring different contributions to the whole. Some parts are perceived to be stronger; others are perceived to be weaker.

49. In Paul’s language, the body has parts of which those who consider themselves to be superior are ashamed; parts they rather would cover up (1 Cor.12:23). God has so arranged the body of Christ, however, that precisely these parts become indispensable. Therefore, they are to be especially honoured and respected, and their essential contribution is to be acknowledged (12:24).

50. Given that God has thus arranged the body of Christ, it is very important to understand that 1 Corinthians is not sketching a moral vision or some kind of ideal for the church. As The Church – Towards a Common Vision states: “Christians believe and confess with the Creed that there is an indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the reality of the Church” (§3). Proclaiming the church as the body of Christ is not a moral vision, therefore, but a confession of what we have received.

51. This all-inclusive understanding of the Body of Christ as the reality of God’s gift rooted in the communion of its members with God impels Christians to stand with the downtrodden and the outcasts.

<The world that “God so loved” is scarred with problems and tragedies which cry out for the compassionate engagement of Christians. The source of their passion for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ. They believe that God, who is absolute love, mercy and justice, can work through them, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(TCTCV, §64)

Consequently, as disciples of Jesus Christ, Christians cannot but challenge political authorities when their decrees show little respect for human dignity.

52. In view of this calling, Christians confess their shortcomings and failures and pray for the forgiveness that the gospel promises. This confession includes acknowledging that we oftentimes fail to grasp what it means to be a forgiven people. It also means acknowledging that in church communities we continue to erect or maintain walls and barriers to exclude other members from the body of Christ.

53. However, since we are a forgiven people, there is no need for walls of separation, because there are no differences between human beings that we need to be afraid of. In order to learn the skills of a forgiven people and gratefully receive the gift of human diversity, we need God’s communion as the sacramental gift of the Holy Trinity.

54. This sacramental gift is the body of Christ that has been broken for us all. In the liturgy of the Eucharist we are invited to lift our hearts to the Lord and give him praise. If we have failed so far to be inclusive communities of the body of Christ, the Eucharist as the sacrament of communion will remind us of what we have received. “So then, brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1 Cor.11:33). Moreover, in order to offer our gifts to God, we are requested first to reconcile with our brothers and sisters: “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt.5:23-26). How then can we offer our praise, prayer, and gifts to God if we remain in conflict with our brothers and sisters, discriminating against them, isolating or mistreating them?

55. Accordingly, Christians are called to overcome all kinds of divisions in the Eucharist. As the WCC stated in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: “Christians are called in the Eucharist to be in solidarity with the outcast and to become signs of the love of Christ who lived and sacrificed himself for all and now gives himself in the Eucharist.” This is the offer of God’s communion by virtue of which the church lives.

56. Without the incorporation of all God-given members, the church does not reflect the body of Christ. When Christians deprive others of gifts that God intended to be part of creation, they fall short of the glory of God. The recognition of those who are experienced in living with impairments ensures that the church will be faithful to its calling. Working to overcome every form of exclusion and discrimination among God’s people is a
part of the unity that the church seeks, and that Jesus prays for, so that the world may believe (John 17:21).

III. THE GIFT OF LIFE

Giftedness

57. The affirmation of our createdness as an expression of God's love extends itself in the notion of giftedness. Christians confess that life comes from God and that God intended it for us as a gift. In the present connection, "gift language" can be a very powerful expression, but it is not without its problems. Is the impairing condition that one is born with a gift? Some persons living with impairment say it is; others say it isn't.

58. Affirming the giftedness of impairment is often done through the notion of personal identity: "My blindness is not a condition that I have. I am a blind person, and that's who I am." Something similar can be said with regard to conditions such as Down syndrome. One cannot separate the person from the syndrome, because without it, that person would cease to exist as who they are: they would lose their identity.

59. Others disagree, however: "Even when I have fully accepted that my cerebral palsy is part of me, it doesn't mean I see it as a gift. Certain things that are important to me remain quite difficult because of my impairment, such as adequate speech."

60. Perhaps an attempt to broaden the question can be helpful here. The language of "gift" in this connection does not necessarily refer to a particular condition. A broader perspective would encourage us to recognize that the gift is (in) the person with the impairment rather than in the impairment itself. Persons with impairments are much more than their impairment, whether it is Down syndrome, blindness, cerebral palsy, or any other.

61. Focusing on the person rather than its impairing condition enables us to recognize that all human beings have gifts and talents that allow them to respond to their circumstances, whatever their particular condition may be. Looking at impairment along these lines we will discover that every human being is gifted in a way that others may need. This recognition in turn highlights the communal aspect of gift language. We are gifts to one another.

62. Gift language can be taken in a yet wider sense, however. It may not regard a particular condition, or even the person with that condition, but life itself. Taken in this sense, the gift of life refers to the condition of "being alive." It is important to realize, however, that this condition never comes in isolation. The gift of life includes family: a place where we feel at home and people whose acceptance means that we belong with them. But it also comes with ambiguities, limitations, and sorrows.

63. For some persons their potential barely exceeds the condition of being alive, as in the case of profound intellectual and developmental impairments. Even in these cases, there may be gifts that others are in need of, for example the gift of one's presence, or of one's capacity to respond to attention or to exhibit some sign of attachment, or to have one's body respond peacefully to the care received from other people.

Socio-economic Deprivation

64. In recent history the segregation of persons with impairments from the rest of society has been governed by, among other things, the perception that they are unable to be productive members. Until the present day, disability rights are perceived within the purview of economic conditions.

65. In view of policies that marginalize persons with impairment for economic reasons, however, Christians know, or should know, that the economy of production is transcended by the economy of God's grace. In the divine economy, people's gifts and talents are not measured according to economic productivity, but according to their role in the realization of God's purpose in creation. As stated in The Church: Towards a Common Vision:

The Church is comprised of all socio-economic classes: both rich and poor are in need of the salvation that only God can provide. After the example of Jesus, the Church is called and empowered in a special way to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalized. (§66).

66. Human lives always have these two components then: first, the potential of the individual human being, and second, the circumstances in which it needs to be developed. While these two components can be distinguished, they cannot be separated. They are often intertwined and interdependent. Children who are malnourished have a greater risk of physical and mental impairments due to their family's poverty, in which case their damaged brain is the result of a social condition. In this way cognitive impairments in many children are causally linked to social rather than natural conditions. As Christians we need to ask ourselves
to what extent we are responsible for upholding these repugnant social conditions.

67. In the same connection, living in urban societies rather than in rural areas comes with different hazards. It makes us collectively responsible for injuries to innocent children sustained through such things as landmines, substance abuse, or HIV infection. In general there is a collective social responsibility for the injuries of children born in conditions of deprivation. In all parts of the world church communities try to find ways to share in bearing this responsibility.

68. When people are suffering from socio-economic deprivation, the meaning of gift language comes under pressure. Gifts are typically appreciated for the particular experience they promise. But what is the gift of life when a person is born under negative social and economic conditions? What if a person is born into extreme poverty, in the midst of genocide, or to drug-addicted parents? Living in such conditions cannot but raise the question of what the gift of life is for?

69. Answering truthfully we must say that the gift of life does not save human beings from the experience of brokenness. Nor does it shield against injustices. Family, neighbourhood, community, nation, state, and society at large—each in turn can fail to provide what is necessary for a decent human life. But seeing human life as God’s gift does shield against indifference and prejudice. The gift of being materializes when God’s creatures accept their responsibility in supporting others to develop their gifts and talents.

70. In view of these responsibilities, we need to acknowledge that most persons with impairments are economically disenfranchised and experience some level of deprivation in their standard of living or employment opportunities. When social support is unavailable, their families have to make considerable sacrifices. Bearing responsibility for a person with impairment takes its toll in terms of time and resources, and will limit their parents’ and siblings’ opportunities to earn an income.

71. Poverty and lack of opportunity are the realities of the overwhelming majority of persons with impairments and their families today. The ramifications of this fact cannot be properly considered, however, in isolation from the effects of economic disparity between societies.

72. The disparity between the well-being of a person with impairment in the economic North and that of a non-impaired person in the economic South, for example, is such that on average the former may be “better off” than the latter. At the same time, persons with impairment in the economic North experience a huge gap in well-being compared to the average member of their own society.

Medical Technology

73. Issues of social justice also pertain to other aspects of personal well-being. Persons with impairments may face many barriers to appropriate health and medical care, particularly in areas of disaster and violence. Much the same is true for the accessibility of education. Bereft of the opportunity to be trained in an occupation, people find that their gifts and talents go to waste. Here we can make the same point about the relative deprivation of persons with impairment in their own societies. Equal opportunities are mostly wanting.

74. A particular concern with regard to justice is the rapid global development of medical technology in the areas of artificial reproduction. Combined with genetic screening and testing, artificial reproduction gives prospective parents the option of “informed choice” about specific genetic characteristics of their offspring.

75. In the bioethical literature that deals with the moral issues attached to this development, the justification of screening and testing frequently focuses on what are called “genetic defects” and argues in favour of these practices based on the notion of “quality of life.” Quality of life arguments are troublesome, however, when they are produced to support the claim that some impairing conditions result in human lives that are not worth living.

76. Some bioethicists in the Western world make this case on the basis of the distinction between “being alive” and “having a life.” While being alive is a condition that holds for all living creatures, having a life is a condition that only holds for human beings. The latter is distinguished by the faculties of reason and will, which enable the bearers of these faculties to set goals, make plans, reason about them, change them, pursue them, and so on.

77. Based on this distinction it is argued that the value of life for human beings is dependent on the condition of “having a life” because it constitutes human beings as individual selves. What makes human life valuable is the capacity to pursue one’s own goals as the expression of what one values in life. The value of life, in other words, depends on the capacity of valuing one’s life.
The implication of this argument is that the condition of “being alive” has no value in itself. Life is valuable for human beings because of what they are capable of doing with it. Therefore, following these bioethicists, the notion of the “sanctity of life” must be abandoned because it is taken to stake the value of life on the condition of “being alive.”

Christian views opposing this bioethical position sometimes do take the notion of the “sanctity of life” to mean that life as such is sacred. However, this view tends to overlook the distinction between the creature and its creator. The value of human life is derivative. It is grounded in the fact that it is God’s gift to human-kind. In this sense, the doctrine of sanctity of life retains its significance in Christian theology.

The church confesses that all things are created in Christ, and that in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16). The purpose of our lives, then, is in God’s act. Therefore, the faith of the church proclaims the goodness of “being.” Focusing on human life as God’s gift in creation, the present document questions the bioethical position that grounds the value of life in the qualities of our bodies and minds. Instead, we take the position that the quality of our human lives is extrinsically grounded in the love of God. Without proclaiming the goodness of being, our faith loses the ground on which the language of hope can only begin to make sense.

Meanwhile, the effect of trading the notion of “quality of life” for the notion of “sanctity of life” should not be underestimated. The bioethical argument referred to above is produced in the cultural context of a free market economy, which allows for the “production” of “designer babies.” In this context, abortion rates can be staggeringly high, as is presently the case for unborn children diagnosed with Down syndrome.

These developments in artificial reproduction cannot but send the message that “disabled lives” are unwelcome and ought to be prevented from coming into being. Defending these developments as a matter of “reproductive freedom” tends to ignore the effects of that message for persons with impairments and their families.

In view of these developments, the church must take upon itself the role of advocacy for the social position of impaired human beings and their future in society. Human reproduction is invaded by the commodification of “preferred” children in a market economy, which in fact introduces a trend toward “eugenics from below.” In view of the apparent rejection of genetics as a possible source of division and conflict, we call upon the WCC to take responsibility on this issue, reminding what was stated in The Church: Towards a Common Vision:

The Church proclaims the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, engages in work of compassion and mercy (cf. Luke 4:18-19) and is commissioned to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to serve God in the ministry of reconciling those divided by hatred or estrangement (cf.2 Cor.5:18-21).§66

IV. VULNERABILITY, LIMITATION, AND HEALING

Accepting the Human Condition

The trend in reproductive technology betrays the apparent inability in contemporary society to face vulnerability, limitation, and loss as an ineradicable part of human existence. This explains the fear of living with a disability. In the public eye, persons living with impairment betoken vulnerability, which society seeks to compensate by accounting for these persons as people with “special need.”

Inadvertently, the institutional arrangements based on the perception of “special needs” tend to reinforce the widespread belief that vulnerability is a categorical distinction that applies to a particular group of people. It is not. Vulnerability is inherent to the human condition. Human beings as such are vulnerable. To ascribe vulnerability to persons with impairments serves the false belief that people without impairments are strong and self-sufficient.

The response from the disability rights movement to this false belief has been that “ability” is not a permanent condition for anyone. There are only “temporarily able-bodied” human beings. Most of us, if not all, will face impairment at some point in our lives. This is why it is in everybody’s interest, so the argument runs, to include persons with “disabilities” in society on the basis of equality. However, instead of justifying the goal of inclusion on the basis of enlightened self-interest, Christian theology has taught that “ability” cannot be a permanent condition of human beings because of the transience and finitude of all creatures.

Limitation

All this is not to say that “vulnerability” is a non-issue for persons living with impairment. People often seek to hide their vulnerability from themselves as well as
from others. Wounds and bruises are painful, and there is no reason to deny this. There is certainly no point in romanticizing the wounds people carry. We did already refer to the groaning of all of creation in Romans 8 (see above §42). Human existence is characterized by the labour that comes with its being finite. The promise of a new creation has not yet been fulfilled. The “not yet” of this promise is exemplified by the fact that as human beings we still face hardships, fall ill, and die.

88. These reflections take us again to the question of limitation. We cannot speak about the “gift of being” without addressing the limitation of our being as God’s creatures. Equally, we cannot speak about it without recognizing the suffering and lament of all of humanity. This indicates why limitation is the ground of our need for each other and of our need for God. It does not merely affect certain individuals, but involves all of us together as the people of God in a broken world.

89. This is what the Bible means when it says that we all hold the treasure of God’s life in earthen vessels (2 Cor.4:7). For the church it is crucially important to note that we hold it together. As it was said in A Church of All and for All:

In our attitudes and actions toward one another, at all times, the guiding principle must be the conviction that we are incomplete, we are less than whole, without the gifts and talents of all people. We are not a full community without one another. Responding to and fully including people with impairments is not an option for the churches of Christ. It is the church’s defining characteristic. (§87)

90. Acknowledging limitation that is part of our being as God’s creatures, then, implies accepting that contingency is part of our experience. We are subject to all hazardous eventualities that can befall finite beings. This is no less true of “temporarily able-bodied” people as it is true for people living with impairment.

91. At the same time it is true that persons living with impairment and their families often have a stronger sense of the experience of contingency than other people may have. They know what it is to have one’s life turned upside-down by the unexpected. As it was noted in A Church of All and for All:

We have found ourselves in that liminal space between what is known and what is yet unknown, able only to listen and wait. We have faced fear and death and know our own vulnerability. We have met God in that empty darkness, where we realised we were no longer “in control” and learned to rely on God’s presence and care. We have learned to accept graciously and to give graciously, to be appreciative of the present moment. We have learned to accept our limitations, new way of life that is unfamiliar. We have learned to be adaptable and innovative, to use our imaginations to solve new problems. (§54)

92. Knowing what it is to live with ambiguity in the midst of this paradox, many persons with impairments have learned to be resilient. But such accomplishment does not come easy. The confrontation with impairment can be very painful — not necessarily in a physical but in a psychological sense — particularly in its early stages. It frustrates people’s expectations, or the expectations of their families. Regardless of its particularities, impairment always means that some possibilities are irreversibly foreclosed.

93. In view of these experiences, we affirm that every person living with impairment may find peace in seeking God. In one way or another, all have wrestled with God intellectually and physically to achieve this peace, and whilst some have been privileged to write intellectually about it, others exhibit this peace in their innate gift of grace shown in the love and affection for those who support them. Persons without apparent intellectual powers may also find peace in God. If so, as we believe, the church surely can find ways of accepting the gift they have to offer. God loves each and every one and extends to all the opportunity to respond to that love.

94. In this connection, we are reminded of the story of Jacob wrestling with God (Gen.32: 24-6). In their wrestling with God, persons living with impairment ask the same questions: Why me? Is there a purpose to my condition? In view of these questions, having a “disability” is often considered to be tragic, even though many persons with impairments live reasonably happy lives, not unlike other people. However, it sometimes takes time to discover and acknowledge that impairment is not necessarily tragic.

95. Given varying cultural backgrounds, people come to accept their impairments by diverse routes. Some have had impairments since birth, either by congenital conditions or by a traumatic birth, whilst others have been victims of accidents, or have developed conditions later in life. Tragedies of lost hopes and expectations are overcome by learning to find a new self. This can be the result of a painful struggle, the outcome of which is unknown and feared at the time the impairing condition imposes itself. Therefore, the experience of tragedy
is real at realizing that the impairment is inevitable, because it is prior to discovering a way in which that experience can be overcome.

96. Churches must take seriously this experience and sustain people in their lament of being hurt by life’s contingencies. The experience of grieving can be very real, which is especially true when people suffer from acquired impairments such as traumatic brain injury. In such cases, life as one knew it is gone, and what the future will bring is frighteningly uncertain. This may also be true for parents whose child develops a physical or intellectual impairment. Grieving loss takes time, which makes the presence of patient friends particularly important. Many people have reported being disappointed in their faith communities in this respect.

**Vulnerability**

97. The first thing to say in this regard is that in Jesus Christ, God has assumed the life of a human being. This is expressed by the notion of the incarnation. By taking upon himself the mission of living among his creatures and then dying for them, God in Jesus Christ embraces the vulnerability of human existence in order to redeem it. In sending his son because of his love for the world (John 3:16), God has accepted the limitations of being finite as inherent to human existence.

98. In the incarnation, we see how God’s vulnerability is connected with love. When God accepts and heals us in our self-incurred afflictions, it is done through God’s love, in which God becomes vulnerable to the possibility of being betrayed. Therefore, it is said that we are healed by God’s bruises (Is. 53:5).

99. God is love (1 John 4:8). This means that God is exposing himself to vulnerability. There are many passages in the Bible, particularly in the books of Israel’s prophets, where we hear about God grieving, or being infuriated in being rejected. “I will punish her for the festival days of the Baal, when she offered them incense, decked herself with jewellery and went after her lovers, and forgot me” (Hos. 2:13).

100. What pertains to the connection between God’s love and God’s vulnerability also pertains to human beings. Part of what it means to love is that we make ourselves vulnerable to the other. When we give ourselves in love, we do so because of the desire to be loved in return. Another person’s love cannot be commanded, however, which means that when in love we are always at risk of being ignored or rejected. Since to love is an act of freedom, there is no guaranteed loving response.

101. Vulnerability, then, is at the very heart of God’s world. This is testified in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians where he writes about his own impairment:

> Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:8-10).

102. Living in a state of vulnerability, then, a person with impairment is not an exception to an otherwise untainted existence. “The power of Christ” that dwells in the apostle stems from acknowledging that the “thorn on the flesh” is part of his creatureliness. The same message is found in his hymn in Philippians, where he features Christ by saying that “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil. 2:6-7).

103. When the power of Christ dwells in us, then, we will willfully acknowledge that human life exposes us to the vulnerability that is inherent in our creatureliness. Consequently, the argument to include persons living with impairment and their families in our midst out of enlightened self-interest misses the point. God himself has embraced finite human existence with all of its frailness and limitations.

**Charity**

104. Traditionally, the most important of motive for serving people with special needs has been charity. They were looked after and taken care of as a way of practising charity. In this way, persons in need of support came to be regarded as “vehicles of charity.” They were seen as God’s gift that enabled members of the church to grow in the practice of Christian virtue. As has been widely testified in recent decades, being a vehicle of charity has not been a blessing for persons with impairments and their families. More often it has been degrading and humiliating.

105. Self-advocates tend to resent the notion of charity, also within the church. They want to be appreciated for what they have to contribute, rather than being welcomed as people in need who create opportunities...
for others to practice Christian virtue. Here again, the church has much to benefit from the image of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians.

106. Put in terms of Paul’s metaphor: the eye does not welcome the contribution of the ear because it will improve the capacity for seeing, but because together with all the other members, they are the body of Christ that they are called to be. The church’s vocation is to be the sign and servant of God’s design to gather humanity and all of creation into communion under the lordship of Christ (see Eph. 1:10). The church will only be able to live this vocation when it learns to appreciate the gifts from all its members.

**Healing**

107. A recurring theme in religious thinking about disability is the question of healing. Given the continuing witness of persons with impairments as a gift to the body of Christ, how can healing be an issue? What are we to make of the fact that many of these persons themselves witness that they neither want nor need to be cured of their impairment?

108. In view of these questions many people are struggling with what are called “the healing narratives” in the New Testament. Not only do the gospels tell stories about Jesus’ ministry of healing, they also indicate that this is very much a part of his mission. The question needs to be asked, however, whether this was also Jesus’ understanding?

109. Next, there is the persistent popular view among religious people that connects disability with sin. When theological reflection has abandoned this connection, as is true for most of contemporary theology, does it follow that the healing narratives have nothing more to say? Are they indeed stories about healing as cure, as is oftentimes assumed, or are they about healing in a different respect? For example, are they stories of faith and healing as the restoration of communion with God in Christ as sign of the kingdom and the new life, where bodily limitations of time and space are transcended?

110. Furthermore, connecting disability with healing as cure also entails connecting it with a life full of suffering, which may be a presumptuous imposition. As we have seen, self-advocates have responded to this imposition with the slogan “Nothing about us without us” in order to claim the right to tell their own stories.

111. Many faithful persons with impairments have testified that the healing narratives and their interpretations have been a reason to turn away from the church. These stories have been used to treat people with disabilities and their families as objects of pity who need to be cured and forgiven. From what has been said in this document thus far, it is clear that regarding these persons as objects of pity because of their impairing condition is theologically unsound. All of us are human beings created in the image of God, and therefore we all, including persons living with impairment, exist within the economy of grace, which no condition of impairment can change.

112. Moreover, if, from the perspective of the gospel, cure was a necessary element of healing, we would have to conclude that Paul’s account of the body of Christ needing the gifts of all is in fact empty. In view of this consideration, the need for healing is better understood as pertaining to the restoration of the community with God. “Healing” refers to wounds that are incurred by the violence of excluding people by sending them away. In terms of Paul’s image, “healing” is needed when despised members have been cut off from the body of Christ.

113. As we have argued in the previous chapters, the church knows, or must know, that as a forgiven people it cannot exclude some as unwanted members. This pertains to all persons living with impairment, among whom persons living with cognitive impairment should be mentioned in particular. It is part of the mission of the church to welcome each and every one with, rather than in spite of, the impairing condition.

114. To illustrate the view we are presenting here, we will turn to the story of the man born blind. Jesus’ friends also apparently assume a link between disability and sin. However, when they ask the question, “Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?”, Jesus gives them no answer. Instead he says, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (John 9:2-3). Traditional readings have assumed that “God’s work” anticipates the fact that later in the story Jesus heals the blind man. As the narrative unfolds, however, something else is revealed.

115. The Pharisees accuse Jesus that in healing this man he failed to observe the Sabbath. They try to persuade the blind man to testify against Jesus, which the man refuses several times. He even dares to make fun of them: “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also
want to become his disciples?" (John 9:27). They get angry and throw him out of the temple.

116. When Jesus is informed about this, he goes out to find the man, and when he finds him, he asks, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man answers, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus then reveals himself, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he,” upon which the man responds, “Lord, I believe” (John 9:35-38).

117. So the man confesses to believe that Jesus is the son of man. Up to this point in the gospel of John, this confession has been the heart of the matter. The Pharisees have been emphatically opposing Jesus’ account of his mission. In their view, his “father” did not send him as he claims, because there is no communion with God other than by Moses’ law, which it is their duty to guard.

118. The conflict about Jesus’ mission shows how the man born blind reveals the work of God, namely by confessing that Jesus is from the Father. Since this is precisely what the Pharisees deny, Jesus tells them that despite their knowledge of the scriptures, they are spiritually blind: “If you were blind, you would not have sin, but now that you say ‘We see’ your sin remains” (John 9:41). In denying Jesus’ mission, they testify to have no true knowledge of God.

119. The central question with regard to the healing narratives then is: What is Jesus healing in people? We suggest the answer is that he heals their broken relationship with God. People who are “defiled” by impairment are thrown out of the temple and excluded from their religious community. Jesus restores them in these relationships. To be healed is to be restored in a relationship of communion with God and one another.

120. With regard to the healing narratives, then, we may look at religious and social rather than medical woundedness. No doubt people in these narratives perceived particular medical conditions as part of the impairment. But this does not alter the fact that the healing narratives are primarily concerned with the restoration of relationship, first with God and then with the community. This can be seen in the story about the man with leprosy who asks Jesus to make him clean (Mark 1:40-45), and in the story of the Jesus meeting the man who was paralyzed (Mark 2:1-12).

121. Healing narratives in the gospel provide a lens for rethinking “disability” as it has been understood traditionally in most religious communities, inside and outside Christianity. In reading them as reports about curative medicine in biblical times, many communities have made “healing” a very painful and frustrating topic for persons living with impairment. It did not occur to readers that these “disabled” figures needed more to be healed of their estrangement from God and their fellow believers than of their impairment.

V. CALLED TO BE A CHURCH OF ALL AND FOR ALL

The Good News

122. The good news of the gospel is that the Jesus restores us as God’s creatures to communion with God. Whatever reasons people may have had for excluding others from this relationship, inside or outside the church, have become obsolete. The gospel challenges the faithful not to drive out from their communities all those whom God already has accepted.

123. Jesus often describes the renewal of creation announced by gospel as a reversal of the ways of the world—for example, when he compared God’s kingdom with a banquet for the poor. In making this comparison, he was perhaps remembering the passage in Isaiah where the prophet announces: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines” (Is.25:6). In Matthew’s account, the king’s elite guests are too caught up in their affairs to honour his invitation. The king does not postpone the banquet. Instead, he invites people from the streets, who live on the margins. Jesus does not say that God’s reign is for a future world. Instead, he says, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” It is offered to us all as a present reality (see §73 of A Church of All and for All).
124. The document *Together Towards Life* states:

The church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation toward the kingdom of God. Its mission is to bring new life and announce the loving presence of God in our world. We must participate in God's mission in unity, overcoming the divisions and tensions that exist among us, so that the world may believe and all may be one (John 17:21). The church, as the communion of Christ's disciples, must become an inclusive community and exists to bring healing and reconciliation to the world. How can the church renew herself to be missional and move forward together toward life in its fullness? (§10)

In view of this statement, we ask what hope this message entails for persons living with impairment and their families. What can we expect from the church when it is called to embody the kingdom of God?

125. When all who want to come are indeed invited to this feast – to this church – it will include people who at times feel they are looked upon as a disgrace to their community. Along with people who are poor, homeless, sick, in prison, or struggling with addictions, we will find persons with impairments. They are members of the body of Christ, but in our churches they are sometimes referred to as people who need to be prayed for.

**Liturgy**

126. As well-intended as such prayers are, they nonetheless send the message that the role of some is to pray for the good of others, while the role of these others is to be the beneficiaries of their prayers. This is not how we understand the presence of persons with impairments in our church communities. They are not merely the passive recipients of the prayers of other members. Instead, they hope for and expect a church community in which the category of “disability” no longer means anything. This expectation pertains to what the church preaches, to how it celebrates its liturgy, and to the ways it seeks to practise the gospel.

127. The most visible expression of church as communion is when it gathers in worship to give thanks for the paschal mystery. The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all God’s children. It commands the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life. It points beyond the communion of the church toward the whole of creation. As we read in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,

All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the Eucharist the all-renewing grace of God penetrates and restores human personality and dignity . . . As participants in the Eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this on-going restoration of the world’s situation and the human condition. (§20).

128. In celebrating communion with God and one another, the Eucharist opens up the vision of the renewal of creation, of which it is a foretaste. In the celebration of communion, the world is represented in that we give God thanks for signs of this renewal wherever human beings work for justice, love and peace (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, §22).

129. At this point it is especially relevant to focus on persons with cognitive impairment. They are left out of worship services as a matter of course, with the assumption, “They don’t understand what is happening, so why bother?” This insensitive attitude toward these persons and their families is unholy. It ignores the fact that the experience and expression of the liturgy engages the whole person: not only their intellect, but also the senses: through music and singing, liturgical gestures such as kneeling and bowing, as well as art and the use of incense, each of which indicates the participation of the body in the liturgy. Persons with cognitive impairment are not oblivious to these expressions. They respond to the integrity of the liturgy in which they are invited to participate. They pick up the real and true involvement of those around them and respond to their devotion.

**Mission**

130. In its document *Together Towards Life*, the WCC has stated that guided by the Holy Spirit, its mission aims at the liberation and reconciliation of the whole of creation:

The mission of the church is to prepare the banquet and to invite all people to the feast of life. The feast is a celebration of creation and fruitfulness overflowing from the love of God, the source of life in abundance. It is a sign of the liberation and reconciliation of the whole creation, which is the goal of mission. (§101).

We ask the church to invite persons living with impairment and their families to participate in this mission. True support will be based on the affirmation of the life of each person as a child of God, with or without
impairment. True support for persons living with impairment, then, does not focus on their needs, but invites the contribution of all that enables the church to be the body of Christ. That is how the needs of all God’s creatures are served.

This document professes the call for the church to be a Church of all and for all, where the contribution of persons living with impairment are valued, where they are respected for who they are, and find support in their communities. We ask the church to acknowledge and practise the equality and dignity of all human beings as the central task of living the gospel, and give witness of its message in all her work.

POSTSCRIPT

When the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) prepared its first document A Church of All and for All, it took the lead in the struggle against oppression and segregation of persons with impairments in their respective churches and societies. With the publication of that document in 2003, the WCC recognized the importance of EDAN’s work in this respect.

In the years since then EDAN has learned that A Church of All and for All has been useful to many of WCC’s member churches, and that theological seminaries have used it widely in their teaching. Persons with impairments have grown in their capacity as agents of change, also within the ecumenical community. EDAN’s position has changed in this respect. We are no longer demanding recognition from the margins of WCC. Even though for many persons living with impairment and their families the struggle for being included and accepted in their church communities continues, there are promising signs that inclusion and participation by all is more positively affirmed as part of God’s gift.

These observations brought about the need for updating the first document. Our first consultation on the question took place in May 2013 in Nunspeet (The Netherlands). We concluded that in view of shifting positions it would be better to write a new document, and to opt for an approach in which the realities of “disability” experience are interpreted from the perspective of creation, making the notion of human creatureliness central to our theological reflections. Taking a different approach is not to deny the fact that many observations and assumptions in the previous document are still valid, and that marginalization and exclusion are far from being overcome. But it is to affirm the beginnings of changes that have occurred. Returning to Nunspeet in October 2014 for a second consultation, we found ourselves in full agreement with the notion of creation as the centre of our theological reflections on impairment and “disability.”

This document is addressed to the ecumenical family of churches and their communities. We hope this new document will once again inform communities of faith, their leaders, students in theology, and their teachers, and inspire them to continue the work of becoming inclusive church communities. Much remains to be done in this respect. Our greatest hope is to be part of a church whose communities know how to receive the gift of being the body of Christ, and celebrate the rich variety in the giftedness of all of its members.

Works Cited

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982).

A Church of All and for All, Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (Geneva, WCC, 2003).

Appendix 1: Sources

Chapter 1. The History of the Ecumenical Movement


Chapter 2. Contemporary Issues in the Ecumenical Movement


Chapter 3. World Christianity: Intercultural and Interreligious Theology


Chapter 4. African Theologies and the Realities of Mission Practice


Chapter 5. God of Life, Creation, and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace


5.4 His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Saving the Soul of the Planet, 2009. From: https://www.patriarchate.org/environmental-addresses/-/asset_publisher/47ISmr00STje/content/saving-the-soul-of-the-planet-address-at-the-brookings-institution?inheritRedirect=false


Appendix 2: Complementary Texts

Additional readings on the themes of GETI 2018 have been gathered by GETI 2018 and may be accessed at academy.globethics.net, including:

Chapter 1: The History of the Ecumenical Movement

Chapter 2. Contemporary Issues in the Ecumenical Movement

See also:


Chapter 3: World Christianity: Intercultural and Interreligious Theology


See also:

Chapter 4: African Theologies and Realities of Mission Practice


Chapter 5: The Call to Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace


*See also:*

