This is the first of a series of papers which will be published at irregular intervals, first on the Web, then for some also in printed version. The paper "Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today" was adopted by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in 2000 as a study document to be used during the preparations for the next world mission conference.

INTRODUCTION

1.   The ecumenical movement has its origins in the missionary movement, for the contemporary search for the unity of the church was initiated within the framework of the mission endeavour. The missionaries were among the first to look for ways and styles of witness in unity, recognizing that the scandal of Christian divisions and denominational rivalries hindered greatly the impact of their message.

2.   The concern for mission and evangelism in unity has been constantly on the ecumenical agenda, especially since 1961 when the International Missionary Council merged with the World Council of Churches. In this context, the then Commission on World Mission and Evangelism issued in 1982 "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation". This statement summed up, in a comprehensive way, a number of the most important aspects and facets of mission, including diverse understandings of mission and its biblical and theological basis. Appropriating understandings already reached in the debates of the previous decade and enlarging them in a wider perspective, that document articulated ecumenical affirmations on mission and evangelism in the context of the world of the early 1980s.

3.   The 1982 statement, which was approved by the WCC Central Committee, was received warmly and widely by the churches. It has been used by mission agencies, theological schools, local congregations and individual Christians. It has fermented, during these decades, new understandings of mission and evangelism and has inspired, provoked and strengthened the longing for witness in unity. It has reached far beyond the frontiers of the member churches of the WCC.

4.   Since 1982 many of the world's realities have changed, confronting the churches with new mission challenges. Two world mission conferences have been held under WCC auspices, in San Antonio, USA (1989) and Salvador, Brazil (1996). Important mission issues were raised also in the WCC Seventh Assembly in Canberra, Australia (1991). In the context of the new world situation and fresh missiological insights and learnings, a number of WCC member churches requested that a new statement on mission and evangelism be elaborated to assist the churches together to respond with an appropriate and meaningful mission praxis.

5.   In response to such requests, the WCC decided to undertake the development of a further statement to assist Christians and the churches in their task of mission and evangelism in unity at the turn of the millennium. The present text, which has been adopted in March 2000 by the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) as a Study Document is offered in the hope that it will stimulate reflection on the nature, content and implications of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the varied but inter-related contexts of their life and faithful witness to the gospel, to the end that all people everywhere may have the opportunity to hear and to believe.

6.   The present document does not replace the 1982 statement; neither does it promote a theology of mission different from what was agreed upon ecumenically in that statement. It has an identity of its own. *It attempts to articulate anew the churches' commitment to mission and evangelism in unity within the context of the challenges facing them today.*

7.   ***Use of terminology***. For some Christians and churches the terms "mission" and "evangelism", although related, are perceived and used differently; for others the two are virtually identical in both meaning and content. In the present document the two terms are used with some differentiation.

a)   "Mission" carries a holistic understanding: the proclamation and sharing of the good news of the gospel by word *(kerygma)*, deed *(diakonia)*, prayer and worship *(leiturgia)* and the everyday witness of the Christian life *(martyria)*; teaching as building up and strengthening people in their relationship with God and each other; and healing as wholeness and reconciliation into *koinonia* communion with God, communion with people, and communion with creation as a whole.

b)   "Evangelism", while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional voicing of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship.

8.   The expression "mission in unity" refers to the search for ways of witnessing together in unity and cooperation despite differing ecclesiologies within the context of the burning challenges facing churches everywhere today "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21), avoiding any form of confessional rivalry or competition. This does not imply an unrealistic super-church ecclesiology; neither does it deny the intrinsic relationship between mission and ecclesiology.

A.   MISSION AND EVANGELISM IN UNITY: AN IMPERATIVE AND VOCATION

9.   Mission is central to Christian faith and theology. It is not an option but is rather an existential calling and vocation. Mission is constitutive of and conditions the very being of the church and of all Christians.

10.   The God revealed by the scriptures is not static but rather relational and missionary: a God who has always been manifested as the Lord of history, leading God's people towards fullness of life through the covenants, the law, and the prophets who voiced God's will and interpreted the signs of the times; a God who came into the world through the incarnated Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, taking human flesh, shared our human condition and became one of us, died on the cross and rose from the dead; a God who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, loves, cares for and sustains humanity and the whole of creation, leading them towards salvation and transfiguration.

11.   The mission of God *(missio Dei)* has no limits or barriers; it has been addressed to and has been at work within the entire human race and the whole of creation throughout history. Jesus' parables of the good Samaritan and the sheep and the goats and his dialogue with the Syro-Phoenician woman clearly point in that direction. The early church apologists, in the framework of the dialogue with the people of their time, developed this idea further. On the basis of John 1, they explained that the Logos (Word), God's co-eternal and consubstantial Son, was and is present with the Father and the Holy Spirit in all God's acts, and that through

the Word the world was created: God spoke, and "the Spirit swept over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). In the Holy Spirit, they said, God spoke clearly and explicitly through the Word not only to the prophets of the Old Testament but also (though in a different way) to people of other nations and religions. When the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4), the very same Word "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14), coming to "his own" (John 1:11).

12. A trinitarian approach to the *missio Dei* is therefore important. On the one hand, this promotes a more inclusive understanding of God's presence and work in the whole world and among all people, implying that signs of God's presence can and should be identified, affirmed and worked with even in the most unexpected places. On the other hand, by clearly affirming that the Father and the Spirit 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.

13. The mission of God *(missio Dei)* is the source of and basis for the mission of the church, the body of Christ. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, empowering and energizing its members. Thus mission becomes for Christians an urgent inner compulsion, even a powerful test and criterion for authentic life in Christ, rooted in the profound demands of Christ's love, to invite others to share in the fullness of life Jesus came to bring (John 10:10). Participating in God's mission, therefore, should be natural for all Christians and all churches, not only for particular individuals or specialized groups. The Holy Spirit transforms Christians into living, courageous and bold witnesses (cf. Acts 1:8). "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20) was the response of Peter and John when they were ordered to keep silent about Jesus; or, in Paul's words: "If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel!"(1 Cor. 9:16).

14. Christians are called through metanoia to "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), to be agents of God's mission in the world (Matt. 28:19-20, Mark 16:15), to identify the signs of God's presence, affirming and promoting them by witnessing to and cooperating with all people of good will, and to be co-workers with God (1 Cor. 4:1) for the transfiguration of the whole of creation. Thus, the goal of mission is "a reconciled humanity and renewed creation", and "the vision of God uniting all things in Christ is the driving force of its life and sharing".[i] "The church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relations with God and with neighbours through Jesus Christ."[ii]

15. The mission of the church in the power of the Spirit is to call people into communion with God, with one another and with creation. In so doing, the church must honour the intrinsic and inseparable relationship between mission and unity. The church has the responsibility to live out the unity for which Jesus prayed for his people: "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). This conviction must be proclaimed and witnessed to in the community into which people are invited.

16. Mission in Christ's way is *holistic*, for the whole person and the totality of life are inseparable in God's plan of salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ. It is *local* □ "the primary responsibility for mission, where there is a local church, is with that church in its own place." It is also *universal,* that is, to all peoples, beyond all frontiers of race, caste, gender, culture, nation □ to "the ends of the earth" in every sense (cf. Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47).[iii]

17. "To tell the story [of Jesus Christ] is the specific privilege of the churches within God's overall mission."[iv] Evangelism includes explication of the gospel □ "accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15) □ as well as an invitation to believe in the triune God, become a disciple of Christ and join the community of an existing local church. "Proclamation of Jesus Christ requires a personal response. The Living Word of God is never external, unrelational, disconnected, but always calling for personal conversion and relational communion. Such a conversion is more than appropriation of a message: it is a commitment to Jesus Christ, imitating his death and resurrection in a very visible and tangible way. That which begins with a personal commitment must, however, immediately lead into a relationship with other members of the body of Christ, the local witnessing community."[v]

B. CONTEXT OF MISSION TODAY: CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

18. A major facet of the contemporary context of mission is that of ***globalization*** □ a relatively recent phenomenon having to do with economic developments, changes in means of global communication and the consequent imposition of a new monoculture and a related set of values on most societies. These trends are of course not totally new; but the political changes at the end of the 1980s allow them now to influence the whole world unhindered by any global counter-force.

19. A crucial aspect of globalization is the increasing liberalization of the economy, characterized by the unlimited flow of capital all over the world in search of maximum profit in the short term. These financial operations have rules of their own, mostly without reference to real production of economic goods or services. They have unpredictable effects and damage national economies, leaving governments and international institutions with virtually no possibility of influencing them. In that sense, globalization challenges and is a threat to the very basis of human society.

20. In the wake of the collapse of communism, the free market has become the sole overall functioning system. Economics have become the major criteria for human relationships. The whole realm of present-day social realities, including human beings themselves, is defined and referred to in economic and financial categories. In the global market, people matter insofar as they are consumers. Only those who are stronger and more competitive survive. Those who have no value for the market □ people who are poor, sick, unemployed, powerless □ are simply pushed to the fringes of society. Exclusion, accompanied by structural, spiritual and physical violence, has reached intolerable levels in most parts of the world. The impact of globalization on the so-called developing countries and regions is a life-and-death issue: provision for fundamental human needs such as shelter, health care, nutrition and education among the poorest is actually less than it was thirty years ago. This has resulted in the increasing "economic migration" of workers, rural and indigenous people, looking for jobs or expelled from their lands.

21. Among the consequences of this trend is the increasing degradation of the environment. Nature in many places is savagely exploited, resulting in ecological crises and disasters which threaten even the continuation of life on our planet.

22. A second aspect of globalization has to do with new information technology and mass communication possibilities, the accelerated development and growth of which is transforming human and social relations. At a first glance, it seems that the ancient dream of making the world one is finally becoming a reality. The globe seems to be becoming very

small. People in all parts of the world can and do benefit from new technological developments. Intercommunication is flourishing. Recent scientific and medical discoveries can be shared globally and instantaneously. The new electronic communication tools can be used for human progress, for creating a more transparent and open world, for disseminating information on abuses of human rights and the crimes of dictators. They help peoples' movements and churches throughout the world to network more efficiently. But they are also used by racist and criminal groups and, especially, by those who within seconds move millions of dollars to wherever they will be able to take the largest profit. And those who do not have access to the new communication networks suffer from new exclusion.

23. Through processes of globalization, the values of ***post-modernity***, rooted in Western cultures, are spreading rapidly across the globe. The very identities of people are in danger of being diluted or weakened in the melting-pot of the powerfully tempting and attractive monoculture and its new set of values. The very notion of nationhood itself is severely challenged. Individualism is preferred to life in community. Traditional values which formerly were lived as public values are today being privatized. Even religion is treated as merely a private matter. Personal experience takes the place of reason, knowledge and understanding. Images are preferred to words and have a greater impact on people in terms of advertising, promoting or conveying "truths" and goods. The importance of the present moment is emphasized; the past and future do not really matter. People are persuaded to believe that they are masters of their own lives and are therefore free to pick and choose what suits themselves.

24. The expanding monoculture does not yet affect the whole world to the same degree. The people most influenced by the new cultural trends are the ones who can participate in the market, especially those in the power centres of each country and region. How the values of post-modernity will interact with the various human cultures is not entirely predictable. Resistance has grown against this subtle new form of imperialism, from grassroots organizations and communities, indigenous peoples, churches of the poor and cultures rooted in strong religious worldviews.

25. The centripetal forces of globalization are accompanied by centrifugal forces of ***fragmentation***, which are being felt ever more acutely. This fragmentation is being experienced at personal, national and international levels. Traditional family patterns are breaking down. Divorces have reached an unprecedented rate and the number of one-parent families is growing in many places. At the national level, in the vacuum created by the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the ramifications of that collapse in the rest of the world, turmoil, tensions and fragmentation have arisen among and within the somewhat artificial statal units inherited from the pre-1989 period. New states have emerged along ethnic and tribal lines. Peoples who have lived together for generations can no longer stand one another. Cultural and ethnic identities are being used to oppress other identities. "Ethnic cleansing" and genocides are taking place in many parts of the world, bringing immense suffering, increasing hatred and setting the stage for further violence towards humankind and creation.

26. The contemporary context of mission includes ***trends within the churches*** as well. In many parts of the world, churches are growing dramatically. This is true of churches □ including so-called mainline churches □ in disadvantaged communities, Pentecostal or African instituted churches and charismatic renewal movements, especially but not exclusively in the South. Even in the wealthier countries, where post-modernity is influencing

attitudes and beliefs, new ways of "being church" in terms of community life and worship are experienced. And a growing number of strong missionary movements reaching out to other parts of the world are based in the South.

27. Some but not all of these churches appear to be striving for holistic witness to the gospel. Indeed, the highly competitive environment of the free market is reinforcing many churches and para-church movements in their perception of mission as the effort to attract and recruit new "customers", while retaining the old ones. Their programmes and doctrines are presented as "religious products", which must be appealing and attractive to potential new members. They evaluate the success of their mission in terms of growth, of numbers of converts or of newly planted churches. Unfortunately, very often their "new members" already belonged to other churches. Thus proselytism (as competition and "sheep-stealing") is one of the sharp contemporary issues facing the churches.

28. After so many decades of ecumenical dialogue and life together, there is a paradoxical resurgence of confessionalism today, undoubtedly linked to the fragmentation process. Denominations are signs of the richness of charisms and spiritual gifts within the household of God when they positively contribute to a better common understanding of the gospel and the mission of the church in the process towards unity. But many churches seem to be more concerned about affirming and strengthening their own confessional and denominational identities than about ecumenical endeavours. Some prefer to do their missionary and diaconal work alone, in parallel or even in competition with others, and the number of fundamentalist and anti-ecumenical Christian groups seems to be on the increase.

29. Finally, new religious movements of various kinds are proliferating everywhere, recruiting their adherents from traditionally Christian families, even from among active church members. The churches and their teachings are often attacked and denounced while new, modern, more attractive messages are promoted.

30. The above brief description of the overall context does not, of course, take into consideration the important variations and even opposite emphases in different regions and local situations. Nevertheless, this is the "world" in which the churches are called to give clear, authentic witness to the gospel and to develop viable alternatives for the future which are faithful to mission in Christ's way[vi] .

C. MISSION PARADIGMS FOR OUR TIMES

1. Called to participate in God's mission for fullness of life

31. The rapidly spreading processes of globalization, expressed in the savage and uncontrolled free-market economy and in high technology which reduces the value of the whole of reality to economic and financial categories, confronts the mission of the church with the growing phenomenon of dehumanization. In contexts of poverty and inhuman exploitation this is experienced as a daily struggle for the most elementary basics of life, even for life itself. In other contexts, within a framework of hopelessness, discouragement and estrangement □ experienced as lack of meaning in the present and lack of hope for the future □ the suicide rate (especially among young people) is growing and apathy is becoming fashionable. In all cases, the church is called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ with boldness and to participate in God's mission for fullness of life. It is the mission of the church

to reaffirm with courage and persistence the unique and eternal value of each human person as being created in the image of the holy, mighty and immortal God.

32. Within a context of human reductionism and spiritual captivity, there are signs of the search for meaning, fulfilment and spirituality. A fresh new missionary enthusiasm is evident today and new Christian communities are being established.

33. On the other hand, the growth of new religious movements and the search of youth in particular for religious experiences is becoming a characteristic of our time. Often, however, such searches and consequent experiences have brought painful results, as the dominating spirit of today's context has put its mark even on attempts towards a liberating, fulfilling spirituality. Seen through the contemporary lens of individual fulfilment and experience, spirituality is often understood as a set of techniques and methods for personal growth, holistic health, clarity of mind, control of senses. In other words, the source of fulfilment and meaning is seen not in a relationship with a personal God who is both transcendent and immanent, but rather in the attempt to "awaken" the godly powers which are already present, though dormant, in human beings.

34. In the face of such challenges, it is the mission of the church to encounter people's needs and searches, helping them to discover adequate answers and directions on the basis of the scriptures and the experience of the church throughout the ages. It is timely to witness in word and deed that the source of life, meaning and fulfilment is the triune God fully revealed and manifested in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. By his death on the cross, death was defeated; and through his resurrection, authentic meaning and the final goal and vocation of humanity was transformed into life in its fullness. In the Christian life, therefore, taking up one's own cross □ with all the pains that the death of the old self may imply □ leads always to a joyful and fulfilling experience of resurrection into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). From the experiences of "so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) over the centuries, it is therefore imperative to convey the message that Christian spirituality leads to holistic healing, community and fullness of life in relationship with God, other people and the whole of creation.

35. Religion as life in Christ and consciousness of a rediscovered full and authentic human identity, therefore, cannot be simply a private matter. Rather it shapes one's whole perspective, vision and ways of relating to others. Christians cannot lead dichotomic lives: religious life and secular life are a single reality. Life itself should be a continuous liturgy of loving relationships with God, the source of life, and with other people and the whole of creation. Thus all realities faced by human beings in their daily lives may be subjects of theological reflection. Faith touches all realms of life □ including social and economic justice, politics, ethics, biogenetics and the environment □ and enables appropriate and prophetic answers and directions from that specific perspective.

36. The church is also called to offer, out of its experience over the centuries, concrete alternative paradigms to the consumerist ideology of globalization. To the temptation of dominion it must set limits and use its power to say "no more"; to the temptation of possession and ownership, the ascesis of the early Christians who refrained from eating and shared their food and belongings with the needy and dispossessed; to the temptation of power, the prophetic voice; to the temptation of proclaiming a truncated and partial message tailored to the preferences and expectations of people of our time, the accurate and whole message of the gospel □ "the whole church [challenged] to take the whole gospel to the whole world".[vii]

2. Called to life in community

37. Another great challenge facing Christian mission in our time, especially in the North, is individualism, which penetrates and influences all spheres of life. The individual seems to be considered the sole norm of reality and existence. Society and community are losing their traditional, historical meaning and value. This trend in human relationships also affects the traditional understanding of the relationship between Christians and the church in the process of salvation. Many perceive salvation as a matter between an individual and God, and do not see the role of the community of faith, the church. They may affirm faith in God, but may severely challenge or even deny the significance of the church as an instrument for relationship to God, other people and the whole of creation, as well as the concept of salvation in and through community.

38. In the face of such a trend, which is affecting the very fabric of human society in general and of Christian community in particular, the church is called to proclaim God's will and intention for the world. Created in the image of the triune God ☐ who is by definition an eternal communion of life and love ☐ human beings are by nature relational. The relational dimension of human life is a given, ontological reality. Any authentic anthropology, therefore, must be relational and communitarian.

39. The Trinity, the source and image of our existence, shows the importance of diversity, otherness and intrinsic relationships in constituting a community. The members of a community are different, with different gifts, functions, strengths and weaknesses (if the members were all the same, the body could not be constituted (1 Cor. 12)). The community therefore requires diversity and otherness. These however should be neither over against nor parallel to but complementary to one another.

40. The Salvador conference highlighted the importance that the gospel places on the different identities that constitute community. Such identities, be they national, cultural, historical or religious, are affirmed by the gospel so long as they lead in the direction of relationship and communion. Identities which attempt to further their own interests at the expense of others ☐ demonstrated, for example, in xenophobia, "ethnic cleansing", racism, religious intolerance and fanaticism ☐ thus disrupting and destroying the koinonia, are denied and refuted by the same gospel.

41. An authentic Christian community should be both local and catholic (from *kata holon*, meaning "according to the whole"). Catholicity, which is a mark of the authenticity of any Christian community, is in fact based on the diversity of local identities in complementary communion with one another.

42. Such theological affirmations have important implications for the mission praxis of the church. The Salvador conference, for example, touched on the issue of indigenous spirituality within the framework of the relationship between the gospel and cultures. If the church is a koinonia of convergent and complementary diversities, it is necessary to seek ways in which expressions of Christian theology, liturgy and spirituality in forms other than the traditional and historical ones can be integrated and incorporated in the manifold spectrum.

43. In the same perspective arises the issue of the inclusive community of women and men as equal and complementary partners in the life of the church. The recognition of the role of women in the mission of the church, bringing fullness and integrity to human and church

community, is a sine qua non. To that end, attention should be drawn to the manifold examples in church history of preaching, witnessing and martyred women and to the women saints who, because of their faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel, are venerated as "equal to the apostles".

44. On the basis of the recognition that mission should begin with listening and learning rather than preaching, teaching and proclaiming, a new approach may be called for in relation to the growth of "implicit religion" in many societies. Many people strongly confess faith in God but have little or no relationship with the church. Some practise at home their own form of "liturgy" and devotion. Such practices have often been regarded by the church as mere traditions, folklore or even superstition. Perhaps they could rather be considered as a sincere search for the living God, for fullness of life and meaning ☐ however different they may be from the worship of a local congregation ☐ and become a basis on which to build and to witness with love to the message of the gospel.

3.   Called to incarnate the gospel within each culture

45. "Culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ", said the Bangkok world mission conference in 1973. Recent developments have again placed the inseparable relation between the gospel and human cultures on the mission agenda. At the Canberra assembly (1991) and in other circles there have been heated debates about inculturation theologies and attempts to articulate the gospel in terms very different from the traditions of some of the historical churches. Experiences shared during the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women demonstrated how cultures have sometimes been misused for power purposes and become oppressive. During the 1990s the world has witnessed an increasing affirmation of local identities, often leading to violent conflicts and persecution on ethnic and cultural grounds, sometimes with direct or indirect support by Christians or churches. Such a context makes it urgent for mission reflection to take up afresh the challenge of inculturation.

46. The Salvador conference strongly affirmed that "there is no way of being human without participating in culture, for it is through culture that identity is created".[viii] Culture is interpreted both as a result of God's grace and as an expression of human creativity. In any actual context, it must be stressed that culture is intrinsically neither good nor bad, but has the potential for both ☐ and is thus ambiguous.

47. In recent ecumenical discussions, culture has been understood in a very broad sense as including all aspects of human effort. "Each community has a culture ☐ by which is meant the totality of what constitutes its life, all that is essential for relationships among its members, and its relationships with God and with the natural environment."[ix] This means that religion is part of culture, often even at its heart. One cannot speak of cultures without including people's religious beliefs and value systems.

48. God's mission has been revealed as incarnational. Mission in Christ's way thus cannot but be rooted in a certain context, concretely addressing the challenges in that specific context. Hence the gospel is and must be "translatable". In each and every situation, the churches' witness to Christ must be rooted in the local culture so that authentically inculturated faith communities may develop. Clearly, all cultures can express the love of God and no culture has the right to consider itself the exclusive norm for God's relationship with human beings.

49. When the gospel interacts authentically with a culture, it becomes rooted in that culture and opens up biblical and theological meaning for its time and place. The gospel will affirm some aspects of a culture, while challenging, critiquing and transforming others. Through such processes, cultures may be transfigured and become bearers of the gospel. At the same time, cultures nourish, illuminate, enrich and challenge the understanding and articulation of the gospel.

50. The gospel challenges aspects of cultures which produce or perpetuate injustice, suppress human rights or hinder a sustainable relationship towards creation. There is now need to go beyond certain inculturation theologies. Cultural and ethnic identity is a gift of God, but it must not be used to reject and oppress other identities. Identity should be defined not in opposition to, in competition with or in fear of others, but rather as complementary. "The gospel reconciles and unites people of all identities into a new community in which the primary and ultimate identity is identity in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28)."[x]

51. The debate over the inter-relation between the gospel and cultures has specific significance for indigenous peoples, who suffered greatly from missionary endeavours and colonial conquest, in the course of which their cultures and religions were described mostly as "pagan", in need of the gospel and "civilization". Later the terminology changed, but indigenous peoples were still considered mainly as "objects" of the churches' witness, as "poor" in need of economic or development aid. In more recent theologies, which affirmed "God's preferential option for the poor", marginalized people were indeed considered as bearers □ that is, subjects □ of a new mission movement from the so-called periphery to the centre. But these theologies still functioned on the basis of socio-economic categories, neglecting people's religious heritage. Now, indigenous peoples are challenging the churches to recognize the richness of their culture and spirituality, which emphasizes interconnectedness and reciprocity with the whole creation. They are asking the churches to work in real partnership with them, doing mission together as equals, in mutual sharing.

52. In any culture the message of Christ must be proclaimed in language and symbols adapted to that culture and in ways that are relevant to people's life experiences. There are different approaches to culturally sensitive evangelism. For some people and churches, such witness is implicit when churches regularly celebrate the liturgy, including in it, where appropriate, local cultural symbols. Others suggest that "a way of making non-intrusive contact with communities of other cultures is that of □presence'. An effort is first made to get to know and understand people in that community, and sincerely to listen to and learn from them... At the right time people could be invited to participate in the story of the gospel."[xi] In some cases the gospel may best be conveyed by silent solidarity or be revealed through a deeply spiritual way of life. In contexts which are hostile to the voicing of the gospel, witness could take place through providing "a □safe space' for spirituality to germinate, where the Jesus story can be revealed".[xii] Others insist that in most contexts explicit testimony is called for □ that there is no substitute for preaching the word, following the manifold impulses and dynamics of the Holy Spirit.

53. Attention should always be given to a holistic and balanced approach to the praxis of mission; the temptation to emphasize one aspect and ignore others should be avoided. Authentic evangelism must always include both witness and unconditional loving service. As San Antonio affirmed: "The □material gospel' and the □spiritual gospel' have to be one, as was true of the ministry of Jesus... There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the message of God's coming reign."[xiii]

54. Dynamic interactions between the gospel and cultures inevitably raise the question of syncretism, for each inculturation of the gospel touches beliefs, rites, religious community structures. Among churches the term "syncretism" is understood in different ways. For some, the integrity of the gospel message is diminished when it is fused with certain elements of the context in which it is being inculturated; they understand syncretism as betrayal of the gospel. For others, there can be no creative building up of communities and theologies in any culture without syncretism. The question then is whether a specific inculturation helps or hinders faithful witness to the gospel in its fullness.

55. Differences in interpretation have to do with the understanding of the term "gospel" and of the work of the Holy Spirit in various cultures. These questions must be handled carefully, since accusations of syncretism often reflect and reinforce power imbalances between churches. The Salvador conference pointed to the need for a framework for intercultural hermeneutics (theory of interpretation of the gospel). It further indicated the need for criteria for assessing in dialogue with other churches the appropriateness of particular contextual expressions of the gospel. Such criteria include: "faithfulness to God's self-disclosure in the totality of the scriptures; commitment to a life-style and action in harmony with the reign of God; openness to the wisdom of the communion of saints across space and time; [and] relevance to the context".[xiv]

4.   Called to witness and dialogue

56. The phenomenon of religious pluralism has become one of the most serious overall challenges to Christian mission for the coming century. Witness in multifaith societies has traditionally been considered a concern primarily of churches and missionaries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and other parts of the world. In recent years, however, through increased migration, religious pluralism has become a global reality. In some places Christians enjoy freedom and live and cooperate with others in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. In other places, however, there is growing religious intolerance.

57. In Europe and North America (traditionally Christian territories), the growing presence in local communities of people of other faiths poses serious challenges for the mission activities of the churches. Christians in historically multifaith societies have over the centuries gained experience of how to live and witness in such contexts. New challenges are arising even for them, however, in terms of how the Christian commitment to mission and evangelism may be affirmed with faithfulness to the gospel as well as love and respect for the other.

58. Such challenges inevitably raise theological questions concerning the nature of witness among people of other religious convictions, in relation to the nature of salvation itself. There is little consensus on this in the broader ecumenical movement. In the San Antonio and Salvador mission conferences, the situation was summarized through the following affirmations: "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."[xv] There is a tension between these two statements, a tension which has not yet been resolved.

59. Among people engaged in mission, there is a growing (though not unchallenged) recognition that God is at work outside the churches □ though exactly *how* God is at work in any religious community is impossible to define. But people in mission do indeed discover "glimpses" of God's presence and activity among people of other religious traditions. Contemporary experience meets ancient tradition: early Christian theologians such as Justin

Martyr spoke of "the seeds of the Word" among the cultures of the world; others, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, used the term "evangelical preparation", also referred to in Paul VI's encyclical on evangelism as well as in the Salvador texts.

60. Thus an open question requiring further reflection and sharing among Christians engaged in mission relates to the discernment of the signs of the Spirit's presence among people of other faiths or no faith. The Salvador conference hinted at such signs when pointing to expressions of love, values such as humility, openness to God and to others, as well as commitments to justice, solidarity and non-violent means of resolving conflict. Galatians 5:22-23, which speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, was cited as a helpful guide for this discernment.

61. In mission there is place both for the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and for dialogue with people of other faiths. According to the situation and the charisms of Christians in that situation, the emphasis may differ. Many would claim, however, that the only proper mode of living in community is dialogical. Reaffirming the evangelistic mandate of Christians, the San Antonio conference pointed out that "our ministry of witness among people of other faiths presupposes our *presence* with them, *sensitivity* to their deepest faith commitments and experiences, *willingness* to be their servants for Christ's sake, *affirmation* of what God has done and is doing among them, and *love* for them... We are called to be *witnesses* to others, not judges of them."[xvi] If mission is to be in Christ's way, there cannot be evangelism without openness to others and readiness to discover his presence also where it is not expected.

62. On the other hand, there is no real dialogue if the religious identity and beliefs of the partners are not made clear. In that sense, it can be affirmed that witness precedes dialogue. To speak of evangelism means to emphasize the proclamation of God's offer of freedom and reconciliation, together with the invitation to join those who follow Christ and work for the reign of God. Dialogue is a form of witness to Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbour □ even one's enemy □ and may be, in certain contexts, the only way to be faithful to a humble, kenotic style of mission, following Christ's vulnerable life in service, not domination.

5. Called to proclaim the truth of the gospel

63. One of the great challenges of our times □ and one which touches the very heart of the Christian message □ is the growing phenomenon of relativism, as developed especially among Western philosophers and scientists. In post-modern thinking, the notion of absolute and universal truth, whether in the political, social, economic or even religious realm, is drastically questioned or rejected. Truth is rather seen as a matter of individual discernment through a personal "pick-and-choose" preference, experience and decision. Rather than objective, universal and absolute "truth", there are "truths" parallel to and cohabiting with one another.

64. Such an understanding of and approach to truth not only influences much of day-to-day life in particularly the industrialized countries, but also has a deep impact on the churches' witness and on their participation in the ecumenical movement in general.

65. This approach challenges traditional patterns of Christian mission. People defending such a worldview plead for a new missionary understanding, style and praxis more appropriate to contemporary realities. They ask to give up the "arrogant" attitude of conveying Christianity

as the only truth leading to salvation and request that it be presented rather more humbly and decently as one of many truths found in various religions or in creation in general. They argue that in theory these other truths have a similar value and final goal, with only personal choices making a qualitative difference between them.

66. In the ecumenical field, notions such as "unity", "consensus" and "apostolic truth" are questioned and, for some, have even acquired a pejorative connotation. A more recent ecumenical vision includes the search for a new paradigm and image which could accommodate a diversity of truths under the same roof without diluting or annihilating any in the process of trying to bring them into convergence, for the sake of reaching one common and binding apostolic truth.

67. Glimpses of directions and partial responses to the challenges raised by relativism have been proffered; sharper and more coherent responses are still needed. What is the relationship between the truth of the gospel that Christians are called to proclaim concerning the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and the truth of "the gospel before the gospel", and what are the consequences for the unity of the church?

6. Called to witness in unity

68. In recent decades the churches have become ever more aware of the necessity to engage in mission *together,* in cooperation and mutual accountability: hence mission partnerships have been established, some international mission structures transformed, and common projects undertaken. The same period, however, has seen an escalation of confessional rivalries and competition in mission in many parts of the world. These realities compel the ecumenical family to re-examine issues of mission in unity, cooperation among the churches, common witness and proselytism, and to work towards more responsible relationships in mission.

69. Common witness is "the witness that 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".[xvii] Authentic common witness presupposes respect for and understanding of other traditions and confessions. What should be emphasized is that which is common and can be done together, rather than the barriers which separate. There is more that unites the churches than separates them. These unifying elements should be looked for in building up witness in unity.

70. Mission and religious liberty, including the freedom to change one's religion or belief, are intrinsically related. Mission cannot be imposed by any means on anyone. On the other hand, one's own freedom must always respect, affirm and promote the freedom of others; it must not contravene the golden rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12).

71. Proselytism, a positive term in early Christian times used to designate a person of another faith converting to Christianity, took in later centuries a negative connotation due to changes in content, motivation, spirit and methods of "evangelism". It is now generally used to mean "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".[xviii] Proselytism is "the corruption of witness".[xix]

72. Common witness is constructive: it enriches, challenges, strengthens and builds up solid Christian relationships and fellowship. Proselytism is a perversion of authentic Christian witness and thus a counterwitness. It does not build up but destroys. It brings about tensions, scandal and division, and is thus a destabilizing factor for the witness of the church in the world. It is always a wounding of koinonia, creating not koinonia but antagonistic parties.

73. As new contexts call for new initiatives in proclaiming the gospel in the face of common challenges, the churches are called to identify ways of witnessing in unity, of partnership and cooperation and of responsible relationships in mission. In order to reach such a mutually enriching missionary ethos, the churches must:

a) repent of past failures and reflect more self-critically on their ways of relating to one another and their methods of evangelizing;

b) renounce all forms of denominational competition and rivalry and the temptation to proselytize members of other Christian traditions;

c) avoid establishing parallel ecclesial structures, but rather stimulate, help and cooperate with the existing local churches in their evangelistic work;

d) condemn any manipulation of humanitarian assistance to individual Christians or churches to induce people into changing their denominational allegiance or to further the missionary goals of one church at the expense of another;

e) help people who are in process of changing their church allegiance to discern whether they are being guided by worthy or unworthy motives (such as social advancement or better life opportunities);

f) learn to "speak the truth in love" to one another when they consider others to be proselytizing or engaging in dishonest practices in evangelism.

74. This Christian fellowship and partnership will not be possible unless Christians and churches:

a) listen to one another in genuine dialogue aimed at overcoming ignorance, prejudices or misunderstandings, understanding their differences in the perspective of Christian unity and avoiding unjust accusations, polemics, disagreements and rejection;

b) ensure greater sharing of information and accountability in mission at all levels, including prior consultation with the church in an area to see what are the possibilities of missionary collaboration and witness in unity;

c) demonstrate willingness to learn from others □ for example, from their dynamism, enthusiasm and joy in mission, their sense of community, their rejoicing in the Spirit, their spirituality;

d) make greater efforts for inner renewal in their own traditions and cultural contexts;

e)   make greater efforts to educate their own faithful in local congregations, Sunday schools, training centres and seminaries to respect and love members of other churches as sisters and brothers in Christ.

75. Ecumenical convictions on mission in unity may lead to the formulation of a **covenant** concerning relationships in mission. Among the basic convictions and commitments in mission which could be included are the following:

76. *Convictions*

a)   Mission begins in the heart of the triune God. The love which binds together the persons of the Holy Trinity overflows in a great outpouring of love for humankind and all creation.

b)   God calls the church in Jesus Christ and empowers it by the Holy Spirit to be a partner in God's mission, bearing witness to the gospel of the love of God made clear in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and inviting people to become disciples of Christ.

c)   Christian mission involves a holistic response through evangelistic and diaconal work to reach out to people in their experience of exclusion, brokenness and meaninglessness. It involves the empowerment, affirmation and renewal of people in their hope for fullness of life.

d)   All baptized Christians are commissioned to bear witness to the gospel of Christ and all are accountable to the body of Christ for their witness; all need to find a home in a local worshipping community through which to exercise their accountability to the body.

77. *Commitments*

a)   Impelled by the love of Christ, we commit ourselves to work to ensure that all our neighbours in every place, near and far, have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

b)   We acknowledge that the primary responsibility for mission in any place rests with the church in that place.

c)   Where missionaries or funds are sent by our church to a place where there is already a Christian church, that will be done in a negotiated, mutually acceptable, respectful arrangement, with equal participation of all parties in the decision-making process.

d)   We acknowledge that in our partnerships all partners have gifts to offer and all have need to learn, receive and be enriched by the relationship; so the relationship must allow for the reciprocal sharing of both needs and gifts.

e)   We acknowledge that all the churches' resources belong to God, and that the wealth of the rich has often been derived from the exploitation of others.

f)   We commit ourselves to make the relationship on all sides as transparent as possible concerning finance, theology, personnel, struggles, dilemmas, fears, hopes, ideas, stories □ an open sharing that builds trust.

g)   We recognize that nearly every intercultural encounter between churches is marked with an unequal distribution of power. Money, material possessions, state connections, history and other factors affect the way churches relate to each other. In entering into relationships in mission, we commit ourselves to guard against misuse of power and to strive for just relationships.

h)   We recognize that it is important not to create dependency. Partnerships must lead to interdependence. We will seek through our partnerships to enable the emergence of authentic local cultural responses to the gospel in terms of liturgies, hymns, rituals, structures, institutions, theological formulations.

i) We believe that mission and unity are inseparably related. We therefore commit ourselves to encourage collaboration and structural unity between our mission agencies and our own church, between mission agencies, and between mission agencies and our partner churches. Where several churches already exist in a given area we commit ourselves to deliberately fostering a council of churches.

j)   We recognize that mission and evangelism have been carried on almost entirely along denominational lines. We commit ourselves to undertake mission ecumenically, both locally and abroad, wherever possible.

k)   In developing international partnerships in mission, we commit ourselves to giving priority to building solidarity with excluded and suffering people and communities in their struggles for fullness of life.

NOTES

[i].   Cf. *Signs of the Spirit □ Official Report of the Seventh Assembly*, ed. Michael Kinnamon, Geneva, WCC, 1991, p.100.

[ii].   *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, Geneva, WCC, 1982, p.1.

[iii]. *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism*, WCC, Geneva, 1997, pp.4-5.

[iv].   *Called to One Hope □ The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*, official report of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Salvador, Brazil, 1996, ed. Christopher Duraisingh, Geneva, WCC, 1998, p.62.

[v].   *Proclaiming Christ Today*, report of an Orthodox-Evangelical consultation, Alexandria, Egypt, 1995, ed. Huibert van Beek and Georges Lemopoulos, Geneva, WCC, 1995, p.13.

[vi]   Several commissioners expressed uneasiness because of the excessively negative description of globalisation in this part of the document.

[vii]. "The Lausanne Covenant", 1974, para. 6.

[viii]. Salvador report, p.31.

[ix]. *The San Antonio Report*, official report of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, San Antonio, USA, 1989, ed. Frederick R. Wilson, Geneva, WCC, 1990, p.43.

[x]. Salvador report, p.46.

[xi]. *Ibid.*, p.38.

[xii]. *Ibid.*

[xiii]. San Antonio report, p.32.

[xiv]. Salvador report, p.67.

[xv]. Salvador report, p.62, quoting San Antonio report, p.32.

[xvi]. San Antonio report, p.26.

[xvii]. Thomas Stransky, "Common Witness", in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC, 1991, p.197; quoted in *Towards Common Witness*, p.5.

[xviii].   Report of the Orthodox Consultation on "Mission and Proselytism", Sergiev Possad, Russia, 1995; quoted in *Towards Common Witness*, p.7.

[xix]. "Revised Report on □Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches'", in *Minutes and Reports of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, St Andrews, Scotland, August 1960*, Geneva, WCC, 1960, p.214; quoted in *Towards Common Witness*, p.7. Statements and documents on common witness elaborated within the WCC framework include: *"Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the WCC"(New Delhi, 1961), "Common Witness and Proselytism"(1970), "Common Witness"(1982), "The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness"(1995), and "Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism"(1997).*

19. "We" means those persons or communities who are ready to make such commitments their own. The CWME Commission offers the document as a valuable resource for study and reflection.