



FABC

**Christian Conference
of Asia**



FABC Papers

No. 77

CTC Bulletin

Vol. 14, No. 2, Oct. 1996

Special Number

ASIAN MOVEMENT FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

A Joint CCA – FABC Project

Making Visible the Unity in Christ

That Already Exists

**Christian Conference of Asia
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences**

**Cheung Chau, Hong Kong
12–16 March 1996**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Asian Movement for Christian Unity: "Making visible the unity in Christ that already exists," F. Cariño and T Michel.....	3
<i>Our Pilgrimage of Hope, Final Statement</i> of AMCU participants.....	5
List of Abbreviations.....	8

PART I: THEOLOGY OF ECUMENISM

Theology of Ecumenism in the Asian Context: a Catholic Perspective, K. Pathil	9
Some Basic Theological Assumptions of the Ecumenical Movement, W. Ariarajah	35

PART II: VISIONS OF ECUMENICAL UNITY

The Vision of Ecumenical Unity, K. Fernando.....	47
A Vision of Ecumenical Unity and Mission, J.B. Banawiratma.....	56

PART III: BUILDING ON WHAT UNITES US, OVERCOMING WHAT DIVIDES

Experiences and Challenges of a Spirituality of Unity at Work, S. Lo	67
Building on What Unites Us, Overcoming What Divides, D. Gill	84
APPENDIX I: List of participants at AMCU	92
APPENDIX II: The Asian Ecumenical Committee	93
APPENDIX III: Roman Catholic Participation in Councils of Churches	94
APPENDIX IV: Courses on Ecumenism, Ecumenical Celebrations	96

ASIAN MOVEMENT FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

“Making visible the unity in Christ that already exists”

The two largest Christian bodies in Asia – the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) – held an ecumenical consultation in Cheung Chau, Hong Kong, between 12–16 March 1996. Taking part were 42 participants from 15 Asian countries and official delegates from the World Council of Churches and the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

The consultation studied “The Theology of Ecumenism,” “The Vision of Christian Unity,” and “Building on What Unites, Overcoming What Divides” according to their respective understanding of each. From this background, the participants embarked on a common search for practical ways to work for Christian unity in Asia and committed themselves to a wide range of programs aimed at fostering Christian unity. The two bodies agreed to form the “**Asian Ecumenical Committee**” as a structure for implementing proposals to share information, cooperate on social issues, and provide ecumenical formation.

By sharing insights on Christian unity and by worshiping together, the church representatives became aware of the common responsibility of all Christians for overcoming the scandal of a divided Christianity. They tried to identify the obstacles to Christian unity in Asia: a long history of mutual indifference, prejudice, and hostility, an inadequate understanding of ecumenism, the failure of the ecumenical movement to reach the grass-roots, a lack of structures to carry out initiatives, and unresolved doctrinal, moral and disciplinary issues.

They also sought signs of hope: joint ecumenical activities at national and local levels, the experiences of churches in Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Taiwan where churches have formed more inclusive ecumenical bodies, common responses to social, political and economic issues, improved attitudes toward other denominations, increasing willingness to overcome prejudices and share experiences, and the heroism of Asian Christians of all churches who have given their lives in fidelity to Christ.

The participants agreed that the first priority is the formation and functioning of the Asian Ecumenical Committee. The committee, set up by the two bodies in 1993 and approved in 1995 at the FABC Plenary Assembly in Manila and at the CCA General Assembly in Colombo, is entrusted with carrying out joint CCA-FABC programs, fostering ecumenical relations at the national and local levels, and conscientizing Christians of all churches to the importance of “making visible the unity in Christ that already exists.”

We present here the papers and the final statement of the AMCU seminar in the hope of stimulating the reflection of all Christians in Asia on the need to make visible the unity in Christ which we already share and to recommit themselves to a deeper involvement in striving towards ecumenical unity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Feliciano Cariño, General Secretary CCA

Fr. Thomas Michel, S.J., Executive Secretary FABC-OEIA

OUR PILGRIMAGE OF HOPE

Our common search to make more visible our unity in Christ brought us together to scenic Cheung Chau in Hong Kong from March 12 to 16, 1996. Encouraged by our deep longing to express our oneness in Christ, we, the forty two participants representing the constituencies of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), gathered to deepen our understanding of each other, to share our insights as to what it means to be the followers of Christ in the present Asian society and to seek ways toward a full communion and partnership in mission. We experienced the presence of Christ in our conversation and our journeying together as we felt "our hearts burning within us" when we shared in worship, told our stories, offered our understandings, and listened to our concerns and difficulties in building good ecumenical relationships. We are eager to invite all churches to join this pilgrimage toward a closer fellowship, mutual respect, and common action in love and solidarity with the peoples of Asia.

Our presence in Cheung Chau is a continuation of the common commitment made by the CCA and the FABC in Hua Hin, Thailand in 1993.

Vision and understanding of ecumenism

There are visions and understandings of ecumenism which continue to challenge and inspire us. We are reminded that our ecumenical endeavor is not merely a matter of activities and programmes; it is a way of being church. Unity is ours through Christ our Lord. In our worship, life and witness we seek to make visible the unity we have; we strive to remove those obstacles that stand in the way of manifesting and celebrating the unity that is ours in Christ. Thus, the unity of the church is both a gift and a goal.

The ecumenical movement is a sign and a sacrament of the unity which God wills for all humanity and all creation. Here we reiterate the concluding statement of the Hua Hin document:

"Full and visible unity of the church is God's will for all. Particularly in Asia, a continent full of a variety of faiths, ethnicities and cultures, a visible expression of our unity in Christ will also provide a powerful symbol of hope for the emergence of the one new humanity. We affirm this faith wholeheartedly and call upon all Christians of Asia to be firmly committed to this vision."

Without a sensitive awareness of and an involvement in our cultures and religions, especially as they relate to the struggles of women, indige-

nous people, the marginalized and the oppressed for their justice and identity, we will not be able to realize fully this vision in Asia.

The unity we seek does not come as a denial of individual identities and histories that have shaped our separate heritages but as a call to move beyond them to their fullness in Christ by sharing them with others and learning from others. The pressure for unity compels us to move to Christ, the center.

Some barriers to unity among Asian churches

In our journey towards that visible unity in Christ, we have encountered many obstacles engendered by the long history of mutual indifference, alienation and hostility. The sad condition of separation has built walls of prejudices biases that block the avenues of mutual understanding.

Ecumenism is still inadequately understood by many. The very meaning of ecumenism ranges from mere accommodation, peaceful co-existence or collaboration to visible unity among the Christian churches. The church is the people, the pastors and the congregations, the leaders and the grass-roots. But we hear undiminished complaints that ecumenical endeavour fails to filter down to the grass-roots.

Ecumenical initiatives are not lacking in statements and resolutions in workshops and meetings; but structures to support their implementation are sadly lacking. There is lack of contact and relationships among church leaders, and so many unresolved doctrinal, moral and disciplinary issues remain which dampen the enthusiasm for effort towards unity.

Signs of hope

In spite of the above obstacles, we acknowledge many signs of hope in our midst. The very experience of ecumenical community in this meeting is affirmed by all to be a sign of hope. There are joint ecumenical activities that have taken place at national and local levels at the initiative of the churches, as well as grass-roots activities at the initiative of the people. We have been encouraged by listening to the concrete experiences of the churches in Australia, Aotearoa – New Zealand, Taiwan and Malaysia where churches have formed more inclusive national ecumenical bodies. We also acknowledge some common responses to social, political and economic issues which affect the life of the people (for example Dalit issues in India, the future of Hong Kong in 1997). It is also encouraging that there is a marked change in peoples' attitudes toward other denominations; overcoming their prejudices, they show their greater willingness to share their experiences. We celebrate men and women of many churches who have given their lives in fidelity to Christ.

Challenges for Asian churches

- to foster ecumenical sensitivity, openness and vision, nationally and in each place;
- to ensure that church leaders in each country gather regularly for prayer, study and fellowship, to enhance mutual understanding;
- to press the question of full participation by all churches in national ecumenical bodies;
- to deepen their spirituality, grounded in Word and Sacrament, while continuing to seek ways towards visible unity;
- to develop, together, a deeper openness to brothers and sisters of other faiths with whom we live, and a more profound interaction with the cultures in which we live;
- to enter, together, into a deeper commitment to those who struggle for justice, freedom and identity;
- to prepare themselves so that Asian churches may again make a major contribution to the advance of global ecumenism.

The formation of the Asian Ecumenical Committee

We consider it significant that the CCA and the FABC have committed themselves to form a new committee to foster cooperation and possible joint ventures and to promote and monitor the implementation of the recommendations regarding ecumenical relationships in Asia. We appeal to the churches to support this new committee as they begin to plan programmes such as ecumenical formation, conscientization, joint activities and common programmes at various levels.

Finally we invite the churches to join in a prayer offered during our gathering:

O Loving God, make us people of Hope,
Teach us to be united in the variety of the many gifts
with which you have blessed us,
a living rainbow, a sign in our world
of your universal and eternal Covenant with humankind
and with all creation.
We make our prayer, as always, in the name and
in the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Australian Council of Churches
BEM	<i>Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry</i> , Doc. of WCC Faith and Order Commission, 1982
CA	<i>Centesimus annus</i> , Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, 1991
CBCP	Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
CCEO	<i>Oriental Code of Canon Law</i>
CIC	<i>Code of Canon Law (Latin)</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> , Vat. II doc. on Divine Revelation
EACC	East Asian Council of Churches
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ECEA	Episcopal Commission on Ecumenical Affairs
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
JPIC	Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Vat. II doc. on the Church
NA	<i>Nostra Aetate</i> , Vat. II doc. on Other Religions
NCCA	National Council of Churches in Australia
NCCP	National Council of Churches in the Philippines
OE	<i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i> , Vat. II doc. on Oriental Churches
PCP II	Second Plenary Council of the Philippines
PCPCU	Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
PCEC	The Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches
RED	<i>Revised Ecumenical Directory</i> , 1993
SODEPAX	Joint Commission on Society, Development, Peace
SPCU	Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> , Vat. II doc. on Christian Unity
UUS	<i>Ut Unum Sint</i> , Encyclical of Pope John Paul II on Christian Unity, 1995
WCC	World Council of Churches

PART I

THEOLOGY OF ECUMENISM IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Kuncheria Pathil CMI, Bangalore, India

Asian Churches are today at the crossroads facing new problems and challenges. People of Asia are awakening to discover their freedom and the roots of their own cultural and religious traditions. Solidarity with the people, involvement in their struggles and aspirations, rootedness in the cultural and religious traditions and values of Asia, and the search for autonomy and identity are matters of life or death for the Asian Churches.

Asian Churches are today called to take a common stand as they face common problems and challenges. But, unfortunately, the Churches are divided into hundreds of denominations, vying with each other and claiming to possess the absolute truth and casting aspersions on other Churches. Will Asian Christians listen to the call of the Lord for unity among themselves and with the whole of humanity? This question is all the more important, as Asia will have to play a unique role in the future of Christianity.

This paper is meant to present the theology of ecumenism from the Catholic perspective. In the first part of this paper I shall mainly deal with the official teachings of the Catholic Church on ecumenism. In the second part I shall highlight the progress we have made in the ecumenical movement and the issues and obstacles that still remain on the way to unity. I shall conclude by suggesting certain areas of collaboration and a common ecumenical programme in the Asian context of today.

I. THEOLOGY OF ECUMENISM IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

With the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church fully entered into the modern ecumenical movement. Many documents and statements of the Council, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Decree on Ecumenism and the Decree on the Eastern Churches, are clear indications of a radical change in the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the other Churches. From polemics, triumphalism and condemnation, the Church entered into a new period of mutual understanding and acceptance. The Council clearly acknowledged that the situation of divisions among the Churches is against the will of Christ, who prayed for the unity of his disciples (Jn 17:21), that it is a scandal to the world and a

stumbling block to the proclamation of the Gospel, and committed the Church unambiguously to the ecumenical movement.¹

1. Ecclesiology of Vatican II

Catholic theology of ecumenism today is built on the foundation of Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology. I do not dare to present here the ecclesiology of Vatican II. I would rather indicate the major ecclesiological shift made by the Council.

A shift from institution to mystery

The Church is primarily a mystery, a spiritual reality, a sacramental event which assumes particular forms in history. It is basically the mystery of God's plan of salvation manifested in time, in history, in particular ecclesial communities, institutions and structures. Hence the Church cannot be strictly defined, but only described by various imageries and concepts as was done by the New Testament. The Church is primarily *koinonia* or a communion, which is our participation in the life of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit or our participation in the Trinitarian life which has a vertical and horizontal dimension.

Our communion in the life of God makes us into one body. The communion model of ecclesiology is the heart of the Council's teaching.² This mystery aspect of the Church is explained in the first chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.³ In medieval ecclesiology, the Church was reduced to a perfect society and visible institution with clear-cut definitions, rules, structures and boundaries to the extent that the mystery aspect of the Church was lost to a great extent. The Council rectified this institutional overemphasis and highlighted the mystery dimension of the Church. The Church can never be reduced to its visible institutions, structures, rituals and dogmas. The mystery of the Church transcends all these external manifestations and expressions to such an extent that it can exist even outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. This new vision has prompted the Council to accept the ecclesial reality in the other Churches.

¹ Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, hereafter UR, 1.

² *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, Rome, 1993, 13-17. Cf also "The Church: Local and Universal, A Study Document Commissioned and Received by the Joint Working Group, 1990", in *Information Service*, No.74, 1990/III, pp. 76-77. Cardinal Willebrands had underlined the significance of an ecclesiology of communion for ecumenism in his article, "The Future of Ecumenism", *One in Christ*, 11 (1975), p.323.

³ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, hereafter LG, 1-8.

Moreover, the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the Kingdom of God are intimately related, but the Church and the Kingdom cannot be totally identified. The Church is only a humble servant, herald and sacrament of the Kingdom. Thus the shift from institution to mystery is also a call for a Kingdom-oriented ecclesiology which is more open and less triumphalistic.

A shift from hierarchy to people

In the approved scheme of *Lumen Gentium* the chapter on the People of God came after the chapter on the Hierarchy. During the discussions in the Council, a suggestion was made to reverse this order and place the chapter on the People of God before that on the Hierarchy. The fact that this suggestion was accepted by the Council is a clear indication of a shift from hierarchy to people. The Church is primarily the People of God, and the functions of the hierarchy have to be situated within the whole People of God. The members of the hierarchy are first and foremost members of the People of God, and as such the hierarchy and laity have equal status and dignity (LG 9–17). No charisma or function shall extol anyone.

This rediscovery of the Church as the People of God has tremendous consequences for transforming the Church and its mission. The laity begin to take their rightful place and to realize that the Church is theirs, or rather that they are the Church. Under the inspiration of the Council, People's Churches and Basic Christian Communities began to emerge as new models of being Church.

A shift from monarchical papacy to the collegiality of bishops

Another aspect of this radical change is the rediscovery of the synodal and conciliar structures and systems of the early Churches and a shift from the papal monarchical system. The earliest major controversy in the Church on the admission of the Gentiles and the question whether they be circumcised like the Jewish Christians was solved not from above by decree or decision of Peter, but by common discussion and deliberation in a Council where all the apostles and elders of the various Churches took part. The meeting of Provincial synods and councils of the neighboring Churches, whenever they faced common problems and issues, was a custom during the second and third centuries. The fourth and fifth centuries witnessed the great events of the Ecumenical Councils which met to deliberate on the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the period. The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD) stipulated that Provincial synods should be held twice a year, and thus in the East the synodal system became a constitutive part of the functioning of the Church. It was the development of the centralization and the emergence of a monarchical papacy which eliminated the synodal and conciliar structures of the early Churches.

The Council teaches that the College of Bishops has supreme, universal and immediate authority in the Church in teaching matters of faith and morals (*LG*, 22). The authority of the College of Bishops does not contradict the authority of the Pope, as the Pope is within the College, and is in fact the head of the College. It means that the Pope and the bishops should function in the Church in close collaboration and communion as members of one body.

A shift from the universal to the local

In the pre-Vatican II period, the emphasis was on the Universal Church and its unity and uniformity under the papacy at the expense of the diversity of the Churches and their autonomy. Vatican II shifted the emphasis to the local Churches, their rich diversity and legitimate autonomy. As successors of the Apostles, the bishops are not only coresponsible for all the Churches, but as heads of local Churches they have their own authority in the local Churches as “vicars and ambassadors of Christ” (*LG* 27). The authority of the bishops derives not from the Pope but from the Apostles by the act of episcopal consecration by which they become successors of the Apostles (*LG* 20–21). They are the principle of the unity of the local Church. **No local Church can be under any other local Church**, but is in communion with all others.

Every local Church is the concrete manifestation and embodiment of the Universal Church, not merely a fraction of it or an administrative unit. The Universal Church exists in the local Churches; the local Church is the real Church in its original. The various local Churches have legitimate autonomy enjoying their own traditions, liturgies, disciplines, and their own theological and spiritual heritage (*UR* 14). The unity among these is their communion in the same faith and sacraments, a unity expressed in the communion of Churches and their bishops, who are members of one Collège along with its head, the Roman Pontiff. The Church becomes “Catholic” by this communion of many Churches. Separated from this communion, no Church can claim to be Catholic. The different Churches have equal dignity and equal responsibility for the whole Church. The one Church of Christ exists in the many Churches, and the emphasis today is on the many and “unity in diversity”.

I have pointed out that in the teachings of Vatican II there is a **shift of emphasis** from institution to the mystery, from hierarchy to people, from papal primacy to the collegiality of bishops, and from the Universal Church to the Local Churches. A shift of emphasis does not mean a denial of the aspects of institution, hierarchy, papacy and the universal which indeed are important dimensions of the Church.

I will not spell out in detail the ecumenical implications of this shift of

Vatican II. The rediscovery and humble acknowledgement of the mystery of the Church helped the Church to accept the limitations of the institutions, structures, dogmas and rituals, and to acknowledge the presence of the mystery of the Church in other Churches and Christian communities. The shift from hierarchy to people is a call to overcome the clericalism which was prevalent in the Catholic Church against which the Reformation Churches revolted.

The shift from papal primacy to the collegiality of the bishops and the synodal structure and functioning of the Church is a timely ecumenical response to the Orthodox and other Eastern Churches who safeguarded and witnessed to the ancient ecclesial structures based on the biblical and patristic traditions. The shift of emphasis from the Universal to the Local corrects the overcentralisation of the Catholic Church and accepts the diversity of the Churches and their locality. The idea of the Church as a communion of local Churches has enormous ecumenical prospects. Based on this ecclesiology of Vatican II, I shall now spell out some main aspects or dimensions of the theology of ecumenism.

2. Fundamental Unity of All Christians

Pope John XXIII rightly observed: "What unites us is much greater than what divides us".⁴ The Catholic Church accepts and proclaims that there is real communion among all Christians, though this communion may be imperfect and exists in different grades among the different Churches. The solid basis for this communion is our faith in Jesus Christ and Baptism. We have One Lord and One Baptism.

The Catholic Church accepts them with respect and fraternal affection. All those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church . . . all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honoured by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers and sisters in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church (*UR 3, UUS 11*).

It is the Holy Spirit who gathers the people of God and unites them into one Body which is the Body of Christ:

After being lifted up on the cross and glorified, the Lord Jesus poured forth the Spirit whom He had promised, and through whom He called and gathered together the people of the New Covenant, who comprise the Church, into a

⁴ Cited by Pope John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, hereafter *UUS*, 20.

unity of faith, hope and charity . . . The Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe, pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that marvelous communion of the faithful and joins them so intimately in Christ that He is the principle of the Church's unity (*UR*, 2).

It is clear that this fundamental unity of Christians is not primarily an organizational or conceptual or doctrinal unity, but a spiritual unity, a fact of common spiritual experience. This unity cannot be destroyed, although human sin may mar or distort its visibility. Our task is not to create it, but to manifest it. It must be noted that in the history of the modern ecumenical movement, Christians of different Churches had a common experience of fundamental spiritual unity in their common prayer meetings, consultations and study-projects. It is this spiritual experience of so many Christians for several decades which sustains the ecumenical movement, especially in times of crisis.

3. Sister Churches and Other Ecclesial Communities

Vatican II took a positive step when it called the ancient Eastern Orthodox Churches "Sister Churches" and the Reformation Churches "Ecclesial Communities" (*UR* 3, 14, 19). The distinction may not be obvious. In basic ecclesial structures the Orthodox Churches are very close to the Catholic Church which considers itself as the ideal, having the fullness of the visible sign and means of salvation. Hence the Orthodox Churches are called "Sister Churches" which means they are granted equal status. The Council pointed out the apostolic origin of the Eastern Churches and acknowledged that the West had drawn bounty from the treasury of the East for its liturgy, spiritual traditions and jurisprudence. Most important Trinitarian and Christological dogmas had been definitively taught by the Ecumenical Councils held in the East. In the doctrine of sacraments, apostolic succession, ordained ministry and Eucharist, Orthodox and Catholic Churches are very close. Differences between them are only in the theological formulations or expressions of doctrines which are complementary rather than conflicting.⁵ Hence Eastern and Western Churches were often characterized as two lungs of the Church and the Church is called to breathe with both lungs. In the light of this close relationship between the Catholic and the Eastern Churches, the Council also proposed mutual admission of their members to the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the sick when circumstances warrant and for genuine spiritual benefit (*OE*, 27-29).

As already mentioned, the Council did not grant the same status to the Reformation Churches and other ecclesial communities, as the Reformation

⁵ *UR*, 14-18; *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, hereafter as *OE*, 2-11; *UUS*, 55-58.

caused a substantial break with the traditions of the Catholic Church and there are very serious differences between them and the Catholic Church. But the Council acknowledged that many significant “ecclesial elements” are present in those Christian communities, such as the Word of God, life of grace, faith, hope and charity, and some sacraments (*UR*, 3, 19; *LG*, 15; *UUS*, 64). Therefore, the life of grace is available in these Churches and they are indeed means of salvation to their members due to the salvific efficacy of Christ and His One Church (*UR*, 3). The Council made a passionate call for removing the obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion among all Churches so that all Christians may be gathered into one visible body and fellowship with common celebration of the Eucharist.

4. Obstacles to Full Communion

The One Church is today divided into hundreds of denominations who look at each other with suspicion, prejudice, rivalry and mutual condemnation. I take for granted the history of our divisions and the factors that led to it. We must go deeper into the root causes of divisions and uncover the layers of forces that separated the Churches. We can identify factors like heretical doctrines, theological differences, social, cultural and political factors, and those of human sinfulness.⁶ Although doctrinal and theological differences played a role in the historical divisions among the Churches, the factors that divide humanity and those that divide the Churches are, in the final analysis, virtually the same. Doctrinal and theological issues have their ultimate roots in socio-cultural, political, psychological and other human factors. The Catholic Church acknowledges that in our historical divisions all sides are blameworthy and all responsible for historical events (*UR*, 3).

The ancient Christological controversies and the definitive teachings of the Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon divided the Oriental Orthodox Churches (the so-called Nestorian and Monophysite groups) from the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Today we know that the confusion and misunderstanding were due to language and philosophical categories rather than differences in faith and dogma.⁷ The separation between the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church in 1054 was due not to the “filioque” question or other doctrinal issues, but primarily to political and socio-cultural factors and the conflict over papal jurisdiction. The Reformation Churches had serious differences on doctrines of the Church,

⁶ Cf. K. Pathil, “Unity in Diversity: The Christian Model of Unity”, *Journal of Dharma*, Vol.XII/1 (1987), pp. 36–56, esp., “Forces at Work in the Divisions of the Church”, pp. 43–50.

⁷ Cf. *The Vienna Dialogue, Five Pro-Oriente Consultations with Oriental Orthodoxy: Communiqués and Common Declarations*, Booklets no. 1–2, Vienna, 1990 and 1991.

sacraments, ordained ministry, interpretation of Scripture, tradition, episcopacy, papacy etc. (*UR* 3, 19–22; *UUS*, 67). But one has to keep in mind the background of medieval scholastic theology and the structures and corrupt practices of the medieval Church in contrast to the biblical and patristic teachings for a correct understanding and right response to the Reformers' teachings.

On several occasions the Catholic Church publicly confessed sins she committed against the unity of the Church, acknowledging that she was equally responsible for historical divisions. At the end of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI in Rome and Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul simultaneously expressed repentance for the separation between Catholic and Orthodox Churches and asked pardon. The Decree on Ecumenism asked pardon of God and the separated brethren for sins of division:

St. John testifies: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, his word is not in us" (1 Jn 1:10). This holds good for sins against unity. In humble prayer, we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against us (*UR* 7).

Among the sins that require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion should certainly be counted those which have been **detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People** . . . These sins of the past unfortunately still burden us and remain ever present temptations. It is necessary to make amends for them, and earnestly to beseech Christ's forgiveness.⁸ This attitude of repentance is practically expressed in a strong commitment of the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement which is based on our common faith and heritage.

5. The Ecumenical Movement: a Divine Summons

The modern ecumenical movement has its beginning among the Protestant Churches. The Evangelical Awakening of the 19th century cut across the various Protestant Churches which sent missionaries to all over the world. When the missionaries from the divided Churches met in foreign lands, they began to realize that they possess a fundamental unity and that the divisions among them are a scandal to the people of other religions and a serious obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel. Moreover, native Christians in mission countries realized that the divisions in Christianity and the consequent various brands of Christianity imported by the missionaries had no meaning in their lands. They refused to be divided in the name of Christ. Thus the plea for one reunited Church and the search for the rediscovery of the visible unity of the Church came first from mission areas. The

⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 1994, 34.

Churches thus formed an ecumenical forum for the common proclamation of the Gospel. It was the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement which in 1921 became the **International Missionary Council**.

The common proclamation of the Gospel required the visible unity of the Churches which again called the Churches to face squarely their doctrinal and theological differences, settle disputes, heal divisions and reestablish mutual communion. For this specific objective another ecumenical movement was started called the **Faith and Order Movement** (with its preliminary conference in 1920). Others believed that the ecumenical need of the hour was to promote fellowship and peace in a world torn apart by the World War and to work for a just and free society on the basis of the Christian principles of truth, justice and love. To serve this purpose another ecumenical forum was created, the **Life and Work Movement**. The Roman Catholic Church was not a party to any of these for the obvious reason that its idea of unity was different: Heretics and schismatics had no right to exist. Unity meant to return to the fold of the Roman Catholic Church. Even when the above mentioned movements joined in 1948 to form the **World Council of Churches**, the attitude of the Catholic Church was negative. Things began to change only with Vatican II.

The Council acknowledged that the ecumenical movement is a divine summons and grace, fostered by the Holy Spirit for restoration of unity among all Christians.⁹ All Catholics are exhorted to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the ecumenical movement. The Council called for mutual understanding, acceptance and communion by means of genuine dialogue, common social apostolate and common prayer. These should lead to our faithfulness to Christ's will for Church and renewal and reform which alone can pave the way to unity. The Council hopes that "little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning" (UR 4).

The Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenism is clearly stated both in the Latin and Oriental Codes: "It pertains to the entire College of Bishops and to the Apostolic See to foster and direct among Catholics the ecumenical movement, the purpose of which is the restoration of unity among Christians which, by the will of Christ, the Church is bound to promote."¹⁰

⁹ UR, 1; Cf. *Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (Revised Ecumenical Directory), hereafter RED, tc "RED, 22-25.

¹⁰ Latin Code (CIC), canon 755; Oriental Code (CCEO), canon 902.

Although many people speak about a stalemate or standstill in the ecumenical movement of the Catholic Church, in recent times Pope John Paul II has reiterated the commitment of the Catholic Church to ecumenism as "irrevocable" which, however, needs "new momentum".¹¹ In his recent encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, he writes as follows:

Jesus himself, at the hour of his passion, prayed "that they may be one" (Jn 17:21). This unity which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ's mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his *agape* (*UUS* 9).

Although the ecumenical movement is a response on the part of the Church to the movement of the Spirit, unity cannot be created by the Church or by the ecumenical movement. Unity is ultimately a gift of the Holy Spirit.¹² We can only prepare the way and pray for it.

6. Renewal of the Church

Pope John XXIII had the dream of unity of all Christians when he announced his plan of convoking Vatican II. He knew well that the unity of the Church could be achieved only by the renewal of all the Churches. As the Church exists in history, it needs constant renewal. The Church is continuously shaped by history. The world is changing very fast and the Church should not lag behind. Pope John realized that the Church needed renewal in all areas of the Church's life, teachings and activities, such as theology, doctrinal formulations, Church structures, ways of worship, spirituality, disciplines, mission, biblical hermeneutics, preaching the Word of God, catechetics, communications, social teachings of the Church, apostolate of the laity, religious life etc. (cf. *UR*, 6). The Council thus envisaged renewal as the most important ecumenical agenda:

... their (Catholics) primary duty is to make an honest and careful appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and achieved in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more loyally and luminously to the teachings and ordinances which have been handed down from Christ through the apostles.

For although the Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace, her members fail to live by them

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, Address at the Ecumenical Meeting in Caracas, January 27, 1985; also his address to the Cardinals and Vatican Officials at St. Peter's on the eve of the feast of SS Peter and Paul, June 28, 1985.

¹² Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 34.

with all the fervor they should. As a result, the radiance of the Church's face shines less brightly in the eyes of our separated brethren and of the world at large, and the growth of God's Kingdom is retarded. Every Catholic must aim at Christian perfection, and, each according to his station, play his part so that the Church, which bears in her own body the humility and dying of Jesus, may daily be more purified and renewed, against the day when Christ will present her to Himself in all her glory without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph. 5:27). (UR 4).

Beside this renewal of personal life, the Church also needs communal renewal, renewal of Christian communities, their community structures and relationships. It consists in the "increase of fidelity to her own calling" (UR, 6), faithfulness to Christ, to the Word of God and to the prompting of the Holy Spirit by reading the signs of the times. When all Churches come closer to Christ and His Gospel, they will be closer to each other and thus Christian unity will be realized. Renewal of the Churches will be the sign of ecumenical progress, and in fact, today renewal takes place in all the Churches cutting across denominational boundaries.

The essence of renewal is the change of heart: "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart" (UR, 7). "Each one therefore ought to be more radically converted to the Gospel and, without ever losing sight of God's plan, change his or her way of looking at things" (UUS, 15). It is Christ who summons the Church for renewal:

Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore, if influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine (which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit itself of faith), these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment (UR, 6; UUS, 15-17.)

No Church or Christian community is exempt from this summons of renewal which may be said to be the only way to unity. This renewal of Churches must be taken up in constant contact with all other Churches, especially by means of dialogue, close collaboration and common prayer.

7. The Sacraments of Unity: Baptism and Eucharist

The Churches' common search is for visible unity in the Church which is a sacramental unity. If Christ is the unique sacrament of God and of salvation, the Church is the fundamental sacrament of this salvation in Christ. Christ united himself with the Church and made it into his own body, just as in Jesus humanity and divinity are hypostatically united. The sacraments actualize the reality of the Church in the life of the people. They are salvific moments in the life of the Christian community. They symbolize as well as make present what they signify, building up the

Church which is the body of Christ. Hence the ecclesial and communitarian aspect of the sacraments must be emphasized rather than their personal or individual significance. All the sacraments are meant for the unity and fellowship of the Church, expressing and enhancing the unity of the Church.

By the sacrament of Baptism a person is incorporated into Christ and his Church which is his Body. Therefore all those who are baptized are united into the Body of Christ by a sacramental bond.¹³ This unity is only the beginning of the ecclesial communion which is to be nourished and led to its climax by the Eucharistic communion which itself is only an anticipation of the heavenly banquet in the Kingdom of God. Every Eucharist should prepare and lead us to this eschatological communion. All Christian Baptisms conferred with water, either by immersion or pouring, along with the Trinitarian formula and the proper intention, are valid. Therefore, Churches must take appropriate steps for the mutual recognition of Baptism; indiscriminate rebaptism must be avoided.

It is strongly recommended that the dialogue concerning both the significance and the valid celebration of Baptism take place between Catholic authorities and those of other Churches and ecclesial communities at the diocesan and Episcopal Conference levels. Thus it should be possible to arrive at common statements through which they express mutual recognition of Baptisms as well as procedures for considering cases in which a doubt may arise as to the validity of a particular Baptism (*RED*, 94).

The Eucharist is the sacrament of Christian unity (*UR*, 2). When we eat the one bread, we become one body; for the bread we break and eat is the one Body of Christ. By the celebration of the Eucharist the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about. But today this sacrament of unity has become the sacrament of division. In ecumenical gatherings we discuss, study and pray together and are able to do many things together. But when the moment of Eucharistic celebration comes we sadly have to disperse. Around the Eucharist we remain divided.

Is the Eucharist the expression and celebration of our full communion or the means towards it? Churches are divided in their views and convictions. All agree that for a meaningful celebration of the Eucharist there must be a consensus on the doctrine and practice of the Eucharist and on its minister. Is there enough doctrinal consensus in the ecumenical movement on the Eucharist to permit intercommunion and concelebration? The position of Catholic Church is explained in the *RED*, and specific directives are given on the question of Eucharistic sharing between the Catholic Church and other Churches (*RED*, 102-142.)

¹³ *RED*, 92. 92-101 deal with Baptism and the norms for ecumenical practice; Cf. *UR*, 3.

In short, according to the Catholic teaching, since Eucharistic consecration and intercommunion is a visible manifestation of full communion in faith, worship and community life, wherever these are lacking, Eucharistic sharing has no significance. But exceptions are made in the case of Eastern Churches which are close to the Catholic Church in Eucharistic doctrine, practice, and ordained ministry. In extreme cases members of other Christian communities may be admitted to Catholic Eucharistic sharing provided "the person be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed" (*RED*, 131).

8. Hierarchy of Truths

How do we measure our unity in faith? What is the relation of doctrines to faith? Do all doctrines have same importance, or is there a central core of faith to which the various doctrines are related in a hierarchical order? Does our search for unity require unanimity in and acceptance of all doctrines? These questions are extremely significant in ecumenical dialogue.

We have pointed out that the ecclesiology of the Catholic Church accepts and endorses pluralism in the Church. The various Churches have their own individualities and identities which is not against the unity of the Church; on the contrary this variety enhances the catholicity of the Church:

While preserving unity in essentials, let all members of the Church, according to the office entrusted to each, preserve a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, and even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity be exercised. If the faithful are true to this course of action, they will be giving ever richer expression to the authentic catholicity of the Church, and , at the same time, to her apostolicity (*UR*, 4).

To evaluate these diversities of the Churches and their doctrinal formulations and thus to guide the ecumenical dialogues, the Vatican Council also proposed that there exists a "hierarchy" of truths among the various truths of revelation and their doctrinal formulations: "When comparing doctrines they (Catholic Theologians) should remember that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith" (*UR*, 11). The Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches made a study of the concept of "Hierarchy of Truths" and published a study document in 1990.¹⁴ This document clarified that

¹⁴ Cf. *Information Service*, P.C. for Promoting Christian Unity, 74/III, 1990, pp.85-90.

truths of faith do not add up in a quantitative way, but have a qualitative order in relation to the centre or foundation of Christian faith. This foundation of Christian faith is the mystery of Christ and salvation in Christ. The importance or significance or "weight" of a truth or doctrine depends on its specific relationship to the mystery of Christ. This core or foundation of our faith is not simply a doctrine which is confessed, but is an experience within us, a life which we share. All propositional truths and doctrinal formulations are conditioned or limited by time, history, language and culture, and they cannot contain fully encompass the mystery of Christ and of God.

An important outcome of ecumenical dialogue is this understanding of the foundation of our faith and of the limitations of our doctrinal formulations and a subsequent shift in the hierarchy of truths. Most of the Churches have become convinced that in the central Christian faith they are united. There has been substantial acceptance of one another's doctrines and teachings. Many of the Protestant Churches practically accepted the Episcopal ministry which they had rejected during the Reformation. Catholic Church has appreciated and accepted the central Reformation doctrine of justification by faith (*UUS*, 37-39). For progress in ecumenical dialogue and for the realization of unity or full communion among the Churches, the idea of a hierarchy of truths in Christian faith would seem to have supreme significance. Communion on the basis of our common foundation and freedom in understanding and formulating its peripheral aspects are important theological principles which have significant ecumenical prospects.

9. Papal Ministry in the Service of Unity

In 1967 Pope Paul VI in his address to the Roman Secretariat for Christian Unity said: "The Papacy constitutes the greatest obstacle to reunion." This statement of the Pope seems to be accurate both historically and theologically. Papal interference in the affairs of the Eastern Churches and the Papal claim of universal jurisdiction was the real cause for the separation of the Orthodox Churches in 1054. During the Reformation controversies also, the papacy was the bone of contention. Luther and the Reformers accused the papacy of having usurped the supreme place of Christ in the Church. In the Catholic view, the Bishop of Rome has a specific and unique role in the communion of Churches. As the successor of Peter, he is "the permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship."¹⁵ He is the visible sign of unity and the bond of communion, the servant and instrument of unity. According to the Catholic view, communion with the see of Peter and his successors is necessary for the fullness of unity in the visible Church.

¹⁵ *LG*, 18; cf *UR*, 2; *LG*, 25; *Decree on the Bishops*, 2; *UUS*, 88-97.

Although this view may be embarrassing to many Churches, it is significant that in the ecumenical movement there has been a positive development towards an ecumenical papacy. The Petrine ministry of unity, reconciliation and "strengthening the Brethren" seems to be more and more accepted today as essential to the unity of conciliar fellowship. The Orthodox Churches had always given a prime place to the Bishop of Rome, a "Primacy of Honour," though they consistently rejected the "universal jurisdiction" of the Pope. In recent bilateral dialogues, the Anglicans and the Lutherans also spoke of a "Petrine function", "a universal primacy", "a renewed papacy" or "a reconstituted papacy" to preside over the communion of Churches and to be an instrument of reconciliation and unity.¹⁶

On the part of the Catholic Church there are signs of a new style and functioning of the Popes, who speak today practically for all Churches. Popes Paul VI and Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness from all Churches for the painful events of the past caused by the papacy and invited the other Churches and theologians to discuss the question of the ministry of the Pope to see how best it can serve the unity of the Church and move beyond past controversies (*UUS*, 95-96).

II. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF ECUMENISM TODAY

In the first part of this paper we outlined some important aspects, ideas and principles of Catholic ecumenism drawn from the official teachings of the Catholic Church. It was mainly meant for brethren from the other Churches who may not be familiar with the teachings and statements of the Catholic Church. In this second part, I shall briefly deal with the original vision of Christianity, the types of Churches we have today, our present vision of unity, and the problems and challenges we face in the ecumenical movement today. I shall conclude by focusing on the Asian context and on possible and fruitful areas of collaboration among the Churches in view of our common task in Asia today.

1. The Original Vision of Unity

It would be a gross mistake to think that the earliest Church in the New Testament was a highly centralized institution headed by Peter and supervised by his assistants. The early Christian communities were not

¹⁶ Cf. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement, Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversation at a World Level*, Geneva: WCC, 1984, p. 108; P.C. Empie and T.A. Murphy (eds), *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974.

homogeneous in character, but diverse with different forms of ministries, patterns of organizations and having a variety of articulations of faith and ways of worship which were spontaneously shaped by their different historical, cultural and religious contexts. They were only very loosely connected to each other, and naturally, conflicts and tensions were not entirely absent among them. At the same time, the early Christian communities were fully conscious that they all belonged to the One Church of Jesus Christ, which was a fellowship of different Churches, that they all shared the same faith in Jesus Christ by which they were incorporated into One Body.

The first Christian community was that of Jerusalem, consisting of the Apostles, disciples and the first followers of Jesus, almost all of them drawn from Judaism. It was typically a **Jewish Church** in beliefs, rituals, prayers, life-style and community organization headed by a "Council of Elders," the administrative system of the Jewish society of the time. They naturally continued many Old Testament traditions, attended temple and synagogue, even when they accepted Jesus as Messiah and their only saviour. The separation between Judaism and Christianity was a gradual one.

From Jerusalem and its surroundings Christianity gradually spread to Antioch, and from there to the Gentile world of Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. Some of the first Christians were Hellenists (Stephen and others) who were influenced by the Greek language and culture. These Hellenists, who might be said to be forerunners of a liberal Christianity, played a major role in bringing Christianity to Samaria, Antioch and the so-called "Gentile world." The unique leadership of Peter and Paul in taking the Gospel to the Roman world cannot be ignored. The emergence of a **Hellenistic and Gentile Christianity** vis-a-vis Jewish Christianity triggered a host of tensions and conflicts among the early Churches. *The Acts of the Apostles* presents the story of the struggles of these new "missionary Churches" to break away from Jewish traditions and patterns of the Mother Church in Jerusalem. This mother Church could not envisage another Church, Hellenistic or Gentile, quite different from its own patterns and life-style. Perhaps they thought that Christianity, as a new movement within Judaism, was meant only for the Jews and those converted to Judaism. For Jewish Christians, to be a Christian meant accepting the whole of the Old Testament and all Jewish traditions and practices, including the rite of circumcision. This narrow view held by many Jewish Christians was challenged by Hellenistic and Gentile Christians. The Council of Jerusalem supported the latter and ruled that the Jewish Law and traditions should not be imposed on "Gentile Christians" (AA, ch. 15). It is worth noting that the Jewish Christian practice of circumcision and other prescriptions of the Mosaic Law were not condemned, but neither were they made universal law. The first Ecumenical Council thus held a pluralistic approach to ecclesial traditions.

Diversity of the local Churches was thus an essential part of the original vision of Christianity. Although we do not know details of the early Christian communities, the New Testament books witness to different types of Christianity existing side by side with mutual acceptance, though not without conflicts, tensions and controversies.¹⁷ We have already indicated two different types in the earliest Christianity, Jewish and Hellenistic, based on their different cultural and religious backgrounds. Various groups of early Christian Gnostics could be located within the Hellenistic type, though some Gnostic groups later became heretical and broke away from the Church. In early Christianity other types of Churches could be also identified, such as, **apocalyptic**, **charismatic**, and more **institutional**, similar to the Catholic model with the episcopal system.

In the history of Israel, the New Testament period is known as the Apocalyptic period, characterized by the belief that they stood at the close of history, in the last days when Yahweh would establish the final Messianic Kingdom. Some of the Christian communities shared this apocalyptic hope and fervently waited for the immediate Second Coming (*parousia*) of Christ (*Thessalonians I & II; Mark*, ch.13 etc.). At the same time, some of the early Pauline Communities were predominantly charismatic led and guided by those who manifested the gifts of the Spirit. We also see later Pauline communities of the Pastoral Letters that were typically “Catholic,” highly structured and organized with definite patterns of episcopal ministry.

However, all these types of communities had a fundamental unity as they believed in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. This central Christological faith was the test of orthodoxy, however different were the formulations of this confession, such as, Messiah, Lord, Son of God, Son of Man etc. But the moment this central Christological faith was diluted or denied, they became heretical, as in the case of the **Ebionites** (Jewish Christians who denied the full divinity of Christ and held an “adoptionist” Christology) and the **Gnostics** (Hellenistic Christians who denied the full humanity of Christ and held a “docetist” Christology).

2. Divisions in the Church and Types of Churches Today

The original vision of Church unity was almost lost in the course of the Church’s history and development. In fact, many historical divisions in the Church were due to the insistence on uniformity and the tendency to condemn all diversity in doctrinal and theological formulations. Ever since the identification of the Church with the Roman empire in the 4th century,

¹⁷ Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, London: SCM, 1977.

uniformity among the local and national Churches in the empire in matters related to doctrine, structures and organization was insisted upon for the political stability of the empire. New ideas and innovations were frowned upon, and the tragic consequence was the divisions in Christianity.¹⁸

All religions often break into new denominations when they encounter new situations, cultures and peoples. A religion originating in a particular context and culture may not be able to fit into other contexts and cultures. This means all religions have to adapt and reform and diversify themselves to fit into other cultures. When a religion, in order to make itself meaningful to other peoples, branches out into new traditions and systems, new denominations are born. Inevitably, there arise tensions and conflicts between the original tradition and the new traditions. The original tradition often fails to recognize the same faith in the new traditions with the tragic consequence of condemnation, excommunication and subsequent division. The historical divisions that occurred in Christianity are not an exception to this religious and cultural dynamic.

Ever since the origin of Christianity, its unity was threatened time and again by various heresies and schisms, many of which gradually disappeared, while some still continue. The 4th–5th centuries are well known for the **Trinitarian and Christological Controversies** which rocked the Churches in the East. The divinity of Christ and His Lordship had to be explained in the context of the staunch monotheism of the Jewish religion. The Christian answer was the doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity in Jesus Christ. But the question how Jesus could be God and Man at the same time remained a perennial problem.

On this question the two rival theological schools of Alexandria and Antioch had opposing views due to different cultural, linguistic and philosophical backgrounds. The Alexandrians stressed the divinity of Christ, the Antiocheans his humanity. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (428), represented the Antiochean school, and Cyril was leader of the Alexandrians. Cyril accused Nestorius of heresy, claiming that he taught that two natures and two persons, divine and human, in Christ, which would disrupt the unity in the person of Christ. Condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431), the so-called **Nestorian Churches** had to separate themselves from the others.

The second major division is closely related to this controversy. Alexandrian thinking took an apparently extreme form in the teaching of the monk Eutyches who spoke of one nature (*monophysis*) of Christ. The

¹⁸ Cf. Kuncheria Pathil, *Indian Churches at the Crossroads*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1995, pp.31–32.

human nature was swallowed up by the divine nature, as a drop of honey falling into the sea dissolves in it. The Council of Chalcedon (451) condemned this view and defined: "in Christ two natures without confusion and division are united in one person or *hypostasis*". The Chalcedonian formula was rejected by the so-called **Monophysite** groups of Churches, such as, the Egyptian or Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Armenian Church, and the West Syrian Jacobite Church or the Antiochean Church. This second major division was once again in the East.

In the tragic division between the ancient Eastern Orthodox Churches and the western Catholic Church, the factors that divided the two Churches were more political than doctrinal. Ever since the foundation of the city of Constantinople as the "New Rome" and the division of the Roman empire into Eastern and Western, political rivalry between the two was always in ferment. Differences in language, culture, liturgy and theology gradually widened the gulf. The appointment of Photius as Patriarch of Constantinople, not confirmed by the Pope, led to mutual excommunications. The *filioque* (procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father **through** the Son or from the Father **and** the Son) controversy added fuel to the conflict. The final break occurred in 1054 on the occasion of the visit of a Papal delegation and led to mutual excommunications. As already indicated, the real issue was the question of the universal papal jurisdiction, i.e. the question of the right of the Pope to intervene in the affairs of the Eastern Churches.

The fourth major division was the 16th century Reformation and the subsequent formation of a number of independent **Protestant** Churches. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and other reformers challenged many doctrines and practices of the medieval western Catholic Church, such as the doctrines of indulgence, corrupted practices of the sacraments, authoritarianism of Popes and Bishops, primacy of traditions over against the Word of God etc. They called for a reform in the whole Church, from top to bottom. As the Church authorities of the time totally rejected their views and demands for reform, the Reformers had to separate themselves from the Catholic Church, and gradually different Protestant Churches or denominations came into existence, at different periods and in various contexts.

Today we have, therefore, on the ecclesial scene, a number of types of Churches, not exactly a continuation of the New Testament types, but those which emerged in history in interaction with new situations, peoples and their differing needs, temperaments, cultures, and socio-economic and political structures. Among the three major types – Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant – we have sub-types and divisions. How do we envisage unity or communion among these numerous types of Individual Churches?

3. The Vision of Unity Today

The unity of the Church is not the reduction of all these types of Churches into one type, whether Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant. We had mentioned above that even in New Testament times there existed a variety of types of Churches. This diversity is part and parcel of the catholicity of the Church. Hence unity shall not be conceived as a return of all Churches to the Catholic model; nor to the Orthodox or Protestant model, as if only one model were right. Any movement for the uniformity of Churches has to be dismissed as a distorted vision of unity.

The vision of One Reunited Church calls for a "Copernican Revolution" among the Churches.¹⁹ We shall not regard the other Churches as planets rotating around our own Church as if we were the centre. Every Church must be ready to abandon the concept of unity centred on it. No one Church is at the centre. Jesus Christ is the centre of all Churches. The way to unity is the movement towards the centre who is Christ. When all Churches move towards the centre, they come closer to one another.

Some ecumenists argue that all historical identities and ecclesial individualities have to be abandoned, giving way to a common identity or one reunited Church similar to the Church of South India model. It is an amalgamation model which views the historical ecclesial identities as obstacles and problems. But this view cannot be accepted. The existing individual Churches and their identities are our precious heritage that must be maintained and safeguarded, though these identities shall not be conceived as static and closed. No one historical Church or ecclesial tradition is a finished product, but it is always in the making by a giving and taking process of growth.

In the history of the ecumenical movement several models of unity have been proposed, such as the **Federation, Intercommunion, Organic Unity**, and **Conciliar Fellowship** or **Communion** models.²⁰ A federation like that of the World Council of Churches is an inadequate model. What should unite us must not be merely a forum for study and action, but a form in which our communion in faith and sacraments which must be discovered, expressed and celebrated. The Intercommunion model, i.e. unity around the Eucharist, is not enough. We must go beyond it to common structures of consultation and decision making. The Organic Unity model, where there is one head and different members, is today suspect of being a centralizing model with much uniformity at the expense of diversity and autonomy.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Schlink, "The Unity and Diversity of the Church", in *What Unity Implies*, Geneva: WCC, 1969, pp. 35-36.

²⁰ *What Kind of Unity*, Faith and Order Paper, No. 69, Geneva: WCC, 1974.

Hence the Communion model or Conciliar Fellowship model is proposed today in the ecumenical movement.

The One Reunited Church has to be a Fellowship or Communion of different Churches, united in one common faith and sacraments. All Churches will be united in the same Apostolic faith, same Baptism and same Eucharist. But it will be a “unity in diversity,” with each Church different and unique, autocephalous or self-governing and autonomous (with its own norms, structures, theology, way of worship and traditions). No Church will be under any other Church, but all Churches will be intimately related to one another in the communion of Churches. All Churches will accept each other’s members and ministries. This communion will be maintained, supported and fostered by conciliar relationship and conciliar gatherings. To be more precise, all Churches will be able to sit together as equals in an Ecumenical Council which will be a visible sign and instrument of the ecclesial communion.²¹

What is the way to realize this vision of unity? What are the obstacles on the way? What are the problems and challenges today? Where are we today on the road to unity?

4. Problems and Challenges

I do not want to take up here all the doctrinal and theological issues that had divided the Churches in history, but rather indicate that many of the old issues are no longer reasons for keeping the Churches separated. Dialogues between the Oriental Orthodox Churches (the so-called Nestorian and Monophysite Churches) and the Catholic Church reached the conclusion that on the central Christological faith, that Jesus Christ is “fully God and fully Man”, there remains absolutely no difference. The central issue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches was the understanding and functioning of the papacy of the time. The Orthodox concept of the “*Primacy of Honour*”, and “*Primus inter Pares*” can make a positive contribution in present discussions and rethinking of the papacy, especially in the context of Vatican II’s teaching on the collegiality of bishops, and the Protestant suggestion of an “*Ecumenical Papacy*” in view of the “*Petrine function*” today. The central doctrine of the Reformers, “justification by faith,” is practically accepted by Catholic theology today. There are other issues, such as, Scripture and Tradition, interpretation of the Word of God, doctrine of the Eucharist, sacraments, especially ordained ministry of bishops and priests, teaching authority of the Church or Magisterium etc. (*UUS*, 79). Many of the recent Catholic documents have pointed out that the

²¹ Kuncheria Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1981, pp. 423–433.

differences among the Churches have to be taken seriously. Commitment to ecumenism and commitment to truth must go hand in hand. False irenicism and indifference to the Church's ordinances have to be avoided (*UUS*, 79; *UR*, 4, 11).

Along with ongoing multilateral and bilateral dialogues among the Churches, what is required is renewal and radical conversion on the part of all Churches. Divisions among the Churches and their isolated existence for centuries have, in fact, caused fragmentation among all the Churches, hence the need for healing and rediscovery of wholeness on the part of all. Healing of wounds and rediscovery of wholeness or catholicity takes time, hard work and, above all, God's blessing. We cannot fabricate Church unity in a day or two. In our hopelessness and helplessness, God utters the healing and saving Word which alone can unite and save us.

Unity today requires **mutual recognition**. Of course, the Churches cannot simply recognize each other irrespective of what they believe and practice. It has to be a responsible act. Every Church has a right and responsibility to challenge other Churches and show that they are in continuity with the original faith and vision of New Testament Christianity. Could we spell out some of the essential signs or marks of Church of Christ, so that we could identify the Church of Christ in the many Churches of today? The central Christological faith that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, the acceptance of the Sacred Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament as the sacred and precious heritage of the Church which contain the Word of God, the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist by which the memory of Christ is celebrated and the Christian community is built up, the commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel as the sacred mission of the Church, the continuation of the Apostolic ministry and the "episcopal function", and the acceptance of a "Petrine ministry" are some of the basic ecclesial elements by which we can identify the Church of Christ.²² I am not suggesting a "reductionism" or "minimalism" detrimental to the uniqueness and individuality of the Churches, but am pointing out some of the essential and visible elements of the Church of Christ which are found in many Churches today.

Mutual recognition of the Churches and intercommunion among them practically mean the recognition of each other's Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. From this point of view, the recent document of the Faith and Order Commission on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (The Lima Document, 1982) is of great significance. This document is the product of a long ecumenical process involving the work of more than 50 years and of

²² Cf. Kuncheria Pathil, "The Vision of an Ecumenical Church" in *National Council of Churches Review*, Vol. CXI, No.10 (1991), pp.1366-1374.

hundreds of theologians, scholars and Church leaders, with the collaboration of practically all the Churches, including the Catholic Church. The document has articulated doctrinal convergence on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in the light of the studies, common worship and experience of the whole ecumenical movement during the last 70 years. The draft document was first published in 1975 and later revised in the light of 140 responses from over 90 Churches, and finally approved at the Faith and Order Commission Meeting in Lima, Peru, in 1982. Since then, the document was circulated among all the Churches "to receive and respond" and to spell out its practical consequences for each Church and for the ecumenical movement. Until now, already six volumes of official responses to the "BEM" document have been published.²³

The document tried to articulate the common faith of all the Churches in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. It is a common proclamation of our faith of the One Church received from Apostolic times. On Baptism and Eucharist there emerged practically a full doctrinal convergence, but in theology and sacramental practice a healthy pluralism was endorsed. Ministry is indeed the crucial issue. The document made a significant recommendation to all Churches to accept the threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons as an ecumenical pattern which indeed was normative for all Churches until the time of the Reformation. The doctrines of apostolic succession, sacramental nature of ordination, nature of episcopal ministry and papacy are still to be clarified and settled. The emerging doctrinal consensus and the proclamation of our common faith in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry has immense ecumenical prospects in view of the mutual recognition of the Churches and restoration of our communion.

Even if we succeed in solving all the old doctrinal issues among the Churches, other problems may still arise and new divisions may still occur. Emergence of Christian fundamentalism, racism, feminist movements, including the question of the ordination of women, different approaches to the liberation movements, Christian approaches to other religions, inculturation of the Gospel etc. are serious new issues threatening the unity of the Churches. These issues cut across denominational boundaries. Moreover, our search for unity must not be a narrow Church-centred concern. The Church must become an effective sign of the unity of the whole humankind. The Church has to be committed to heal all sorts of divisions both in the Church and in the world, divisions in the name of race, caste, class, culture, language, economy, power, ideologies and religion. This is the greatest challenge before the Churches today.

²³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva: WCC, 1982; Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM*, VI Vols., Geneva: WCC, 1986-1988. For the official response of the Catholic Church, cf. Vol. VI, pp. 1-40.

5. Ecumenical Collaboration in the Asian Context

This ecumenical consultation between FABC and CCA is meant to be contextual with a pastoral thrust. Hence I would like to conclude by suggesting a pastoral and practical ecumenical programme in the Asian context. It will be unnecessary here to describe or even mention the Asian context. There had been several FABC and CCA Conferences, papers and statements on the Asian reality of today, highlighting various aspects of the Asian context.²⁴ In the socio-economic realm, the gulf between rich and poor is ever widening due to the Western development model, globalization, market economy, the misuse of science and technology for profit, neo-colonialism and the exploitation of Asia's resources by the West. In the Asian political scenario, democracy is only a facade for dominant groups, and state authoritarianism, repression of minorities, communalism, and fundamentalism are rampant. The situation of workers, women, and children, especially girl children, is pathetic. On the religio-cultural scene, the situation is still worse. Asia's age-old religious and cultural traditions are being overtaken by Western secularism and consumerism. What is the responsibility of the Asian Churches in this context?

Task of the Asian Churches

It has been repeatedly pointed out at FABC conferences that the Asian Churches require today a threefold dialogue – dialogue with Asia's poor, with the Asian cultures, and with Asia's ancient religious traditions. The Churches must unambiguously declare their solidarity with the poor and join in their struggles for socio-economic and political justice and freedom. Asian Churches must become Churches of the poor, not just Churches for the poor. Most of the Asian Churches have a Western face in their theology, ways of worship and ecclesial structures and discipline, and they are alienated from their own cultural roots. Dialogue with Asia's cultural traditions is a matter of life and death for the Asian Churches. Closely related is the task of dialogue with the living religions of Asia. In a religiously pluralistic society dialogue must be the life-style. Asian Churches need today a new Baptism of immersion, immersion into the life of the poor and the oppressed, immersion into Asia's rich cultural traditions, and immersion into the living and pluriform religious traditions and values of Asia. For this urgent task ecumenical collaboration is a must.

²⁴ Many of the FABC Papers have exhaustively dealt with the Asian reality. I cannot list here all of them, but will mention the latest: S. Arokiasamy, *Asia: the Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death and Destruction*, FABC Papers, No.70.

Local Ecumenism Oriented to Asian Problems

The Local Church is the only Church. The Universal Church is simply the communion of the local Churches. It is in the local Church that the mystery of the Church becomes truly and really present. The local Churches in Asia are enormously diversified with their own specific situations, needs, and resources. Ecumenical initiatives must come from the local Churches, and not simply wait for orders to implement world-wide ecumenical directives. Taking into consideration the overall Asian situation, it may be suggested that priority should be given in the local Churches for forming ecumenical groups including people of all Churches, religions and ideologies to solve the urgent problems of Asia, groups for specific objectives, such as human rights and social justice, women's rights, dialogue with other religions and ideologies, and ecological concerns.

Inter-Ecclesial Dialogues

I do not mean to say that Asian Churches should relegate dialogue among the Churches for Christian unity. Indeed the Churches must witness to their unity and work for full communion. In Asia, Church unity has more prospects as most of the Asian Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, except the ancient Eastern Churches, have come from outside during the Colonial period, and divisions have no historical, theological and cultural roots. The urgent common task of the Churches in Asia also compels for unity. Divided Churches are a scandal to the people and ineffective for the common mission.

In addition to ongoing ecumenical activities – dialogues on doctrinal and theological issues, common Bible studies, and prayer groups in order to promote unity among the different Churches, I would like to propose three things:

- a) Asian Churches need new ways of theologizing which should be inspired by the specific context and needs of Asia. Common workshops should be organized for theologizing in Asia.
- b) Collaboration among the seminaries, theological colleges, faculties and institutes is absolutely necessary for the ecumenical education of future pastors and ministers. Joint programmes, exchange of teachers and resources have to be encouraged.²⁵ In teaching theological subjects, their ecumenical aspects and implications must be highlighted (*RED*, 70ff).

²⁵ Cf. Instruction of P.C. for Promoting Christian Unity, "Circular Letter on Ecumenical Teaching from Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity", *Information Service*, 62 (1986/ IV): 196–198.

- c) A course on Ecumenism should be compulsory in seminaries and theological faculties and should cover the history and traditions of all the Churches, the history of the ecumenical movement, contemporary ecumenical discussions and the emerging doctrinal convergence among the Churches. The *BEM* document must be an essential part of the curriculum.

Ecumenical Structures

The Ecumenical Directory of the Catholic Church has already suggested the formation of Ecumenical Commissions in all the Churches and dioceses to inspire and guide the ecumenical movement and the relationship among the Churches. Joint meetings of these commissions are to be encouraged. Ecumenical associations of pastors, theologians, teachers and students can also promote mutual understanding and appreciation, joint studies and research. In many Asian countries National Councils of Churches have been already formed and function effectively as instruments of collaboration and co-ordination. But in many countries the Catholic Church has not yet joined these Councils, despite encouraging directives from Rome.²⁶ It is time for the Catholic Church to join these Councils to coordinate the activities of the Churches in each country.

Common Celebration of the Year 2000

The Catholic Church has already taken initiatives for the celebration of the year 2000. The Pope has already spoken on this subject on several occasions, especially through his 1994 Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. He proposed a Synod of the Catholic Churches of Asia to prepare for the celebration of the year 2000. How might the other Churches in Asia participate in this Synod? An ecumenical celebration of the year 2000 by all the Christian Churches of Asia is of utmost importance for Asia. How shall we plan and organize this event? What should be the theme of this common celebration? "The Message of Christ for Asia in the Third Millennium" would seem to be an important topic.

²⁶ Cf. "Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels", Document of the P.C. for Promoting Christian Unity, 1975. [Ed. note: cf. **Appendix** for an updated list of Councils of Churches with Roman Catholic membership.]

SOME BASIC THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

S. Wesley Ariarajah, World Council of Churches, Geneva

Perhaps the most commonly quoted Biblical verse in the Ecumenical Movement is Jesus' prayer in John 17.22: "**That they may all be one that the world may believe that You had sent me**". And the most celebrated reading in ecumenical gatherings comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he exhorts them to do everything possible to "**maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**", because "**There is only one body and one Spirit, just as you are called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all and in all**" (Eph 4: 3-6).

Unity: a gift and a goal

These Biblical passages point to two realities about the Church and Christian life that have inspired ecumenical theological reflection. Firstly, God wills the unity of the Church; it is something we need to strive to achieve. Secondly, that unity is something that we already possess because "there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of us all".

The first and perhaps the central theological assumption of the ecumenical movement is that the unity of the church is both a "gift" and a "goal". We do not seek to bring about the unity of the church, but we seek to make visible the unity we already have; we strive to remove those obstacles, disagreements and the consequent divisions that stand in the way of manifesting and celebrating the unity that is ours in Christ.

Paradoxically, the very theological assumption that the church by definition is "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" has been the main contributor to the deep divisions within the church. In the course of history, each part of the divided church had to regard itself as the true manifestation of the "one holy, catholic and apostolic church" and thus had to deny the ecclesial reality of the other. For a long time ecclesial realities other than one's own were considered "heretical", "separated" or as needing to "return to the fold" in order to be in full communion with the Church. Thus the divisions within the church created traditions that were mutually exclusive, signified by denying to each other participation in the central symbol of the church and its unity, the Eucharist.

Reconsidering conditions for unity among Christians

The major theological breakthrough in interchurch relations came with the “softening” of this attitude and self-understanding within the different traditions of the divided church, seen both in the birth of the **Faith and Order Movement** and the documents of the **Second Vatican Council**.

I use the word “softening” rather than “changing” of the attitude because it is no secret that several churches, if pushed to the theological corner, would still maintain that they are **the one** true manifestation of the Church Universal, giving historical and theological reasons why this is the case. It is often presented as an essential part of their ecclesial self-understandings and it would be difficult for anyone else to question or deny it.

With the “softening” came the churches’ willingness to hold in creative tension the Pauline affirmation in Ephesians 4 and the prayer of our Lord in John 17.22, namely that the unity of the church is both a “gift” (of the *esse* of the church) and a “goal” (and a vocation of the church).

Once this became the ground rule, it was possible to begin to consider the conditions under which the unity of the church might be restored so that it might again become “the one eucharistic fellowship”. Churches were willing to engage in theological conversations to seek convergences on some of the doctrinal matters such as baptism, Eucharist, ministry and the understanding of being the body of Christ, or the Church.

The **Faith and Order movement** adopted a multilateral approach where a number of churches came together seeking to arrive at a common consensus on these matters based on a common understanding of the Biblical teaching on the matter, the contribution each of their traditions brought to it and on the basis of what they might, under the guidance of the Spirit, say today together.

These multilateral conversations were augmented in more recent decades by the more focused bi-lateral conversations between churches that separated at a given moment in history, to examine whether those factors that contributed to the division of the church at that time were still valid, and if agreements could be reached which would make re-establishment of communion possible.

I do not intend here to trace the ups and downs of the Faith and Order Movement, the hopes and disappointments of bilateral dialogues or of the changing views on the nature of the unity we seek. There is a sense in which confidence that agreements on doctrinal matters would lead to the unity of the church has begun to erode. In recent years the crucial role played by non-theological factors both in bringing about and maintaining

divisions within the church has also been more fully recognized. Moreover, the radical changes taking place in the world, developments in the internal life of the churches, the place and role of religion in society and the rapid changes in the religious consciousness of human beings have all raised searching questions for our understanding of unity and the ways to achieve it. This, however, is beyond the scope of this discussion.

Making visible the unity we already have

What is important is that the ecumenical movement can never move away from its primary commitment to serve the cause of making visible the unity we have in Christ. It is a unity that must be made manifest "so that the world may believe". In other words, a divided church (despite our convictions of the oneness of the church in essence) is a scandal and a counter-witness to Christ.

It would, therefore, perhaps be more useful, within the search for the expression of the unity of the church in Asia, to put the question in a different form: "Knowing that our churches are indeed divided over doctrine and church order (which still needs to be addressed), what can we as Christian peoples and churches in Asia do that would not compromise the integrity of our churches and yet help to make more visible the unity we have in Christ, so that the world may believe?"

There are several avenues of collaboration that have already been identified and are indeed already in practice in many situations around the world:

- Praying for one another, and together,
- Studying together the issues that divide us with the view to grow in mutual understanding,
- Facing together common issues that confront the churches in their life in the wider community,
- Common engagement in service to the community,
- Common witness,
- Common pastoral care, etc.

These common engagements are based on the conviction within the ecumenical fellowship that any manifestation of the unity of the church must of necessity be preceded by a period of "growing together", if only to bring about a new social, theological and spiritual formation that would remove the in-built prejudices and exclusivism that have kept Christian peoples in mutual isolation and even rivalry over the past several centuries. "Growing together" is thus a theological category within the ecumenical movement. It is a way of entering and experiencing our *koinonia* in Christ,

despite our human inability to articulate that *koinonia* in ways that all of us are able to agree.

“That the world may believe . . .”.

The reason John 17.22 has played a central role in ecumenical theological thinking also has to do with the fact that it keeps the search for the unity of the church within the perspective of the world. The church’s unity is not for its own benefit but “that the world may believe that You, Father, have sent me”. Therefore the second most important theological conviction of the ecumenical movement is that both the church and its unity are for the purpose that God’s will might be fulfilled for and in the world.

It has been rightly observed that the ecumenical movement was born at the intersection between the church and the world. The very description of the movement as “ecumenical”, from the word *oikoumene*, meaning the “whole inhabited earth”, is indicative of the scope it seeks to encompass. The movement is based on the theological assumption that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”, that “God so loved the world”, that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself”, that “Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay”, so that there would be a “new heaven and a new earth”.

In other words, ecumenism is at its best when it is about bringing healing, reconciliation, justice, peace and wholeness into the lives of all peoples and communities. Therefore the search for peace with justice, the struggle to uphold the rights and dignity of peoples, the concern for the oppressed, marginalized and rejected as well as the search for a just and righteous ordering of the social, economic and political life of communities and nations has also been at the centre of the theological understanding of what ecumenism is all about. So has also been the ministry of compassion, bringing relief and rehabilitation to refugees, migrants and peoples uprooted from their lands.

It is very important to recognize that these are not understood as the “good works” that are done when churches come together, or that these “good works” can be instrumental in achieving the unity of the church. Rather, the concern for justice and peace, the solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized, the sharing of resources with the needy and the poor, and advocacy for economic and political ordering of life that respects the dignity of the peoples have all been understood theologically as essential to the meaning of being the church in the world. These are the concerns of the Kingdom; they constitute the way Christians and churches exercise their discipleship to Christ; Alongside the proclamation of the Good News of forgiveness and new life in Christ, they make up our witnesses “that the world may believe”. They are ways of participating in the mission of God in the world in anticipation of the fulfilment of our daily prayer: “Your

kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as in heaven". In this sense, the ecumenical movement is rooted in the Bible and stands within the prophetic movement of the Old Testament and of Jesus' own ministry.

The church and the world

You are only too aware that this has also been the most controversial aspect of the theological understanding of the ecumenical movement. The difficulties have to do with different ways of understanding the relationship between the unity of the church and the unity and renewal of the human community. At the heart of the issue is one's understanding of the relationship between the church and the world. Some would want to see the ecumenical movement primarily as the movement for the unity of the churches and see the call for the involvement in the world as unwelcome engagement in political realities. Others are so committed to justice and peace in the world that they have lost patience with the churches which, after decades of conversation, are still unable to agree to come together. They tend to see the ecumenism that seeks church unity as a diversion from the primary calling of the church to be a healing community in the world.

There is yet another issue. There was a time when the much quoted statement "Doctrine divides, but service unites" was taken as self-evident. But the actual experience of attempting to come together as churches to engage in common issues of the world has shown that we can at times be as hopelessly divided on these matters as on doctrinal issues. While every one would agree on the importance of the social upliftment of the poor, there is no agreement among Christians and churches on the kind of political and economic system that would bring about the desired change. We do not agree on the nature of church-state relationships, of war as a means of correcting injustice, of the ways to limit population growth, of the levels and kinds of development that is appropriate in specific situations, of the place and role of women in church and society, and so on.

The churches can be and indeed are at times as deeply divided on socio-economic, ethical and moral issues as they are on doctrinal matters. But perhaps the lines of division that exist on these matters do not necessarily correspond to the lines of confessional divisions that separate the churches. Therefore one of the basic ministries of the ecumenical movement has been to encourage the churches to enter into creative theological dialogues on social, economic, political and moral issues so that together they may seek to discern the will of God in each situation and on different issues.

It is important to recognize that the issues that we face, the context in which they are faced and the nature of the response they demand are different in different parts of the world. While the Church is one, our life and experiences as churches in different parts of the world can indeed

be vastly different, calling for different ways of understanding our life together.

Thus, those of us from Asia, irrespective of the church traditions from which we come, have the common experience of living in societies that (with very few exceptions) are shaped by other faith traditions. We share the common experience of being minorities, of inheriting theological traditions that were shaped by the cultural norms and historical controversies of Europe and of living in societies where masses of people are deprived of their basic needs and dignity. In this sense there is a specificity to the ecumenical theological reality in a region that is not exhausted by a wider discussion of a theology of ecumenism. It is this reality that gave rise to the need for a Christian Conference of Asia and a Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. It is the increased realization of being called to a common ecumenical ministry to the peoples of Asia that brings these two expressions of ecumenical life together for closer conversation and collaboration.

The Nature of the Ecumenical Fellowship

This brings me to an important question of the theological assumptions made within the ecumenical movement on the nature of the ecumenical fellowship that we look for.

In the early years the unity of the church was conceived primarily in terms of what was called "organic unity" where it was assumed that the divided churches would find sufficient agreements over the issues that divided them to be able to enter into a common life as united churches. The fruits of such a vision are to be seen in the establishment of united churches like those in South India, North India, Pakistan, Australia etc.

The logic of such organic unity was obvious in local and national situations. It was, however, difficult to see how such unity might be implemented at regional and global levels. Further reflections within the Faith and Order movement on "The Nature of the Unity we Seek" resulted in the conviction that the church in the New Testament context primarily meant the "local" church, like the church in Corinth, Ephesus, Rome etc., and that these churches saw themselves as belonging to the one body of Christ in so far as they saw themselves as the local expression of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" church. St. Paul, for example, while recognizing the reality that there were distinct local churches in these places, would not accept that the church be divided in Corinth either along the lines of Paul, Apollos or Cephas or over the moral and ethical questions on which they disagreed.

Thus, the unity of the church was seen as that which we seek in "each place and in all places". The goal was that this unity be expressed in the

gathered Christian community in each place by their being a eucharistic community through the common confession of faith, common exercise of ministry and common ways of making decisions to serve the community. The early church's way of expressing the wider unity of these local churches was to see them as a "conciliar fellowship". Thus when questions of doctrine or matters that affected the life of all the churches had to be addressed, the churches met in Council to seek wisdom together and to engage in common deliberations and decision making. It is significant that while the Councils had authority to teach and to direct, the validity and effectiveness of the Council was made dependent on a "reception process" in the local churches.

While none of the Councils of Churches that we have today at the local, regional and global levels would qualify as full and genuine expressions of the Conciliar unity of the church, it is significant that one of the ways in which ecumenical life is expressed by the divided churches today is through national, regional and world Councils of Churches. These Councils of Churches and other ecumenical expressions like the Christian Conference of Asia, (which decided to remain a Christian Council rather than a Council of Churches in order to be as inclusive as was possible of the Christian reality of Asia), are the places where churches meet and give expression to the unity they have in Christ.

It is significant that even though the Roman Catholic Church has not been able to seek membership in the World Council of Churches, it has, in pursuit of its ecumenical commitment, increasingly sought membership at the national and regional levels, so that almost half of the National Councils of Churches and some of the Regional Councils (like the Middle-East, Pacific, Caribbean) have their full membership.

The nature of Councils of Churches

It is also important, in relation to this discussion, to be aware of an ongoing debate on the nature of the Councils of Churches. Traditionally the Councils of Churches were seen as more than the sum total of its member churches. The churches together had a "voice" of their own which might at times be different from what any one member church of the Council might have been able or want to say by itself. The council, like the early Councils of the Church, was able to speak and act on the basis of the common wisdom, with the provision that any member church could distance itself if it was unable to "receive" what the council had said or done. The councils were even able to speak to the churches, as to the world. In other words, the Council had some form of "authority" accorded to it by the churches.

One of the changes that has taken place as the result of Roman Catholic participation in the Councils is that increasingly the Councils

would speak and act only on matters on which the constituent partners agreed, thus removing the "authority" accorded to the Council as a reality that is derived, and yet distinct, from any of its component churches.

There are positive and negative aspects to this development. Positively, the Councils are restricted in their temptation to stray too far away from the churches. What they say and do reflect more closely the positions of the churches. The Councils also become more accountable to their constituent members.

On the negative side, the concept of the Council as an expression of Christian unity where churches together could speak and act in ways that go beyond what they can say or do in their divided situation is lost; here the Council would not be able to speak unless all churches agree on an issue. Lost also is the possibility of the prophetic word that churches together might say to any one or group of its own member churches.

The theological assumptions of being a Council of Churches at all levels is one of the challenges we will need to face in the coming years.

Ecumenical Movement as the People's Movement

From the very beginning, the ecumenical movement was understood as a movement of the Spirit for the gathering together of all the people of God. The concentration on theological issues that divide the churches and the intention to study them together so that we might arrive at some consensus at the intellectual level, however, has created an ecumenical theological elite who unfortunately are often too quickly identified with what ecumenism stands for. Again, the importance placed on "agreements" and "decision making" on ecumenical issues has also increasingly resulted in the "clericalization" of the ecumenical movement, at least in some of the confessions and regions of the world. These have also been accompanied by the institutionalization of the ecumenical movement so that the crisis of the institutions is often wrongly identified as the crisis of the movement.

Ecumenism, however, is about life: life in which the truth, integrity and reality of the Gospel as that which heals, restores, reconciles, unites and gives life is lived out and witnessed to. Ecumenism is about life in all its fullness; it is about the way we deal with our differences; the way we relate to one another and to the world; about solidarity and willingness to bear one another's burdens. It is about a spirituality that would make us ambassadors of Christ in the world, "God making his appeal through us", as St. Paul would say.

It is little wonder then, that despite all the difficulties that theologians and church councils are having on reaching agreements on issues that divide

us, there has emerged in the life of the people a new ecumenical reality, a lived communion and an unacknowledged lowering of barriers. It is no secret that an unofficial 'ecumenical movement' is alive and active in all those situations where people are engaged in the struggles for the freedom and dignity of the poor. We are not unaware that these ecumenical engagements go even as far as unofficial sharing at each others' table. Those of us who have been leaders of Asian churches have lived with this reality for a long time.

Even in the Western hemisphere there is now a growing ecumenical "consensus" at the level of the people who are in the struggles for peace, human rights, justice for women, the protection of the environment and socio-economic justice. At this level we can also perceive the gradual evolution of a "new" or "wider" ecumenism that seeks to take the understanding of the ecumenical movement beyond Christian ecumenism.

It is not my intention to argue that this "ecumenism of life" is the "real thing". Nor do I want to downplay the importance of doctrinal agreements and institutional forms of ecumenical life. But it is important to affirm that in the final analysis all ecumenism is about and for the people of God. It has to be lived out and experienced at the level of the people and result in enabling them to become agents of change towards the establishment of the reign of God over all of life.

Ecumenism of life in Asia

I have a feeling that perhaps no other part of the world has been more deeply involved in this "lived ecumenism" and the "wider ecumenism" than has Asia, and this may account for the lack of too much interest in "doctrinal discussions" within the Asian ecumenical scene. As the region of the world that has for a long time experimented in inculturation of the Gospel and engaged in theological reflections in context, Asian churches have also learnt to place in perspective the doctrinal controversies that originated in another age and in vastly different contexts. The reality of other religious traditions, their spiritual and ethical heritages and the common engagement with them on life issues has also influenced the way Asians approach religious life.

Therefore I hope it is not too much to expect that there emerge a theology of ecumenism, and theological assumptions of an ecumenical movement that is peculiar to Asia, which would also contribute to the global ecumenical effort which is in desperate need of revitalization. In the course of being established as Christian communities in Asia, we have inherited the divisions that were not part of our history. Perhaps nothing could have been done about it. But now that our churches have struck deep roots in the Asian soil, we should aim at a "home grown" ecumenism – an ecumenism

that takes our Asian realities and the common tasks we face as churches in Asia with the seriousness they deserve.

At the heart of any such endeavour lies our willingness to submit ourselves to some of the basic principles and disciplines of ecumenical life.

The Disciplines of Ecumenical Life

1. The One and the Many

It is not uncommon to hear some people speak of the “ecumenical” and the “evangelical” as belonging to opposite camps. This a very unfortunate polarization. If by the word “evangelical” is meant being faithful to the Gospel or the evangel, or being rooted in the Biblical witness, then what has been described as “ecumenical” has every right to consider itself also to be “evangelical”. We are also aware of so many who are labelled as “evangelicals” whose ecumenical spirit is beyond question.

In actual fact, the opposite of “ecumenical” is not “evangelical”, but “sectarian”. By “sectarian” we mean an attitude where a particular understanding of faith or truth is proclaimed as the whole or only truth. It is an approach that denies truth anywhere else, and thus sees no need of the “other”. It is a way of excluding the other in the definition of what it means to be the church.

Ecumenical discipline demands that while a church may see itself as the expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, it does not pass judgement on the self-understandings of the others. The Toronto Statement, drawn up to help the churches to arrive at a common understanding of “The Church, the churches and the World Council of Churches”, lays down three principles in relation to the ecclesial understanding of each other:

- No church needs to deny or give up its ecclesial self-understanding in order to be in ecumenical fellowship;
- No church has to accept the ecclesial self-understandings of the others to be in fellowship,
- No church should deny the ecclesial self-understanding of the others.

This arrangement may have its limitations. But it is based on the conviction that there can be no ecumenism within a sectarian spirit. The churches seek to come together **because** they are divided and in order to enter into a deeper fellowship. They not only need to know the other; they also need the other to know themselves. Where plurality is experienced as a threat, there can be no ecumenism.

2. The Culture of Dialogue

At the heart of the ecumenical enterprise is the culture and spirit of dialogue. The word dialogue is often misunderstood to mean conversation between two, sometimes opposing, parties. Etymologically the word “dialogue” (like diagram, diabolic etc) refers to something that is “full” or “complete”. Dialogue is a full, complete, or a truth searching conversation where there is openness to learn and to grow. Churches that are so complete in themselves or are totally self-sufficient do not need the ecumenical movement. It is the belief in the unfathomable mysteries of God, the conviction that the Spirit will “lead us into all truth” and that the Christ who has gone before us will take us to places we had not planned to go that make the ecumenical movement both a challenge and a promise.

3. The Spirit of Solidarity

What makes the ecumenical movement or a Council of Churches different from a multilateral organization or a non-governmental organization is that it is not just another organization that has come together for mutual benefit or to pool their resources in order to perform better than what they might be able to do individually. The ecumenical movement is not a free or voluntary association seeking to serve the interest of its members. It is for this reason, for example, that the World Council of Churches has a **basis** that describes the Council as “a fellowship of churches that 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”.

Ecumenical coming together is not an association but a fellowship; it is rooted in common confession of Christ and has the aim of fulfilling a common calling. In other words, the churches in participating in the ecumenical movement are committing themselves to fulfil the will of Christ “that they may all be one” and are open to be led by the Spirit to fulfil together the common calling to be the church in the world.

4. A fully committed Fellowship

It is also generally believed, that despite the differences among them, the churches in participating in the ecumenical movement enter into a level of communion that makes them a “fully committed fellowship”. This phrase has been exegeted in many ways, but basically it seeks to affirm that the churches within the ecumenical movement do not exist alongside each other but enter into a dynamic relationship.

Several phrases like “ecumenical solidarity”, “mutual accountability”, “sharing of material and spiritual resources”, “common witness”, “mutual

respect", "common commitment to justice and peace", "a covenanting solidarity", "mutual intercession" etc. have been used to lift up what might be happening within an ecumenical commitment. Some have spoken of the movement as both a "fellowship of churches" and a "dynamic, frontier movement of the Spirit". The challenge to the churches to act together was seen to be so urgent that some years ago an ecumenical principle, called Lund Principle, was formulated which called on the churches "**never to act separately except on those matters where their conscience does not permit them to act together**". The principle unfortunately has never been put to its full use; but it indicates the nature of the commitment demanded of those who enter the fellowship.

The Ecumenical Movement: tested by fire

There are some today who speak of an "ecumenical winter", of the "paralysis of the ecumenical movement" and even of the "demise" of the ecumenical spirit. I want to believe that these warning signals indicate that some of the ways of our "beings" and "doings" as an ecumenical movement are indeed being tested by fire. But as a movement of the Spirit and as that which calls the churches to fulfil together their common calling, so that God's sovereign rule might be established over all of life, the movement can never end. Perhaps some of the new promise of the ecumenical future is to be discerned in the stirrings of the Spirit that is bringing the churches closer together in the Asian continent.

PART II

THE VISION OF ECUMENICAL UNITY

Bishop Kenneth Fernando, Colombo, Sri Lanka

The CCA welcomes this opportunity to enter into dialogue with the FABC on the possibility of working for Christian unity among the Christians of Asia.

World Council of Churches

The formation of the WCC in 1948 has provided much encouragement to Christians in the task of ecumenical cooperation and working for the unity of the Church. Every General Assembly of the WCC has encouraged ecumenical co-operation and the search for the unity of the Church. I would specifically like to draw the attention of this gathering to this quotation from the Third World Conference of the 'Faith and Order' Commission held in Lund.

"... as we seek to draw closer to Christ we come closer to one another. We need, therefore, to penetrate behind our divisions to a deeper and richer understanding of the mystery of the God-given union of Christ with his church. We need increasingly to realize that the separate histories of our churches find their full meaning only if seen in the perspective of God's dealings with his whole people.

The same 'word to the churches' from the Third World Conference goes on to say:

"The measure of unity which it has been given to the churches to experience together must now find clearer manifestation. A faith in the one church of Christ which is not implemented by acts of obedience is dead. There are truths about the nature of God and His Church which will remain for ever closed to us unless we act together in obedience to the unity which is already ours. We would, therefore, earnestly request our churches to consider whether they are doing all they ought to do to manifest the oneness of the people of God. Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately? Should they not acknowledge the fact that they often allow themselves to be separated from each other by secular forces and influences instead of witnessing together to the sole Lordship of Christ who gathers his people out of all nations, races and tongues?"

Although the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, they have co-operated in the work of the Faith and Order Commission and of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and consequently much progress has been made together in the promotion of Ecumenism.

Joint Working Group

A Joint Working Group of the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church was constituted in 1965 and we have now celebrated the 30th Anniversary of its foundation. It will be helpful for us to note its achievements and its failures. There are very special difficulties that we have to face when we seek to cooperate as two widely different constituencies. The language we use and our perspectives differ greatly. Consequently, this task of forging a mechanism for co-operation is very difficult and very urgent. The WCC has constantly been studying the nature of the unity that we seek. Basically, the Joint Working Group has recognised the importance of understanding the Unity of the Churches not as absorption into a monolithic whole but the acceptance of diversity. Some of our Churches, notably the Anglican Communion, has for a long time now recognised the need to accept the role of the papacy; but it will not be a papacy that concentrates authority at the very top but a papacy that gives expression to an authority discovered and formulated in conciliarity. There is no way in which the various Churches throughout the world in their extremely wide diversity will ever accept a single norm. The unity of the Church will have to take the form of a unity in diversity. In some sense, this is not a new model for the Church since from the very earliest times the Church has accommodated diversity of practice and order whilst striving for unity of the faith.

This attempt to discover a new model for the unity of the Church will be of significance to the whole of humankind since the unity of the Church must be a symbol for the unity of humankind. All our institutions, both religious and secular, contain within themselves both exclusivist, introspective self-preserving elements and inclusivist, outward looking, accommodative elements. In the contemporary world, it is necessary for us to distinguish between these two tendencies and emphasize the latter in the interest of building community both among Christians and humankind in general. We stand on the threshold of discovering new forms of human cooperation both in religious and secular societies. This new form will have to be built on the recognition of the need for acceptance, forgiveness, renewal, building trust and working in hope. All these are essential preconditions without which the human family will not be able to experience unity. It is only in such a spirit that we can discover our cosmic unity, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Memories of the past must be healed and the ultimate truths of religion must be emphasised as the foundation of human community. Despite the fact that the Joint Working Group was able to make only a very little progress in building up structures of unity, nevertheless, this group

was able to discover the areas where joint action between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC is possible.

The Joint Working Group in its early years greatly emphasised the importance of dialogue at all levels. It is only when people meet and talk together that we can begin to build up structures of unity.

Under the auspices of the Joint Working Group two Study Commissions were formed on 'Catholicity and Apostolicity' and the other on 'Common Witness and Proselytism' (*Ecumenical Review* 23, 1971). The Joint Working Group also published a very useful study on 'Patterns of Relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches' (*Ecumenical Review* 24, 1972).

The Joint Working Group recognised that it was premature to expect the Roman Catholic Church to seek membership in the WCC in the near future. However, areas of cooperation must be discovered and pursued. It is my view that this principle will also have to govern the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and CCA. Some of the areas in which the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC have co-operated remarkably well are the following: the Christian Medical Commission, The Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group and the Joint Committee on Society Development and Peace (SODEPAX).

The Joint Working Group also initiated a survey of Roman Catholic participation in Councils of Churches at regional, national and local levels. This study was published by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity – SPCU in 1975. This group studied social thought and action focussed on development, peace and human rights. They later studied racism and apartheid. The results of this study were presented by the CCIA and Pontifical Commission "*Justitia et Pax*" in 1982.

Joint participation between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC in the Commissions on 'Faith and Order' and on 'World Mission and Evangelism' is well known. Perhaps, the most significant area in which cooperation among all our Churches has been evident is in the preparation for and observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January each year.

There has been considerable cooperation among all our Churches in the areas of interfaith dialogue and our response to the challenges of science and technology. The Ecumenical Institute in Bossey has also increasingly invited active participation of the Roman Catholic Church. In more recent times, the Joint Working Group was able to put out two documents on the 'Church, Local and Universal' and the 'Hierarchy of Truths' and these studies have very greatly increased understanding among our Churches.

On the negative side it must be noted that efforts to participate jointly in the programme for 'Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation' ended in failure and perhaps there are lessons to be learnt from that sad experience.

Second Vatican Council

The ecumenical endeavour found much encouragement at the Second Vatican Council and we recall with much joy the decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, of 1964 which spelt out clear guidelines in the task of ecumenism for the Roman Catholic Church. More recently, the Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* provides much encouragement to members of the Roman Catholic Church to continue the task of seeking the unity of the Church.

Ecumenical Winter

Some of us have been speaking recently about an Ecumenical Winter and a freezing of the relationships among the Churches in recent years. However, an Ecumenical Spring now seems to be approaching and the Fifth Conference on Faith & Order held in Santiago de Compostela in 1994 and the Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* seem to be indications that the Ecumenical Spring is here.

Christian Conference of Asia

The Christian Conference of Asia, formally the EACC, the "EACC," has always clearly stated that the unity of the Churches is the first of its objectives. Asia is able to boast that we have seen the formation of three United Churches which include Churches that claim the historic episcopate, namely the Church of South India, the Church of North India, the Church of Pakistan and the Church of Bangladesh. We also have in Asia another phenomenon of a United Church which includes the historic episcopate in some sense, namely the China Christian Council. But this United Church is not so much the fruit of ecumenical endeavour as the result of political circumstances.

However, it must be admitted that ecumenical cooperation among Churches in Asia is at a very low ebb, if we consider cooperation among other Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. In Australia, Taiwan, Malaysia and in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Roman Catholic Church cooperates in National Councils of Churches and much progressive work has been achieved in these countries. However, in other Asian countries, cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches has been sadly lacking.

The CCA brings together 119 Churches in 16 Asian countries. The

total membership of these Churches exceeds 50 million. There is a very great variety among these 119 Churches. They include the ancient Orthodox Churches of India, Anglican Churches with a historic episcopate in several countries, Lutheran and Calvinist Churches stemming from the European Reformation, American and British Methodist Churches, Baptist Churches and some Pentecostal Churches of more recent historic origin.

Within the CCA it has been possible for us to identify common objectives and areas in which common action is possible. Nevertheless, our efforts in the direction of promoting the Unity of Churches does not permit us to congratulate ourselves in any way.

The CCA includes Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and we are glad that in some of the countries represented in CCA there have been bilateral and multilateral conversations among Churches and that in Australia these conversations have led to the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Ecumenism in Asia

We are of the view that ecumenism in Asia should be a very high priority for all of us who are concerned with the extension of God's Kingdom and the spread of the gospel in Asian lands. Asia is the home of all the world's historical religions. With the exception of the Philippines, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, Christians form a very small minority in the other Asian countries. This tiny minority of Christians faces enormous problems in the contemporary Asian scene.

With the exception of Japan, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, all our countries are poor and belong to the Third World. Our people live below the poverty line and endure dehumanising poverty. Many of our countries face violence and internecine warfare among our own people. In many lands there is political instability and democracy has not yet found deep roots among most of our people. Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are very active in many Asian countries and pose a challenge to the Gospel. In several Asian countries human rights are restricted and Christians are unable to witness to their Faith and propagate the Gospel in freedom.

On the one hand, these factors make the Christian task extremely urgent and, on the other, they make our task extremely difficult.

Cooperation Among Christian Churches

In this context more meaningful cooperation among all Christian Churches is of paramount importance. The fact that in several Asian countries the Roman Catholic Church is the largest and the strongest

Church makes cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and the other Churches an objective that we must earnestly strive after. It is clear that some of the Christian Churches that are most active in Asia are fundamentalist Churches that constitute a threat to the mainline Churches and the Churches that have been established over the centuries. We need to make a clear distinction between fundamentalist Churches and Evangelical Churches. One of the tasks that we must address jointly as CCA and FABC is the whole question of how we face Christian Fundamentalism, while acknowledging the positive elements of the Evangelical emphasis.

I would like to remind this Consultation of the objectives of ecumenical cooperation that have been spelt out by the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. It is indeed true that a doctrinal framework is necessary for ecumenical co-operation. The Faith and Order Commission has called upon all Churches:

- to recognise each other's baptism on the basis of the BEM document;
- to move towards the recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed through the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the life and witness of one another;
- on the basis of convergence in faith in baptism, Eucharist and ministry to consider, wherever appropriate, forms of eucharistic hospitality; we gladly acknowledge that some who do not observe these rites share in the spiritual experience of life in Christ;
- to move towards a mutual recognition of ministries;
- to endeavour in word and deed to give common witness to the Gospel as a whole;
- to recommit themselves to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking more closely the search for sacramental communion of the Church with the struggles for justice and peace;
- to help parishes and communities express in appropriate ways locally the degree of communion that already exists.

These are challenges which our Churches should accept as objectives of ecumenical cooperation. I would specially like to emphasise the importance of the mutual recognition of Baptism because this seems to be an essential condition for our work together. Unless we recognise the Baptism of one another, we would have no basis for ecumenical cooperation.

In Asia, we must recognise the existence of many active Evangelical and Fundamentalist Churches. We have to distinguish clearly between these two categories. While Fundamentalism constitutes a danger to all religions not least to the historical Christian Churches, Evangelicalism belongs to a

different order and it should be possible for us to accept the evangelical revival which is a phenomenon present in all our Churches as a positive development. One of the great difficulties we have in cooperating with evangelical Churches is the refusal on the part of some of them to recognise the Baptism of other Christians. This question needs to be studied at depth and resolved.

The Task Ahead

It will be necessary for us to define the work that could be jointly undertaken in Asian countries by CCA and the FABC. I would like specifically to make the following suggestions:

1. The goal of visible unity must never be lost sight of. It is with such a vision before us that we must cooperate with one another in the Ecumenical Movement. The Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1994 put out a report on 'Fuller *Koinonia*'. At this Conference it must be emphasised that the goal of visible unity was clearly spelt out, but at the same time the Conference recommended an interim relationship of *Koinonia* and greater fellowship among our Churches. Visible unity will remain a vision and a dream for a long time to come given the wide variety of ecclesiastical communities that now exist in the world and the wide discrepancy in our different understandings of ecclesiology. In this context, *Koinonia* among the Churches may be a fruitful concept and we ought to explore it further in an effort to understand what fellowship among Christian communities means for us in Asia today.
2. *Koinonia* in Faith, Life and Witness as understood at Compostela includes the following concepts.

At the very heart of the Godhead is the Holy Trinity. The mysterious life of divine communion provides us with a pattern of communion which all Churches should seek to follow. It is only through prayer and contemplation that the mystery of the divine Trinity and unity can be experienced. It is in this light that a cohesive ecumenical vision becomes possible for us.

The Trinity teaches us that personal and relational unity come before institutional and organisational unity. There must be a growth in personal relationships in the Church's life. We must be at peace with one another, learn to forgive and above all trust and love one another.

Koinonia is also decisive in our present understanding of the person of Christ. Just as Jesus Christ combines in His person the

divine and the human, so the Church brings together what is sacred and what is secular. In so far as we are a divine community we already experience unity in Christ, but in so far as we are a human secular community, barriers continue to divide us. These contradictions within the life of the Church need to be understood and grappled with.

These truths persuade us that the very structure of the church is relational. These relationships must be explored and celebrated. The theme of *Koinonia* contributes a quality of life and existential relevance to our discussion on Church unity.

3. The Faith and Order Commission of the WCC boasts that the Lima document on Baptism Eucharist and Ministry published in 1982 marks a very important stage in the development of ecumenical relations throughout the world. All our Churches including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches and some Pentecostal Churches reached a consensus, if not total agreement, on the subjects of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry that have proved to be divisive down the centuries.

This document needs to be translated into more Asian languages and studied with great diligence by us all. It will be of very great help if CCA and FABC could jointly sponsor the publication of an Asian Edition of the Lima document which could be widely discussed and used for study by Asian Churches. Such an effort is bound to promote ecumenical endeavour in all our Asian countries.

4. Much cooperation is possible even at this time in the area of liturgy and worship. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity must be observed throughout Asia with much greater enthusiasm by us all. It appears that this observance too has now declined and an effort will have to be made to revive its observance.

On special days in the year like Christmas, Easter and Good Friday it should be possible for us to meet together in joint acts of worship and for joint witness. These are activities that could be promoted jointly by CCA and FABC.

The Joint Task Force of CCA and FABC has already suggested some areas in which joint study and action among us will be possible. While endorsing all these suggestions, I would like to emphasize the importance of adopting a common lectionary so that all our Churches could reflect on the same themes and the same passages of scripture Sunday by Sunday.

Cooperation in education is vital for all the Churches in Asia. Good Christian education is the answer to the challenge of Fundamentalism and

the temptation to establish syncretistic relationships with other religions and secular ideologies. We must seek to cooperate in the education of our own children and members within the life of the Churches. In some Asian countries religious education is included in the syllabus of secondary schools and also in universities.

Here too there is opportunity for collaboration among the Churches. Human rights, especially the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is threatened in many Asian countries either implicitly or explicitly. This is also an area in which collaboration among all the Churches is extremely important. In some Asian countries, Christians are denied the right to engage in evangelistic work. This is partly because of aggressive, unethical styles of evangelism adopted by some of the Churches. This is also an area where joint study and action seems to be of very great importance. We must especially guard against new forms of evangelistic imperialism emanating both from Western countries still, and in some instances, even from our own Asian countries.

The use of violence to bring about political and social change is a common phenomenon in many Asian countries. In some countries, this has taken the form of organised terrorist activity. It is the task of the Churches together to study this phenomenon and the factors that produce it. We must also place before our country methods of non-violent activity to bring about political and social change.

Finally, I would like to suggest to the Joint Task Force of CCA and FABC that we should set up a number of small groups to study some of the issues that call for urgent attention so that we may approach them jointly.

Ecumenism, if it is to be real, must be local and initiatives taken by CCA and FABC must be taken down to the national and the local levels. It is in the villages and towns of Asia that Christians must witness together to our oneness in Christ and the most important precondition for relationships of that kind will be the common courtesy and the love that must bind Christians, both Clergy and lay persons, together at the local level.

A VISION OF ECUMENICAL UNITY AND MISSION

Fr. J.B. Banawiratma, S.J.

“All Christ’s faithful . . . the more purely they strive to live according to the Gospel, the more they are fostering and even practicing Christian unity” (*UUS*, 20; *UR*, 7).

Let us begin with Anthony De Mello’s fanciful vision of Jesus’ attendance at an ecumenical football game open our discussion on the vision of ecumenical unity.

“Jesus Christ said he had never been to a football match, so we took him to one, my friends and I. It was a ferocious battle between the Protestant Punchers and the Catholic Crusaders.

The Crusaders scored first. Jesus cheered wildly and threw his hat high in the air. Then the Punchers scored, and Jesus cheered wildly and threw his hat high in the air.

This seemed to puzzle the man behind us. He tapped Jesus on the shoulder and asked, ‘Which side are you shouting for, my good man?’ ‘Me?’ replied Jesus, by now visibly excited by the game. ‘Oh! I’m not shouting for either side. I’m just here to enjoy the game.’ The questioner turned to his neighbour and sneered, ‘Hmm, an atheist!’

On the way back we briefed Jesus on the religious situation of the world today. ‘It’s a funny thing about religious people, Lord,’ we said. ‘They always seem to think that God is on their side and against those on the other side.’ Jesus agreed. ‘That is why I don’t back religions, I back people,’ he said. ‘People are more important than religions. A human person is more important than the Sabbath.’ ‘You ought to watch your words,’ one of us said with some concern. ‘You were crucified once for saying that sort of thing, you know.’ ‘Yes – and by religious people,’ said Jesus with a wry smile.”¹

Decisive is neither the one or the other club but the game they play, which of course needs both clubs to be available to do so. It seems that this also is the case with our ecumenical unity in Asian contexts. In this paper, I will focus on the following four points:

- (1) Ecumenical unity: not a goal in itself
- (2) The primacy of evangelium-praxis
- (3) Reopening our traditions: ecclesial transformation
- (4) Contextual ecumenism: transeclesial mission

¹ A. De Mello, *The Song of the Bird*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1982: 190-191.

Ecumenical Unity: not a goal in itself

Many ecumenical contacts in Asia find their expressions in ritual ceremonies at Christmas time under the umbrella of governmental institutions. Others might have prayer groups without having common social engagement. Besides intramural ecumenism, the dialectic of ecumenical praxis-reflection still occurs less frequently among our Christian communities.

Another example is the experience of EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians). "Five main issues have influenced EATWOT's dialogue on theological methodology: class, culture, religion, gender, and race".² Those five issues are in fact interconnected Third World problems, which should be analyzed and reflected upon in the light of the Gospel. EATWOT's concern for praxis-based and praxis-oriented reflection presupposed people's and communities' praxis. This, however, seems to be not the general atmosphere of Asian ecumenical unity.

In the context of poverty, social injustice and threat of ecological destruction, our ecumenical unity should be oriented to those problems.³ Moreover, in the context of Asian multireligiosity, those concerns should be brought out in transecclesial commitments.⁴ By doing so we develop our Churches more and more from being Churches in Asia to becoming Asian Churches.

The ecumenical endeavor, to be one in Christ, is not a matter of activities, but a way of being Church. Therefore ecumenical unity is not a goal in itself. The goal of ecumenical unity is the goal of all Churches, that is, to be in Christ, so that where Christ is, there His disciples may be also; not only after His second coming (Jn 14:3), but now on the earth (Mt 25:34-40). The goal of ecumenical unity is to develop the oneness in Christ, to follow the Way, and the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6).

Led by the Holy Spirit who carries on the sending of Jesus, the Church is also missionary. The oneness Jesus wants is as the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father (Jn 17:21), an intimate relationship in mission (*UUS*, 23). Jesus' mission is to proclaim the Reign of God, which "is like yeast

² J.H. Cone, "EATWOT: Its Past, Present and Future", *Voices from the Third World*, 1995, XIII/1: 23.

³ E. Castro, "JPIC A Conciliar Process", *The Ecumenical Review*, 1992, 44:292-303; J.B. Banawiratma, "Gerakan Oikumenis: Mau Ke mana?", J.B. Banawiratma, ed., *Tempat dan Arah Gerakan Oikumenis*, Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 1994, p. 73.

⁴ Th. Sumartana, "Gerakan Oikumenis dalam Perspektif Historis-teologis", *Tempat dan Arah Gerakan Oikumenis*, p. 37.

that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Lk 13:21). To enter into the movement of God's Reign is to be a leaven of transformation in this world.

The life and mission of the church is Biblically depicted in many ways. Christ's disciples are sent to make the disciples of all nations, that is, to know, love, and follow Him, to work for and with Him. We find also the image of light and salt. "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot" (Mt 5:13). "You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:14-16). To be with and to follow Christ means to share in His life and mission to transform this world, to be the sign of God's presence and action, to glorify the Father.

Our unity in the life and mission of Christ takes place in our concrete Asian contexts. Therefore, we should develop ecumenism through an approach of contextual unity and mission rather than an approach of full unity. Based on the already existing unity, it grows as far as achievable through conciliar process.

The Primacy of *Evangelium-Praxis*

To be in ecumenical unity is the way of being Church, that is, to be within Christ and His mission. This Christian life is not primarily expressed in talking, but accomplished in doing (Mt 7:21). The decisive moment of our religious life is the moment of orthopraxis.⁵ Without denying the meaning of words, which articulate interpretation and give orientation to the new praxis, the *evangelium-praxis*, "words unspoken", has the primacy.

The moment of praxis is a moment of silence, not talking about God, Christ and ecumenical unity. With praxis we mean both action and contemplation, where by the work of the Holy Spirit we "hear and understand", and "bear fruit and yield, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (Rom 5:5; Mt 13:23). It is the moment of Christo-praxis, the moment of God-walk.

In the Ignatian tradition, to live as a contemplative in action opens people to the Holy Spirit's teaching and guidance to find God in all things, as the Holy One working within the world and inviting people to take part. Frère Roger Schutz of Taizé speaks about the unity between struggle and contemplation (*lutte et contemplation*), whereas Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks

⁵ E. Gerrit Singgih, "Katolik dan Protestan Sekarang Ini", *Tempat dan Arah Gerakan Oikumenis*, p. 15.

about the dialectical unity between prayer and faithfulness to the Earth (*Gebet und Treue zur Erde*).

Action and contemplation need interpretation and verbal communication. In our ecumenical movement, it can manifest itself in the forms of a) sharing of faith experience and prayer, b) sharing of analysis and reflection, and c) prophetic witness.

Ut unum sint invites all Christians through common prayer around Christ to grow in awareness of what little divides them in comparison to what unites them (*UUS*, 22). What unites them is to be one in Christ. Based upon and for the sake of being more united in Christ, all Christians are called to a greater awareness of ecumenical unity and mission through sharing of faith experience and prayer. In the moment of analysis and reflection, we clarify our hearing and understanding of the *Logos* speaking to us and of the *Sophia* teaching us, where we read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. Then we let the light shine, so that people know what is going on, where lie the conflicts between God's Reign and the power of anti-God's Reign. Serving as prophetic witnesses, they are the leaven of transformation towards integral liberation for all. The moment of God-talk is again and again oriented to the moment of God-walk or Christo-praxis. It is a way of doing ecumenism, that is, to be with Christ where He is, to follow the Spirit who blows where S/He chooses.

What Pope John Paul II says about the Church's social message in his 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, is also true for the Church's proclamation in general:

"Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message [read also: her proclamation] will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of her preferential option for the poor, which is never exclusive or discriminatory toward other groups (*CA*, 57)."

Ut Unum Sint describes solidarity as one of the fruits of dialogue (*UUS*, 43). Nevertheless, in our interecclesial or even trans-ecclesial ecumenism we can also perceive a movement from the opposite direction.

"The church-to-church ecumenism could also be the **spontaneous outcome of a common endeavor to discover the Asian face of Christ**, that is to say, inter-ecclesial ecumenism here in Asia ought to be a **by-product** of the new praxis which is trans-ecclesial, Christ-centred and world-oriented."⁶

⁶ A. Pieris, "Contemporary Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ", P. A. de Achutegui, ed., *Towards A "Dialogue of Life"*: Ecumenism in the Asian Context, Manila: Ateneo University Publications, 1976, p. 162.

To be able to be one in Christ and to glorify God, in solidarity for and with the poor Asian face of Christ, is the urgent demand of ecumenical unity. As we have already heard from Irenaeus, the glory of God is reflected in humanity restored to full life: "*Gloria Dei vivens homo*". Furthermore, there will be no fully restored humanity unless the oppression of the poor is overcome, in the words of Oscar Romero: "*Gloria Dei vivens pauper*".⁷ Our salvation is in following Jesus where He is, in restoring humanity to full life, in glorifying God.

From the feminist liberation movement and theology, we learn that patriarchy (or later called kyriarchy) is so deeply rooted in our cultures that poor women are doubly oppressed because they are poor and because they are women, or even triply, due to racial discrimination. Therefore, no integral liberation, no social justice for all shall be achieved without gender justice. From eco-feminism we learn that gender injustice is deeply connected with eco-injustice, since patriarchy suppresses sensitivity to life. Accordingly Third World women's theology is "at the service of all who struggle for wholeness of life and liberation".⁸ In all cases the poor and oppressed will suffer the worst of the ecological catastrophe since no alternative way of living is available for them. Hence, in the context of interconnected problems of social injustice, gender injustice and the threat of ecological destruction, our solidarity must focus on empowering people to struggle for social justice in the context of gender justice and caring for the environment.

If we accept the primacy of praxis in our ecumenical movement, it will be clear who can contribute to ecumenical unity. They are 1) the poor and the oppressed who suffer social injustice, 2) women who suffer social and gender injustice, and 3) the environment which suffers eco-injustice.

Reopening Our Traditions: Ecclesial Transformation

To be consistent with what was said above, we need to reopen our traditions from the perspective of the primacy of *evangelium-praxis*. There will be no progress in ecumenical unity without an ecclesial transformation in which our churches will not be hindered by traditions and vested interests, so they will be willing and able to cross the walls, carry the risks, endure wounds with patience, and undergo emotional, intellectual and moral conversion. Ecclesial transformation is no more and no less than the demands of placing the Gospel at the core of ecumenical unity (*UUS*, 20).

⁷ J.W. De Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology, A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Cape Town: David Philip Pub., 1991, p. 137.

⁸ V. Fabella, *Beyond Bonding, A Third World Woman's Theological Journey*, Manila: EATWOT and Institute of Women's Studies, 1993, p. 110.

“As the gospel emerges more powerfully in the forms of Church life, we often discover, painfully sometimes, that the demands of God go against what at one time we had thought to be essentially related to the Church but which, in the light of the gospel, we discover to be part of our tradition by external custom rather than by inner necessity. Then we must accept the transformation even on the ecclesiastical level.”⁹

Certain Christian traditions reinterpreted from the concern for orthopraxis can bring themselves closer to and be united with other Christian traditions. The reflection of John W. de Gruchy from the experience of crisis in South Africa, for example, comes to the conclusion that the Christian tradition under the influence of John Calvin (“Reformed theology”): “is best understood as a liberating theology that is catholic in its substance, evangelical in principle, and socially engaged and prophetic in its witness”.¹⁰

I ask myself whether Catholic theology is not best understood as a liberating theology, that is, contextually reformed, evangelical in principle, socially engaged and prophetic in its witness? Christian theologies should become part of the contextual struggle for and with the people for liberation to achieve full humanity. Then theology is not only “God-talk” business, but “God-act” oriented.

We cannot deny the facts of our own traditions. The unity of different traditions does **not** mean to absolve one or the other. It would impoverish our Christian life were we to pretend to have no differences. In the Paschal celebration, people sing the Easter Proclamation, the *Exultet*, which proclaims: “O happy fault, o necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer”. We can also sing “O happy fault, o necessary sin of division, which has gained for us such rich traditions communicating the life of Christ”. We are called to accept the new life in Christ and the richness of our traditions communicating it. The crux of the matter is not to abolish traditions, but to desacralize our own traditions in order to cross-fertilize each other. Hence, our ecumenical unity and mission must be done in humility, self-criticism and critical dialogue. Ecumenical unity is not to be achieved by mode of expansion of one over another, but by a mode of accepting our limits and extending our openness. The problem is how to distinguish between “Yes” to the decisiveness and relational distinctiveness of Jesus Christ and “No” to an exclusive Church tradition for the sake of being a faithful Church, of being in Christ’s life and mission. In this way our ecumenical journey goes through an approach of contextual unity rather

⁹ G. Baum’s introduction to Roger Schutz’s understanding of ecumenism, in R. Schutz, *Unity: Man’s Tomorrow*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1963, p. 6.

¹⁰ De Gruchy, p. xii.

than of full unity. It is a journeying together in the Spirit of Christ. This is in fact the core of our conciliar process.

Ut unum sint mentions five areas in need of fuller study: 1) the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, 2) the Eucharist, 3) Ordination, 4) the Magisterium of the Church, and 5) Mary (*UUS*, 79). To be consistent with the primacy of Gospel praxis, doctrinal study should become auxiliary to it. This is an understanding of ecumenism that seeks what unites rather than what divides, with full respect to all distinctiveness, through the communication of truth, justice and love.

The ecclesiological renewal of Vatican II holds that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church. Nevertheless many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside it. Also, the Universal Church is rediscovered as the communion of local Churches under the entire college of bishops, of which the bishop of Rome is the head (*LG* 8, 22, 26). Accordingly within the Catholic Church, contextual or local communities are recognized, and unity is not found in uniformity but in the pluriformity.¹¹ Along this line, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference envisions being a new Church, a "participatory Church" which will have to be "a communion of communities". Their concrete forms are Basic Ecclesial (Christian) Communities. They consist of neighborhood groups gathered by the word of God to pray and share the Gospel of Jesus, living their daily lives, in one mind and heart realizing their mission.¹² This is the way to transform the life of the Church from below. A similar direction is occurring in Europe where the future of the Church is envisioned as the "Grass-roots Church" (*Basiskirche*).¹³

Based on our fundamental unity in Christ, we can envision the development of Basic Christian (Ecclesial) Communities to become ecumenical communities, namely Basic Inter-ecclesial Communities. Even their leadership can be analogically understood as "collegial" in as much as their leaders are together reading the signs of the times, discerning the call of God's Reign and mediating the Gospel praxis. Then, we have visible forms of unity in the communion of communities and communion of leadership.

¹¹ T. Jacobs, "Katolik dan Protestan Sekarang Ini", *Tempat dan Arah Gerakan Oikumenis*, pp. 6-7.

¹² FABC, "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium," Statement of Fifth Plenary Assembly, 1990: 8.1, in G.B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Quezon City: Claretian Pub., 1992, p.287.

¹³ J.B Metz, "Kirche als Basiskirche" (*Jenseits bürgerlicher Religion*), K.-J. Kuschel, *Lust an der Erkenntnis: Die Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München: Piper, 1994, pp. 213-224.

Through the contextual approach to ecumenical unity, all Christians could be grateful for the unity achieved on all levels.

Ecclesial transformation from below will raise a question of authority. Here also we can learn from the feminist liberation perspective, since both ecumenism and feminism touch the problem of authority.¹⁴ We have to confess that within our Churches there is also gender injustice. How far can all within the Churches recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers, unless we are willing to tackle the problem of authority?¹⁵

The problem of authority arises also through an awareness of plurality in all aspects of life, which characterizes our societies today. In the area of religious experience, this plurality has been expanded through the shift of the experience of God, from extrinsicism to intrinsicism, from Outsider-God to Insider-God, from God outside the world to God inside the world. Accordingly, there is also a shift from the experience of religious authority (Bible, traditions, magisterium) to the authority of religious experience. The radical plurality in all aspects of our life has brought on a crisis of authority in religious life. The authority of the Churches is subject to criticism. Nevertheless, it can function to create Basic Christian Communities which open themselves out to Basic Human Communities and thereby articulate and mediate the praxis of the liberating communities. As Pieris puts it:

“The magisterial role in the Asian church has to be earned by the Master’s competence to mediate liberation. Authority makes no external claims. Authority is competence to communicate freedom.”¹⁶

The above considerations affirm our commitment towards an approach of reopening our traditions and transforming our Churches from below.

Contextual Ecumenism: Trans-ecclesial Mission

In the context of religious pluralism we have to prevent our Christian communities from becoming alienated “Christian tribes”. A new way of

¹⁴ M. O’Garra, “Ecumenism and Feminism in Dialogue on Authority”, M. A. May, ed., *Women and Church, The Challenge of Ecumenical Solidarity in an Age of Alienation*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, New York: Friendship, 1991, pp. 118-137; in the same volume, K.S. Hurty, “Ecumenical Leadership: Power and Women’s Voices”, pp. 88-100; N.L. Cocks, “Ecumenical Social Thought: A Christian Feminist Voice”, *The Ecumenical Review*, 1991, 43: 341-348.

¹⁵ Sun Ai Lee Park, “A New Phase in the Ecumenical Movement: One Woman’s Perspective on Asian Activities”, *Women and Church, The Challenge of Ecumenical Solidarity in an Age of Alienation*, p. 162.

¹⁶ A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 86.

being contextual Church should be the Church in dialogue and social transformation: "Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and cultures" (NA, 2).

From there the truth of the Gospel proclamation gains its credibility. As a human and limited reality, the Church can only exercise her mission and become dynamic communities of faith if she becomes communities of dialogue and transformation. By so living, the Church can become more and more the communities of Christ's disciples who are "not of this world", but "in this world", characterized by the messianic sign (*Messianische Kirche*)¹⁷ becoming the "sacrament of salvation" (LG, 1).

We need a critical dialogue between cultural and religious experiences with the symbols in the Christian traditions. Our goal is to uncover both the transformative and enslaving elements in all traditions, in order to cultivate the former and to eliminate the latter. Together with brothers and sisters of other faiths, the Basic Inter-ecclesial Communities should open towards Basic Human Communities.¹⁸

A Basic Human Community can be described as a small community involved in social activities to eliminate suffering, struggle for a just society, and sustain the development of people and the environment. Primarily, they are poor people empowering themselves. Secondly, they can be the facilitators struggling for and with them. They are crossing the boundaries of religions and beliefs, they are united in a life situation and a life concern.

From the Christian perspective the concern of Basic Human Communities is fundamentally one related to Christian orthopraxis. In our Christian language it is a struggle for God's Reign. Hence, the Basic Human Community is a community of God's Reign. Basic Human Community is a response to the demand of Christian faith in our multicultural and multireligious context.

The above considerations suggest that our ecumenical endeavor proceeds through a contextual approach, rather than from that of full unity. Within this approach in the same manner as in the life of the Church, Gospel praxis has its primacy. From the perspective of the Gospel praxis we should reread our rich traditions with integrity and openness to each other.

¹⁷ J. Moltmann, "Kirche als messianischer Gemeinde" (*Messianischer Lebensstil*), *Lust an der Erkenntnis: Die Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts*, pp.225-236.

¹⁸ Pieris, "Contemporary Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ", pp. 57-58, and *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 121.

The primacy of Gospel praxis demands the transformation of the churches from below, in which the participation of women in the process as well as in decision making is not excluded. The transformation of the Church from below has already begun in the Basic Christian (Ecclesial) Communities, which can be developed into Basic Inter-ecclesial Communities. Moreover, our contextual ecumenism in Asia demands the building of Basic Human Communities which empower the poor and oppressed towards integral liberation. The way of ecumenical unity is no more and no less than the way of being Church today.

G O D
all in all
(cfr. 1 Cor 15:28)



GLORIFY GOD

ALTERNATIVE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES:

Basic Christian (Inter-ecclesial) Community,
Basic Human (Trans-ecclesial) Community,
“Communion of communities”:

- (1) Praxis: Contemplation and action
- (2) Sharing of faith and prayer
- (3) Analysis and reflection
- (4) Prophetic witness.

=

The journey of Conciliar process
towards more
“Preferential option for the poor and the oppressed”,
“Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation”,
“Social justice, Gender justice and Eco-justice”

R E I G N O F G O D
“Gloria Dei vivens homo” (Irenaeus)
“Gloria Dei vivens pauper” (O.A. Romero)

PART III

BUILDING ON WHAT UNITES US, OVERCOMING WHAT DIVIDES

THE PHILIPPINE SITUATION: EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF A SPIRITUALITY OF UNITY AT WORK

Stephen Lo, Manila, Philippines

1. Introduction

What I am going to share is very practical in nature. It springs from an experience in the Philippine situation and is backed up by the experience of the Focolare Movement in ecumenism for the past thirty years in several parts of the world. It is an experience of what we may call a dialogue of life following a spirituality of unity,¹ without departing from the fundamental norms of ecumenism. Therein, issues have arisen which bear some similarities to other Asian countries. Challenges have surfaced which must be faced. Priorities have arisen in the process which can be followed and implemented in the Philippines, and perhaps, to different degrees, elsewhere in Asia, through similar but modified initiatives.

In a pamphlet commemorating the recent ecumenical celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the Philippines, we read some significant remarks which workers of ecumenism cannot ignore:

“During the present millennium divisions among Christians have become more and more evident . . . Can the next millennium see a healing of them? In some countries, churches are losing members and seem less able to speak to the people. Are our churches complacent about the effect of their differences and division? Can we foresee a conversion and reconciliation which will enable Christians to preach the Gospel and together, give witness to it in service, vigorously and effectively ?” Can Christians regain their credibility? Can we not as Christians heed the words of the Lord seriously: “Just as I have loved you, you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13: 34)?

¹ Briefly, this is taken to mean a way of living the Gospel from the point of view of unity, the gift asked by Jesus of the Father: “That they all may be one” (Jn 17: 21). Every aspect of Christian living is directed to the achievement of this goal. The presence of Jesus among people gathered in His name (Cf. Mt 18: 20) would be an existential preparation: being united in Jesus prepares Christians to aim for the goal of ultimate visible and full unity among all Christians.

2. A Practical Note on Ecumenism

There is an increasing need to review the meaning of the ecumenical movement. I take this to mean that particular movement that covers all activities and endeavours which, according to the various needs of the Church, and on opportune occasions, are organized for the fostering of unity among Christians (UR 4). All those involved in this movement, arguably "those who confess Christ the Lord, and more generally all people who acknowledge the value of the religious in life" must bear, in the words of E. Schillebeeckx, "an attitude of mind in faith to a visible unity, not only of love and hope, but also of faith . . ."

The journey of the churches towards unity is based on common realities and values which even centuries-long divisions have not been able to undermine. Among others, these are faith in Christ the Son of God, the sacrament of baptism, and at least for some churches, other sacraments, the Sacred Scriptures, and others. Yet "there can be no ecumenism of the name without a change of heart, (where) yearnings of unity take their rise (UR 7). "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can be rightly called 'spiritual ecumenism'" (UR 8).

Ecumenism no longer remains the monopoly of experts.² All Christians (and therefore also all laypersons) are called to it. "To believe in Christ means to desire unity" (UR 9). And all are capable of it. The ecumenical process is brought forward by whomever, first among the things he does, lives out the Gospel sincerely, literally and integrally.³ As Cardinal Bea pointed out in 1968,⁴ the more the Christians of each individual denomination strive to profoundly live out the Gospel, the nearer they will approach to one another, for it is only in this way that they become more and more similar to Christ.

In many parts of the world and among many Christians, ecumenism

² "The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living [which is fundamental and the *conditio sine qua non* for unity] or in theological and historical studies" UR 5.

³ . . . he has his part in the ecumenical movement, (always and everywhere), . . . even though he does not live among . . . (other Christians), through restoring the whole Christian life according to the spirit the Gospel," *Ad Totam Ecclesiam*, "Directory concerning Ecumenical Matters: Part I, Secretariat for Christian Unity, 1967.

⁴ Inaugural Speech at the Ecumenical Life Center of the Focolare Movement, Ottmaring, Augsburg, Germany, June 23, 1968.

has increasingly become a yearning that makes the call of Jesus: "May they all be one" (Jn 17: 21) resound. The ecumenical way is the way of the Church. Perhaps this was put best by John Paul II: "the movement promoting Christian unity is not some sort of an 'appendix' which is added on to the Church's traditional activities. Rather ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does" . . . (UUS 20).

3. Building on what unites

Anyone involved in ecumenical activities or at least concerned about striving for Christian unity will spontaneously hold the deep conviction that the realities which unite Christians are much more more profound than those that could ever divide them. This has brought about affective and effective growth of communion among them, which is bound to lead to the reestablishment of full visible unity among all the baptized (UUS 77).

A list of these common elements can be easily composed. Depending on the churches, these elements may vary, but in general, the following will be found in the Asian context. I have no intention of going deeply into theology. The following reflect only what my contacts with and knowledge of the different churches, inspired by a spirituality of unity, have brought forward. We have "the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity and the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as the visible elements" (UR 3). In the word of God, implicitly though clearly, can be found:

the same **call of Christ** to His cause: "May they all be one" (Jn 17: 21),
the same **command to love** one another (cf. Jn 13: 14, and Jn 15: 12),
the same **patrimony of faith** in Christ,
the same **hundredfold in the discipleship** of Christ,
the same **shared love for the crucified and forsaken Jesus** on the
Cross,

His presence in the Word of God,⁵

His presence in the brother and sister: "Insofar as you did it to one of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40),

His presence in the community of Christians gathered in love:
"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst" (Mt 18: 20),

the very rich and sacred **liturgical heritage**.

⁵ Chiara Lubich, "One of the real presences of the Word, who is God, is therefore the word of God," *The Word of Life*, New York-Hong Kong-Manila, 1975, p. 38. Cf. also, St. Augustine, *Sermo 120, De Verbis Joan. "In principio erat Verbum"*, 2-3; PL 38: 677.

I will deal with some of these points, as they are inherent in a spirituality of unity.

4. A spirituality of unity

A. The word of God is what all Christians hold in common, treasure and depend upon, for it likens thought, word and action to those of Christ. It injects the sentiments of Christ into the hearts of everyone.⁶ It generates Christ in the Christian. Jesus becomes present in the soul when His word is listened to and treasured, reflected upon, put into action, and allowed to guide one's life.⁷ It generates Christ in communities and churches.⁸ Two persons can live in true unity with each other on condition that each is another Jesus: a living word of God, i.e. when they are 'stripped' of all that is merely human, when they have lived and incarnated the word of God so that they become living words which will be consumed in ONE.⁹

The theological value of Christian experience (in living out the word of God) is now accepted (DV 8) as a source of theological knowledge or as essential "theological ground." This enables us to perceive God, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and other divine realities as concrete. Christian experience also engenders a deeper penetration of truths of faith and their sources. There is "interior wisdom deriving from the spiritual experience of **lay persons** imbued in the Spirit of God" (DV 8).

Christian experience and theology must go together: this guarantees the penetration of the Word of God in every aspect of life of the Christian whether he or she be alone or in a community.¹⁰ For these reasons, the word of God which becomes lived out is an effective "tool" for ecumenism.

B. The Commandment of mutual love cannot be overemphasized, but must be taken as the **pearl** of the Gospel. This was done even in the apostolic period when John the Apostle in his advanced age simply repeated this admonition of Jesus wherever he went. Down the ages, this commandment has always appeared in the Rules of different Orders.¹¹

⁶ C. Lubich, op. cit., pp. 71ff.

⁷ Paul VI to the parishioners of St. Eusebius, Rome, Feb. 26, 1967.

⁸ C. Lubich, op. cit., p. 88.

⁹ C. Lubich, Letters, October 23, 1948.

¹⁰ "A Church which is founded on the 'apostles and the prophets' (Eph 2:20), on ministry and charism . . . cannot but remain faithfully enriched by the interdependence of theology and sanctity, theological doctrine and 'theology LIVED,'" M. Schneider, *Unterscheidung der Geister* (Vienna, 1981, pp. 2-3), cited by Greshake in *Problemi e Perspettive di Teologia Dogmatica* (Brescia, 1983, p. 301).

¹¹ cf. the Rule of St. Augustine, I, 3; that of St. Benedict: LXXII; that of St. Francis, Unofficial Rule, XI.

There is an added dimension. A new discovery of the emphasis on the word "as" in the formulation, interpretation and the incarnation of this Commandment is found. Faithfulness to mutual love, to the point of dying for one another, of being consumed in one, will bring about unity in Him, which presupposes unity of thought.¹² Naturally, the life of the Blessed Trinity must be imitated in this, as the three Divine Persons love one another.¹³ Evidently, it is understood that love, reciprocal love, which presupposes faith, is the condition for remaining in communion with God.

C. The presence of Christ in the Church takes at least one other form, namely, his presence in Christians, and, to some degree, in all persons. Throughout the New Testament we can read of His presence in the apostles, disciples, believers in general, in those who suffer, with whom He wants to identify in a particular manner (cf. Mt 25: 31–46). Jesus' presence in the apostles is affirmed in all four Gospels, even as they echo the Jewish tradition that the emissary is like the man himself.

The phrase "who receives you receives me" (Mt 10: 40), which originally referred only to those sent out by Jesus, was later applied to members of the Christian community.¹⁴ Paul's letters speak profusely of Christ's presence in the Christian. Departing from the general formulation, he opts for the expression to be "in Christ", which he uses to indicate the incorporation of the believer in Christ's body, which has taken place at Baptism. (This expression occurs in his letters 164 times.)¹⁵ For him, the believer becomes mystically identified with Christ. Herein is a profound union with no natural parallel, in which the distinction of persons is preserved. In addition, the Christian's life conforms to that of Christ in an experience of death and resurrection:

"You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him . . ." (Col 2: 12)

"Our old self was crucified with him . . ." (Rom 6: 6)

"If we have died with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Tim 2: 11).

For John, there is the mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer (Jn 6:56; 14:15-23; 15:5,7,23). The conditions for this are: believe in Jesus and love one another (cf. 1 Jn 3:23). The brother or sister, therefore, who is recommended to us by none other than God and who is loved immensely by God as we are, is our pathway, a shortcut, to God.

¹² cf. C. Lubich, *When our Love is Charity*, New York-Hong Kong-Manila-Melbourne, 1971, pp. 37ff.

¹³ Cf. C. Lubich, *Unità' e Comunità*, "La comunità Cristiana," in *Fides*, Oct. 1948, p.4.

¹⁴ C. Lubich, *When did we see you Lord*, New York, 1980, p. 34.

¹⁵ C. Lubich, op. cit., p. 36.

D. "I shall be with you all days until the end of time" (Mt 28: 20). This is the guarantee that Jesus gives the apostles and all generations of Christians. He also gives a practical moment-to-moment possibility for achieving it: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst" (Mt 18: 20). Here we have Jesus who comes in person, as the personification of the Old Testament idea of the "God who is near."

"Jesus in the midst" is definitely one form of Jesus' presence.¹⁶ He is immediately present whenever Christians are gathered in His name, in His will, in practicing mutual love.¹⁷ His presence is the Church: "where three [are gathered together], even if they are **lay persons**, there is the Church."¹⁸ As can be expected, "Jesus in the midst" of brothers and/or sisters living together is the "salvation" in all kinds of difficulties caused, for example, by religious intolerance, a materialistic mentality and way of life, or a complete absence of the knowledge of Jesus.¹⁹ The reality of "being united" is one of blessing, protection and security.²⁰

The Decree on Ecumenism exhorts the faithful to live according to the Gospel, and to use the *consenserint*²¹ to beseech the grace of unity among Christians (UR 8). Thus, Christians must be "one" (united) in groups, in whatever manner they can, so that therein all are one, in which case the movement to full visible unity will proceed and will one day be achieved.

E. The crucified and Forsaken Jesus²²

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mt 27:46)? This occasion is said to be the one on which Jesus had suffered most. In general, one appreciates love most when one suffers most. So Jesus has to be loved most for when He feels forsaken on the Cross: by God and by men. His suffering, besides being physical, was also moral, psychological, spiritual and ontological, and His suffering continues today in that of the visible Church and of the whole humankind (cf. Acts 9: 5; Col 1: 24). He was all wisdom, yet had to ask a question to God. He felt he had been deserted by God. He sort of lost His identity.

¹⁶ Cf. Origen, "In Isaiam hom.", 1, 5 (PG 13, 223-4).

¹⁷ Theophylact, Bishop of Bulgaria, "Enarr. in evang. Matth. 18: 19-20," PG 123: 343.

¹⁸ Tertullian, "De Exhortatione castitatis," 7 PL 2: 922.

¹⁹ Cf. C. Lubich, *Jesus in the Midst*, Manila, 1976, pp. 24-26.

²⁰ Cf. Niceta Pectoratus, "Practicorum capitum centuria," 1, 77, PG 120: 887, and John Chrysostom, "In Ep. ad Hebr.," 19, 1, PG 63: 140.

²¹ to pray together in the name of Jesus: "... if on earth two of you are united in asking for anything, it will be done for them by my heavenly Father" (Mt 18: 19).

²² Cf. C. Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*, Manila, Hong Kong, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 43-102.

When one suffers and recalls the abandonment of Jesus, he can participate in His suffering, and identify himself with Him, loving Him as a spouse with an exclusive love. This love bears a consequence which unites him with Christ, and which brings him over up to the stage of Jesus' Resurrection. The forsaken Jesus, who transformed suffering into love, has wrought the unity of man with God and the unity of all among themselves, as this is believed and experienced, and as an experience that all Christians can have.

Being an example of external as well as interior detachment, the forsaken Jesus brings about supernatural unity. We can expect Him to lead us to overcome every possible disunity, including the wounds of separation among Christians.

All these considerations give rise to the possibility of three forms of "effective and affective communion" among the Christian faithful: namely, **with Jesus in the word of God**, with Him **in the neighbour** and, **in the community**, with "Jesus in the midst". Among Catholics there is an extra form of communion, namely, that with Jesus in the Eucharist.

5. The Philippine Experience

The Philippine experience has been inspired by the above-mentioned spirituality of unity. The efforts of building unity among churches have been a **dialogue of life** in its most varied expressions, including the dialogue of love, of facts, and of hearts. For the past 5–6 years, it has gone through the stages of mutual awareness and interest, reciprocal service and understanding, cooperation, companionship, concern, friendship, fraternity and unity. This dialogue has then been extended to other groups and churches through networking and a sharing of life and experience, with or without the spoken word, officially and, above all, unofficially or non-officially.

A life of unity has grown among several churches. Previously, ecumenism had never presented itself as a real possibility, with each church going its own way. Few, perhaps, were aware of the existence of the others. By 1996, because of the above-mentioned "growth", the situation has changed greatly. A broader span of common interest has emerged, with more frequent encounters and deeper relationships. This has progressed from the official to the friendly and fraternal, from feast-making to deep soul-searching, from celebration to activities to shared life, and from high level encounters to level of the grass-roots. It includes the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC).

As seen in the program of "ecumenical celebration" which usually takes place around the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, this has grown

from a few simple liturgical celebrations, to many, varied manifestations which have proved:

- a) to show more life (sharing of experiences of living out the word of God), which has yielded a simple effective spirituality of ecumenism;²³
- b) to pay attention to more sectors of society, especially the youth who thus absorb an ecumenical mentality;
- c) to showcase a greater unity already acquired through the preparations.

In these, there has been an increasingly rich spiritual experience of the life of unity. This had already been built by the use of liturgies jointly prepared by the WCC and PCPCU, employed not only out of convenience but with the conviction that it was a fruit of unity and for this reason carried the grace and blessing of the Lord. In that experience was found not only mutual respect or esteem but, in addition, a gradual growth in mutual interest in the common cause of working for Christian unity and related activities in a spirit of mutual service. There has been more concern for the well-being of one another, thus generating the mutual love that Jesus asks of all Christians, which is so necessary for meriting his presence in the small or big group and guarantees a valid and interesting program for all. A greater networking has been achieved, with all that implies, among the different churches involved in the program, thus contributing, gradually and effectively, though quietly, without any fuss, to a greater unity among the churches. In practice, then, the participation of more churches and the holding of celebrations in many different venues have enabled thousands of Christians to join in and benefit from the undeniable reality of tangible unity, even if it would only last for a week or so.

In the program of the January, 1996, celebration, more than 10 churches and groups participated. It highlighted 8 liturgical services, a Songfest for Unity, and a day-long activity focused on the theme "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev 3: 14-22). It was characterized by official but cordial greetings given by representatives of the different churches, community singing, mime presentations, sharing of life experiences, fellowship and ecumenical worship. One could find elements of a spirituality of unity present in the program – the Word, the Brother, Jesus among His believers. It was hoped that this unity could develop into life and vitality in the different participating churches in their quest for Christian Unity.

²³ The experience of a young boy who offered to perform a task he did not like to do for a companion of his and his family obtained the desired result of the reconciliation of the latter's parents who were on the way to divorce. This prompted a Methodist Bishop present at that ecumenical assembly to exclaim with joy : "But this is the life-background of a theology of vicarial prayer.

Other concrete activities

These include involvement in the electoral reforms of the country, conducting medical missions in 1994-1995, and programs of ecumenical participation in the World Youth Day, such as an interreligious manifestation. During the 1996 ecumenical celebrations in Cebu, there was an hour-long radio program of questions and answers on ecumenism; plans have been made to make this more frequent.

In Davao, an "ecumenical retreat" is usually held, in which several leaders of various churches take part, a prayer rally and testimony, a "youth afternoon" on ecumenism, and a monthly meeting of members of different churches, including the Philippine Independent Church, the Lutheran Church, the Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the Methodist Church, the Philippine Episcopal Church, and the Salvation Army.

Follow-up programs

- 1) **Formation** for ecumenical dialogue. This is being done for several hundreds of Christians involved in the dialogue itself. Courses are run for members of the Focolare Movement and others to explain and develop an awareness of ecumenism and especially to reinforce, through lived-out experiences, the conviction that all Christians are brothers and sisters. We must know and love one another.
- 2) Coming of age of **ecumenism among youth**. Young people have worked together to hold "ecumenical youth afternoons" and concerts, also aimed at attracting Muslims and other religious youth groups.
- 3) **Sharing of life**. This has become more and more regular in mixed groups made up of members of different churches, a real living of the Gospel together, which shapes one's thought, word, and action after that of Christ.
- 4) **Center of witness** of unity. This is run by the Focolare Movement and is found in the small town of Tagaytay. It is a center of Christian living, where Christians of different denominations live together on a permanent basis in order to show people that although they belong to different churches, charity can do much. A little city on a hilltop where Christians of various churches demonstrate "prophetically" how Christianity will be in the future when Christendom will be fully united. Charity is God, and God will be in the midst of His people, and He will enlighten all minds.
- 5) **Preparation of guidelines**. Simplified versions of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the *Revised Ecumenical Directory (RED)*, and *Ut Unum Sint* are being prepared.

- 6) **Ecumenical workshops.** With the NCCP, a workshop on ecumenism is being organized.

6. Overcoming what divides

As elsewhere in the world, among Christian churches in Asia, the Philippines not excluded, there are several points of doctrinal divergence. These include the different understandings of a) the Eucharist (or the Lord's Supper), b) the primacy of the Pope, c) the role of Mary, d) mixed marriages, and e) the question of proselytism. The following considerations arise from a reflection on the above-mentioned (no. 3) experiences.

- a. Perhaps we could revive the mentality of the primitive Church, reflected upon by the Fathers, which often put the word of God and the Eucharist on the same level.²⁴ Vatican II speaks of "the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ" (*DV* 21). Furthermore, the painful experience of many Christians of not being able to celebrate the Eucharist together can be and has been understood, in several ecumenical manifestations and meetings, as an aspect of the Forsaken Jesus. This has sparked a greater desire to love this suffering, which results in a stronger bond of unity, and a greater hope of one day achieving full unity. In the meantime, it is more urgent to deepen other vital realities held in common which can immediately be turned into life and thus build the reality of unity.
- b. Regarding the primacy of the Pope, perhaps it is already of general agreement, as could be seen at the 1995 World Youth Day, that he is accepted as a moral leader in Christendom. His personal charisma has had much to contribute to this image. He suffers because of disunity among Christians, but he tries to do his part, to the point of asking pardon: "To the extent that we are responsible for these (painful recollections), I join my predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness" (*UUS* 88). This gesture leaves people unarmed before the actions of the Holy Spirit who converts and thus heals hearts and minds.²⁵ He does this even as he upholds, as he must, the role of Peter, which is founded on Christ's words, and therefore a ministry of love, and not on his weakness, and rooted in conversion and humility. At the same time,

²⁴ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata", 1, 1; St. Ignatius of Antiochia, "To the Philadelphians", 5, PG 5: 699C; St. Jerome, "Commentarius in Ecclesiasten", III, 13 & "Corpus Christianorum Series Latina LXXII (Turnholdt, 1959), p. 278. All quoted in C. Lubich, *Word of Life*, pp. 47ff.

²⁵ This has left a profound impression, as testified by the reaction of the noted Orthodox theologian Oliver Clement: "The Pope speaks in the first person in such a way as to make me profoundly touched. All he says is excellent, even though time will be necessary."

Peter had to "strengthen his brothers," from which derives Rome's task of service to promote unity. This is what she can give to the other churches and ecclesial communities now that these latter desire some form of visible and concrete form or expression of unity among all Christians (UUS 88-96).

- c. If Mary has been and still is an obstacle for the unity between evangelical Christians and Catholics and others, the obstacle may diminish in gravity by some justifiable considerations. She is the mother of Christ, and is even now the model of Christians who want to repeat the role of bringing Jesus spiritually to the world by contributing to the realization of the words of Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in their midst" (Mt 18:20). She is also a disciple of Christ and she "followed" Him, putting into practice in an exemplary manner the words of God.²⁶

In the Philippines, devotion to Mary is strong as ever, even though she is known better than before, so that she is definitely no longer considered an object of worship. This has perhaps made things easier. This could be due to an upsurge of a more Christ-centered ecumenical process. At any rate, she is now often seen as the personification of Scripture, which is of radical importance as a factor of unification.

- d. Mixed marriages present not a few problems. They are first of all pastoral in nature. Lack of knowledge has often resulted in members of one church unduly participating, during the wedding ceremony, in the Eucharist celebrated in another, causing some confusion.
- e. Proselytism. In Asia, proselytism is gradually though slowly decreasing. One might feel that this process is really going on quite slowly. Sadly but truly, due to the lack of common accord, the Lord is prevented from working or being Lord at all. He cannot win over hearts because of the "competition" for souls, which does not reflect the reality of "this" in Jesus' words: "By **this**, they will know that you are my disciples" (Jn 13: 34). Obviously, this is a preoccupation in Asia.

²⁶ "In the canticle (of the Magnificat) each part of every phrase is the echo of some passage of the Bible . . . There we see Mary so penetrated by the word of God that she is its echo. So we should not be surprised that God (in the Annunciation) answers her in the same way. To the Virgin nourished by Scripture the divine messenger speaks the language of Scripture," R. Laurentin, *La Virgine Maria*, Rome, 1970, p. 44. Cf. St. Maximus: "The ark contained the Law; Mary bore the Gospel within herself . . . from the ark the voice of God came forth; Mary bore within herself the Word, the true word made flesh," "Sermo XLII", 5.

We need to inculcate a mentality of ecumenism through a dialogue of life. Ideas may remain only in books; experience of life in common accord and mutual charity become impressed on hearts and minds.

6. Challenges and Priorities

There are some aspects of the situation of ecumenism in the Philippines presented some years ago, which still exist. Among others:

- 1) the upsurge of native religious movements, the divisions among Protestant groups, among themselves, the fundamentalist phenomenon, resulting in the proliferation of groups and communities of "Born again" Christians,
- 2) social injustice in the minds of both lay people and the clergy as the basic problem,
- 3) celebration of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity limited in time and participation by churches,
- 4) formation of priests for ecumenism very deficient,
- 5) the problem of general ignorance of Christians, whether Catholics or not, leading to a general phenomenon of indifference to each other among them,
- 6) prejudices that lead to antagonism,
- 7) the problem of aggressiveness and proselytism of fundamentalist groups that gives rise to a pastoral dilemma of whether to work for the defense of the faithful or to promote the ecumenical dimension (of the Catholic faith),
- 8) lack of priests and Church personnel: Catholics per priest (11000, Sept. 1991; 9657, June 1993).²⁷

Some of these challenges still exist and can be analyzed "geographically."

- a. In Mindanao, where Christians are a minority. Where the non-Catholic Christian church is small, the smaller churches seem to be afraid of being "eaten up" or integrated. In these cases, ecumenism is still something being feared. Unity among churches is not always a primary concern, but "conversion" and other pastoral concerns take over. This also results in a lack of formation of Christians, even seminarians, in the area of ecumenism, and consequently, little aware-

²⁷ Taken from a report of the Episcopal Commission on Ecumenical Affairs (ECEA) of the CBCP, presented (Sept. 1991) to the P. C. for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU).

ness of its necessity, importance and urgency. This becomes a vicious cycle. If ecumenical activities are conducted, it may be out of missionary strategic necessity (e.g. to achieve a stronger Christian common voice), convenience or protocol.

- b. Until recently, in certain parts of the Philippines (e.g., Metro Manila, Metro Cebu) and perhaps in Asian countries, where Christians are a majority and in great numbers, it may be observed that the formation of Christians is short of personnel, and therefore suffers in quality, depth and span. There may be a general ignorance (ie., non-awareness) of the ecumenical dimension of faith on the part of the lay people, especially in provincial areas, as well as a lack of interest on the part of the formators (social necessities may be a more pressing priority). In the early 1980s, the Catholic Church had regular formal contacts only with a few mainstream churches, such as the Lutheran and the Episcopal Church.

More attention needs to be given to ecumenism as a whole in the life of the Church. Much has been achieved, yet as late as in 1991, ecumenism received only tangential attention in the documents of PCP II (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines). While it is not the most important and the only church issue, it is hoped that at least it can be integrated or taken side by side with the other issues.

- c. Usually the good-naturedness of the Philippine people, like that of other Asians, is a great asset, but there is also a "no need for interest" mentality about ecumenism, because "anyway they (the other churches) are the same." There is generally a sort of religious tolerance or indifference. Still worse are the interconversions, which, because of the above reasons, easily take place. They are often done on an insufficiently serious basis, and do not bear positive consequences for the general cause of ecumenism.
- d. The fact that most Protestant churches are autonomous gives rise to the more complex phenomenon of multifaceted ecumenical relationships between them and the Catholic Church. This calls for a similar kind of relationship also among Protestant churches.

Challenges in other fields

- a. **Social.** The description of many Asian countries as having the fastest economic growth rate may yet be an illusion. Many parts of Asia still remain undeveloped or at least underdeveloped, with immense masses suffering from dire poverty. Human rights, women's rights, and child abuse in all its deplorable forms including prostitution are issues that continually demand attention from any society if it is to be truly

Christian. Environmental abuses carried out in the name of development pose a constant threat to the original ecosystems that sustain the peoples in these parts of Asia. Being overly preoccupied with their own survival, people are often deprived of the chance to accept the credibility of Christians who are usually identified with the “developers”. There is also the problem of the globalizing influence played by the media on cultures, with its often unbecoming effects on all sectors of society, especially the youth. Have multinationals become too powerful? Is public opinion still influential? Can Christians do something more together?

- b. **Political.** Many Asian countries are still governed by totalitarian regimes or young democracies, or democracies by arrangement and compromise. In such regimes, they either do not tolerate religious freedom outright, or they simply do not have any experience of dealing with religious systems. In others, the Church-State relationship is a new experience. This is further complicated by world politics wherein such situations are taken advantage of to further certain political or economic goals. In such a state of affairs, unity among Christians, and to be clear, a united front of Christians, is definitely an asset, not for convenience, but as an assurance of the presence of Jesus who alone can counter such “advances.”
- c. **Economic.** The entry in the arena of economic competition gives rise to the consideration of basic values, Christian in nature, which are fundamental in the process of nation building. A fast-food mentality has sprung up in the so-called “dragons” in economic growth, with the rush for material comfort further eroding the social and moral fabric.
- d. **Cultural.** The perception in many places that Christianity is something “imported,” and therefore to be rejected, cannot be ignored. (In Asia, Christianity thrived first in countries with a less “developed” culture, so to speak. Among the first agents of Christian mission were those who believed it necessary to import and impose culture.) This happens despite what is called an “inclusion” mentality. The reason behind this has to do with the scars left over by colonialism. Attention should be paid to this in any attempt at inculturation.

The “inclusion” mentality leads at least to an immediate tolerance, which may pave the way for further rapport. On the other hand, this may block the deepening of a relationship. It has been said that in matters religious the East is by tendency rational whereas the West is basically irrational, while the contrary is true for daily living. This holds true in Asia. On the technical level this might be considered avoidable, but in a dialogue of life this would represent a real challenge.

- e. **Religious.** Asia is the cradle of the world's great religions. The common witness of Christians is practically "directed" to the believers of these religions. It therefore must be given the substance of unity in an at least reconciled diversity. Are the churches ready for this or are they in competition for "conversions" without considering the common witness a priori? Perhaps "inculturated" witness has to take also this aspect into consideration.

Some suggestions

While this should have been apparent in each of the above situations, there is clearly no one-word formula for facing the above challenges. Priorities could surely be set by each country. This would be the concern of local ecumenism. However, the suggestion to follow a spirituality of unity can be made, which may be built on the ideas presented above. Practically speaking, it can be said that this spirituality permits Christians to hold on their courage and strength derived from the presence of Jesus among them even in times of persecution or of religious intolerance and, above all, for guidance at all times.

The idea and experience of "seeing Jesus in the neighbour" inevitably helps put the human at the center of every civic endeavour, which will give the right motivation to attempts at solving those problems regarding his sustenance and the development of societies. The word of God, for the presence of Jesus in it, too, can prove a valid guide in the fast changing world with its unstable hierarchy of values. This might lead to a demand for a more clear-cut definition of ecumenism or a clear time-frame for ecumenical activities. For example, are activities to be held first among clearly recognized Christian churches, or should these activities include immediately and simultaneously contacts and relations with quasi-Christian groups? This would enhance deeper relationships and avoid undue reactions (even for pastoral motives) in certain sectors which are not ecumenically prepared for the latter kind of contacts.

A balance could probably be achieved between style and content of ecumenical activities, e.g. festiveness is an indispensable ingredient for group dynamics, but need not be the only one. Rather, it must pave the way for a more profound communion of life and for theological dialogue. Some aspects of Asian culture may contribute immediately to a good initial rapport, but need to be complemented by a clarity of expression or of position in a truly ecumenical relationship.

Perhaps it is necessary to **reexamine** how far Christians in general recall the fundamental mandate of Christ: "May they all be one" (Jn 17: 21), which brings with it special help for the individual and the group in their ecumenical endeavours. It is not necessary to have a pessimistic vision of

ecumenism as a reaction to an objective scandal of division among Christians and their churches. "The ecumenical movement is a grace of God, given by the Father in answer to the prayer of Jesus."²⁸

The family is a vital and necessary venue for inculcating a mentality of ecumenism in the young early enough in their life.

Interreligious dialogue has acquired greater significance in the life of Asian Christians in general. Common witness is not only necessary but also mandatory. A shared commitment to interreligious dialogue must be further enhanced and implemented in a commonly acceptable manner.²⁹

Cannot the faithful of the world religions also participate and help in the organization of ecumenical activities? To build brotherhood and fellowship is always challenging and salutary. Perhaps the two commitments, unity among Christians and interreligious dialogue, can be mutually constructive once the guarantee of pastoral discretion is present. A special concern may be expressed in the relationship with the Primal Religions of Asia. They should not be regarded largely as objects of "conversion" and "upliftment" (given that their followers are usually different from the rest of the world in what is usually called the "cultural level"). They should, rather, be treated simply for what they are.

Depending on the preparedness of the local churches, more sessions of prayer in common and non-sacramental liturgical worship could be organized also in significant periods other than the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, such as Easter, in order to invoke divine grace for a greater faith in our common faith.

Because of the importance of shared life, local, national, or regional centers of life of unity (cf. p. 8, no. 4)) could be set up, even though they be on a small scale. Part of the program could be study, "to be familiar with the outlook of our brothers" (UR 9). Courses which integrate good-will or courtesy visits could be organized which, it is to be hoped, would proceed to the sharing of spiritual activity.³⁰

²⁸ Directory, p. 20.

²⁹ An example is found in the application of the 'fulfillment theory' in Hinduism by some Catholic theologians and Protestant scholars, cf. A. Fernandez, "FABC Paper 34: 13-17.

³⁰ Cf. below the report to the CBCP on the June, 1996, National Course on Ecumenism.

7. Conclusion

We have tried to present an experience of dialogue of life which has been inspired by and, at the same time, has consolidated a spirituality of unity for ecumenism in the Philippine situation together with an empirical analysis of the issues in the Asian context. We believe that the application of the same spirituality can prove fruitful in ecumenical endeavors. The ecumenical way is a path that is not yet paved. It is, rather, as a local Chinese proverb says, "the way is walked out by people together." Unity is something to be desired and is a reality to be built up together. Even though it may be unity in diversity, it is diversity reconciled, not compromised but agreed upon. It is based on the supreme command of the Lord: "Love one another" and the consequent presence of Jesus among His people, as he promised, "Where two or three . . ." (Mt 18:20), and the grace which Jesus asked of the Father, "That they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

BUILDING ON WHAT UNITES US, OVERCOMING WHAT DIVIDES

Revd David Gill

General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia
Sydney, Australia

There is one book every newcomer to ecumenical staff work must read. It is the Memoirs of Dr W.A. Visser 't Hooft, the founding general secretary of the World Council of Churches.

At one point in those pages, Visser 't Hooft tells of his first encounter with Cardinal Bea, who had just been appointed head of the Vatican's new Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. It was September 1960. Visser 't Hooft dared not even tell his wife where he was going for the weekend. The concierge of the Milan convent where they met was under strict orders on no account to ask the name of the mysterious visitor from Geneva. It was all very hushhush, very delicate, very risky.

My mind went back to that encounter when, on 3 July 1994, I stood in St. Christopher's Cathedral, Canberra, for a service inaugurating the National Council of Churches in Australia. The old Australian Council of Churches was handing over its responsibilities to the new, more comprehensive national body. The cathedral was jammed, the atmosphere hushed, as representatives of the thirteen member churches moved down the aisle to take their places: bishops of the Orthodox churches, the Anglican Primate, leaders of the four Protestant churches and, among them all for the first time, the Cardinal who chairs the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. This time there was nothing hushhush about the encounter, as it was carried nationwide by ABC television that same night. Nor did it seem at all delicate or risky. It only seemed wonderfully right, to all of us.

THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

The story begins in 1988, when the governing body of the former Australian Council of Churches (ACC) made a courageous decision. It invited churches that were not members of the ACC to sit down with Council representatives and see whether, together, we could find our way towards a structure that would better serve the ecumenical movement in Australia. Everything was put on the table for discussion. Nothing was nonnegotiable. The process was to be opened.

The Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches accepted the invitation, and a joint task group started work. A proposal was developed and tried out

on the prospective member churches. In the light of comments received, a constitution was drafted and won the churches' approval. Six years after the 1988 initiative, the ACC made way for the new and more comprehensive National Council of Churches in Australia.

This was not simply a discussion about structures. What we saw, through these years, was the churches entering into a renewed covenant with one another and moving, as one of their documents said, "from cooperation to commitment".¹

Three things about the change should be noted.

1. More than its predecessor, the NCCA stresses that it is to be seen as a Council of Churches. Those thirteen member churches will determine policy, representation on commissions and committees, and stances on public issues. The heads of those churches participate in meetings of the NCCA Executive, and there is increased consultation with the churches before the Council's commissions and committees make decisions.

The churches' enhanced sense of ownership of their Council is certainly a plus. Yet some have worried about a possible diminishing of the Council's prophetic role, because of the tighter ecclesiastical control. That anxiety must be taken seriously, for we will sell the ecumenical movement short if we deprive it of its capacity to provoke, to disturb, to renew.

But what is it that makes ecumenism a creative disturbance in our midst? Why does this strange movement stir us to dream new dreams, think new thoughts and contemplate the possibility of new relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ? Ecumenism's challenge comes not because of structures that have liberated themselves from the churches. Rather, it stems from the dynamic let loose when churches seek, together, to discern the will of God and to follow the footprints of God in the dust of human history.

2. Australia's new NCC was given a new beginning, a new name, a new constitution. Relationships with bodies like the World Council of

¹ The NCCA comprises the Anglican Church of Australia, the Antiochian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Churches of Christ, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Religious Society of Friends, the Roman Catholic Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Salvation Army, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Uniting Church in Australia. The Lutheran Church in Australia failed to secure the two-thirds majority vote it set for itself to approve membership, and will consider the question afresh at its National Convention in 1997.

Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia had therefore to be renegotiated. But for all the stress on newness, the fact remains that ecumenism in Australia has a history, a memory, an experience too rich to forget.

Some delicate footwork is needed to do justice to that history, while remembering that it is a history not fully shared by all the NCCA's member churches. The Roman Catholic Church was not part of the ACC. ACC member churches were not involved with the developments associated with the Second Vatican Council. We have different ecumenical memories. The process of building these into a shared memory, with which all equally identify, will take time and sensitivity.

3. "Don't waste time; do it!" was the instruction to those who brought the NCCA into being. The new Council was inaugurated on the basis of bare essentials, with many issues of programme, style and structure to be worked out on the run. Nearly two years later, the NCCA is still a Council under construction, as the churches figure out the implications of what they committed themselves to – and discover that other churches sometimes read the implications differently. That debate, at the moment, revolves around the churches' expectations of our Christian World Service commission.

To what have the member churches committed themselves? The NCCA's basis says it well:

"The NCCA gathers together in pilgrimage those churches and Christian communities which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and commit themselves

[i] to deepen their relationship with each other in order to express more visibly the unity willed by Christ for his Church, and

[ii] to work together towards the fulfilment of their mission of common witness, proclamation and service,

to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Note the key motifs: pilgrimage, confession of faith, the scriptures, a deeper relationship with each other, the unity Christ wills, common witness, proclamation and service, doxology and the Trinity.

A Discovery of What Unites

Beneath these structural developments was a process of [re]discovering what unites us.

1. A shared history

Looking backwards, our churches have a common heritage featuring centuries of unity – as well as centuries of division. Even those years of division, it should be remembered, represent a relationship of sorts. The greatest hurdles to ecumenical advance in our times stem not from churches that have a shared memory of conflict so much as from churches that have not even known each other well enough to fight!

2. A knowledge of the heart

We are united by bonds of trust born out of attempts to be faithful.

In the early 1980s, by happy coincidence, Australia's three largest churches were led by Queenslanders. The Chairman of the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Anglican Primate and the President of the Uniting Church all hailed from Brisbane. For years, they had worked together to challenge a reactionary, racist and corrupt state government. All three of them had suffered outrageous attacks from politicians, the media and public opinion. All three of them bore similar scars. And all three had become friends, colleagues and partners in ministry.

Then, tragedy struck. One month after standing down as President of the Uniting Church, one of the trio suffered a heart attack that was to take his life. The two archbishops, visiting Sydney at the time, asked if I would take them to the hospital. I will always remember that scene at the bedside: three old friends together again facing the mystery of death, together affirming faith in the lord of life. That scene will remain for me, always, as an icon of hope.

Thank God for what Stephen Lo in this meeting has called "a knowledge of the heart", which presses us towards more adequate theological formulations, more comprehensive ecumenical structures, more daring ventures of mutual trust and shared faith.

3. A yearning for renewal

Fr Pathil reminded this meeting that Vatican II was both the council of unity and also the council of aggiornamento. Wesley Ariarajah has pointed out that the World Council of Churches is driven by a yearning that the churches should be transformed into credible witnesses to the Gospel. Ecumenism, from whatever angle, is not just about unity for unity's sake.

Years ago my Charismatic friends taught me the gesture of the open hands. Held out in prayer, in hope and in joyful expectation, those hands speak vividly of both the churches' need and God's fidelity. The NCCA is a product of people saying: we must hold out our hands for the renewal of the Church of God in Australia, and we must hold them out . . . together.

4. A commonality of faith

From different angles, with different nuances, accentuating different emphases, our churches found themselves belonging to a tradition of faith going back twenty centuries and more, centred on the same cross, proclaiming the same mystery of grace, informed by the same scriptures, inspired by the same saints and martyrs, entered by the same waters of baptism, nourished by the same bread and wine, imbued with the same pentecostal Spirit, gifted with the same charisms, drawn towards the same destiny in God.

Within that commonality of faith, we do have our differences. Here, I believe, we have all been helped by Cardinal Franz K^onig, who in October 1964 persuaded Vatican II to adopt the term "hierarchy of truths" in recognition that there is a qualitative ranking of church teachings according to the relation in which each stands to the mystery of Christ. Some are more important, more worth losing sleep about – and uniting or perhaps staying divided over – than others. With that recognition, many of the obstacles to mutual commitment within a council of churches fall away.

A Fresh Discovery of What Divides

In the journey of these years, Australia's churches have discovered anew some of the things that stand in the way of unity.

1. False stereotypes

Back in the office, following the NCCA's inauguration, I had to cope with an apoplectic caller who denounced Rome and all its works, quoted the King James version of the Bible at me for fifteen minutes straight, and warned of the sticky end awaiting all who fraternise with papists. At about the same time, the bishop who had led the Catholic Church into the NCCA was receiving a similar call attacking Catholic leaders who had anything to do with Christians of other churches. It would be nice to think that one of these days those two callers might meet – they will have lots to talk about!

More soberly, *Ut Unum Sint* urges upon us "the necessary purification of past memories". You and I may have transcended the sectarianism

and paranoia that marked interchurch relationships in the bad old days, but none of us is free of preconceptions, stereotypes, expectations – yes, and anxieties too.

All of us, separately and together, have many memories that need purifying.

2. Institutionalism

A recent issue of *Ecumenical News International* (Feb. 1996) carries a telling quote from the General Secretary of the WCC. Says Konrad Raiser:

“The institutional representatives of the churches . . . are caught in a framework of rules and norms which have been formulated over centuries to justify or maintain separated identities. . . . An ecumenical vision that can inspire new commitment and can generate hope must break out of these constraints.”

Indeed it must. But our ecumenical structures are institutions too, and they too develop rules, norms, assumptions, programmes, styles of work and constraints which must sometimes be broken open for the sake of ecumenical advance.

The transition in Australia, for example, was not without its doubts and hesitations. Was the ACC risking too much by putting everything on the table for renegotiation? Would there be this commission, this staffpost, this budget line in the new council? Could we really trust each other? Would ecumenism survive without a structure that had been in place for so long?

Lurking beneath those anxieties was another, deeper question: do we really believe what we say about ecumenical structures being provisional, destined to die for the sake of the movement they seek to advance?

3. Inertia

Churches affirm ecumenism in principle, yet in practice are distracted by a preoccupation with those internal problems which in one form or another plague us all. The more grave the problems, the greater the distraction. In Australia, now, most churches are in crisis. The crisis takes different forms in different churches. Often it involves declining numbers, tightening budgets, aging congregations, ambivalence about authority, uncertainty about the substance of the faith, hesitancy about mission, and so on and so forth. The bottom line is a

morale crisis of very considerable dimensions. All our churches are struggling to find their way amidst the odd mix of secularism and religious pluralism that is contemporary Australia.

The danger, at this time, is that the ecumenical movement gets relegated to the backburner until what appear to be more urgent denominational dilemmas are sorted out. But ecumenism is not a matter to be thought about when more pressing items have been disposed of. As Fr Banawiratma has reminded us, ecumenism is not a matter of programmes, structures or activities; it is first and foremost "a way of being Church". It is that set of perspectives on the faith, that quality of relationships with other Christians, that openness to the whole Church across the nations and through the centuries, within which we wrestle with the fundamental question of obedience and look for the wisdom needed to put our respective houses in order.

4. Pride

How many bilateral encounters have you known where both sides were hammering the table, with each church making maximalist claims for itself as having the fullness of the Christian faith, the fullness of means of grace, the fullness of apostolic order?

Why do we do this, when each of us in our own heart is painfully aware of our own church's inadequacies and shortcomings? What would happen, if we could replace the ecumenism of pride with an ecumenism of penitence? If instead of asserting strength we felt able to acknowledge weakness? If rather than demanding each other's acceptance our churches were big enough, trusting enough, to ask each other's help?

For is not that the way of the gospel? The mystery of grace, after all, is that God accepts us – not because of the precision of our doctrines, the elegance of our liturgies, the vintage of our ministerial orders, the good works of our social services, the rectitude of our social ethics, or the zest of our assorted varieties of religious experience. Under the cross, all our churches stand with empty hands.

The good news is that we, with our empty hands, are accepted – in spite of the inadequacies that mar our mission, the failures that warp our witness, the infidelities that litter the centuries. Accepted! Embraced by the mystery of grace.

It is this gospel of God's outreaching love that has our churches reaching out to overcome what still divides them, yearning to be one community of faith, seeking afresh the path to the one cross of the

world's one redeemer. That gospel is what brought the National Council of Churches in Australia into being. And that gospel of amazing grace remains the great challenge before us all, because it is the one hope of us all.

PUBLISHED OCTOBER 1996

* * * *

FABC PAPERS is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: FABC, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

APPENDIX I

Participants at AMCU

Rev. K.C. Abraham, Bangalore, India
Dr. Wesley Ariarajah, Geneva, Switzerland
Fr. J.B. Banawiratma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Dr. Esther Byu, Hong Kong
Dr. Feliciano Cariño, Hong Kong
Rev. Dhyanchand Carr, Hong Kong
Br. Edmund Chia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Bishop Manat Chuabsamai, Ratchaburi, Thailand
Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, Hong Kong
Ms. Cressida John, Bombay, India
Ms. Madelene A. Dannug, Quezon City, Philippines
Rev. Nathaniel M. Fabula, Iloilo City, Philippines
Bishop Kenneth Fernando, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Rev. Glynthea Finger, Hong Kong
Fr. Fidelis Masanori Fujihara, Kawasaki, Japan
Rev. David Gill, Sydney, Australia
Sister Helen Graham, Cubao, Philippines
Ms. Gloria Gusman, Manila, Philippines
Dr. Huang Po-Ho, Tainan, Taiwan (R.O.C.)
Rev. Henriette Hutabarat, Hong Kong
Bishop Deogracias Inigues, Iba, Philippines
Rev. Ipe Joseph, Nagpur, India
Fr. Bunsong Hongthong, Ratchaburi, Thailand
Rev. Kim Young Oon, Seoul, Korea
Fr. Kim Sung-tae, Seoul, Korea
Bishop Kuriakose Kunnacherry, Kottayam, India
Rev. Agustina Lamentut, Tentena, Indonesia
Mr. Stephan Lo Kin-Sang, Tagaytay, Philippines
Fr. Thomas Michel, Bangkok, Thailand
Bishop Joseph Atsumi Misue, Hiroshima, Japan
Bishop B.D. Mondal, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Archbishop Andrew Mya Han, Yangon, Myanmar
Rev. Prakai Nontawasee, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Fr. Kuncheria Pathil, Bangalore, India
Sister Myrna Porto, Bangkok, Thailand
Fr. Albert Poulet-Mathis, Taipei, Taiwan (R.O.C.)
Msgr. John Radano, Vatican City
Rev. Hermen Shashtri, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Bishop Anicetus Sinaga, Sibolga, Indonesia
Fr. A. Suresh, New Delhi, India
Archbishop Armando Trindade, Lahore, Pakistan
Rev. Tso Man King, Hong Kong

APPENDIX II

ASIAN ECUMENICAL COMMITTEE

At the 1993 Joint Working Group meeting of the CCA and FABC, it was decided to form an Asian Ecumenical Committee which would be responsible for approving and coordinating proposals for ecumenical cooperation and for initiating new ecumenical projects. This agreement was ratified by the FABC Plenary in January, 1996, and the CCA General Assembly in June of the same year.

The two bodies have now announced the members of the Asian Ecumenical Committee.

CCA members:

1. Dr. Feliciano Cariño
 2. Bishop Kenneth Fernando
 3. Rev. David Gill
 4. Ms. Gloria Guzman
 5. Dr. Huang Po-Ho
 6. Rev. Agustina Lamentut
 7. Rev. Hermen Shashtri
-
1. Fr. J.B. Banawiratma
 2. Bishop Deogracias Iñiguez
 3. Bishop Kuriakose Kunnacherry
 4. Fr. Thomas Michel
 5. Fr. Kuncheria Pathil
 6. Archbishop Armando Trindade
 7. Ms. Gabrielle Yang

The first meeting of the Asian Ecumenical Committee will take place in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 14 January 1997.

APPENDIX III

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARTICIPATION IN COUNCILS OF CHURCHES

In several AMCU papers, it was suggested that the Catholic bishops' conferences of the various countries of Asia consider, in accord with the directives of the Vatican's Council for Promoting Christian Unity (RED, 166), the possibility of some form of membership in the national or regional Council of Churches or Christian Councils. For purposes of information and encouragement, we provide here a list of Councils of Churches with Roman Catholic membership. The list is up-to-date as of 24 June 1996 (source: PCPCU).

Regional conferences:

Caribbean Conference of Churches
Middle East Conference of Churches
Pacific Conference of Churches

National Councils of Churches/Christian Councils

Africa: (SECAM members) Botswana, Gambia, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar (Christian Council of Churches), Namibia, Nigeria (Christian Association of Nigeria), South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland (Council of Swaziland Churches), Uganda (Joint Christian Council)

Asia: (FABC members) Malaysia (Christian Federation of Malaysia), Taiwan

Latin America: (CELAM members) Antigua, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Curaçao, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Vincent, Surinam, Trinidad & Tobago

Europe: (CCEE members) Belgium, Britain and Ireland (Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland), Czech Rep. (associate membership), Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Isle of Man, Netherlands, Sweden

North America: Canada (associate membership)

Oceania: (FCBCO members) American Samoa, Aoteroa-New Zealand*, Australia*, Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu

*As members of their respective national Council of Churches, which in turn are members of the CCA, the New Zealand Episcopal Conference

and the Australia Catholic Bishops' Conference are fully represented in the CCA. However, they are not members of FABC but belong, rather, to the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO).

Total NCCs with Roman Catholic Membership: 48

Regional Conferences: 03

Total: 51

Observer/Consultant status:

In four Councils, the Roman Catholic Church has observer/consultant status: Austria, Slovakia, Ireland, Zimbabwe.

APPENDIX IV

COURSES ON ECUMENISM, ECUMENICAL CELEBRATIONS

Mr. Stephen Lo (FABC-3) offers the following examples of a course on ecumenism conducted by the Focolare Movement in the Philippines and an ecumenical celebration held at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. They are presented here as inspiring examples of local ecumenical initiatives.

National Course on Ecumenism for Members of the Focolare Movement June 25-26, 1994

In the past few years in the Philippines, the Focolare Movement has had regular contacts with members of the various Christian denominations in several places. Thus arose the necessity for a specific formation on ecumenism for the members of the Movement. One such course was held on June 25-26, 1994, in the light of the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement. Over 100 members from Luzon and the Visayas attended.

The highlights of the program included:

- presentation of the history of ecumenism in the Focolare Movement
- the "ecumenism of Chiara Lubich"
- the ecumenism of the Movement in the Philippines
- a conversation of Chiara Lubich to members of the Orthodox Church on mutual love, the starting point of the ecumenism of the Movement;
- report: ecumenical meeting organized by the Ecumenical Council of Churches on "Spiritualities of our Times," Romania, 1994, with the active participation of the Focolare Movement;
- report: ecumenical meeting among Lutheran members of the Movement, Berlin, 1992
- report: ecumenical meeting among Anglican members of the Movement, London, 1993
- documentation of the encounters of Chiara Lubich with the late ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of the Orthodox Church from 1967 onward
- documentary presentation of the ecumenical experience between Lutherans and Catholics in the permanent Mariapolis in Ottmaring, Germany for the past 25 years;

- presentation of the main characteristics of the Catholic Church and of sects in the Philippines;
- regular sessions of open forum that punctuated the Course, most important for clarifying problems in specific situations and for sharing relevant experiences.

This Course, first of its kind held by the Movement in the Philippines, opened the mind of the members of the Movement and prepared them for more profound and fruitful contacts with our Christian brothers.

Future courses will be planned which will deal more specifically with the presentation of mainstream Christian churches in the Philippines, as well as the sects such as the Iglesia ni Cristo and "Born Again", and the Philippine Independent Church.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY CULMINATING CELEBRATION

La Union National High School, January 27, 1996

- | | | |
|-------|--|--|
| 08:00 | Registration | |
| 09:30 | National Anthem, Welcome, Greetings, Introductions | |
| | Welcome: | Mayor Manuel C. Ortega |
| | Moderator | Romeo Sunggay |
| | Greetings: | Mr. Rey Natividad, NCCP |
| | | Ms Costanza Tan, Focolare Movement |
| | Acknowledgments: | Bishop Pedro Maglaya |
| | | Ms Vangie Pangan |
| 10:00 | Community Singing | (led jointly by the choirs of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and of the Roman Catholic Church) |
| 10:15 | Message | Bishop Antonio Tobias, Diocese of San Fernando, La Union |
| 10:30 | Song Presentation | GEN of Manila |
| 11:10 | Community Singing | |
| 11:20 | Testimony: | Rev. Luvimino Samaniego
Moderator, Metropolitan Conference, UCCP
President, Metropolitan Regional Ecumenical Conference |
| 11:35 | Mime presentation | GEN of Manila |
| 11:45 | Testimony | Madelene A. Dannug, Focolare Movement, Catholic Church |
| 11:55 | Song Presentation | GEN of Manila |
| 12:00 | Lunch Fellowship | |
| 13:30 | Community Singing | (Joint Choir) |
| | Action Songs | |
| | Mime presentation: | GEN of Manila |
| 14:15 | Ecumenical Worship Messages | Bishop Deogracias Iniguez, Chairman, Episcopal Commission on Ecumenical Affairs, CBCP
Bishop Daniel Arichea, United Methodist Church,
Vice chairperson, NCCP |
| 15:15 | Closing Remarks | Rev. Pedro Maglaya
Mr. Ray Asprer |

FABC Papers:

- No. 71. *Jesus Christ: His Service to Life*, by Luis Antonio G. Tagle. A Position Paper for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
72. *Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides*
- a. *Prayer, Contemplation and Holiness: the Church, Community of Christian Discipleship in its Service to Life*, by Catalino Arevalo.
 - b. *Dialogue at the Service of Life*, by Michael Amaladoss.
 - c. *Christian Discipleship in Asia: Protecting Human Life*, by Francisco F. Claver.
 - d. *A Life-Giving Asian Spirituality for the Service of Life*, by Thomas H. Green.
 - e. *The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, by Sean McDonagh.
 - f. *The Family and the Child: The Asian Family's Struggle for Life*, by Catherine Bernard Haliburn.
 - g. *The Struggle for Life: Asian Youth*, by Leo Perera.
 - h. *Women and the Church's Service to Life in Asia*, by Amelia Vasquez.
 - i. *Religious Life: A Service to Life in Asia Today*, by Virginia Fabella and Quirico Pedregosa, et al.
 - j. *Christian Discipleship in Work and Profession — A Service to Life in Asia Today*, by Cora Mateo.
 - k. *Formation and Education for Christian Discipleship in Asia*, by Wendy Louis.
 - l. *The Church in Asia and the Ministry of the Media and the Arts at the Service of Life*, by Gaston Roberge.
 - m. *Integral Human Development and Justice and Peace at the Service of Life in the Context of Asia*, by Anthony Rogers.
73. *Journeying Together in Faith with Migrant Workers in Asia*, by Graziano Battistella. A Background Paper for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
74. *Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life*. A Report of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asia Bishops' Conferences, 1995.
75. *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*. The Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1996.
76. *Working for Harmony in the Contemporary World*. A Hindu-Christian Dialogue, 1996.
77. *Asian Movement for Christian Unity*. A Joint Project of the Christian Conference of Asia and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1996.

