

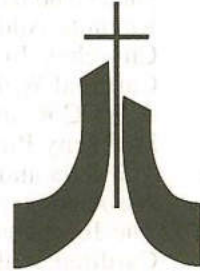
**FABC Papers**

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**ASIAN MOVEMENT FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY III  
A Joint CCA – FABC Project**

**GIVING SHAPE TO A NEW ECUMENICAL VISION**

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

**Chiangmai, Thailand  
January 27 – February 1, 2001**

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### I. A PLEA TO THE CHURCHES IN ASIA

#### The Final Statement of the Participants of AMCU III

The Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU) was conceived in 1994 by the two largest Christian bodies in Asia—the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Its goal is to promote unity at the local, national and continental levels among Christ's disciples in Asia.

Among other initiatives, the Asian Movement for Christian Unity has organized seminars involving church leaders, theologians and ecumenical officers. The first (AMCU I) took place in Hong Kong, March 1996, with the theme, "Theology of Ecumenism." AMCU II was held in Bali, Indonesia, January 1998, on the theme, "Ecumenical Formation as Churches of Asia Move towards the Next Millennium."

The third seminar (AMCU III) brought some 50 participants—including senior representatives of the World Council of Churches

and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity—to Chiangmai, Thailand, January 27—February, 2001. Its theme, "Giving Shape to a New Ecumenical Vision in Asia," echoed the encouragement given by the CCA (at its two most recent assemblies), and by Pope John Paul II (in his 1999 Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 30) that our churches should enter into a process of prayer and discussion to explore the possibilities of new ecumenical structures and associations for promoting Christian unity.

### **An Ecumenism of Communion**

Communion is the heart of the ecclesial reality. To be a church means and demands that we enter into relationship with other churches. Koinonia exists, to some extent, between all Christian churches. Identifying, owning, nurturing and deepening this reality is the ecumenical task. Developing such relationships is all the more necessary in the Asian context. Christians have to bear a common witness and together engage in our common mission, in dialogue with our neighbors of all faiths, in the context of Asia's massive poverty and injustice. Our search for unity and our mission are inseparably united.

The driving force behind our ecumenical vision is the reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ, and his passionate prayer that all his disciples may be united (John 17:20-21). Christian unity is motivated by the Gospel, nothing less.

The theological foundation of our unity is our common baptism by which all Christians are really incorporated into the one body of Christ. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one Body" (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4-6; also 1 Cor 11:17-29). Affirmation of our common baptism beckons us to express our unity visibly in common witness (Matt 25:31-46). Our search for unity is a response to God's plan of gathering all the people of God (Jer 23:3, 31:10, Ez 37:21), and "to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head" (Eph 1:10). The church of Jesus Christ has to become truly "a sacrament and sign of unity of the whole humankind" (*Lumen Gentium 1; Unitatis Redintegratio 2*)

### **THE NEED FOR CONVERSION**

To catch up with the vision of unity our churches and all Christians need a radical conversion, a conversion of heart. It requires a radical transformation in our way of thinking, acting and living, es-



pecially in relation to other churches. It challenges every kind of self-sufficiency and triumphalism, and invites us to see the positive values of other Christian traditions. This change of heart has to be reinforced by a life of common prayer and worship.

Formation of ecumenical associations in every Asian country is an integral part of our present ecumenical vision. However, it must be underlined that such councils or fellowships of churches are not super-churches or substitutes for our goal of full unity. Ecumenical structures are never ends in themselves. They exist to help our churches pray together, think together, enter into a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Gospel together, share the treasures of faith together, and become part, together, of Asia's struggles for justice and peace.

Our common faith and baptism compels us to work together in a fellowship, though there still may be differences among the churches. After all, the ecumenical goal is not to create a uniform church, but a fellowship of churches that maintain their respective diversities and identities. Membership in a council of churches does not necessarily imply full recognition of other member churches (cf. the WCC's Toronto Statement on "The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches" 1950). Such membership can enrich all the member churches by enabling their mutual sharing of gifts, and can help them move towards the visible unity which Christ wills for his people.

### **Toward Inclusive Ecumenical Associations**

Inspired by this vision, driven by these convictions, participants in AMCU III urge the churches in Asia to find ways of giving clearer, visible expression to our common Christian calling. Different situations, of course, require different responses. No single structure will fit every national context; and already there are several models for closer cooperation that merit wider consideration.

What is important, as a matter of urgency, is that our churches — those that belong to national ecumenical bodies as well as those, including many bishops' conferences and synods, that at present do not — should respond positively, imaginatively, courageously to the invitation to enter into a process of prayer and reflection, aimed at finding a way of structuring their relationships that will more effectively serve the ecumenical movement in our time.



In each country, a joint working group might be set up by the churches to examine their existing relationships and bring forward proposals for improvements, and even for alternative ecumenical structures. While any church remains apart from the growing fellowship of Christ's people, that fellowship must be considered sadly incomplete. Fears and difficulties felt by particular churches should be discussed frankly, confident that Christ will not abandon his people to their divisions.

All ecumenical structures are to serve the churches' witness to the reconciling power of God in Jesus Christ. The test of their effectiveness, ultimately, is found in relations between Christian people in each place. National ecumenical structures are to assist and encourage, never to stifle, the initiatives of local churches in witness and service.

Similar questions need to be addressed in terms of continental ecumenical relationships. CCA and FABC, through their Asian Ecumenical Committee, will continue to seek ways for more effective cooperation—coordinating activities, for example, through regular staff meetings and joint ecumenical courses and programs. Some national bishops' conferences may wish to pursue the possibility of direct membership in CCA. The question of moving towards a new regional ecumenical body, in place of CCA, remains open for future consideration.

### ECHO MEETINGS IN ASIAN COUNTRIES

What is the next step? As proposed above, churches in countries throughout Asia are urged to pursue this thinking in their own settings. An "echo" meeting, replicating nationally what AMCU III has tried to be regionally, might prove helpful. Responses to these considerations from the churches of each country are requested, indicating the actions being taken, for consideration by the next meeting of the Asian Ecumenical Committee in 2002.

We, the participants of AMCU III, coming from the different churches in Asia and beyond, are grateful to God for this unique ecumenical experience of living together, praying together and reflecting together on our common mission in Asia. We were able to shed prejudices, discover valuable treasures in other churches and listen to the Spirit speaking through ourselves and others. We appeal to our own churches to commit themselves fully to this ecumenical vision and fellowship to which God calls us all, that we may give a common witness and help build a new Asia transformed

by the values of the Gospel.

## II. GIVING SHAPE TO A NEW ECUMENICAL VISION IN ASIA: SOME INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS

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### I. Introduction

Though coming from the world of business, it is worth noting what Reinhold Wurth says about "vision" as a way of avoiding the "trap" of either presenting "vision" as simply a "fantastic idea but is totally detached from reality;" or as a "simplistic suggestion or cheap recipe" that has no chance of coming into organizational reality. Writes Wurth:

Visions are spiritual high flights between past and future. Visions are more than dreams since they can be supported with arguments. Nevertheless they are less than strategic plans because visions go beyond the time-scale of the latter. Learning from the experiences of the past but at the same time detaching himself from them, the successful visionary attempts to anticipate the future in his thoughts as boldly and as realistically as he can. If he succeeds in formulating this future in a way which is to some extent valid, i.e., credible and viable for an (enterprise), a successful visionary can be a successful businessman.<sup>1</sup>

Talking about "giving shape to a new ecumenical vision" should be understood, as I see it, as a way of anticipating and formulating the ecumenical future in a valid, credible and viable way. There are ecumenical antecedents and experiences, common theological perspectives and historical conditions, that provide it its validity, credibility, and viability.

### II. Some Ecumenical Antecedents

From the side of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the ecumenical antecedents are clear and specific.

A. At the Asia Mission Conference (AMC) of the CCA, that was

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<sup>1</sup> Reinhold Wurth, cited in Hans Kung, *A Global Ethics for Global Politics and Economics*, Oxford U.P.: 1998, p. xvi.



held in Cipanas, Indonesia in 1989, an encompassing and challenging resolution was passed for the future of the ecumenical movement in Asia. Noting the "yearning" for a "common witness" and for the Church's "unity and renewal," and recognizing that "ecumenical structures are provisional expressions of the ecumenical vision," the resolution urged the CCA and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) to set in motion a process by which "a new ecumenical reality might emerge in Asia" that would include in its direct fellowship and structure the constituencies of the CCA and the FABC. There was FABC participation at the Cipanas Conference and in the working group that drafted and proposed the resolution. It is clear from the way the resolution was worded that, among many theological and ecclesiological questions that were considered, there was expressed the conviction and the hope that the shape of ecumenical life in Asia can and should respond to the challenge of a more inclusive and comprehensive ecumenical fellowship.

- B. In Manila, Philippines, at the 9th General Assembly of the CCA, the Cipanas resolution was adopted with the affirmation of "willingness" on the part of the CCA to "rethink CCA's ethos, constitution, programs and ways of work in the quest for a more adequate expression of Asian ecumenism." In adopting this resolution, the Assembly invited the FABC to set up with the CCA a "task force" to "explore the possibility of Catholic membership in the CCA, or of a successor Asian ecumenical structure....," that could enable such a wider ecumenical fellowship.<sup>2</sup>
- C. Over the past several years, the "task force" has been appointed and has undertaken its work. It is now the Asia Ecumenical Committee (AEC). The AEC has met several times over the past five years, and has set up the Asian Movement of Christian Unity (AMCU) as an organ of its work. As a result of these organizational bodies, and affirming "the unity that already exists among us," joint activity between the two bodies has intensified as initial expressions of giving shape to a new level of ecumenical life and relationships. A Joint Staff meeting has been held; more direct and constant communication among various desks of both bodies has followed; areas of possible common work and programs have begun to be identified more clearly; and most important of all, mutual participation in each other's life and work

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<sup>2</sup> Christian Conference of Asia, *Christ Our Peace: Building a Just Society*, p. 84.



has increased considerably.

The latter include the participation of the CCA in the Special Synod of Bishops for Asia that was held in the Vatican in 1998; the involvement of FABC faculty and participants in the Asian Ecumenical Course of the CCA; a joint Ecumenical Formation Course that was held for South Asia in Bangalore in 1999; CCA participation in the FABC Plenary in Bangkok in 1999; FABC participation in the CCA visit to the Middle East on the issue of "migrant workers"; and CCA participation in a number of FABC meetings on "Social Communication." As I noted in my report to the 11th General Assembly of the CCA in Tomohon, as a result of all of these, we have become "friends" sharing life with each other, and not only participants trying to overcome the sense of strangeness that has kept us distant from each other.

- D. The 11th General Assembly of the CCA in Tomohon affirmed these developments very strongly. It also recognized that in view of these developments there exists ample antecedent understanding of issues and possibilities, and actual common work, to open the possibility and discussion of a new shape and a new ecumenical vision in Asia.

### **III. Common Theological Perspectives and Historical Imperatives**

Theological imperatives and convictions and the pressure of Christian witness in the new historical conditions of Asia give added validity, credibility and viability to the challenge of "giving shape to a new ecumenical vision in Asia."

- A. The Biblical and theological imperatives and basis for Christian unity and the unity and renewal of the Church — so much of which have accumulated in ecumenical history, in recent Biblical, theological and ecclesiological pronouncements of Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant bodies, and the ongoing discussions of critical issues of doctrine and worship among various Christian Confessions — give validity to this effort. Jesus prayed "that they may all be one." In this prayer, Jesus indicates Divine will for the unity of the Church and of Christians. He also roots the imperative and the basis of this unity in the unity of the Godhead, and the credibility and prerequisite of the task of evangelization and of the Church's mission to the world. As the basis on which AMCU has been organized notes rightly, there is as a result of this a "unity that already exists among us" that

we need to manifest and make more visible in ever more concrete and specific ways as an integral part of the life and mission of the Church in Asia. The recent Papal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, underscores this point strongly in its assertion that "division is a counter-witness to Jesus Christ," and therefore "a scandal" and hindrance to the work of evangelization. This means, on the practical level, a joining together by Christian Churches in a "process of prayer and consultation in order to explore the possibilities of new ecumenical structures and associations to promote Christian unity".<sup>3</sup> For the CCA, the vision of "life together" that manifests itself in a "one ecumenical fellowship" of Churches and Christian bodies on the national, regional and world levels has always been a part of its ecumenical hope. Indeed, it considers this a "special, specific and privileged" task of the ecumenical movement in Asia

- B. The possibility and the coming into being of a "more comprehensive expression" of Christian unity and of the ecumenical fellowship in Asia should be seen as in itself a prophetic manifestation of the possibility embodied in Christian faith and life for unity in a deeply and painfully divided, fractious, and conflict-ridden world. In itself, it gives credibility and substance to Christian claims for unity and reconciliation and the power that can bring these into being. Philip Potter, a past General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, pointed this out not too long ago. "One of the greatest services that the Christian community can render to the world," writes Potter, "(is to) mobilize and awaken the dormant forces of the Christian community, and demonstrate in its own life that these are actually stronger than the barriers that separate nation from nation, class from class, race from race...Such conscious (community) implies a sense of solidarity, a willingness to suffer together, a determination not to let oneself be cut off from fellow Christians by any event, not even by war or revolution, and a burning desire to realize the visible unity of the Church." In the divided and conflict-ridden world in which we live, the wider and enlivened fellowship of Christians across confessional, geographic, cultural and other boundaries offers a message of hope.
- C. Recent experiences in the life of conciliar expressions of the ecumenical movement have given a new and important basis to

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, para. 30.



talk about what it means to give structural shape to the ecumenical vision. On the one hand, there has emerged a more critical understanding of the character, the possibilities and the limits of "ecumenical councils" as expressions of ecumenical life. There is as a result a greater sensitivity and realism concerning what they can do and cannot do, and what can and cannot be expected of them in regard to the life of the Church and of its witness in the world. There has emerged too a critical and serious effort to look at other possible structures by which ecumenical fellowship might be made visible. On the other hand, the experience of Catholic membership in various Councils of Churches nationally and regionally in Asia and in various parts of the world have provided valuable and critical lessons about what structural shape might be given to a more inclusive and comprehensive ecumenical fellowship. There is in other words historical and theological grounds on which the challenge of giving shape to a new ecumenical vision can be discussed viably and credibly.

- D. As we are told constantly, we enter at the beginning of the 21st century the most dynamic and challenging period of Asian history. As *Asiaweek* has noted recently, Asia in the 21st century "has become a global force in every field." The explosion of the new world of communication of which Asia has been a part, the pace and volatility of Asian economic life and development, the unfinished tasks of nation-building that have erupted in many places, the continuing areas of war and the challenges of peace and reconciliation, the new world of religious activism and militancy, and the new challenges of international relations in a global world, among others, provide dynamism and volatility to Asian life, and the historical imperatives to the life and mission of the Church that requires ecumenical vision and commitment.
- E. Finally, and in a most important way, the challenge of giving shape to a new ecumenical vision involves the multiplication and joining together of resources, experiences and insights for giving expression to the varied manifestations of Asian Christianity, of Asian spirituality, religious life and theology, and of Asian Churches' witness to Asian economic, social, political and cultural life. It also involves, in the most practical level, the task of putting together and multiplying limited human, material and other resources for the undertaking of common work.



#### **IV. Some Concluding Remarks**

For the CCA, in short, in reaching the point of talking with the FABC about the task of "giving shape to a new ecumenical vision," we reach a new and a major point in ecumenical discussion and consultation in Asia. We realize that in engaging in these consultations, we are not making any specific commitments to any new structure of ecumenical life or relationships. We also realize, however, that in sharing life and thought together we enter into the realm of possibilities that the Holy Spirit might foist upon us. We must engage in these consultations with a sense of openness to what the Holy Spirit might ask of us to do in order to manifest more fully the unity that has been given to us and that is a part of our life. Ecumenical life, after all, has never been the result of our work or our achievement but of our response to the fresh urgings of the Holy Spirit. I personally feel glad therefore that we have been able to have this meeting together, and hope very much that we will do what it takes to move further in our ecumenical journey together.

#### **III. THE SPIRIT'S GIFT TO THE CHURCHES: NEW ECUMENICAL VISIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

**THOMAS MICHEL, S.J.**

When we look back on the century which has recently ended, we see a period of great turbulence for humankind. The rise and fall of totalitarian ideologies, devastating World Wars, the demise of colonialism, and the unprecedented advance of technology have all made the 20th Century a time of exceptional achievement, but also a time of widespread war and human suffering. What will historians of the future find to be of most lasting importance in the great events that affected human life, both for good and for bad, during this century?

When we turn our gaze to the history of the Christian people and their Churches during this same period, can we identify those key movements of God's grace that stand out as evidence of God's continuing care, of the Holy Spirit's constant activity in the ongoing pilgrimage on earth of Christ's disciples? In my opinion, future Church historians might well consider the growth of the Ecumenical Movement throughout this past century to be one of the most significant signs of God's accompanying and guiding the Church of Christ. These future historians might see the 20th Century as the time when the Spirit was actively motivating Christians and showing them the path to rebuild the unity that Christ has always desired for his disciples.

The Ecumenical Movement has certainly been a movement of great grace for Christians. It is an expression of *faith* in our profession of one baptism, one Lord, one God who is Father of all. Ecumenism is an affirmation that Jesus Christ desires his disciples to be united in faith so that together we bear witness to God's saving deeds in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, continually reenacted in history by the power of the Spirit. The Ecumenical Movement proceeds from a painful awareness that the unity which Christ established among his disciples is not yet visible to people, because of the multiplicity of churches and ecclesial bodies, and because of the frequent mutual suspicion and enmity and conflict that have characterized relations among Christian groups. Of all religions we appear to the conscientious observer to be the most divided. We might say that despite the unity of faith that we profess, what we all too often bear witness to is our disunity. I was once asked by a Muslim friend, "Why don't you Christians want to pray together? Every group of you insists on having your own church buildings, your own worship services, your own projects in society."

The Ecumenical Movement is also an expression of *hope*. It arises from the conviction among Christians that the divisions we have known and grown up with, that have kept us apart for so many centuries, and whose origins have been often forgotten except by scholarly researchers, need not go on forever. The conviction behind the Ecumenical Movement is that there is something that we can do, with God's guidance and in the power of grace, to move from disunity to greater visible unity. Throughout the course of the 20th century, the Ecumenical Movement has grown from the concern of a few to become a central force in the life of Christian Churches.

The Ecumenical Movement is also an expression of *love*. It is a realization among Christians that Christians of other Churches are not our enemies, to be excluded, condemned, struggled against, overcome, defeated. Rather, they are our brothers and sisters with whom we share the deepest bond possible on earth, a communion rooted in the powerful presence of our Master and Savior Jesus Christ. Through ecumenism, we learn that we can live with other Christians, work with them, worship and praise God together with them, forgive them and seek their forgiveness, teach them and learn from them, all this to God's greater glory.

I believe that in this work of grace that we call Ecumenism, one of the most effective instruments that God has used to bring about the success of the movement are the new forms of ecumenical asso-



ciation that have arisen in the course of the past century. National and regional Councils of Churches and Christian Councils are one of the clear signs of the Spirit's activity in the ecumenical movement that account for its dynamism and growth.

In 1900, there were no Councils of Churches, the first appearing in France in 1905. Today, a century later, there are 103 national and regional Councils. In the Roman Catholic Church, the awareness of the value of Church Councils for promoting Christian unity, while belated, has moved even more quickly. At the time of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Catholic Church was not a member of a Council of Churches anywhere in the world. Today, less than forty years later, the Catholic Church is a full member of 58 national or regional councils of Churches in over 70 countries.

Can we deny the work of the Spirit in a phenomenon that seems to parallel the course of the century—from zero in 1900 to 103 in 2000, Roman Catholic participation moving from zero in 1965 to 58 in 2000? Can we claim that this is only an accident of history? When we try to discern the "signs of the times," the ways in which the Spirit is at work in the Churches today, must we not acknowledge that the Holy Spirit has been instrumental in inspiring the formation of Church councils, and their guiding, fostering their maturation to become central elements of ecclesial life?

We have come to discover what Councils of Churches and similar ecumenical associations can be, and also what they are not. They are not a superchurch, where the member bodies lose their identity and power of independent decision. They are not an end in themselves, or the goal of Christian unity, but rather privileged instruments on the path to greater unity in Christ. They are not simply a consolidation of offices and coordination of activities.

Councils of Churches are, rather, an occasion of grace by which Christians of various communions can come to know each other, to appreciate those elements of the one Christian tradition which each confession has variously preserved and developed, to join together in addressing the social problems of the region, to be challenged by trying to see themselves as their fellow Christians see them, and to overcome the centuries of distrust and prejudices that centuries of isolation have allowed to occur. In short, they are schools where God can teach us how to love one another better. Isn't this what Christian life is all about? Isn't this, ultimately, how the world will know that we are Christ's disciples?



I believe that such an awareness of the value of Church councils for Christian renewal forms the background of Pope John Paul's recommendation to Christians in Asia in his 1999 exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*. There the Pope encourages us to enter into a process of prayer and discussion with Christians of other Churches, in order to explore the possibilities of new ecumenical structures and associations for promoting Christian unity.

The Pope makes it clear that the search for effective associations to promote unity is not something that each Church can do on its own. It is, he says, by embarking on the project together of praying about this, of studying the issues jointly, of reflecting with one another about the pros and cons, of facing the obstacles and difficulties and counter-arguments, that we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us where the Spirit wills.

If this seminar, AMCU III, is to be seen as a first effort on the part of Catholics to implement the recommendation of the Pope in *Ecclesia in Asia*, it must equally be recognized as an important step on the part of the member Churches and Synods of the Christian Conference of Asia to implement the decisions of their General Assemblies in Manila and Colombo which called on their members to meet with Roman Catholic leaders to pursue this same goal. My colleague, Dr. Carino, has well traced the antecedents of the Christian Conference of Asia commitment to work with the Catholic Church to find new and inclusive ecumenical structures and associations. Catholics, in their turn, must be grateful to their fellow Christians of the CCA for the leadership and inspiration they have given in this direction.

Where the Spirit will lead us in our deliberations we do not know, but we do know that in opening ourselves to the grace which will be offered on these days, we are asking God to show us the way, we are asking God to make us instruments of building unity with sisters and brothers who, like us, profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

I would like to conclude with a personal reflection. Last June, I took part as an observer in the CCA General Assembly held in Tomohon, Indonesia. I found it very moving to discover in the official CCA delegations from Taiwan and Australia Roman Catholic sisters and brothers. My overriding impression of their presence was one of feeling "how right this is"; that "this is where we belong"; "this is the shape of the future" already existing among us in seminal form. I felt exposed to new possibilities, to wondering about what new contributions the Churches in Asia might make to this

ongoing work of the Spirit. Will future historians look back someday on AMCU III as an event in the life of Christians in Asia, when together the Churches set themselves on a course leading to deeper union in faith, hope, and love?

#### **IV. KEYNOTE ADDRESS THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL BASES FOR CHURCHES' INVOLVEMENT IN COUNCILS OF CHURCHES**

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER<sup>4</sup>**

### **I. Theological and Spiritual Foundations**

#### **A. Response to Christ's Will – the Motivating Force**

I would like to start my reflection with a simple question. Why was it deemed opportune and necessary to enter into this process of consultation in Asia? What is the driving force behind the setting up of councils of churches? It would seem to me that there is no other reason for coming together, and being together, over the next few days except the desire to respond to the will of Jesus Christ who wanted one Church, and prayed passionately in his priestly prayer on the eve of his death for the unity of all his followers. We are here not because of political, or of mere humanistic, reasons. We don't pursue our own purposes and advantages. We are here because we are convinced that the search for Christian unity is essential to being authentic Christians, for credible common witness, and also for authentic worship of the one God. In other words, there is some incompleteness, a certain imperfection when we worship separately. This consultation, I believe, is very important for the whole of the Church in Asia. It is a signal that Christians realise according to Christ's will the urgency of working and praying together in search for full Christian unity.

#### **B. The Priestly Prayer of Jesus**

Let me first of all offer some reflections on the priestly prayer

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<sup>4</sup> Ed. note: Less than a month after addressing AMCU III, Bishop Walter Kasper, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was named Cardinal by Pope John Paul II, and appointed president of the same Council.



of Jesus. In Christ's priestly prayer for the unity of his followers, Jesus first offers before us the principal cause of unity as the model of unity for his disciples. "Father, I pray not only for these, but for those who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (Jn 17:20-21).

We note three points here. The first one is that Jesus prays that all his followers may be one as Jesus himself is one with his Father. The Trinity, therefore, is the highest example and source, the model, and the highest form, of the unity to which all Christians are called (cf. *UR 3*) Such Trinitarian unity is not a uniformity, but means unity in the diversity of persons, and diversity in unity. The Trinitarian unity is an expression that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8; 16). Thus, Church unity has to be defined as communion in faith, worship and love.

The second point is that the unity Jesus prays for is not our own work but a divine gift, which is already given in and through Jesus Christ. In him we are already one by the one Spirit. So unity is a gift from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But at the same time, unity is an obligation. It is given as a task for all Christians, beginning with the apostles, and for all generations. This obligation is founded in the new commandment Jesus gave us: "A new command I give you: love one another. All will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (Jn 13: 34-35). Thus, when there are divisions among Christians, this will be in contradiction to Jesus' command; this is sin against Christ's will.

This leads us to the following sentences of Jesus' prayer; and to the third point. Jesus prays: "May they be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21); "that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and have loved them even as you loved me" (Jn. 17:23). Here, Jesus indicates how he shares the glory, the divine unity of the Holy Trinity with us; and what consequences flow from our receiving that gift as we live that same life on the human level. All of Jesus' followers must come together in perfect, visible unity, so that the world may see in them a visible sign to the world, offered as authentic witness of their faith in Jesus Christ. Only by our common witnesses can we be credible to the world. The search for unity and our mission to evangelize belong inseparably together.

To conclude this point, I would simply say that we come together as Christians principally because we are convinced we must



work for the re-establishment of a full visible unity in faith, mission and sacramental life. It is not a vague and mere emotional unity that we seek, but a unity in essentials according to the will and desire of Jesus Christ. Those who gather in Councils of Churches, or in consultations, to search for ways of establishing common ecumenical instruments are driven by the same motivation, the same vision and passion for unity, that was in Christ Jesus our Lord. Christians gather as we do during the next few days because of their concern about divisions in their witness in mission. All these divisions contradict the will of Christ, and do a disservice to the very Gospel the Churches proclaim. Our divisions are indeed a scandal, and a countersign and counterwitness to people of other religions.

### **C. Common Baptism**

The second theological and spiritual foundation is our common Baptism. We have come together on the basis of the Baptism we share in Jesus Christ, founded on our common faith in Christ. Through baptism we "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28); "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12:13); "There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6). Thus, we can affirm and confess our common faith in one God, one Christ and in one Church: "*Credo in unam sanctam catholicam apostolicam ecclesiam*" (I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church).

This affirmation of the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ through our common baptism leads us to the image of the Good Shepherd in John's Gospel, Chapter 10. Jesus the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, seeking to bring the whole flock together: "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. So that there will be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). With these words Jesus describes his own mission. With these words he at the same time describes himself as model for all who are called to be shepherds of his flock. They have to lay down their lives for their sheep and for the unity of their flock. Finally, these words apply to all followers of Jesus Christ. They all have to struggle for full visible unity in Christ.

As Christians, therefore, we cannot remain complacent to, or undisturbed by, the glaring situation of divisions among us. The separations, the schisms and divisions are scandalous; and they are also sins against the will of Jesus Christ. Thus, we may not try to

justify, rationalize or ideologize them. We are called to feel the pain of our divisions, and to have a genuine desire for repentance and confession, that must lead to concrete steps in healing the wounds of division.

The theological and spiritual foundations for Councils of Churches are not just abstract principles and theoretical speculations, but a part of God's plan of salvation to gather the people of God (Jer 23:3; 31:10; Ez 37:21), and "to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:10). Our ecumenical journey towards unity is a part of this gathering and recapitulation in Christ. Its intention is that the One Church of Jesus Christ may truly become "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind" (LG I; cf. UR 2).

#### **D. Conversion of Heart**

The call of Christ to all his followers to unity, and the reality of their division, today challenges us to feel shameful for a situation brought about by sin, and, therefore, calls us to repentance. In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* Pope John Paul II, in a key paragraph, underlines this aspect. "Passing from principles from the obligation of Christian conscience, to the actual practice of the ecumenical journey towards unity, the Second Vatican Council emphasizes above all *the need for interior conversion* (UUS 15). He then refers to the Decree of Vatican II on Ecumenism which stresses that same point: "There can be no ecumenism worthy of its name without a change of heart" (UR 7).

This sentence uses the fundamental biblical concept of *conversio* (*metanoia*) in the sense of a decisive turning away from human selfishness. This means a radical turning to God, and a readiness to act in accordance with his will; and at the same time a turning to our neighbor. The phrase "conversion of heart" is obviously drawn from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, where Paul speaks of *novitas mentis* (being renewed in mind) (Eph 4:23), which is not simply a question of moral attitude, but a fundamental transformation in our way of thinking, acting and living. Such a change of heart and life starts before baptism and continues after baptism in our entire life. This implies a new vision, a new perspective and understanding; but it also underlines self-denial and rejection of every kind of triumphalism that does not see one's own deficiencies and failings.

Against this background we see why the Holy Father in his encyclical underlines the dimension of personal as well as communal



conversion as an essential prerequisite on the journey towards Christian unity. It is conversion that opens our eyes to see the positive aspects in other Christian traditions. The Pope speaks of "the discovery of examples of holiness, the experience of immense riches present in the communion of saints, and the contact with unexpected dimensions of Christian commitment. In a corresponding way, there is an increased sense of the need for repentance: an awareness of certain exclusions which seriously harm fraternal charity; of certain refusals to forgive; of certain pride; of an unevangelical insistence on condemning the 'other side,' of a disdain born of an unhealthy presumption" (*UUS* 15). This needs a purification of memories and mutual forgiveness.

On the first Sunday of Lent of the Jubilee Year 2000, Pope Paul II gave a good example of such conversion when he confessed the sins which have harmed the unity of the body of Christ, and wounded fraternal charity. The Pope asked forgiveness, so that all Christians reconciled with God and with one another will be able to experience anew the joy of full communion. No Christian is exempt from such conversion of heart and mind. Conversion begins always with oneself. Thus, a personal conversion is needed, that includes acknowledgement of one's own guilt, and the honesty to ask for mutual forgiveness.

### **E. Centrality of Prayer**

Reconciliation and the unity of the Church, as well, are not our own work but the gift of the Spirit. We cannot "make" reconciliation. Unity is not feasible; we can only pray for it. So the Second Vatican Council and the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* underlined the centrality of prayer for the promotion of Christian unity. This was expressed in the Decree on Ecumenism in the following words: "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 rightly be called 'spiritual ecumenism'" (*UR* 8).

The importance of this emphasis lies in the fact that the divisions among Christians are not simply in theological matters, but more profoundly in the breach of the spiritual bonds of communion. For this reason the Second Vatican Council considered the soul of the ecumenical movement as being found in the change of heart and in prayer for Christian unity. Citing the Second Vatican Council, the Holy Father refers to common prayer as, "a very effective means of petitioning for the grace of unity." "When Christians pray together,

the goal of unity seems closer. The long history of Christians, marked by many divisions, seems to converge once more, because it tends towards that Source of its unity, which is Jesus Christ. He "is the same yesterday, today and forever!" (Heb 13:8). In the fellowship of prayer Christ is truly present; he prays in us, "with us", and "for us." It is he who leads our prayer in the Spirit-Consoler, whom he promised and then bestowed on his Church in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, when he established her original unity" (*UUS* 22).

These spiritual aspects of conversion and prayer are intimately related to the nature and purpose of councils of churches. Such councils, as councils of churches, cannot work like political gatherings, or meetings of businessmen. Councils of churches can function only when there is more at stake; when there the Spirit of God is at work. Without the spiritual dimension they will fail. Therefore, a council of churches must provide a context where divided Christians can come together with open hearts, with readiness to learn from each other, and to share their gifts, in prayer and in search for full unity. When member churches come together in prayer, this is a sign that hope for unity is not lost. Prayer in common becomes a sign to the world that Christians, though still divided, can offer their common witness.

## II. Theological Reflections

### A. Christological and Trinitarian Foundation

There are many ways in which members of different churches, and the churches, themselves, can come, pray and work together. In many forms much progress was made on the local, national, regional and universal levels in the last century, especially since the Second Vatican Council. Councils of churches are one of the important ways of the ecumenical movement. They are the most stable structures to promote Christian unity and ecumenical co-operation (*RED*, 166). Let us, therefore, ask how these councils of churches have to be understood.

First of all, councils of churches are not a church; nor are they a super-church. They cannot claim church authority (*RED*, 169). Councils of churches are a fellowship of churches founded on a common Christological affirmation of churches which confess the Lord Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. World Council of Churches, "Constitution, Rules, Regulations and By-laws," I, Basis. Most other constitutions seem to use similar language.



as God and Savior according to the Scriptures; and that confess their faith in the triune God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> This is the basis formula of the World Council of Churches, where the Christological affirmation is purposely placed in a Trinitarian setting. The Second Vatican Council quotes this text in the first Chapter of the Decree on Ecumenism as the foundation for the ecumenical movement (*UR* 1). This basis of the World Council of Churches also lays the foundation for the fundamental purpose of every council of churches.

Thus, the common Christological and Trinitarian confession is the basis for a fellowship of Churches, which are under other aspects still divided. So the basis formula of the World Council of Churches implies what the Second Vatican Council has described as "a certain, though imperfect communion," since "all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ" (*UR* 2). The "certain though imperfect communion" is the framework for what I want to develop here.

The member churches of a council of churches in a given local place normally come together because of the close bonds of faith (even though they are divided), as well as because of a certain urgency to face common issues together. In other words, their faith commitment to Jesus Christ urges them, while still divided, to work together, and in doing so they reflect in an imperfect way the unity found in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The member churches' commitment to be together, to work together; and to pray together becomes an invitation to Christ to be in their midst: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

A yearning for the call to full communion is the major motivating force that makes members of a council of churches stay together. Thus, a council of churches fulfils its task properly if it calls its member churches "to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and common life in Christ."<sup>6</sup> In other words, one of the roles of a council of churches is to foster and nurture the partial, though imperfect, communion that already exists among the member churches, while at the same time challenging them continuously to work towards full visible unity.

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<sup>6</sup> World Council of Churches, "Constitution, Rules, Regulations and By-laws," III, 1.

At the Third International Consultation on Councils of Churches in Hong Kong in 1993, the first theme dealt with "NCCs as Instruments of Unity." The opening paragraph of the report on that theme affirmed the primary focus of councils of churches: "To the extent that a common binding element can be identified among NCCs, it is the baptism mystery of grace as it compels Christians to respond towards the unity of the body of Christ."<sup>7</sup>

To conclude this section, I would say that the partial but real communion between member churches in a council of churches can only be understood within the framework of common baptism in Christ, and the member-churches' common confession of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This dual framework of common Baptism and the Trinitarian confession I believe to be the fundamental basis of the ecumenical movement, of the passionate desire to seek full visible unity among divided Christians.

## B. The Ecclesiological Question

So far, I have avoided entering into the complex question of the relation between councils of churches and ecclesiology. You are aware that this is an old debate in the ecumenical movement. When the World Council of Churches (WCC) entered into the debate on its own self-understanding as a fellowship of churches, it became clear that this was a very complex ecclesiological problem for the member churches.

In September 1949, the issue of the Basis for the WCC was discussed at Istina Centre in Paris with some Catholic ecumenists. That discussion with Dr. Visser't Hooft resulted in the first draft of what later in 1950 was to become the *Toronto Statement*.<sup>8</sup> At Toronto there was also a debate over the proposed title of the statement, "The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches," which in the end became the sub-title to "The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches," mainly because to use the latter as the title would have provoked the very problem the statement was meant to clarify, namely, that the WCC had no ecclesiological position of its own.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, 291.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. "The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches. The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches." Adopted by the WCC Central Committee, Toronto, 9-15 July, 1950, *The Ecumenical Review*, vol.3, 1950, pp.47-53.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva: WCC, 1982, pp. 78-79.



The main point I would like to make here emerges from the second part of the *Toronto Statement*. In trying to explain the implication of membership, part IV, no. 4 states that "membership does not imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word."<sup>10</sup> In a WCC publication of last year on the topic we are addressing in this consultation the question of ecclesiology is sharply spelled out. "It is relatively easy to form an association of churches that all conceive of the church in the same basic way. But that is precisely the crucial new factor about councils: they express fellowship among churches that may or may not be able to recognize and accept each other fully."<sup>11</sup> Here we find a very crucial point touching on the self-understanding of each member church (including the Catholic Church) in a council of churches.

### C. The Catholic Position: *subsistit in*

It is against this background that the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council, challenged by centuries of divisions, committed its faithful to work for the full unity of all Christians. This commitment was made in the context of a clear affirmation of the Catholic Church's own ecclesial self-understanding that opened the way to ecumenical relations and dialogue. The Council stated that the Church of Christ "subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him" (*LG 8*).

At the same time the Catholic Church acknowledged the "many elements of sanctification and of truth found outside her visible structures," adding that these elements as "gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism towards catholic unity" (*LG 8*). The Second Vatican Council named some of these elements (*LG 15*), among which the most important is baptism (*LG 15; UR 3*). The Council has, moreover, referred to those elements that are shared by the Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches on the one hand (*UR 14-18*), and the Catholic Church and other churches and ecclesial Communities on the other (*UR 19-23*). The term "elements" comes from John Calvin. But for Calvin these are sad remainders; whereas for the Council they are living and dy-

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<sup>10</sup> *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 3, 1950, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> Diane Kessler & Michael Kinnamon, *Councils of Churches and the Ecumenical Vision*, Geneva: WCC, 2000, p. 21.

namic elements of sanctification and truth; "gifts belonging to the Church of Christ," "forces impelling towards Catholic unity" (LG 8). So the Council adds that the separated churches and communities "have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation" (UR 3).

The Declaration of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, which surprised, and even hurt, many non-Catholic Christians, must be read and understood against the background, and within the larger context, of these conciliar documents, and the Holy Father's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, as well as of the Pope's addresses on various occasions affirming the irreversible commitment of the Catholic Church to the search for full Christian unity. In his encyclical Pope John Paul II stated that there is no ecclesiological vacuum outside the Catholic Church; but that there can be found gifts of the Spirit, signs of holiness, and even of martyrdom for Christ's name (UUS 12-13; cf. UR 4).

The original purpose of the phrase "*subsists in*" was mainly to affirm the oneness and uniqueness of the Church of Christ, and her concrete realization in time and space within the Catholic Church. But the use of *subsistit in* instead of *est*, used still by Pius XII, opened at the same time the way for the ecumenical reality, for ecumenical commitment and dialogue with other churches. It is important to note the explanation given by the doctrinal commission on "*subsists in*" at the Second Vatican Council in 1964. "*Subsistit in* is used instead of *est* as an expression more in harmony with what is said elsewhere about ecclesial elements."<sup>12</sup>

Cardinal Jan Willebrands, the former president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, gives some interesting insights on the term *subsistit in*. The use of the term 'subsists' instead of "exists" was mainly to maintain the unity of the Catholic Church, while at the same time opening her towards members of other churches and ecclesial communities. Cardinal Willebrands explains this as follows: "It is the manner which Christ's Church is found in the Catholic Church which gives the full content of that word. At the same time, the difference between *subsistit* and *existit* remains essential, because *subsistit* does not rule out that "many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside of her visible structure" (LG).

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<sup>12</sup> *Acta Synodalia sacrosancti concilii oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol.111/1, 177.



Against this background, we note that *Dominus Iesus* differs from the open and inviting language of the Second Vatican Council and of the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II. *Dominus Iesus* uses a more scholastic terminology and style which are hard for most people to understand. But with regard to the content this Declaration affirmed more or less what has always been known about the self-understanding of the Catholic Church.

#### **D. Communion: Unity in Diversity**

The vision of the Church behind the phrase *subsistit in* cannot be fully understood without reference to the ecclesiology of communion (*koinonia*), which is rooted in the witness of the New Testament and in the tradition of the ancient church.

The New Testament speaks of *koinonia* (*communio*) in the Eucharist (Acts 2: 42; 1 Cor 10:16); the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:13; Phil 2:1); the Gospel (Phil 1:5); etc. The First Letter of John says that "fellowship (*koinonia*) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ," which is the foundation of the fellowship among us (1 Jn 1:3). The Apostolic Creed takes up this term confessing our common faith in the *communio sanctorum* (communion of saints). On a more concrete and practical level the ecclesiology of communion found its expression in manifold mutual contacts between local churches, letters of communication, visits, hospitality, help particularly in situations of persecution, synods and councils, and finally in Eucharistic sharing, especially concelebration between bishops. Thereby, the apostolic sees, especially the apostolic see of Rome, were centers of communication and common points of reference.

This ecclesiology of communion, which was familiar to the Fathers of the Church and fundamental for the life of the Church in the first centuries, was later on often overshadowed by a more monolithic ecclesiology of unity. The patristic renewal in the 20th Century rediscovered the ancient tradition and led to an ecclesiological renewal which influenced also the Second Vatican Council. All these trends became fruitful in the ecumenical movement, where the ecclesiology of communion became fundamental for more or less all ecumenical dialogues with the Eastern and the Western churches as well.

In the light of the renewed ecclesiology of communion the goal of the ecumenical movement is not a uniform Church but a full visible communion of Churches. Vatican II defines the ecumenical goal as the realization of full communion, or as "fullness of unity" (*UR*

4; cf. *UUS* 14). This means that the confession of the same faith does not entail the same formulations of faith, but allows different expressions, for example, of liturgical and devotional life, and of canonical rules. Unity understood as communion is a unity in diversity.

In a certain sense, councils of churches reflect such an ecclesiology of communion. They express the imperfect communion already existing; and they create a space in which member churches gradually grow in communion; yet each member retains its distinctive identity. The desire for full *koinonia* in diversity is what normally characterizes the life of a council of churches, whereby there is much sharing of life, common prayer and service. But it is important to say that the *koinonia* we attribute to a council of churches does not emanate from its structure, but from the relations between its member churches.

To affirm the reality of *koinonia* in diversity is not to condone the fact of divisions between member churches. The process towards the full unity in diversity that we intend to reach with the help of God's Spirit should help to differentiate the divisions and the contradictions which still exist in the present situation of imperfect communion. It would be wrong to view divisions as legitimate diversity. Divisions will always have a negative effect on the quality of *koinonia* between member churches in a council. So it would be more accurate to speak of a partial but real communion between member churches, and of their main task to grow towards full visible unity, where each tradition maintains its own legitimate diversity but loses its contradictory character. In this sense one often speaks of the model of reconciled diversity.

### **E. Four Conclusions**

1. Councils of churches are founded on a dual framework of common Baptism and the Trinitarian and Christological confession of faith. On that basis we may speak of a "real but imperfect communion" between members churches in a council of churches.
2. Participation by the Catholic Church in councils of churches does not imply that she must regard other members as churches in the strict sense of the word, i.e., in the sense of the self-understanding of the Catholic Church.<sup>13</sup> But she participates in such

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. "Toronto Statement," *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 3, 1950, p. 51.



bodies because there already exists a positive relationship between churches and ecclesial communities in a given place.

3. The communion attributed to a council of churches comes not from its structure, but from the relations between its member churches. Therefore, the member churches are and remain the main agents in the ecumenical movement. The councils of churches are important and helpful instruments, and forums for encounter, dialogue, sharing, common witness and actions. But they cannot take decisions on behalf of their member churches. They are obliged to give an accounting to the churches. Therefore, normally they are not competent to enter negotiations for unions between churches.
4. For the Catholic Church to be a member of a council of churches at local, national and regional levels does not diminish her identity or her uniqueness; but such a membership rather enriches her by the relationship with other member churches and by a mutual sharing of gifts.

### **III. Practical Applications**

#### **A. Participation in Councils of Churches**

In the last 35 years since the Second Vatican Council, a new ecumenical climate has given rise to a positive relationship and collaboration at local, national and regional levels between the Catholic Church and other churches. We see this development as fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit in our time (*UR* 1, 4).

The growing approach between the churches has led to an increased number of councils of churches, or similar bodies, in which the Catholic Church is a member. In a number of cases, for example in the Caribbean and the Middle East, the Catholic Church has even been a founding member of these bodies. In other cases, the Catholic Church has been an equal partner in creating new instruments that are inclusive of the churches in a given local national and regional level. Out of a total of 103 councils of churches throughout the world (depending on the criteria used in counting) the Catholic Church is member in 58 such bodies.<sup>14</sup> Such situations in which the Catholic Church is an equal partner changes the ecumenical rela-

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<sup>14</sup> That number excludes state councils and such bodies in large metropolitan areas.

tions considerably.

Over the years the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, within the framework of the Joint Working Group, has been represented at all consultations held at the international level on councils of churches from 1971 to 1993. These meetings have in fact changed the way the Catholic Church is represented. For example, there have been Catholics representing those Conferences of Bishops that are members of councils of churches at various levels. Thirty-five years ago that would have been unthinkable. But at the 1993 Consultation in Hong Kong, out of 17 official Catholic delegates, 7 were present in their capacity as representatives of Conferences of Bishops with membership in councils of churches.<sup>15</sup>

In detail there are many and different possibilities for the structuring and the organization of councils of churches. Differences can be in the composition, in the representation, in the procedures and methods of the decision-making process, in the form of public statements, etc. All these are questions which have to be decided by agreement, according to pastoral opportunity and the very different ecumenical and social situations in the world.<sup>16</sup>

## **B. Practical Ecclesiological Issues**

Though the trend for full membership of the Catholic Church in councils of churches can be considered as one of the many positive steps in the promotion of Christian unity, at the same time it raises some problems that may hinder progress towards unity. One of the issues raised at the above-mentioned consultations has been on the effect of Catholic membership on councils of churches. Participants have studied the pastoral difficulties that face the Catholic Church after joining councils of churches. Obviously, some of these difficulties would not be unique to the Catholic Church. But some decision-making processes may at times become more difficult by the presence of the Catholic Church in councils of churches, due to her self-understanding as both local and universal.

Especially, one reason why the Catholic Church often finds it

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<sup>15</sup> Bishop Aloisio Bohn was present as the president of the Brazil Council of Churches.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Church in Asia: Towards New Ecumenical Structures*, K. Pathil, ed. *Jēevadhara*, vol. 30, no. 178.



difficult to proceed in decision-making would be on certain matters that lack doctrinal clarity, or are not compatible with Catholic doctrine. The first concern of the Catholic Church is clarity of doctrine (*RED*, 169). Unfortunately, instead of seeing this difficulty as an ecclesiological one, it has sometimes been interpreted in terms of the Catholic Church's refusal to collaborate.

In 1975, the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (now Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity) published the document *Ecumenical Collaboration at the Local, National and Regional Levels*. The document outlined the work and purpose of councils of churches in an attempt to overcome certain difficulties. It drew a clear distinction between the traditional type of ecumenical Councils and provincial Councils (*conciliate; conceals*) of local churches in full communion with the Bishop of Rome; and the fellowship of churches that make up councils and Christian councils (*concilium; consilium*).<sup>17</sup>

These distinctions, and the practical difficulties they sometimes imply, are a part of the transitory situation the ecumenical movement has reached today, in which much progress has been made; and yet divisions still exist. Such divisions render the relationships between member churches to being marked by imperfection and made ineffective in their common witness. Thus, the ecumenical movement has led to an intermediate new church reality, where in many cases the old one-sided negative attitudes and mutual condemnations (anathema) no longer apply to our present-day dialogue partners, though we are not in a position to lift all of them. The question of how to deal with the intermediate ecumenical situation is important, and needs to be considered by all dialogue partners.

Councils of churches can be one possibility whereby such a situation could be used positively for the progress towards unity. The Directory on Ecumenism makes it clear that "Councils of Churches and Christian Councils do not in fact contain either within themselves or among themselves the beginning of a new church which could replace the communion that now exists in the Catholic Church" (*RED*, 169). In the words of the Toronto Statement such an instrument cannot be a "super-church." This is an important description because a council of churches cannot take pastoral decisions on be-

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels*, 1975, p. 19, footnote 39.

half of its member-churches. On the pastoral level the main responsibility remains with the individual member-churches. Thus, tensions can arise and are to some degree even inevitable, but a council of churches can be an important means of collaboration in order to overcome these difficulties.

### **C. Practical Co-operation: Common Witness**

The actual already-existing imperfect but real and deep communion provides a sufficient basis, and even more, an urgent call for practical co-operation between the churches. The councils of churches and similar ecumenical structures are an important forum for such practical co-operation. In his Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II says that ecumenical relations presuppose and "call for every possible form of practical cooperation at all levels" (UUS 40). Indeed, there has been a growing awareness at all levels among churches that they must overcome their isolation from each other, and together seek ways of co-operation in witness to the world.

There are many fields of co-operation. Because the esteem of for the Holy Scriptures is a fundamental bond of unity among Christians, which remains even when churches and ecclesial communities are not in full communion, the co-operation in the publication and diffusion of adequate Bible editions is an important form of common service and witness. Such a co-operation can be an effective remedy against a fundamentalistic and sectarian use of the Bible. In this context may be mentioned the co-operation between the Catholic World Bible Federation and the World Federation of Bible Societies (*RED*, 183-186).

Another possible area of practical co-operation is the collection of the important liturgical texts (Our Father, Apostolic Creed, the Creed of Nicea/Constantinople, the Trinitarian doxology, Gloria, etc.), and common hymns which can be used in common prayer services. When Christians pray together, their common witness reaches the heavens, but it will be heard also on earth (*RED*, 187.)

Co-operation in the field of catechesis is limited by its very nature, because each church has to give an introduction and initiation to her own faith in its full integrity. Unity at the lowest common denominator is neither desirable nor helpful. The ecumenical movement should not reduce our faith but rather should enrich it by sharing the gifts of the Spirit (*RED*, 188). Nevertheless, co-operation is possible, and even necessary. In catechetical texts and materials we should take care to avoid negative, polemical, depreciating and mis-



leading representations of other Christians and churches, of their history, their doctrine, worship and practice. For this aim councils of churches can mandate commissions to make proposals in order to improve catechetical texts and manuals.

The most important field in which councils of churches can offer common witness is the field of social and cultural collaboration. This form of co-operation reflects the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, which encouraged such collaboration among Christians: "Co-operation among all Christians vividly expresses that bond which already unites them, and it sets in clear relief the features of Christ the servant... Through such co-operation all believers in Christ are able to learn easily how they can understand each other and esteem each other more, and how the road to the unity of Christians may be made smooth" (UR 12). Within the framework of councils of churches, such practical co-operation in the social field becomes a powerful and credible means of evangelisation. Councils of churches, thus, become signs of what is common among Christians, and important instruments of fostering fuller communion.

Practical co-operation among member churches helps to show the link between common witness and evangelisation, particularly in terms of being instruments of reconciliation and advocacy. This is important especially in situation of injustice, of social and racial conflicts, of terrorism, persecution, and oppression. In all such situations Christians have to give common witness to the values of life, to justice and peace, to freedom of religion, human rights and reconciliation. Together, they have to be advocates for the poor, the marginalised, the persecuted and oppressed; and their common witness may be stronger and more efficient than are individual statements of particular churches. Together, they can work for cultural and social development, medical care and preservation of creation.

This was stated clearly at the Third International Consultation for Councils of Churches in Hong Kong in 1993. In the theme on "Common Witness in a Changing World" the report said the following: "In order to help the member churches to act as instruments of reconciliation and so fulfil our role as servants and advocates of unity, NCCs have been engaged in a wide range of activities."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, 1993, p. 292.

Bishops' Conferences visiting our office, especially those with membership in councils of churches, have said that their collaboration with other churches has meant much in terms of acting together on particular issues at their level. It is quite clear that such common witness overflows from the common life member-churches already share together into the sharing of the same suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The New Sudan Council of Churches in Southern Sudan is a good example. Here, member churches evangelise side-by-side, and share equally the sufferings inflicted upon them as part of their common witness to the same Lord Jesus Christ.

However important it might be in the life of member-churches, in a council of churches ecumenical collaboration has its own limitation, depending on the issues or the manner of co-operation. This is one of the challenges that councils of churches must face. The general rule should be: **what we can do together already today without offending our conscience, we should do together.** It is my impression that we could do much more in common than we do today. Such cooperation is even more urgent in countries where missionaries work side-by-side. In such situations, our divisions are counterproductive and contradict the very Gospel we try to proclaim. Common witness in evangelisation gives credibility to the Gospel and to Jesus Christ, who prayed that "all may be one...that the world may believe." (Jn 17: 21).

## V. THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL BASES FOR CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT IN COUNCILS OF CHURCHES

### A WCC Response to Bishop Kasper's Keynote Address

TENY PIRRI-SIMONIAN, WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, GENEVA

I want to thank Bishop Kasper for his well-researched, well-thought-out and well-argued paper. We read the paper in the WCC with great interest and appreciated the positive spirit. After the frustrations created by recent Vatican declarations, in particular with the declaration *Dominus Iesus*, it is important to hear Bishop Kasper reaffirming the basic understandings which have emerged in ecumenical dialogue since the Second Vatican Council, and which have guided ecumenical collaboration since then.

Bishop Kasper's paper is largely in line with the WCC policy statement, *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision* (CUV), of the World Council of Churches, adopted by the Central Committee of the WCC in 1989. Bishop Kasper confirms the position of the Roman Catholic Church to the draft CUV which says: "So although the RCC is not at present a member of the WCC, the PCPCU can



accept the present WCC Basis as a point of reference, a source or ground of coherence which is more than a pragmatic formula, and less than a detailed confession of Christian faith."

The self-understanding of the WCC is found in its constitutional Basis which states: "The World Council of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." There are two aspects of this statement that are important for a renewed understanding of the WCC: 1) the characterization of the Council as a "fellowship of churches"; and 2) the CUV emphasis on the "common calling" which the churches seek to fulfil in and through the Council.

The description of "fellowship of churches" indicates clearly that the Council itself is not a church, and—as the Toronto statement categorically states—WCC must never become a "superchurch." Nevertheless, the use of the term "fellowship" in the Basis suggests that the Council is "more than a mere functional association of churches set up to organize activities in areas of common interest" (CUV p.13). Further, Article 3,1 of the Constitution portrays the Council as a community of Churches on the way to the "goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, [seeking] to advance towards that unity, in order that the world may believe."

The constitutional *Basis* of the WCC, and the words of the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council that a "real, even though imperfect, communion" exists between the churches, already pose an ecclesiological challenge to the World Council of Churches as a fellowship of churches and to the ecumenical movement. We should admit that many Councils of Churches still have great difficulties in understanding themselves in this same framework as the WCC. Perhaps, this is what Bishop Kaspar is referring to in his paper when he speaks about the theological and ecclesiological dimensions of the life of Councils of Churches. Our task then is an affirmation of what Councils of Churches are meant to be, and to clarify constantly the objectives of our continuing ecumenical endeavours.

After this general introduction, I would like to raise some issues:

**1. Our common baptism in Jesus Christ.** I welcome the emphasis Bishop Kasper put on baptism. Through baptism we become members of the Church, the living Body of Christ. Baptism is the

foundation of Unity, the *raison d'être* of our togetherness. The form, level, degree of our fellowship may be different, but the basis remains the same, i.e. Baptism. It is Baptism, which gives clear identity to our fellowship because through Baptism we become members of community in Jesus Christ.

2. **Unity.** The foundation of unity is our common baptism and conciliar fellowship of local churches. "Conciliarity is not a notion *in abstracto* but a reality *in concreto*; not just a dimension of the church, but its very being.<sup>19</sup> Unity is a gift of God and not a human-made reality. It is given to us by God through the incarnation of his Son. Therefore, unity is not a concept or a conceptual reality, but an incarnational reality given by Jesus Christ. Unity is broken because of human sin. We therefore must work together in the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and rediscover God's gift given to us. It is a reality that after so many years of study and research by Faith and Order, that is with the participation of the Roman Catholic Church, we have come to realize that we have different understandings and models of unity, but at the same time, we come to affirm that the source and foundation of our faith is the same through Jesus Christ.

We have different concepts of unity; we have different perspectives on how to reach the visible unity because we have different ecclesiologies. Hence, our concepts and models of unity are conditioned by our different ecclesiologies.

3. **Councils of Churches as Pre-Conciliar Fellowships.** Whether we talk of National Councils of Churches, Regional Councils of Churches, or the World Council of Churches, we are speaking of the same fellowship that has national, regional and global manifestations. A fellowship that provides an ecumenical space, a forum, and a place for common prayer, common reflection and common action.

- Ecumenical space: Councils are ecumenical spaces for interaction. "The significance of this fellowship lies precisely in its opening the space where reconciliation and mutual accountability can take shape and where churches can learn together

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<sup>19</sup> Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship: A Common Goal*, p.23. 1992, WCC Geneva.

<sup>20</sup> Konrad Raiser, *The Report of the General Secretary. Together on the Way: The Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, ed. Diane Kessler, p.89, 1999, WCC Geneva.



to walk on the way of a costly ecumenical commitment...".<sup>20</sup> Being Church means being in interaction with other churches (communio ecclesiology). We observe that this is expressed in all Councils. "The ecclesiological significance of Councils lies in their bringing to birth and nourishing 'unity'—a unity given by God in Jesus Christ which through the Holy Spirit is made manifest as churches exhibit 'visible unity'.<sup>21</sup>

- A forum for multilateral theological dialogue. Speaking about multilateral dialogues, we cannot ignore the crucial importance of bilateral dialogues. After Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church played an important role in promoting bilateral dialogues.
- A place for praying together, which Bishop Kasper has also mentioned.
- A place for common service and witness. Our experience has shown that Councils have provided the opportunity to churches to work together and to witness together.

What concerns the nature of churches' togetherness in Councils, the issue has a history of long debate in the ecumenical movement. Some consider this togetherness has no ecclesiological significance. Others consider it a source of identity, and attribute a sort of ecclesiological importance. Here I would like to paraphrase from His Holiness Aram I's book, *Conciliar Fellowship*. He says that anything the Churches do together has some ecclesiological value. Their ecclesiological significance lies in the fact that they promote interchurch relations and collaboration. Councils express the churches' common commitment to work for unity. They contribute to the churches' common ecumenical vision. Therefore, according to His Holiness Aram I, the ecclesiological significance of a Council of Churches does not lie in what the Council does. A council is a functional reality. Participation in the Councils, despite all the outstanding issues, should be a priority because of the opportunity it gives to "grow together," and to engage in "common witness," at least as far as the Churches are able to go.

Regarding the Roman Catholic notion that the church "subsists," the position of WCC expresses the ecclesiological teachings of Protestant and Orthodox Churches. All churches exist and subsist as

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<sup>21</sup> Alan D. Falconer, *The Ecclesiological Understanding of National and Regional Councils of Churches*, Nordic Ecumenical Council, Faith and Order Conference, p.9, 30 August 1997, Stockholm.

historical manifestations in the Body of Christ. The One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church expresses itself through the conciliar fellowship of local churches truly united. This means that the Catholic Church is not a universal but essentially a local reality, where catholicity, oneness, holiness, apostolicity are manifested through the conciliar communion of the local church.

The issues that Bishop Kasper has raised are integral to the work of Faith and Order, and the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. There is sufficient experience accumulated in ecumenical dialogues which would help us assess and learn from the past years. Nevertheless, dialogue around this theme should continue to include also discussions in third-world theologies. It is important to mention that the Joint Working Group, in addition to its reflection on ecumenical dialogue and on baptism, has begun a process of evaluation of its experience during the past three decades.

We hope that this meeting in Chiangmai will be the open but safe space where the dialogue prompted by these two papers will continue.

## **VI. THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF FORMING NATIONAL ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATIONS: The Australian Experience**

**REVEREND DAVID GILL**

In July 1994, the churches of Australia created a new ecumenical body. The old Australian Council of Churches (ACC), made up of Anglican, Orthodox and some Protestant churches, became the new National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), involving Roman Catholic and additional Protestant participation as well.

The background papers for AMCU III include several items that bear on what happened in Australia:

"Building on What Unites Us, Overcoming What Divides"  
— a paper I presented at AMCU I, in Cheung Chau, in 1996;  
the NCCA's inaugural Constitution, published in FABC  
Papers No. 97; and especially "New Ecumenical Structures:  
An Australian Experiment" — a paper I presented at the May  
2000 of the Joint Working Group between the World Council  
of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, subsequently  
published in *Jeevadhara* in July, 2000.



As conscientious conference-goers you will of course have studied all that material with meticulous care, so I will not inflict it on you again. My assignment now is to tell the story by recalling "the joys and challenges" we experienced, at least as they were perceived by one who was General Secretary of both the old ACC and the new NCCA.

But first, note why Australia's churches found themselves reconstituting their national ecumenical body. The ACC had been formed in 1946. The Roman Catholic Church, the country's largest, was not a member, nor were several significant Protestant churches. In churches that did belong, there was a developing feeling that the organisation — its self-understanding, structure, programs and styles of work — might be due for a rethink.

So in 1988 the ACC's member churches invited several churches that were not part of the existing structure to enter into a shared attempt to work towards an ecumenical body that might better express and more effectively serve the ecumenical movement as it is today. Please be clear: this was not simply a scalp-hunting exercise, aimed at adding a few more names to a list of member churches. It was Australia's churches wrestling with the basic question: into what kind of fellowship is God calling us now?

In the *Jeevadhara* piece referred to above, I listed seven important convictions that emerged in the course of our rethink. Let me highlight these again, because they are fundamental to how the NCCA understands itself and tries to do its job.

1. Humanly speaking, the primary actors in the ecumenical movement are the churches.
2. Ecumenical structures must be seen to be interim, provisional, flexible and responsive to the churches that comprise them.
3. A council of churches has to respect the differing convictions of the churches, not least in the way it spells out the ecclesiological implications of council membership.
4. Membership implies sustained commitment by the member churches — to the council, yes, but more importantly to one another through the council.
5. Decision-makers in ecumenical bodies should be genuinely and authoritatively representative of the churches that comprise them.
6. Councils must focus on fostering trust and deepening mutual understanding. Building relationships takes precedence over running programs, and the reconciled koinonia for which we yearn is to find expression in how we deal with each other

in ecumenical decision-making even now.

7. Ecumenism does not start and stop at the national frontier.

So much for the NCCA's working principles. Seven years after its inauguration, what have been the most memorable joys, the deepest regrets, the most searching challenges?

## Joys

Some of the best moments, in Australia's transition, have been discovering the depth of ecumenical commitment of key people in the various denominations. Every one here knows the road towards unity can often seem a lonely journey indeed. But there are more fellow-pilgrims than we often realise.

After the ACC voted to invite non-member churches to share in re-conceiving Australia's national ecumenical body, I sought the advice of a senior and highly respected member of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference. We had lunch together — more things are wrought over meal tables, ecumenically, than this world dreams of! — and I explained the decision that now had to be communicated, with the greatest possible care, to the Catholic leadership. Would he guide me on the best way to proceed? My friend promised to ponder the question and get back to me. Next morning he phoned. "David, I have thought and prayed about our conversation," he said. "I have decided that if the bishops say no to your invitation it will be a sin. I will do everything I can to help." And he did, very effectively.

Another welcome discovery was the ease with which we found a common mind on the key issues. A task group had been established — five people appointed by the ACC, five by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, one by the Lutheran Church. Between them they came with a wealth of experience in the thrills and spills of ecumenism. Two bishops, one Anglican, the other Catholic, co-chaired with wisdom and grace. There were no major disagreements, theological or otherwise, as the task group spelled out its vision for ecumenism in Australia. The churches found that vision persuasive and gave it their assent.

A further joy was to see the high level of mutual trust that developed from the outset. The task group's style of work has flowed on into the NCCA itself, producing a council in which member churches take each other seriously, try to listen and learn from one another, respect each other's sensitivities, instinctively reach after consen-



sus, have no great enthusiasm for counting votes, or inventing standing orders, and repeatedly show they trust each other enough to move ahead with common endeavors, even when all the details are not yet in place.

Listening and learning, and the fairly-relaxed style of decision-making, meant that participants found themselves moving rapidly beyond the stereotypes they had nurtured of one another. Protestants discovered the Roman Catholic Church to be anything but the monolith they had imagined, as its diversity and internal disagreements became a normal part of our life together in the NCCA. Lutherans, we learned with surprise, were taking ecumenism with a seriousness that left many other churches in the shade. Councils of Churches, the newcomers realized, were less freewheeling and rather more responsive to the convictions of their members than some had appreciated. The most elusive stereotypes of all—those between our seven eastern (Orthodox) and seven western (Protestant and Catholic) member churches—could be addressed with good will, unhampered by the acrimony that of late has complicated such relationships elsewhere.

The regular, committed participation of national heads of member churches has been another plus. Their presence in the NCCA's triennial National Forum and in the three meetings of its Executive held each year underlines the fact that this is a council of *churches*, not just a gathering of enthusiastic individuals. It also ensures that the mind of each church is authoritatively represented in the meetings and in whatever statements or initiatives emerge from the meetings.

But perhaps the greatest joy was the opportunity the NCCA's birth provided to demonstrate, to the churches and to the nation as a whole, that the ecumenical movement is continuing to move. Member churches heard again Christ's call to visible unity, and renewed, again, their commitment to take that call seriously. People who had been discouraged by cynical talk of an ecumenical winter discovered, instead, evidence of an ecumenical spring. When national television carried the service of inauguration from St Christopher's Cathedral, Canberra, there were tears in many eyes across the nation. They were tears of gratitude.

## **Regrets**

The major sadness for the new council was that some members of the family still felt unable to gather under its roof. Yes, it was

more inclusive than its predecessor, but the Serbian Orthodox Church, several Protestant churches like the Baptists and the Presbyterians, and the whole Pentecostal stream, remained outside. We had made progress, but it was incomplete progress.

In practical matters, the NCCA soon found itself hamstrung by a lack of resources. The task group responsible for planning everything had alerted prospective member churches to the anticipated requirements, in staff and program costs, of the objectives they were setting for the Council. Member church contributions to the NCCA have never reached even half that figure. My hope had been that the churches' greater sense of "ownership" of the Council would translate into a matching acceptance of financial responsibility for the Council. In that, clearly, I was naïve.

The result is that some of the NCCA's key objectives remain pious hopes, with no prospect of anything being done about them in the foreseeable future. A second consequence is that committees and staff are, by default, having to seek funding from sources other than the churches. To the extent that they succeed, their very success must inevitably start to call into question the emphasis on the organisation being a council of *churches*, and introduce the risk of funding sources subtly influencing the NCCA's policies and priorities. More than the NCCA's founders appreciated, a council's self-understanding and its sources of income go hand in hand.

A third regret is that the new body finds itself operating in working relationships that are seriously unbalanced. Our most important ecumenical partners — the WCC, the CCA, and most NCCs in the Asia region — comprise only Protestant, Anglican and, in some cases, Orthodox churches. We find ourselves trying to foster a comprehensive ecumenism at home, but having to draw insights from and work together with a largely Protestant ecumenism elsewhere.

Finally, the NCCA has not yet found an effective way of bringing the churches' views into the public forum, when matters of national or international importance are up for debate. Constitutional constraints on the making of public statements, devised to ensure that what the Council says truly echoes the convictions of its member churches, require consultation and therefore time. The media does not work that way, however, with the result that the churches' voice has been muted. The intention — that the NCCA should express what the churches think, not what a committee or a general secretary thinks the churches ought to think — is absolutely correct. But a viable way of achieving this laudable goal has yet to be found.



Perhaps the culture of trust, referred to above, needs further work.

## Challenges

The NCCA's inauguration represented a fresh commitment by member churches to one another. How to ensure that, having affirmed our ecumenical vision, we would not then sink back into the torpor of denominational business-as-usual? That can happen so easily, and when it does, the ecumenical structure in question has become an "ecumenical alibi," that gives all concerned the comfortable illusion of journeying towards unity, while enabling the status quo of denominational immobility to continue unchallenged.

What sharpens the problem, for us and for most other NCCs, is the fact that we are far removed from the decision-makers. What can you do, in distant Australia, when member churches' official stances on major matters of faith, order and ecumenical relations are determined by curias or patriarchates, conferences or holy synods, on the other side of the world?

What you can do, in the words of a so-called covenanting process now underway between the NCCA's member churches, is press upon one another the question: "What is possible if we go to the limits of what is permissible?" It is all too easy to hold others responsible for our failure to move forward together, when, even under existing constraints, there are so many unrecognised opportunities for closer co-operation. For example, there is nothing to stop any of our churches praying for each other in a sustained, informed, disciplined way. For most denominations, there is no reason not to share their buildings with others, in order to make more effective use of physical resources. Common witness and service offer lots of scope for joint action between two or more churches. The point to keep in mind is that, with some sanctified imagination, we are all likely to discover many more opportunities for ecumenical initiatives, nationally and in each place, than we had ever dreamt of. Hence, the idea of encouraging churches to covenant with one or more others, in quite specific ways, is a tangible way of making progress in their ecumenical journey.

Such a process already starts to raise questions of its own. How can separate churches, attuned to long years of solo decision-making in isolation from other churches, start to do their thinking and arrive at their decisions in conversation with their covenanted partners? How can denominational decision-making procedures be freed up to make space for agenda items presented by covenanted partner

churches? These are questions of denominational psychology and institutional mindset, as much as denominational business management.

Through it all, the challenge in Australia today is to discover an ecumenism for a time of stress. Our churches are in trouble, like some elsewhere. Numbers are down, or at best static, in many denominations. Budgets are tightening. We feel less significant, more peripheral to the nation's life. There are conflicts in a number of churches, not least over questions of authority. Morale is suffering. At such times, introversion is an all-too-natural response, with ecumenical commitments put on hold until what seem to be more urgent issues can be sorted out.

But ecumenism properly understood cannot be shelved until more propitious times come. It is not a program or an agenda item. It is a way of being Church. It is that set of relationships and commitments within which, severally and together, we wrestle with the question of what obedience to Jesus Christ requires of us today.

### **And Some Working Principles**

Several important convictions have emerged in the course of our experience.

1) Humanly speaking, the primary actors in the ecumenical movement are the churches. Ecumenical instruments can help. Enthusiastic individuals are indispensable. But we must never lose sight of the fact that it is first and foremost a movement of the churches. Take that seriously, and there are important implications for any council's ethos, priorities, leadership and decision-making style.

2) Ecumenical structures must be seen to be interim, provisional, flexible and responsive to the churches that comprise them. They are instruments created to help achieve certain goals, not ends in themselves; temporary devices to meet a current need, not permanent features of the ecclesiastical landscape. The principle, of course, is easy enough to affirm. In reality, however, ecumenical structures are institutions, like the churches which comprise them. Like those churches, councils 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 old ACC risking too much by put-



ting everything on the table for re-negotiation? Would there be this commission, that staff post, this budget line in the new body? 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: did we really believe what we said about ecumenical structures being provisional, destined to die for the sake of the movement they seek to advance?

3) A council of churches has to respect the differing convictions of the churches, not least in the way it spells out the ecclesiological implications of council membership. At one stage, the planners toyed with a proposal to build NCCA membership on the basis of our common baptism. Two considerations soon scuppered that. The Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends pointed out that approach would exclude them, and the other churches were reluctant to fracture the fellowship in that way. It also became apparent that significant differences about baptism still remained among at least some of the other churches.

What developed was an understanding of the implications of membership that was very much in step with the WCC's Toronto statement on "The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches" (1950). As the NCCA's constitution puts it:

While some member churches may not be able to recognise each other as churches in the full and true sense, they nevertheless acknowledge in each other important elements of both doctrine and practice that belong to the Church which Christ founded. It is hoped that through further dialogue the member churches will broaden their knowledge of each other, extend their recognition of each other, find ways of giving greater expression to what they hold in common, and move towards a more visible expression of the unity Christ has given to his Church.

4) Membership implies commitment by the member churches<sup>o</sup>—to the council, yes, but more importantly to one another through the council. That commitment is not a one-off, fulfilled on being received into membership, but continuing. The NCCA's basis uses the imagery of pilgrimage to express this:

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:

- a) to deepen their relationship with each other in order to express more visibly the unity willed by Christ for his Church; and
- b) 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.

## VII. THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER

PRESIDENT, PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

1. In the dialogue with the Lutheran Churches the doctrine of justification was prominent from the very start. It was over this that unity was ruptured in the sixteenth century. For Martin Luther this was the teaching by which the Church stands and falls. For him it was not just a theoretical problem; it was an existential question about the core, the centre, the heart of the gospel and the Christian existence.

After a difficult inner struggle, Luther discovered that we are not righteous before God on account of our good works. Rather, we are righteous because God accepts us as sinners. Justification is not a matter of our righteousness, but of the righteousness that, unmerited by us, God bestows because of Christ's merits alone, as grace alone, and on the basis of faith alone (*sola gratia, sola fide*).

The Council of Trent also condemned the Pelagian doctrine that a person can save himself by good works. The question at issue was not: justification by grace or by good works. Rather, it was whether and to what extent God's action enables and stimulates the co-operation of the human person. The Council of Trent ended up saying that we can co-operate in our justification, not by our own strength but animated and empowered by grace. The Council also wanted to make clear that God does not merely declare us to be righteous but truly makes us righteous; he makes us new within so that we are a new creation and can live as new human beings. Faith must become effective in love and loving deeds.

2. These doctrines have divided us for more than 400 years. The path for an agreement was paved by theologians from both sides. So when the official dialogue was started after the Second Vatican Council, we were already able to draw on the results of theological research. Already, the first document from the dialogue between



the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, the so-called "Malta Report" of 1971, laid out a wide-ranging consensus about the doctrine of justification. The question was taken up once more by the dialogue in the United States "Justification by Faith" (1985), again with the same results. Even later, it was also treated when all the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th Century were examined, after the first papal visit to Germany. The results are presented in the book *Lehrverurteilungen - Kirchentrennung?* [The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?]. Finally, the last dialogue document to be mentioned, "Church and Justification," (1994) concluded once again that there are no longer any Church-dividing differences over this issue.

So the *first* aspect we should note is that what is said in the "Joint Declaration" signed on 31 October in Augsburg did not drop out of the skies, but was prepared by decades of specialised theological work and ecumenical dialogues. In this dialogue which has lasted for decades, there has been no question of easy short-cuts, or of false irenism, relativism, or liberalism.

On the contrary, no. 14, where the common understanding of justification is expressed, starts with the statement: "The Lutheran Churches and the Roman Catholic Church have together listened to the good news proclaimed in Holy Scripture. This common listening, together with the theological conversations of recent years, has led to a shared understanding of justification." Not liberal irenism but common study of the sources of our faith, studies of the Sacred Scriptures and of our respective traditions, led us to this agreement. This gave us new insights which shed new light on the statements of the sixteenth century.

We neither discovered a new gospel; nor did we reject what our fathers and forefathers believed as an expression of revealed gospel. Neither Church can give up the doctrinal statements of that time or disown its own tradition; but we were enabled to understand them afresh and in a deeper way. We discovered again that the once-and-for-all revealed Gospel is so deep and so rich that nobody, no council and no theologian can ever exhaust it. It is by the gift of the Holy Spirit that we were able to deepen our understanding, so that we could "re-cognize" and re-receive our respective traditions. This new perception and re-reception is a gift of the Holy Spirit. So the event of Augsburg was, first of all, not only a signing of a document but overall a celebration of joyful thanksgiving to God.

A *second* point: Although the documents I have mentioned were

produced by theologians and commissions which had been officially appointed, their results had no official status for the two Churches. So, after these fundamental theological preparations, it was time for the Churches themselves to take up the question and deal with the results of the theological dialogue. Thus, the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity decided to attempt a "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification."

It is well known that this was not to be easy. But what counts though is the result. The crucial thing is that through the "Joint Declaration" the Churches themselves, rather than just theologians or even groups of theologians, have reached a consensus or convergence. It is this that makes the "Joint Declaration" something new. On the Catholic side, it was finally approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Immediately after the signing, the Pope himself publicly expressed his approval and joy at what had taken place, and he has repeated his approval publicly on several occasions since. On the Lutheran side the "Joint Declaration" was submitted to all synods of the member Churches of the Lutheran World Federation, which in the end stated a "magnus consensus."

In Augsburg the relationship between Catholics and Lutherans reached a new quality and intensity. We held out our hands to each other as Churches, and we do not wish to let go ever again. Obviously, this agreement is not directed against any other Church or Church community, or against the fellowship in the larger ecumenical movement. It is open for all and an invitation to the other Churches to join us.

*Thirdly:* The main content of the "Joint Declaration" is stated in number 15:

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work, and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.



I think this is a very large consensus, a consensus not only on justification, but putting justification in the framework of the Christological and Trinitarian confessions of the undivided Church of the first centuries, a consensus in the centre and focus of the gospel.

In the light of this fundamental consensus, numbers 40-41 come to a twofold conclusion about justification itself: 1) There is a consensus on fundamental questions concerning the doctrine of justification. Nevertheless, open questions remain and these must be further discussed, but they do not take away from the common ground that has been reached. 2) The mutual condemnations of the 16th Century, insofar as they concern the doctrine of justification, no longer apply to the other partner today, if he stands by what is agreed in the "Joint Declaration".

So we are dealing not with a full but with a differentiated consensus. There exists full consensus about the key fundamental issues, in the exposition of which various starting points, different thought-forms and expressions, and different emphases and statements are possible. So the "Joint Declaration" does not repeal the Council of Trent. For Catholics it remains just as valid as it was before. But it can be interpreted according to our present understanding of the faith in such a way, that Luther's doctrine, as set forth in the "Joint Declaration," is no longer ruled out as opposed to it, and thus Church-dividing. The differences that remain are not contradictory statements, but ones that complement and complete each other.

In the background lies a certain image of the unity of the Church for which we are striving: a unity which does not mean uniformity but a unity in diversity, or (as, above all, Lutheran theologians say today) a unity in reconciled diversity. The "Common Statement" attached to the "Joint Declaration" expressly takes up this model, and has thus given it official confirmation by the Church.

3. The Pope has described the "Joint Declaration" as a "milestone." The image fits the situation exactly. We have reached an important staging post but are not yet at the final goal. So, clearly, the signing does not mean everything has been done. Full Church communion was not yet reached. So we have to ask how do we go forward now.

First of all, we shall have to review the questions about the doctrine of justification that have been left open after the "Joint Declaration." I am thinking, for example, of certain doctrinal questions, such as clarifying further the issue of *simul iustus et peccator*, of co-operation, or the criteriological significance of the doctrine of

justification. In the meantime, we asked some ecumenical institutes to deal with these questions. About the question of indulgences, which became a burning one during the Holy Year 2000, we shall have a consultation in the next weeks between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Lutheran World Federation and the Reformed World Alliance.

Secondly, there are important questions still at issue between us beyond the doctrine of justification. From the Catholic point of view there is above all the ecclesiological question. This comes to a head in the issue of church ministry, i.e., the priesthood of the ordained, the office of bishops in the apostolic succession, and the Petrine ministry. The International Joint Dialogue Commission between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church has begun working on these questions under the general theme of "The Apostolicity of the Church."

A third and final point. Many Christians today, Protestants and Catholics as well, no longer understand the formulations of the 16th Century. We have all become too deistic; that is to say, it seems to us that God has quite withdrawn from our world and our everyday existence. So the question about the merciful God, which moved Luther so deeply, leaves us somewhat cold. We have thus to translate both the questions and the answers of the past into the language of today, so that they will stir us as much today as they would have in the past. We have to set forth together the heart of the Good News in the language of today so that it is credible and convincing.

The doctrine of justification wants to say to us that we neither can nor should "make" our life or its fulfilment by our own efforts. Our value as persons does not depend on our good or bad achievements. Before anything we ourselves do, we have been accepted and affirmed. Our life is ruled by a merciful God who through everything and despite everything holds us in his hands. We are able to live by God's mercy. So we also should be gracious and merciful towards our fellow men and women. Thus, justification implies justice and work for justice and human rights. It has not only a private and personal dimension, but also a social and political one. When God is merciful to us all without any discrimination, we should behave in a similar way.

The "Joint Declaration on Justification" touches not only a central problem of the past, but makes the way free for a common witness to the Good News for today. It enlarged and deepened our already existing communion, and enabled us to carry out our mission to the world together. This can give us new ecumenical confidence and momentum.



## VIII. THE BENEFITS AND DIFFICULTIES OF REGIONAL ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATIONS: THE MIDDLE EAST EXPERIENCE

PAUL SAYAH, MARONITE ARCHBISHOP OF HAIFA AND THE HOLY LAND  
The Middle East Council of Churches

### Historical Background

The early part of the 20th Century saw a general ecumenical awakening, and the Churches of the Middle East found themselves within that stream. The Ecumenical Patriarch Yoachim III raised the issue of Christian unity and encouraged the spirit of reconciliation. The Protestant missions also felt the need to create links among themselves; and formed, in 1956, a fellowship of Protestant agencies called the Near East Christian Council (NECC). In 1962, after cultivating some amicable contacts with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Near East Christian Council was transformed into the Near East Council of Churches (NECC), with some of the Oriental Orthodox Churches joining the original NECC. Then NECC conducted negotiations with the Eastern Orthodox Churches; and in 1974 the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) was formed.

The "Family System" was adopted; and the new Council was composed of three families — the Protestant or Evangelical, the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox Families. Then the seven Catholic Churches of the Middle East were invited as observers; and after about 15 years of dialogue, they joined the Council at its fifth General Assembly in 1990, to bring its membership to four Families. Thus all the Churches of the region, with the sole exception of the Assyrian Church of the East, joined, for the first time in history, to form the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC).

### Objectives

Five themes summarize the objectives of MECC as follows:

1. Strengthening a sense of unity
2. Encouraging mutual support among the Churches
3. Cultivating mutual respect and understanding
4. Nurturing the spirit of *diakonia*
5. Mediating among the member Churches, and between them and Churches elsewhere.

## Organization

A General Assembly meeting every four years gives the Council its basic orientations. There is also a Council of Presidents composed of four members. The Executive Committee is composed of 24 members and meets once or twice a year. The General Secretariat, is made up of the General Secretary and three Associates; with the Program Units: Faith and Unity, which deals with ecumenical concerns; Life and Service, which offers relief and developmental services; and the Unit on Education and Renewal, all of which see to the implementation of the mandate of the Council on the ground. Two remaining programs deal respectively with Communication and Finance. The General Secretariat manages directly programs dealing with Human Rights and Christian-Muslim Dialogue. It is important to note that the four families are equally represented at all levels of the structure of the Council, independently of the number of their faithful.

### **My Experience with MECC: Benefits and difficulties**

Reflecting on the history, objectives, organization, etc., of MECC, I feel that it is designed as a platform, a space for the Churches to reflect together and act together, through the various programs and activities, in order to advance the ecumenical process in the region, and to promote the visible unity of the Church. I presume that this is what ecumenical organizations are usually designed to achieve.

The challenge lies in the degree each organization succeeds in realizing those objectives. MECC proposes to bring the Churches to reflect and act together through its various Programs, Units and Departments.

I will reflect with you, first on some benefits and difficulties in the process of theological reflection; and then will talk about benefits and difficulties related activities of *diakonia*.

### **Benefits and Difficulties in the Process of Common Reflection**

In my 11 years of involvement with MECC, 1st as a director of the Unit on Faith and Unity; and 2nd, as an Executive Committee member, I feel that our deliberations have benefited the Churches in some ways and encountered various difficulties on the way. And this is what I shall attempt to reflect on briefly.



1. Through our theological reflections the Churches have come to a deeper self-understanding, because they have had to face the challenge of other Churches presenting differing points of view on basic issues, such as biblical interpretation, the theology of the Church, sacramental theology, etc. Each Church had to explore differences, as well as many common points. The differences challenged the Churches to accept diversity, and the similarities helped break a feeling of isolation, and bring about some sense of solidarity. A greater sense of trust developed, as well, and some prejudices were alleviated.
2. As a result of such a process new ways of co-operation became possible. The best example of co-operation was the implementation of a program called "the Parish Ministers' Program," which consisted in bringing together clerics from the various Churches serving in the same area to pray and reflect together on ways of co-operating in order to render all the Christians in the area a better service and a more co-ordinated pastoral and social care. This program aimed first and foremost to help develop a better ecumenical spirit at the level of the clergy, and encourage them to spread that spirit at the grassroots level.
3. The main difficulty we experienced at that level was a deep-seated mistrust and fear of proselytism. This led in some places to grave difficulties, and even to the discontinuation of the program.
4. In our theological reflections, although the various theologians were more inclined to listen to each other, very often they did not show sufficient flexibility in the discussions. Even when a clear misunderstanding was shown to have motivated historical stands, change was very difficult. I am thinking particularly of the dialogue we facilitated between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Family, (but mainly the Coptic Church). The level of mistrust, and the weight of memories, made it impossible, despite far-reaching theological agreement, to admit the Assyrian Church into the MECC. It is worth noting that both the Coptic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East have signed Christological agreements with the Church of Rome.
5. One of the benefits of the Council was the ability of the Churches to speak with one voice about some social issues and some common Christian concerns, such as the Christian presence in the

region. Such stands show a greater visible unity among the Churches. It was always more difficult to voice common political opinions, because of the nature of the political regimes. Advocacy in such situations was not always possible either.

6. Despite the apparent benefits of our theological reflections we encountered major difficulties in the representation mechanism. The delegate of a Church would agree on an issue, but on going back to his Church, the same issue would not be accepted at times! A good example of this is the common Arabic translation of the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed. After many years of hard work, a common text was agreed upon in the presence of delegates from all the Churches, but eventually a limited number of the Churches accepted the proposed text, without any explanation from those who rejected it. The fear of change again, I guess! Because some hinted at the fact that the people would find the change difficult to accept.
7. It proved to be easier to implement decisions taken outside the structure of the Council by the heads of Churches themselves, and in bilateral discussions. A good example of this, in Lebanon, is the agreement between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches on the celebration of "Solemn Holy Communion," or "First Holy Communion," in the parishes and not in the Catholic schools, to avoid causing problems for the Orthodox who receive the three sacraments of initiation together soon after birth. This agreement included an understanding on mixed marriages, and the publication of a common religious education program to be adopted in the public schools. Does this mean that the Heads of Churches prefer to make their decisions directly, and not through representatives or Councils?
8. What does this say about the real commitment to the organization as such? If this commitment is to be measured by the financial contribution of the member Churches to the budget, one wonders about the seriousness of such commitment, for the contributions barely exceed 1%. The commitment to the ecumenical agenda by the Churches depended a great deal, in my experience, on the enthusiasm of members of the delegations, and of course the Heads of the individual Churches. I feel that this is where the main difficulty lies. One gets the impression that the Churches are there to take more from the Council than to invest in it.



## **Benefits and Difficulties Related to Common "Diakonal" Activities**

1. This brings us to benefits and difficulties related to the role of the Council in social service. We have experienced grave difficulties and have heard many complaints about the sharing of material resources. On the other hand, some very valuable relief work was done in various emergency situations in Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, etc.... And once the need for relief subsided the funds were directed towards more developmental work.
2. As for human rights programs, the nature of some of the regimes in the region made it impossible to do much advocacy work on the ground; and the program had to limit itself rather to academic events; or, at best, to some awareness-building activities.
3. The Christian-Muslim dialogue remained rather an academic activity limited to a number of intellectuals, an exercise for the chosen elite. In fact, the Churches have very differing stands on the very possibility of a real academic, theological, or even philosophical dialogue. As for the dialogue with the Jews, it is practically non-existent; and the difficulty there is more political than theological.
4. Finally, experience in MECC shows that the ecumenical work, especially when it comes to the practical aspects, can be done much more effectively on the local rather than the regional level. Each country has its own specific circumstances and traditions, which tend to dictate patterns often very difficult to change.

### **IX. BENEFITS AND DIFFICULTIES OF REGIONAL ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATION: The Middle East Experience**

**FATHER FARID AL-HACHEM**

Talking about the ecumenical experience of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) after 25 years of its existence, we must keep in mind the special features of the Middle Eastern Churches.

1. Our churches are the oldest and the most venerable churches, since they are directly linked to the Salvific Event of Jesus Christ, which took place in Jerusalem, where the Holy Spirit also founded the first church on the day of Pentecost. After Jerusalem, Antioch, the capital of the region, became the point of departure of the apostolic missions throughout the world.

2. The Middle East region displays, since early antiquity, a rich diversity of civilizations and cultures. When the Christian faith penetrated this region, it expressed itself from the outset in its varied forms of civilizations and cultures. This diversity is the result of the overflowing of numerous peoples to our region due to its economic richness, and its serving as a bridge between East and West. Before Christ, the last invasion was the Greco-Roman, that lasted for about a millennium (311 B.C. — 640 A.D.). The Islamic invasion followed and changed progressively the face of our region. In modern times, from the 17th Century onwards, Occidental civilization, in its varied forms, began to penetrate it. All these influences left their cultural marks on the peoples of our region.
3. For six centuries prior to the Islamic invasion, our churches were the most important center of Christianity. Here arose the main spiritual and monastic currents, and also the major theological streams, thanks to our early fathers and to our great schools, such as those of Alexandria, Antioch, Edessa, and others that spread in our cities.
4. This cultural pluralism unfortunately had its negative consequences when the dogmatic disputes exploded during the fifth century. This led to the profound division in the body of the one and plural Church of our region. The rich diversity became the source of a painful split as a result of the Council of Ephesus (431) and that of Chalcedon (451), which continues to have lasting effects on our churches, in spite of many dialogues, and bilateral and multilateral agreements about Christological issues between the Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian Churches.
5. After the Islamic invasion, these divisions deepened and weakened our churches; and from the Middle Ages onward, immersed them in a profound decadence. In modern times, the Roman Catholic mission divided them further into Orthodox and Catholic churches. Then in the 19th Century, the arrival of the Protestant missions divided them once again.

The result has been that we have now about twenty churches with all kinds of denominations. In fact, the entire spectrum of worldwide Christianity is represented here on a smaller scale. There are both Eastern Chalcedonian and Oriental non-Chalcedonian Churches, Catholic Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East (non-Ephesian), the Anglican Church and various Protestant denominations. These churches form the MECC under four families: Oriental



Orthodox (non-Chalcedonian), Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Reformed. The overall number of Christians in the region is estimated to be about 15 million, who are spread throughout the Middle Eastern countries.

### **The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC)**

The Middle East Council of Churches embraces these four church families equally, with their differences. It is evident that the work of this council is not easy.

1. Within the churches difficulties are many. The first is the different heritage of each, which causes uneasiness on sensitive theological and dogmatic issues that have added and deepened differences during the many centuries of self-isolation against external challenges, which threatened the existence of these churches. There are the Egyptian Churches, which are offspring of the Alexandrian heritage; and the Lebanese and Syrian Churches that are of the Antiochian heritage. And the Iraqi Churches, which have an outstanding Christian heritage that was built up in the Persian Empire far from any influence of the Christian heritage in the Roman or Byzantium empires. Then, there are the Jerusalem Palestinian Churches, with many internal disputes, that go back in time regarding the right of dominion over the Holy Shrines and places. Add to all the above, the Western influence, whether from Roman Catholic or Protestant churches. Our churches still carry all the scars of Christian disputes from the first century up to this day. All these churches coexist in the Middle East Council of Churches with the desire to minimize possible clashes.
2. The external condition in which the council operates is also very difficult. The Christians are a small minority living in a Muslim-dominated area. There often arise fanatic Islamic movements that create disturbances in a society which for the last 50 years has been in a state of war with Israel, which had by force taken the land of the Palestinian people and occupied it. This state of continuous instability forces many Christians who were the original inhabitants of this land to migrate, which is emptying some churches, such as those of the Holy land, South Eastern Turkey and Northern Iraq. With the participation and help of the local churches, the MECC has been trying to lessen these various difficulties, and has succeeded in accomplishing a few of its goals, but has failed up till now to fulfill all of them.

## The Benefits of MECC

The MECC is a meeting-place for the various churches of the region, a facilitator of their common response to common needs. It encourages and supports relationships between its member-churches in an ecclesiastically sensitive manner, adhering to the historical confessions of the United Church, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, to which all its members subscribe. Its family structure emphasizes consensus and participation in community. Larger and smaller families each have equal voice in its deliberation, and no one perspective is permitted to eclipse any other. The decision-making process of the MECC is sensitive to the various church traditions represented.

Since its founding and first General Assembly in May 1974, the Middle East Council of Churches has stayed true to its conviction that the Church's ministry in the region is relevant and crucial.

Celebrating and using its diversity of traditions and gifts, the church has been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, cornerstone of the Kingdom, fountainhead of hope and the binding force, which draws Christians towards each other in the Spirit's fellowship. It breaks down walls of enmity between themselves, and between them and other people of sincere faith. In the end, in a divided and violent world, it forges links of peace and wholeness, whose strength is Jesus the Christ, the prince of peace.

This outlook continues to deepen as the MECC is discovering how increasingly significant its role becomes in the Middle East and worldwide.

There are five key themes characterizing its program and activities.

1. The first of these themes, in the birthplace of the Church, is MECC's commitment to strengthen a sense of confidence, continuity and purpose in the fellowships of its member churches. Underlying many of its specific activities is the intention to encourage Christians in their choice to remain in the Middle East and make their positive contribution towards a new and better future.
2. Building upon this theme and feeding back into it, the MECC has encouraged a spirit of mutual support among its members in their endeavor to renew their people in understanding their faith and their life of witness.



3. Deepened faith and self-confidence have inspired a dialogue among the various traditions represented in the Council; a growing respect for Christian diversity; and a common desire to be faithful to the Biblical calling to love neighbors, to seek justice, and to walk humbly with God. In that humility the MECC has sought to build bridges of mutual understanding and respect between Christians and peoples of other faiths, particularly Muslims and Jews.
4. Confident that Christians have a vital role to play within the Middle East's pluralistic society, striving for renewal and faithful witness in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, the MECC has been active in nurturing in the churches the spirit and resources for service (*diakonia*). The Middle East is the arena of conflict and contention between powerful and self-serving forces. In this maelstrom of tension, too often turned to violence, the legions of the poor, the downtrodden and exploited, the sick and the suffering, the deprived, disenfranchised and the displaced grow daily more numerous. Without political or ideological axes to grind, but focusing upon the human needs of individuals and communities for whom Christ died, the MECC's work of assistance and healing has reached across barriers to touch not only the material, social and physical needs of people, but their spiritual distress as well.
5. Finally, knowing itself to be a strategically-positioned servant in the worldwide witness of the Church, the MECC sees a role for itself as mediator not just between Christians and churches in the Middle East, but also between them and their brothers and sisters in Christ elsewhere. Social and cultural gaps often impede and undermine understanding, but with its heritage rooted in the early years of this century, the MECC is uniquely equipped to bridge those gaps, nurture trust, and focus broad Christian concern for justice, peace and the relief of human suffering in the region.

### **The Unit on Faith and Unity (UFU)**

The UFU aims at promoting the dialogue between the churches of the Middle East, both at the theological and pastoral levels, in order that the presence of the churches becomes more effective in witnessing to Jesus Christ in the region. Thus, the UFU addresses itself to promoting the very core of MECC's reason for existence and bears a major responsibility for breathing into the whole work

of the council the spirit of unity and integrity.

It tries to recall the pluralistic heritage of the Middle Eastern Churches arising from the living of the Gospel in various historical, cultural and social circumstances, and to spread in it a spirit of renewal and unity. This is accomplished through periodic meetings of experts delegated by the MECC churches. Theological and pastoral issues are debated that deepen the spirit of unity, and lead to a better performance by the pastors working in mixed and neighboring parishes.

The unit has devoted great efforts to translating its common theological understanding into events that have impacts upon the grassroots parish level, encouraging expressions of bilateral and multilateral ecumenism among pastors and their people at the local level. The more formal theological dimension of the unit's program has led fruitfully to a series of local conferences for parish servants or pastors. They are organized by local ecumenical committees, and focus upon locally relevant issues in ecumenical relations.

### **Christian – Muslim Dialogue**

The area of dialogue with Muslims is considered to be very sensitive. MECC's main partner in this area has been the Arab Working Group on Muslim-Christian Dialogue, a group founded in Lebanon but now with branches in several other Arab countries. Through this partnership several delicate issues have been examined. Propelled by the confrontation over a mosque being built in the face of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth and the series of killings of Coptic Christians by Muslim extremists in Egypt, the working group has placed the issue of the sources of religious tension high on its agenda.

A major conference on this subject was held in Beirut in March, 2000, (see *News Report*, Vol. 12, #2, Spring-Summer 2000, pp.4-6). A follow-up event scheduled for June, which would have focused upon the Nazareth controversy, had to be postponed due to the reluctance of Palestinians to participate. But a working paper on Muslim—Christian coexistence has been produced, and it was used as the backdrop for a conference on religious tension and coexistence, held November, 2000, in Cyprus. Participants were not only from the region but also came from Indonesia, Nigeria, the Balkans and other places, where Muslim-Christian tensions are running high.



The centuries of coexistence between Christianity and Islam in the Middle East have given birth to an uninterrupted dialogue, which is existential in nature and scope, and manifold in ramifications and implications. It has produced a permanent interaction and interpenetration in all spheres and at all levels of social life, and has been a source of mutual enrichment for the people of Middle East. It has also been a major cause of political, religious and military confrontation and crisis. However, in this part of the world dialogue, with all the risks that it entails, is both virtually unavoidable and absolutely imperative for an effective Christian witness.

### **The Difficulties of MECC**

In spite of numerous successes in many ways, the MECC faces many difficulties, especially in issues linked with dogmatic differences. This is despite the feeling of the churches that it is their duty to work together to witness for Christ among those who do not believe in Christ. So far it has failed to enter into a serious theological discussion among members. A division that is fifteen centuries old cannot be erased by a dialogue that has not lasted twenty-five years, which is the age of the council. The main hurdle, in my opinion, is the affiliation of these churches to the main international churches of different trends in the world. For this reason our local churches are following the ongoing dialogues among the major international bodies of the churches in the world, in order to participate with the outcome. After having played a major role in the dialogues and in the theological disputes, our churches have become enslaved nowadays to the disputes of the major churches. They do not have enough courage to hold their destiny in their own hands, but they have become a forced followers, and conforming to the differences of the big churches: such as Orthodox, Catholic, and Reformed Evangelical Churches.

But the churches of the Middle East today witness a clear spiritual and intellectual revival which enables them to live in spite of their divisions in a spirit of peace, brotherhood and co-operation. They are rediscovering their rich heritage and their weaknesses through theological institutions which are characterized by a scientific way of analysis. These institutions have formed an association called (ATINIE ) Association of Theological Institutions in the Middle East. This association is acting in the MECC. This revival is able to spread an awakening among the members of these churches, and lead them to total commitment to work for the sake of the unity that can become a unique model by itself among the international

churches. Just as our churches played a major role in advancing the theological ideas in the past, it can also play the same role for the benefit of all the churches.

## X. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GIFT OF AUTHORITY

RIGHT REVEREND PHILIP FREIER TSSF  
BISHOP OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

### Introduction (paras 1-6)

Like it is in most family differences, there is a great deal more held in common between estranged parties than either is willing to admit. At least it seems that way when the relationship between Anglicans and Roman Catholics since the Reformation is examined. It became easy for the separated churches to act as if the other did not exist, and for each to reduce complex positions and historical circumstances to caricatures. Easy, even, to add extra insults to the original injury.

The meeting between Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey in 1967 was remarkable in opening a new chapter of dialogue between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Much had changed in both churches; there now was a worldwide Anglican Communion, not just the geographically defined Church of England of the Reformation; and the Roman Catholic Church had experienced the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II. A new spirit of dialogue was possible which bore immediate fruit with the formation of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). Its method was to be shaped by this new and prevailing spirit. George Tavard, an inaugural member of ARCIC I, commented:

This commission established a principle that has been applied in most dialogues: The polemical language of the past must be avoided at all cost; and the questions behind this language ought to be faced anew in light of both our better historical knowledge of the Reformation and the theological developments that have taken place in our two churches since the 16th century.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> George Tavard, "The Gift of Authority," *America*, 3 July 1999.



The work of ARCIC I resulted in the following statements:	
<i>Eucharistic Doctrine</i>	Windsor, 1971
<i>Eucharistic Doctrine: Elucidation</i>	Salisbury, 1979
<i>Ministry and Ordination</i>	Canterbury, 1973
<i>Ministry and Ordination: Elucidation</i>	Salisbury, 1979
<i>Authority in the Church I</i>	Venice, 1976
<i>Authority in the Church: Elucidation</i>	Windsor, 1981
<i>Authority in the Church II</i>	Windsor, 1981

A second commission, ARCIC II, was formed in 1983, and produced agreed statements on *Salvation and the Church* (1986), on *The Church as Communion* (1991), and on principles of ethics *Life in Christ* (1994). This fourth statement of ARCIC II, *The Gift of Authority* (1999), builds on the previous work, and in sequence to the documents of ARCIC I is subtitled *Authority in the Church III*.

The task of ARCIC II in bringing *The Gift of Authority* to the churches included seeking further elucidation of:

1. the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the exercise of teaching authority,
2. collegiality, conciliarity, and the role of laity in decision making,
3. the Petrine ministry of universal primacy in relation to Scripture and Tradition.

Developments within both churches since the 1967 meeting of Paul VI and Michael Ramsey meant that each faced its own internal dialogue about the nature of authority in the church. For Anglicans this crystallized around the ordination of women, and for Catholics concerns about the pace and direction of the Vatican II reforms. It is no longer possible to provide a simple depiction of how authority is exercised in either church without the problematic nature of these practical circumstances entering the reality. Yet, Anglicans have made a journey to greater maturity, which has enabled unity to be found even where the pain of division still lingers. The recent celebration of full communion between the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) was a good example of this, since it came in the midst of continuing difficulties of reception in both churches. ECUSA Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold commented at the Eucharist held to mark the new relationship between Episcopalians and Lutherans in the US:

Communion is an organic relationship ... it's not a document; nor is it a set of legislative criteria, although docu-

ments and legislative criteria do enter into it along the way. My hope and prayer would be that any fears or anxieties that presently exist in either of our communities would be resolved over time through the living of the relationship.<sup>23</sup>

*The Gift of Authority* has come into the life of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches at a time when there have been actions and determinations which have tested the growing recognition of *koinonia*. As much as the ordination of women has been a point of tension within the Anglican Communion, it also stands as a formal obstacle to relations with the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in light of the papal statement that women could never be ordained in the Roman Catholic Church. Likewise, the declaration by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, raised Anglican eyebrows when it said, "...ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery are not Churches in the proper sense." Interpreted in the light of *Apostolicae Curae*, the 1896 papal encyclical, that declared Anglican orders as "absolutely null and utterly void," the ecumenically discouraging implications of *Dominus Iesus* and the letter dealing with the term "sister Churches" were hard to escape. John Hind, writing in the influential *Church Times* newspaper, anticipated Griswald's advice about resolving tensions in the living of new relationships:

In assessing the ecumenical policy of the Roman Catholic (or any other) Church it is as important to listen to the voices of friends in our own areas as it is to heed official pronouncements. It is also important to learn how to read the situation as a whole, and how to interpret the significance of symbolic actions. The words of Pope Paul VI, his gift of an episcopal ring to Archbishop Michael Ramsay, the achievements of ARCIC, Pope John Paul's visionary encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, the Mississauga meeting, the daily experience of changed relationships, the Queen's visit to the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury's part in the opening of the Holy Doors at St Paul-without-the-Walls in Rome, and the bishop of Winchester's presence at the celebration of the martyrs in the Colosseum — all illustrate the position of the Roman Catholic Church on ecumenism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> James E. Solheim, "Lutherans and Episcopalians inaugurate full communion in Epiphany Service at National Cathedral," 8 January 2001, Episcopal News Service, [www.ecusa.anglican.org/ens/2001-3.html](http://www.ecusa.anglican.org/ens/2001-3.html)

<sup>24</sup> John Hind, *Church Times*, 10 November 2000.



Decisions about the language used in discussing these matters seem either to evoke the divisions of the past or to anticipate a unified and reconciled future. To apply the method adopted by ARCIC is to run the risk of speaking about the Church in a way which seems quite different from our lived experience. This has been one of the criticisms of *The Gift of Authority*, that it depicts the Church as an ideal community rather than a "real community, fractured but also gifted in many ways."<sup>25</sup>

### God's "Yes" and Our "Amen"

The central theme upon which *The Gift of Authority* is tightly argued is the text of 2 Corinthians 1:18-20, "As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you ... was not Yes and No; but in him it is always *Yes*. For all the promises of God find their *Yes* in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God." Mary Tanner's commentary helpfully explains the theme:

God's will is to bring all people into communion with himself within transformed creation. In Jesus Christ, God not only affirms that purpose but also secures the outcome, demonstrating God's everlasting "yes" to us. In the faithful obedience of Jesus to the Father, Christians can recognize the perfect response of humanity, the perfect "Amen" to God and to God's purpose. In, with, and through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we speak our "Amen" to God and God's purpose for us. The life of the Christian, and the life of the community of the Church, is lived within the orbit of God's continuous "yes" to us and our attempt, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to say "Amen" to God. The ministry of authority in the Church is to help the Church and the world to hear God's "yes" and to enable a response to be made to it. Within the framework of this controlling theme the exploration unfolds; first the nature of authority and then the way authority, is exercised in the Church, including a ministry of primacy.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Cassidy, in "The Gift of Authority, Churches Together in Gainford": a series of four seminars on the Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, led by members of the Commission and leading theologians," 4 October 1999, [www.durham.anglican.org/refrence/arcicrep.htm](http://www.durham.anglican.org/refrence/arcicrep.htm)

<sup>26</sup> Mary Tanner, "The Gift of Authority, a commentary," [www.anglicancommunion.org/documents/authority](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/documents/authority)

## Authority in the Church, (paras 7-31)

The closely-argued nature of the text starts to become evident as soon as the "Yes," "Amen" theme is applied to the issue of authority in the church. This has its origin in the creational order from which the response of the individual believer follows, and then leads naturally into a consideration of the "implication of participating in divine life within the Body of Christ" (para 12). By para 13 the diversity of the sources of guidance that shape the believer and the believing community's "Amen" is explored. In *The Gift of Authority* this sets the stage for developing a consideration of Tradition and Apostolicity, The Holy Scriptures, Reception and Re-Reception, and Catholicity as "Yes," "Amen" responses pointing to the way that authority is exercised in the Church. The location of the personal faith of the believer into the understanding of authority represents a new direction for the ARCIC discussions. It is an attractive emphasis for Anglicans and Protestants, and serves to embrace those who see this as a central focus for the reality of faith.

Anglicans broadly hold to Scripture, Tradition and Reason as the "three-legged stool" upon which authority in the church sits. On the surface, at least this may not seem so different from Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium, understood by Roman Catholics.<sup>27</sup> When pushed, some Evangelical Anglicans will advance *sola scriptura* as the basis upon which Christian life and the issues that surround it should be determined. The review of the *Gift of Authority* undertaken by the Doctrine Commission of Sydney Diocese in Australia takes its starting point from the Reformation *Articles of Faith* of the Church of England, and develops "by Scripture alone" further: "This concept carries with it three others: the sufficiency of Scripture for our knowledge of God and faithful living, its clarity, and its final authority in matters of Christian belief and practice." This is taken to the next stage in asserting "by Scripture alone" as a "foundational truth" that is "an appropriate description of spiritual reality..."<sup>28</sup> This represents a position in the spectrum of Anglican belief that will suspect *The Gift of Authority* of more closely representing the Roman Catholic position than one they can identify as their own. More typically, Anglicans have identified the dispersion of the sources of

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<sup>27</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, paras 74-100.

<sup>28</sup> "Review of Authority in the Church III, *The Gift of Authority*," Doctrine Commission, Diocese of Sydney.



authority as a grace. The 1948 Lambeth Conference developed this approach well:

Authority, as inherited by the Anglican Communion from the undivided Church of the early centuries of the Christian era, is single in that it is derived from a single Divine source, and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation, the authority of the eternal Father, in incarnate Son and the life-giving Spirit. It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of the saints and *consensus fidelium* which is the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through his faithful people in the Church. It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralized authority, having many elements that combine, interact and check each other; these elements contributing together, by a process of mutual support, mutually checking and redressing errors or exaggeration to the many-sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to his Church. Where this authority has found to be mediated not in one mode but several, we recognize in the multiplicity God's loving provision against the tyranny and the dangers of unchecked power ...<sup>29</sup>

The development of the notion of "reception and re-reception" (paras 24, 25) is helpful in moving the discussion away from any sense of capitulation, where one party gives way wholly to the position of another, to a sense where both partners are challenged through dialogue to become more truly the sort of people they are called to be in Christ. This has important implications for an understanding of the Reformation, as well as for the restoration of unity. Reception has been identified as an, "inalienable dimension of the process of authority," something which is an essential part of the dynamic of faith:

Authority cannot enforce the obedience of an unwilling individual. The life of the church lies in receiving what God has revealed of himself. This process is never complete and new things need to be learnt from a changing world,

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<sup>29</sup> Lambeth Conference 1948, London, 1948, Part II pp 84ff, cited in Hugh Montefiore, "Authority in the Church," *Theology*, 80 (1970), p 1665f.

through reflection on Scripture, etc. Re-reception means that those who think they have received in a final, non-negotiable way must see the need to be open to receiving in new ways. This does not mean that earlier ways were wrong, or to be rejected, but a re-entering into the truth puts old truths into new light for today. It can be seen as a dimension of a continuing Christian pilgrimage in the world.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Exercise of Authority in the Church (paras 32-50)**

The missionary dimension of God's 'Yes' to humanity introduces this section. 'The exercise of ministerial authority within the Church, not least by those entrusted with the ministry of *episcopate*, has a radically missionary dimension. Authority is exercised within the Church for the sake of those outside it ...' (para 32). The unity of the Church is thus seen as the means of empowering the Church for its missionary role, whilst at the same time ensuring this happens, 'in a way that enriches rather than diminishes the legitimate diversity of local churches' (para 33).

*The Gift of Authority* continues its method of searching behind terms to find a meaning that is unifying. This is evident in its treatment of synodality as the "manner in which believers and churches are held together" as the faithful respond to the call to walk together in Christ in the local church. For some the argument becomes forced or even contrived. William Henn observes:

Paragraphs 39-40 offer a fascinating account of the different ways in which Anglicans and Roman Catholics express synodality, of particular interest because of the different emphases present in the descriptions. Paragraph 39 is confident about the extensive practice of synodality and consultation of the laity within the Anglican Communion; but it seems almost to have to "protest too much" that the bishops have a "distinct and crucial" responsibility, a "distinctive and unique ministry" of oversight. Paragraph 40, about the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, presumes a strong exercise of episcopal and primatial authority but seems almost to have to "protest too much" that "the tradition of synodality has not ceased," and that the three post-Reformation councils celebrated by the Roman Catholic

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<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Sagovsky, in *Churches Together* in Gainford seminar.



Church and, especially, many structural developments implemented since Vatican II" have fostered a greater degree of synodality.<sup>31</sup>

Anglicans have experienced recent turbulence due to their differing responses to issues of human sexuality. The alleged divergence of ECUSA from the determinations of the 1998 Lambeth Conference led to the unprecedented step of a group of bishops from non-ECUSA Anglican Provinces ordaining two "missionary" bishops to minister to conservative congregations within ECUSA. The leading role of Archbishop Moses Tay of Singapore in hosting this consecration service in his Cathedral placed Asia in a central position in the debate about authority within the Anglican Communion itself, and by extension in the whole matter under consideration here.

The fact that this action proceeded contrary to the advice and without the consent of the Archbishop of Canterbury is significant. Tay, and the other bishops who joined him in this action, asserted that they were acting with an authority that followed from the Lambeth Conference determination. Understood in this way the primatial role of the Archbishop of Canterbury was contained within the collegiality of the Lambeth Conference rather than sitting alongside or above it. Uncertainty about the internal mechanisms of authority within Anglicanism have led others to propose that the authority of the Primate's Meeting be enhanced to include the ability to censure "intransigent" parts of the church, even to the point of suspension from full communion.<sup>32</sup> Whilst primacy remains problematic within the Anglican Communion, it is hard to imagine that reaching an ecumenical understanding of the nature and function of a universal primate will be simple.

ARCIC I gave considerable attention to the issues of indefectibility and infallibility in *Authority in the Church II*, defining indefectibility as the promise to the Church that, "despite all its many weaknesses and failures, Christ is faithful to his promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."<sup>33</sup> *The Gift of Authority*

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<sup>31</sup> William Henn, "A commentary on *The Gift of Authority* of the Anglican—Roman Catholic International Commission," [www.anglicancommunion.org/documents/authority](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/documents/authority)

<sup>32</sup> Drexel Gomez and Maurice Sinclair (eds), *To Mend the Net: Anglican Faith and Order in Renewed Mission*, The Ekklesia Society, Texas, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> *Authority in the Church II*, para 23, note 3.

builds on this work and places infallibility at the service of the Church's indefectibility. Infallibility is carefully described in corporate terms in para 42: "In specific circumstances, those with this ministry of oversight (*episcopate*), assisted by the Holy Spirit, may together come to a judgement which, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with apostolic Tradition, is preserved from error." The link to the *sensus fidelium* of the people of God, and then to the college of bishops, seems an intentional effort to frame infallibility as a characteristic of the church rather than as an attribute of the papal office. When the office of the Bishop of Rome is explicitly discussed in para 47 a careful use of words, perhaps heeding the concerns of *Authority in the Church II*,<sup>34</sup> has the Pope articulating the faith of the local churches so that, "the wholly reliable teaching of the whole Church that is operative in the judgement of the universal primate," is clear to all. Time will tell if this is merely "trying to sell papal infallibility to Anglicans"<sup>35</sup> or something more radical, with the potential to transform both churches to a new understanding.

It would be wrong to leave this section without recognizing the positive affirmation of the teaching role of the Church, "the belief that the Church can confidently utter the Word of God today, and that this Word of God is not only what the Church, but what the world, needs to hear."<sup>36</sup> Whatever may be the practical concerns about moving towards a consensus on the details of authority, the document repudiates relativism, and emphasizes the "Yes," "Amen" response that the proclamation of the Gospel calls from the believing community for the sake of all people. The ministry of primacy, then, serves the Church for this role in the world. By regarding the *sensus fidei* of the people of God the ministry of primacy enables the believing community to recognize the truth contained in authoritative pronouncements of such a primate who acts in that authority in collegial and synodical unity, thus serving a pastoral purpose within the church, as well as an evangelical and missionary purpose for the world.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., para 31. "Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgement [i.e., infallibility] necessarily attached to the office of the bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be wholly assured before their reception by the faithful."

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Turner, "The Exercise of Authority," in *Churches Together in Gainford* seminar.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Sagovsky.



## Agreement in the Exercise of Authority: Steps towards Visible Unity (paras 51-63)

The *Gift of Authority* poses the clear challenge to both partners in the dialogue to test the reality of the very issues which have been explored in the document, and upon which common ground has been established. In any document of this kind, the wider constituency of the church is invited to recognize truths that can be owned and lived in ecclesial life. In this way the document is hoped to have the impact intended. Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics need to examine the particular issues that arise in each communion to discover if these principles can bear the weight of argument, for which they are used in the document. For both churches the issues *The Gift of Authority* puts before them are similar to those already generated from within. This is potentially a very creative time with opportunities for both internal and ecumenical unity to advance.

The Anglican claim to comprehensiveness, of having found a way to preserve unity without an imposed uniformity is challenged (para 56). This is to be anticipated from the issues already canvassed, "To what extent are Anglicans open to the acceptance of instruments of oversight whose decisions would in certain circumstances bind all?" Participation of Anglicans in the *sensus fidelium* needs to be enhanced in whatever structures are established in response to this question. The document observes that Anglicans have tolerated divergence and anomaly but asks "at what price?" "What has been the cost in terms of *koinonia* within the Communion?" Similarly, impaired communion has expressed itself in the Eucharist and in the exercise of *episcopate*, as well as in the mutual recognition (interchangeability) of ministry. The journey of growing understanding and shared *koinonia* that has resulted from ecumenical dialogue offers hope of lifting the vision of Anglicans to a broader horizon, when debate within the Communion seems bogged down or stalled.

*The Gift of Authority* places significant emphasis on collegiality of the type demonstrated in the College of Bishops, with the Bishop of Rome as its head. The document recognizes that there is a degree of nascency in these structures, and questions whether the determinations of the Second Vatican Council in this respect have been carried out sufficiently. The actual, rather than theoretical, ability of bishops to govern their own dioceses without unconsultative intervention from Rome is questioned indirectly by asking if the bishops' actions, "... reflect sufficient awareness of the extent of the authority they receive through ordination for governing the local church?" (para 57). By extension, the increased par-

ticipation of clergy and laity, not only the bishops, in consultations that contribute to authoritative determinations is left as a question for the Roman Catholic Church, if it is to receive *The Gift of Authority* as an instrument to stimulate its "Yes," "Amen" response.

With its challenges to each Communion, the document has direct practical challenges to the life of the churches as they exist in mutual mission in the world. The discovery of ways to share *episcopate* between Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops is listed as one means of developing the *koinonia* that has been recognized over the journey of the ARCIC discussions. Universal primacy, "as a gift to be shared," is put forward in such a way that it needs to be re-received by both communions, each in a different and slightly nuanced way (para 62).

An experience of universal primacy of this kind would confirm two particular conclusions we have reached:

- 1) that Anglicans be open to and desire a recovery and re-reception under certain clear conditions of the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome
- 2) that Roman Catholics be open to and desire a re-reception of the exercise of primacy by the Bishop of Rome and the offering of such a ministry to the whole Church of God.

*The Gift of Authority* offers to the churches a process "as well as an agenda" for moving towards greater unity. In many places the laity of both churches are in amicable and constructive relationship in daily life. Much can be learned from this grassroots living of *koinonia*.

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